

International Certification Study: Denmark

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With this examination of the situation in Denmark, we will close our discussion of the Nordic countries, initiated in the February 2002 *ATA Chronicle* with the discussion of certification procedures in Finland and Sweden, and continued in the last issue with the discussion of Norway. Norway and Denmark are closely related (they constituted a single country for nearly half a millennium). Therefore, the historical data presented in this article will apply to our past discussion of Norway as well. Information on selected organizations in Scandinavia is also available in the September 1998 *ATA Chronicle*. In addition to a well-informed article on the Nordic languages in general, followed by an article on the Danish language in particular, the 1998 issue features articles on organizations for translators and interpreters in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

The historical data in this article is largely based on the information provided by Jørgen Christian Wind Nielsen, state-authorized translator and member of the Danish Association of Business Language Graduates and of the Association of Danish-Authorized Translators. Information on the associations described here was found on their respective websites. More detailed reports were generously provided by Birgitte Jensen, president of the Danish Association of Business Language Graduates; by Flemming Koue, past president of the Association of Danish-Authorized Translators, state-authorized translator, assistant professor at the Copenhagen Business School, and coordinator of *Translatøreksamen* (a special examination for translators which is described in this article); and by Bo Myhrmann, state-authorized translator and member of the Board of Translators and

Interpreters under the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency.

Historical Overview

On August 21, 1635, the Danish King Christian IV published an open letter stating that all foreign shipping documents had to be translated into Danish. Thus, the translation industry in Denmark began with the Sound Dues, a special toll levied on all ships passing through the sound between

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Denmark and Sweden, with Hamlet’s Elsinore being a major traffic junction for international shipping at that time. The “Translation Office” associated with the Sound Dues continued to exist until 1857.

Reportedly, in 1785, a royal certification was issued to a translator capable of translating Swedish, Portuguese, Italian, and several other languages. By 1800, 10 translators were certified by the king, most of them multilingual and translating up to four languages. Certification was issued on application, and applicants were tested by a notary public, who was in charge of official translations during this period. This system was in effect until 1863, the year when the Ministry of the Interior was appointed the competent authority. An official examination committee was established in 1910 in tandem with the first executive order

on the authorization of translators and interpreters.

With the examination committee, the Association of Danish-Authorized Translators (*Translatørforeningen*) came into existence. The authorized translators obtained the sole right to use the title “state-authorized translator and interpreter” and, de facto, an exclusive right to do interpretation and translation work in the Danish courts of law. The exclusive right was granted under the Danish Administration of Justice Act, entering into force in 1919. Pursuant to Section 149 of this Act, the official language of the courts is Danish, and any questioning of persons who do not speak the Danish language must, if possible, be performed through an authorized interpreter.

In 1966, Denmark introduced the allegedly first ever law on state-authorized translators and interpreters in the world. All legislation concerning the authorization of translators and interpreters in Denmark can be found at <http://130.228.210.124/eogs/lov/menu/tolke.htm> (Danish only). Another important piece of legislation is the Nordic Convention on Languages, *Den Nordiske Sprogkonvention*, which entered into force on March 1, 1987. The Convention makes an exception concerning citizens of other Nordic countries by allowing them to hand in to public authorities and courts of law documents that are written in their native languages. This exception is also applicable to Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish citizens and to their respective languages.

Authorization of Translators and Interpreters

Certification—or authorization, as the Danes prefer to call it—is administered by the Danish ➡

government and granted to students who have successfully completed five years of in-depth translation studies. Authorization is thus granted to translators and interpreters after they have obtained the degree of *cand.ling.merc.* (M.A.) in translation and interpretation from either the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) or the Århus School of Business (ASB).

Studies in English, French, German, Spanish, and, to a limited extent, Italian and Russian are offered by the business schools as full-time programs. The present training structure for these languages is three years for the bachelor's degree and another two years for the master's degree—the last two years being devoted to specialization in either international communication and marketing/corporate communication, language engineering or, most importantly in this context, translation and interpreting with a focus on language for special purposes. The core subjects taught in the qualifying master's program for translation and interpreting include legal language, technical language, economics, accounting, banking and finance, and interpretation skills. Moreover, grammar, linguistics, the methodology of information retrieval, and translation theory serve as useful tools for students, who are required to pass a broad range of examinations, written and oral, to obtain the degree. It is important to note that translation studies also include translation into and from Danish, as authorized translators commonly translate into their foreign language. Detailed information on the programs is available at the websites of the two schools (www.cbs.dk and www.asb.dk, respectively).

In languages other than those mentioned above, candidates may register for a special translator's examination administered by CBS. This is an option frequently used by foreigners

in Denmark who want to translate into and from their mother tongue, but also by Danes who want to obtain authorization to perform certified translations into and from these languages. The requirements of this special examination do not differ much from the requirements of the regular M.A. program, but a major difference is the fact that no structured training is available (i.e., candidates are left to study on their own). The examination is both written and oral, and is conducted more or less along the lines of the M.A. program. This means that students have to demonstrate an ability to translate complex and up-to-date texts of, for instance, a legal, technical, and economic nature, representing realistic text types from the Danish market for freelance translation services. Each text is about one page long. Dictionaries and other aids are allowed (but not the Internet), and so is the use of computers. The examination used to be free, but currently the whole process of authorization is estimated to cost about 1,800 euros. Mr. Flemming Koue of CBS is responsible for the professional standard of the languages not included in the regular M.A. program, and can provide detailed information in this respect (contact: flemming.koue@get2net.dk).

When candidates have successfully completed their master's degree from either of the two business schools or passed the special translator's examination at CBS, they are eligible for "state authorization" from the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency under the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs. The authorization is granted automatically upon application, and entitles translators to use the official stamp or seal (with the crown at its center) and to call themselves "state-authorized translator and interpreter"—the

official Danish title is "translatør og tolk," or simply "translator," which is protected by law.

The eligibility requirements are set forth in the above-mentioned law on state-authorized translators and interpreters (Act No. 213 of June 8, 1966). While the law has been amended several times since then, the original text is quoted here in unofficial English translation. Pursuant to Section 1(2), authorization may be granted to any person who:

- i. Is of Danish nationality;
- ii. Is a resident of Denmark;
- iii. Has attained the age of 25;
- iv. Is under no legal incapacity or guardianship, and whose estate is not in the hands of the Official Register; and who
- v. Has passed a particular examination.

Under Section 1(4), "the Commerce and Companies Agency may grant exemption from the condition stipulated in Subsection (2)(i) above." In fact, the requirement of Danish nationality and residency in Denmark no longer applies to citizens of the European Union and the European Economic Area. This means that a Danish citizen is now allowed to reside in a foreign EU or EEA country and work as a state-authorized translator. Besides, any citizen of the EU or EEA is eligible for authorization when he or she has obtained the qualifying degree at the Danish business schools.

Translators from other EU countries may apply for authorization in Denmark in compliance with the provisions of Council directive 89/48/EEC concerning mutual recognition of diplomas. In this situation, the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency passes on the application, together with the respective diploma,

to the Board of Translators and Interpreters and to CBS for their comments. These official bodies then compare the contents of the diploma with the Danish rules and standards. Frequently, these diplomas do not meet the Danish standards because they do not include a test in legal, technical, or economic language, and the applicants are required to pass the corresponding examinations before they can obtain the authorization (Danish being one of the required languages).

In addition to the rules on authorization, Act No. 213 lays down the rights and responsibilities of state-authorized translators and interpreters. Overall, this law is mainly intended to protect customers by imposing on translators an obligation to be careful and accurate in their profession, and by specifying that any infringement of the provisions will be considered a punishable offence. They must also strictly observe the rule of professional secrecy.

Section 3(2) of the law stipulates that the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency may set up a board to assist the agency in administering the law. The Board of Translators and Interpreters is thus consulted on many aspects of relevance to the authorization and the profession of translators, including changes in study programs and authorization applications from translators with diplomas from foreign institutions of higher education.

A state-authorized translator has the right to perform certified translations into and out of Danish and the relevant foreign language. This is understood to mean a translation that the translator signs and stamps to certify that the text is “a true and faithful translation of the attached document.” This could typically be a legal document that needs to be used in a foreign

court of law or presented to the government authorities in a foreign country (pleadings, wills, divorce orders, exam papers, and birth certificates). The translator’s signature and stamp (or seal) must later be authenticated by the Commerce and Companies Agency, whose signature and stamp (in case of a translation into a foreign language) are authenticated by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the ministry’s signature and stamp need to be authenticated by the consulate of the country where the translation is going to be used. It is at this point that the document obtains legal validity in the country in question. New rules and bilateral conventions have been adopted to avoid this very formal and time-consuming procedure. As a result, some countries only demand a single stamp on a translation to make it legally valid, either from their own consulate or from the Commerce and Companies Agency.

The total number of state-authorized translators and interpreters in Denmark is 2,385 (as of April 30, 2002), most of whom are organized with the Danish Association of Business Language Graduates (EsF), described in the next section. A growing number of translators combine in-house work with part-time freelance activities, and may therefore also be members of one of the two trade associations for mainly self-employed translators. Self-employed translators account for roughly 400-500 of all state-authorized translators.

Associations for Authorized Translators and Interpreters

Today, Denmark has two professional associations for state-authorized translators and interpreters: the Association of Danish-Authorized

Translators (Translatørforeningen) and the Danish Association of State-Authorized Translators and Interpreters (Dansk Translatørforbund), respectively. Translatørforeningen was established on March 20, 1910, and acted as one of the six founding members of the International Federation of Translators (FIT) in 1953. Its members are all trained translators or graduates from one of the previously mentioned Danish business schools, and are certified by the Danish state to work as translators and interpreters. They may write the abbreviation “MTF” after their name to indicate their membership in the association. Translatørforeningen now has about 180 members, divided into five categories, and is represented on the Board of Translators and Interpreters under the Danish Commerce and Companies Agency (currently by Bo Myhrmann). The association serves its members by providing advisory services, promoting their interests in relation to government agencies, and organizing courses on relevant subjects. Courses are also open to nonmembers.

In 1989, a group of authorized translators left Translatørforeningen to form the Danish Association of State-Authorized Translators and Interpreters (Dansk Translatørforbund), while Translatørforeningen joined forces with the Danish Association of Business Language Graduates (EsF, see below) as a section for self-employed authorized translators. The hundred or so members of Dansk Translatørforbund are translators and interpreters, mostly self-employed, who are certified by the Danish state and who indicate their membership in the association by writing the letters “MDT” after their names. Dansk Translatørforbund has adopted a code of ethics which every member must follow. Each member of DT is ➡

under an obligation to keep his or her professional knowledge and proficiencies updated. To help contribute to this process, DT regularly holds courses on relevant subjects. The courses are also open to nonmembers.

The alliance between *Translatørforeningen* and EsF ended in 2001, when *Translatørforeningen* again became an independent organization in response to developments in the market for self-employed authorized translators, and to avoid any conflict of interest between employees and employers among the two organizations' own members.

Danish Association of Business Language Graduates

The Danish Association of Business Language Graduates (*Erhvervssprogligt Forbund*, or EsF) is among the associations featured in the September 1998 *ATA Chronicle*. EsF, a member of FIT, essentially acts as a trade union. In addition to the issues directly related to the T&I field, such as organizing courses and conferences for translators and interpreters, EsF is actively engaged in working conditions for employees, including salaries and maternity leave, working hours, all types of contractual issues, and employment in Denmark and abroad. While EsF does not offer any certification, it is of interest here because it is the only foreign organization for translators and interpreters with which ATA has a formal agreement, entitled "Principles of Cooperation." The document, signed in the fall of 1999 by Past ATA President Muriel Jérôme-O'Keefe and current EsF President Birgitte Jensen, serves the following purposes:

1. To exchange current information about, and between, the organizations (official notices, monographs, circulars, periodicals

published by the two organizations, and other publications);

2. To assist each other with advice and guidance concerning professional matters when such assistance may be offered without legal liability to the assisting party;
3. To render assistance to the organization's members in connection with professional matters in the country in question, when customary and feasible;
4. To mutually admit members of the other organization to attend as observers and to participate on equal footing with the organization's members in open meetings, courses, seminars, conferences, or other similar activities of the organization, on standard terms, fees, and conditions of entry;
5. To permit simultaneous membership in both organizations, upon payment of required dues and compliance with conditions of membership.

The purpose of the International Certification study is to explore the possibility and feasibility of such reciprocal arrangements, particularly in the field of certification. While reciprocity in certification does not apply to the document above, there are other reasons why future arrangements of this sort might prove difficult. In the case of Denmark and other Scandinavian countries, a major consideration is the fact that the certification processes in the U.S. and in Scandinavia are essentially different in nature. While in the U.S., certification is carried out by independent professional organizations, namely the accreditation offered by ATA, in Scandinavia, certification (authorization) is granted directly by the government of the respective country. This will

be a major stumbling block in the future discussion as to whether such arrangements will be feasible.

Another important lesson learned from this agreement is the fact that while in Denmark it reportedly serves as a tool used by the EsF secretariat when giving advice to members who are traveling to the U.S., on the ATA side, the agreement could be acted upon with greater involvement than is currently the case. For future arrangements of this nature, it will be important to establish a mechanism for continued support and development of such agreements, perhaps through a standing committee or a staff member.

Further information on the organizations described in this article is available at their respective websites:

**Association of Danish-Authorized Translators
(Translatørforeningen):**
www.translatorforeningen.dk
(Danish and limited English)

**Danish Association of State-Authorized Translators and Interpreters
(Dansk Translatørforbunds):**
www.dtfb.dk (Danish and limited English)

**Danish Association of Business Language Graduates
(Erhvervssprogligt Forbund):**
www.esf.dk (Danish only)

In the next issue we will examine the very different certification procedures in Japan. As the editor of this series, I encourage readers to submit any relevant information concerning non-U.S. certification or similar programs, as well as comments on the information published in this series, to my e-mail address at jiri@cetra.com.

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