All your base are belong to us

1. Introduction
Since the feedback session last time did not take up as much time as I thought it would, we have
time to look at some general challenges in Danish-English translations and some possible solutions
to them.

2. Adjectival heads of noun phrases
In Danish, it is possible to use substantival adjectives (a.k.a. adjectival heads of noun phrases) to a
great extent, but in English the use of adjectival heads in noun groups is much more restricted.
'The dead', 'the unemployed', 'the local' (as in a local person), 'the Japanese' etc. are okay, but
often, you have to insert a noun or 'one'. The good old trick is to use 'one', but it ends up sounding
weird if there are a lot of these constructions and you just use 'one' all the time.

3. Countability
Countability has to do with whether you can use nouns in the plural form or not. Some nouns are
uncountable, which means that do not take plural forms.

Sometimes, countable nouns in Danish have uncountable equivalents in English. A classic
problem is 'informationerne', which is fine in Danish, but *'the informations' does not work in
English because it is non-countable in English.

This is the typical case: a Danish countable word, which has to be in the singular in English
because it is uncountable. However, there are also some uncountable nouns in English which
actually take the plural '-s' but do not appear in the singular form. And still you cannot really count
them. Some examples are:

- 'savings' = *'a saving', '?three savings'
- 'belongings' = *'a belonging', '?five belongings'
- 'linguistics' = *'a linguistic', '?eight linguistics'

As with the 'normal' uncountables, these plural form uncountables cause problems for Danish
learners of English because things work differently in Danish than in English in the sense that some
Danish singular uncountables are plural uncountables in English. One such example is Danish
'politik' versus English 'politics'. 'Politics' is one of those plural uncountables, so when you
encounter 'en politik' in Danish, you should not translate directly into *'a politic', but rather rephrase
it into something else, like 'a political strategy', 'a line of politics', or perhaps just 'policy'.

How do you deal with uncountables? This is a case where you simply have to know which
nouns are countables and which ones are not. You can see this in most dictionaries, but, eventually,
you will have to learn these by heart. In some cases you can just go with the required form of the
uncountable in the target language. But you might encounter a source text in which the noun is
somehow quantified, and the quantification is important enough to be included in the target text as
well. One trick here is to paraphrase or to use a measuring 'of'-construction.

4. Distributional plural
In Danish constructions like the following are quite normal:
In all of the above cases, the subject is plural but the garments that they wear are in the singular. This is fine in Danish, although it is not that logical, actually. However, in English the distributive plural principle applies, which states that if you have a subject in the plural and you want to refer to similar garments that all the referents of the subject refer to, then you should present the garments in the plural:

- 'They put their jackets on'
- 'The men wore suits with neckties'
- 'They were all wearing black T-shirts...'

If you use the singular, then you present the situation as if they are all wearing the same garment (as if a group of people are stuffed into the same suit, for example):

- 'The men wore a suit with a necktie'

This does not apply to garments, by the way. There was actually a similar problem in the crazy Odense text – namely, 'more and more people take an interest in gardening and find it lovely to get inspiration for the garden at home'. Here, it is supposed to be 'the gardens at home'.

5. Aspect constructions
Aspect in Danish does not work exactly the same way as in English. Firstly, Danish does not have a progressive construction as such like English does (that is, Danish does not have a [BE + V-ing]-form), but Danish does have a number of other constructions that may be used to express more or less the same thing as the progressive construction. One of these is the use of cardinal posture verbs (plus 'gå') in pseudo-coordination constructions:

- stå og V
- sidde og V
- ligge og V
- gå og V

All of these may be used to express 'something is going on now'. When translating these into English, it is often a good idea to just ditch the posture verb and go for a straight progressive construction instead.

Secondly, while both Danish and English have a perfect construction (i.e. a [HAVE V-ed] (Eng) or [HAVE V-et] (Da) construction), they work slightly differently. In Danish, it is possible to use the present perfect construction to refer to a past event when a time adverbial that refers to a specific point in the past occurs, but you cannot do this in English:

- så sent som i går har vi skannet...
- *just yesterday we have scanned...
In these cases, it is better to use a straightforward past tense in English.

6. Concord

Concord, or agreement, or “kongruens” as we call it in Danish, often poses somewhat of a challenge to Danish learners of English, and concord errors crop up almost everywhere these days. As it happens, examiners and teachers at university level are very strict when it comes to concord errors, and they typically punish this sort of thing very harshly. So we better do something about that.

6.1 What is concord?

Concord is basically when two, or sometimes more, elements in a sentence agree with each other in terms of certain properties such that they have to take on corresponding forms within their respective word classes. For instance, if a subject consists of a noun or nominal group in the plural, such as, for instance, 'the cats' (the '-s' suffix being the plural form or regular nouns), then the verb in the same clause has to also be in the plural form, such as for instance 'eat' ('-ø' being the plural form of regular verbs).

Thus there is subject-verb agreement between the subject and the predicator in (1a), making it grammatically acceptable, while there is a lack of concord in (1b), making it grammatically unacceptable:

- The cats eat mice every day
- *The cats eats mice every day

6.2 Where do we find concord?

Different languages require concord in different categories, and in English we find concord requirements in the following categories:

- **number**: whether a constituent is in singular form or plural form
- **person**: whether a constituent is in 1st, 2nd, or 3rd person form
- **gender**: whether a constituent is masculine, feminine or neuter

We saw an example of number concord above; here are some examples of concord in the other two categories:

- I am angry
- *I are angry

- Jenny arrived and she looked sad
- *Jenny arrived and it looked sad

In English, concord applies in the following cases, which also count as different types, or classes, of concord:

- **subject-verb concord**: a verb, or predicator, should be in the same person and number as
the subject

- **pronoun-noun concord**: a pronoun should be in the same person, number and gender as the referent noun it refers to
- **subject-subject complement concord**: if the subject complement is a noun group or a pronoun, then it should be in the same number form as the subject
- **object-object complement concord**: if the object complement is a noun group or a pronoun, then it should be in the same number form as the object
- **demonstrative-head noun concord**: if a noun group has a demonstrative pronoun as the determiner, then it should be in the same number form as the head noun
- **concord in the distributive plural**: if a subject is in the plural, and the transitive clause it appears in refers to several identical situations, then the object should also be in the plural

Here are some illustrative examples:

- The man in the corner is waiting for someone to show
- *The man in the corner am waiting for someone to show
- There are worms everywhere – look at them
- *There are worms everywhere – look at her
- Jack and Jill are idiots
- *Jack and Jill are an idiot
- Jack and Jill are a travesty (this is possible though)
- We consider them idiots
- *We consider them an idiot
- We consider them a parody (this is possible too)
- This man is a liar
- *These man is a liar
- The men took off their uniforms
- *The men took off their uniform

We are going to focus primarily on subject-verb concord here, since this is the most problematic type of concord to Danish learners of English.

6.3 Grammatical concord: the rule

Danes have a lot of problems with subject-verb concord, mainly because Danish does not have a corresponding phenomenon anymore. It used to, but the Danish morphology system has been simplified to point that it no longer distinguishes between person and number. The principle of concord is actually really simple. It goes like this:

- if the subject is in 3rd person singular form, then add an ‘-s’ to present tense verbs
- if the subject is in any other person form or in plural form then do not add anything
This is the **grammatical concord** rule which applied to most cases in both regular and irregular verbs.

The verb **BE** is an exception in that it is more complicated, distinguishing between number and person in a more detailed manner in that it has a more complex **morphological paradigm**, and concord applies in both past and present tense:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>present</th>
<th>past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he, she, it</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>were</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A lot of Danes have problems with this verb, because the Danish corresponding verb **VÆRE** is much simpler. This means that the first examples are grammatically correct, while the ones in the second set are not:

- We are criminals
- He was an old fart
- The aliens kill humans
- Jack and Jill are not nice people
- English grammar has captured my attention
- *The cat in the hat are black
- *We has a car
- *The rats on the floor looks strange
- *The drinks on the table tastes very nice
- *Jack and Jill likes rock music

Those are the rules, and they are actually pretty simple.

### 6.4 Why concord is tricky

The principles of grammatical concord are pretty simple, so why do Danes find them so difficult? Well, firstly, we do not have a corresponding system in the Danish language. Secondly, there are some factors within the English language itself which make it tricky for non-native speakers of English to apply the concord rule stated above.

#### 6.4.1 Notional concord

The grammatical concord principle is purely formally based in the sense that it is the number-person form of the subject that determines the number-person form of the verb. However, there are some cases where it is the meaning, rather than the form of the subject, that determines the form of the verb, creating what seems to be a clash in concord between the verb and the subject. This is called **notional concord**.
We find notional concord in relation to **collective nouns**, a collective noun being a noun that refers to a group, unit, or collective of people, such as 'family'. Quite often there is a possibility of variation in concord, but we are not dealing with **free variation** here. Free variation is when you can use different forms to express the exact same meaning. In relation to collective nouns, you can use both singular and plural verb forms when the noun is in the singular form, but you will express a slight difference in meaning:

- The family enjoys skiing (focus on the family as one unit)
- The family enjoy skiing (focus on the family as consisting of multiple people)

Notional concord also applies to titles of books, movies, journals etc. In this case, regardless of the number-person form of the title, the verb is typically in the 3rd person singular form, because it refers to the book or movie or whatever as one single unit:

- *Star Wars* is a huge franchise
- *Pride and Prejudice* is boring
- *Clerks* has been an underground favorite since the 90s
- *I* sounds better live than on the CD
- *You and I* is yet another pointless pop song

The same applies to compound units and plural forms which refer to something we tend to think of as one unit, such as names of dishes and drinks:

- *Bacon and eggs* has to be eaten in the morning
- *Gin and tonic* is refreshing
- *Slippery nipples* is a friggin' weird drink (no joke, there's a drink with this name!)

Some additional cases of notional concord are measure units referring to, for instance:

- sums of money: “500 pounds is a lot of money”
- distance: “Seventeen lightyears is nothing when you own the Millennium Falcon”
- weight: “300 kilos is nothing... if you're a Hutt”
- a period of time: “Five minutes is all I ask for”

### 6.4.2 Confusing modifiers

Postmodifiers in subjects often confuse Danes if the modifiers contain plural nouns. But it is not the last part of the subject that determines the form of the verb phrase, even though it appears right in front of the verb phrase. It is the head of the noun phrase that determines the person-number form of the verb phrase:

- The lightsabers in the corner are mine
- *The lightsabers in the corner is mine*

- The laserblast that destroyed those planets originates from the Death Star
- *The laserblast that destroyed those planets originate from the Death Star*
● The man and woman in the car are in love
● *The man and woman in the car is in love

In cases where the subject is a clause, then the predicator has to be in the singular 3rd person form:

● That she could do such things is beyond me

6.4.3 Some tricky nouns
There are lots of tricky nominal subjects, and you are strongly encouraged to have a look at it if you have not already done that. I will just mention three cases here:

● plural form nouns that do not end in ‘-s’
● singular form nouns that end in ‘-s’
● certain adjectives as head if there are more of what they refer to

Here are some examples:

● Two spacecraft are attacking our base
● The news is out
● The undead have been haunting this village for centuries

6.4.4 Both ... and ..., (n)either ... (n)or....
‘Both ... and ...’ constructions take plural, while ‘(n)either ... (n)or’ take singular.

6.4.5 Relative pronouns like ‘which’ and ‘that’
Remember that the pronouns ‘which’ and ‘that’ take verb phrases which have the same person-number form as the noun they refer back to:

● There are things in life which/that are best forgotten
● *There are things in life which/that is best forgotten

7. Nominal compounding and the classifying genitive
You might come across cases in the source text where the Danish sentences are complex and potentially ambiguous, but where English provides some grammatico-lexical tools that enable you to actually construct simpler and more clear translations in English, but if you do not use these tools, they end up being equally, if not more, confusing and complex in English:

● ‘Der er ikke tid til at gå ind og se den nye film med Will Smith’
● ‘There is no time to go out and see the new movie with Will Smith’

This sounds like Will Smith is going to the cinema with you to watch the movie. Here, it makes more sense to use **endocentric nominal compounding** in English to clearly express that the movie is a specific kind of movie – namely, a Will Smith movie – which is actually less ambiguous than the Danish text is.
● 'There is no time to see the latest Will Smith movie'
● 'There is no time to catch the latest Will Smith flick'

There are also cases where using the English classifying genitive is a useful strategy:

● 'livsstilsprogrammer for mænd om biler'
● 'life-style shows for men about cars'

This is fine, but perhaps a bit clumsy. A more elegant solution would be the use of the classifying genitive.

● 'men's life-style shows about cars'