

Echoes of English

**Anglicisms in minor speech communities
– with special focus on Danish and Afrikaans**

Henrik Gottlieb

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Preface

This monograph is a result of my almost life-long interest in language contact, first stimulated in 1973 by English Professor Knud Sørensen's *Engelske lån i dansk* [English loans in Danish], the first book ever to address the English influence on my mother tongue, Danish. The reason that *Echoes of English* – a result of many years' research in the influence of English – is not written in Danish, is that I want to reach all readers interested in knowing more about what may happen when a dominant and prestigious language is used in a 'minor' speech community as a main source of coining new words and spicing up existing concepts.

I have avoided terms like 'borrowing' in the title, as what takes place is – depending on the eyes of the beholder – either (1) a dominant language forcing its superfluous words onto an ill-protected speech community, (2) a prestigious language donating features to a language in need of lexical enrichment, (3) an open-minded speech community consciously selecting foreign language items that may come in handy, or (4) speakers of a recipient language stealing and abusing whatever they need from a defenseless 'major' language, in this case English.

At any rate, no 'borrowing' takes place, and also the term 'language contact' is often a misnomer. Unlike the situation in South Africa, in which we do find a mutual, albeit somewhat imbalanced, exchange of lexical and grammatical features between Afrikaans and English, there is no such exchange between English and Danish – or most other European languages. For more than a century, whenever English is involved, we are confronted with an elephant-and-mouse scenario, in which the 'contact' with English simply means exposure to English; as a donor language English gets very little (apart from increased prestige) back from the languages impacted. In other words, the 'soft' power of English vis-à-vis a recipient language (RL) like Danish is so great that for every RL feature entering English (think of *hygge*), several thousand Anglicisms enter the RL.

Although only some five percent of the world population speak English as their home language, in terms of influence English is second to none in the history of humankind. It is my aim with this book to demonstrate the characteristics and consequences of the global linguistic echoes of English by focusing on Danish and Afrikaans.

As Germanic languages, Danish and Afrikaans are related both to each other and to English. Yet, due to their very different history and geographical setting, they represent two scenarios of English impact: While for centuries Danish has

been an all-domain language spoken by all citizens in the Kingdom of Denmark and thus never depending on English, Afrikaans – based on 17th-century Dutch – fought for its status as a language in its own right until officially recognized in 1925. Unlike Danish and many other European languages, Afrikaans never enjoyed the privilege of being a national language, and as one of eleven official languages in present-day South Africa, Afrikaans is losing domains – and even speakers – to English. Although Danish may have lost a few domains to English, speakers of Danish are not anywhere near shifting to English. However, code-switching – an obvious sign of bilingualism long found in South Africa – is now becoming increasingly common among young Danes.

The first three chapters of *Echoes of English* address general aspects of the Anglicification of languages and establish an international taxonomy of Anglicisms, while chapters 4 through 7 – without losing the international perspective – present empirical studies on various aspects of the English influence on Danish. Enlarging the focus to Scandinavia and beyond, chapter 8 looks at a somewhat neglected field: the (English-inspired) names given to babies. Chapter 9 shifts the focus to South Africa and offers a comprehensive historical discussion of the English influence on Afrikaans, while chapter 10 concludes the volume by comparing the linguistic and language-political outcomes of the long-standing English influence on Afrikaans with the more recent, but no less intense, English impact on Danish.

It is my hope that the topics and methodologies used in the various chapters of this monograph may inspire others to conduct similar research into the workings of the voluntary intercourse between English and any of the more than 6,000 languages still spoken in today's world.

However, although Anglicisms come in many shapes and sizes, not all is gold that glitters. These years I am compiling Danish Anglicisms for the Global Anglicism Database (GLAD), and when in doubt as to whether a feature is English-based or not, I sometimes think of a situation I experienced back in 1977. Familiar with the American-inspired rebellious youth culture in urban Denmark, I once – when visiting a small Danish town – noticed a fashion store with the supposedly hip name *Busted*. Inside the store I learned that the name had nothing to do with the only sense I knew of the English word, i.e. “arrested by the police”. In fact, the name was not even English; the shop was named after the proprietor, Mr. Busted – whose last name, as several other Danish family names, comes from a local placename, with *sted* related to English *stead*, meaning ‘place’.

By 2019 the store – still in business, yet only selling clothes for women – is now named *Bustedwoman*. The ‘old’ part of the new name is still pronounced in Danish, and the original owner’s son, Mr. Busted junior, is now in charge. To complete the irony, and to illustrate the degree of English impact on the mindset

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of modern Danes, an employee told me that among her co-workers and their customers, the ‘busted’ part is sometimes interpreted as ‘busty’ – not realizing that in English the form ‘busted’ never refers to female bosoms, but may (according to Urban Dictionary) denote “a very ugly female”.

This goes to show that not only should we be skeptical toward expressions that look English but may not be; the likelihood that ‘unlikely’ expressions may be interpreted as Anglicisms grows with time – as the English influence on societies and individuals worldwide has continued to grow for almost three centuries now.

*Henrik Gottlieb,
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