

Barkho, Leon, Where Swedes Get it Wrong When Writing English – A Practical Guide for Students, Teachers, Academics and Professionals. Printed by Books on Demand, Visby. ISBN 978-91-7465-063-1. IX + 148 pp. Price SEK 259 (Bokus.se)

The book under review is a private project in the sense that no publishing-house has been involved in the production. The author is employed at the International Business School of Jönköping University College (not University, which it is misleadingly called in the book). It is stated in the blurb on the back of the book that he holds a master's degree in applied linguistics and a doctorate in media and communication science. The book is based on his experience of editing and "polishing" texts in English produced by Swedes.

The topic as such is very much of current interest and the object of serious academic studies, in article, textbook or thesis format. This private enterprise, however, does not belong to that category.

The author presents his book as corpus-based, which is misleading; what he refers to as a corpus is simply his own database. The scale of his reporting is thus limited to the material he has collected over much of the past decade, and any expectations of large-scale coverage of texts produced by Swedes raised by the title of the book are not fulfilled.

To some extent, the book is an exercise in contrastive linguistics, but from that point of view it has at least three basic shortcomings. The author is not a native speaker of English, not a native speaker of Swedish, and not a grammarian. As for English, he refers to himself (pp. 14–15) as "a teacher of the foreign language I know best, English" and his non-native status is evident throughout the book. Admittedly, apart from his repeated use of *Meantime* as a connecting adverb, which puzzles and slows down a reader, the message is hardly ever distorted. Swedish and Sweden seem to be even more foreign to him, and he fails to see the Swedish background to some of the mistakes he cites. He also makes quite a few sweeping statements in the spirit of unfounded generalization displayed in the title of the book: "Swedes love talking in languages other than their own", "Swedes are very fond of punctuation marks", "Many Swedes are fond of writing sentences which are difficult and awkward. Generally, Swedes love long sentences with several clauses". (Similar statements concern English: "In English, we usually do not prefer to start a sentence with a number.") One detail that is a risk to Swedish readers without the support of teachers is the fact that he never explains that ✓, which in Sweden is the traditional symbol for "incorrect", is used in the English way, i.e. for "correct". The ☒ used for the opposite cannot be defined as meaning "incorrect" in the book but rather as "version that the author has seen fit to change". As for grammar, he states (p. VII): "Grammatical concepts are simplified but not at the expense of accuracy." The latter half of the statement is simply not true and shortcomings regarding grammatical analysis and description will be dealt with in some detail later on in the review.

One thing in the book that the present reviewer finds valuable to readers is the disentangling of convoluted sentences produced by Swedes. However, the adjustments made sometimes change the meaning of the sentence. Under the heading “unnecessary infinitive clauses” (which is not the right place), the author finds fault with “Faculty members plan to write a report to see what progress they have achieved” and replaces it with “Faculty members will write a progress report”, which changes the modality of the sentence. In the chapter “Content words” he finds the metaphor too bold in “The programs [are] aimed at ‘showering’ students with impressions” (concord corrected by the reviewer) and replaces the sentence with “The programs aim to leave good impressions on the students”, which is probably not what the writer meant. In addition, some changes are completely unnecessary. For instance, the sentence “It is the dean who decides on these matters” is found by the author to contain unneeded material (“expletives” in his terminology) and should be changed to “The dean decides on these matters”. Occasionally his changes result in ungrammatical and/or pragmatically odd sentences, as in the following attempt to use a reduced relative clause (11.6): “Mrs. Duncan’s husband, Neil, an architect who died in 2003, supported her work. (NY Times)” becomes “Died in 2003, Mrs. Duncan’s husband, Neil, an architect, supported her work.”

Contrastive pedagogical works sometimes include a section on “false friends”, and the book under review is no exception. “False friends” are generally defined as words that look or sound alike in the languages treated without having the same meaning. The idea underlying the listing of such words is that learners risk being misled by the similarity so that they make the mistake of using a “copy” from their own language, which will distort the message. For such lists to be valuable, there should be a realistic risk of such “copying”, e.g. in that the words involved belong to the same word class. Also, actual use should be an attempt to render the meaning the word has in the source language. Adequate examples in the book under review are *vräst* – *wrist*, *gymnasium* and *mark* (as a noun). However, the author seems to think that Swedes risk using *hair* instead of *here* because the Swedish word *här* sounds more like *hair*. Similarly, it takes a very inexperienced learner to copy Swedish *sin* for use as an English possessive determiner. The author’s listing also includes words that are not “false” at all, only slightly different in form: *ambulans*, *analys*, *anonym enorm*, *klimat* and many others. The inclusion of *högsta domstolen* underlines the fact that his definition of “false friends” is highly unorthodox. The chapter concludes with pairs of sentences that supposedly show how the “false friends” are correctly used in the two languages. (Half a dozen of the words illustrated are not in the preceding list, among them *fart*, with the mind-boggling “correct” example *A young woman would not fart in her husband’s lap.*)

The chapter on “friendly words” (the author’s term) is less objectionable, dealing competently with difficult pairs such as *amount/number*, *continual/continuous*, *effect/affect*. However, when it comes to grammatical words, there are a number of weak points. About usage with *if/whether* the author says that he is

“afraid there is no rule of thumb”, but he fails to make the basic distinction between conditional *if* and interrogative *if*. (Elsewhere, 12.3 and 14.6, he claims that there is a semantic difference between the interrogatives *if* and *whether*: “... *whether* conveys slightly greater doubt.” The syntactic and collocational differences are not mentioned.) The *some* and *any* words are treated without any comparison between them (in spite of the difficulties systematically experienced by speakers of Swedish) but with a focus on the grammatical number of personal and possessive pronouns for anaphoric reference to them. In the section on *rise/raise*, it is stated that “*rise* is a transitive [sic] verb, i.e. does not need an object”, which can be contrasted with the statement about *raise* two lines further down: “... a transitive verb, requiring an object.” Throughout the chapter, illustrative material is (wisely) taken from published sources (newspapers and magazines), not from the author’s collection of mistakes made by Swedes.

The much-needed chapter (no. 9) on subject–verb agreement has a short introduction that starts with the basic rule but moves very quickly to notional concord and ends by pointing out what should have been clear from the basic rule, viz. that it is the head of the subject noun phrase that determines agreement. The examples given of Swedish mistakes are not very systematically presented: Each example is given a section number (9.1–9.15) and the examples/sections are not grouped in a way that demonstrates that the problem is the same. For instance, **The use of properties are important* is 9.1, **The factors in the equation offers no proof* is 9.5, **The buying behavior of customers affect the potential ...* is 9.10, which is then followed, logically, by another four examples (9.11–9.14) of the same kind. Sections 9.16–9.25, still under “Subject and verb agreement” have nothing to do with verbs (except 9.23) but deal with pronouns to agree with noun antecedents, and with inversion (9.24–9.25). Inversion is said to occur “after certain words and expressions”, but nothing is said about what they have in common, viz. negation or restriction. The list of examples consists of quotations from published sources and the media, which is a good thing, but there is no grouping to help readers systematize them. There are two examples of *Nowhere ...*, two of *Seldom ...*, two of *Little ...* and so on, but the members of the pairs are placed far apart in the list. Besides, there is no mention of the fact that the examples concern only partial inversion (auxiliary + subject + main verb), not full inversion (main verb + subject), which is just as big a problem for Swedes.

In addition to the peculiarities in grammatical matters already cited, at least the following deserve mention. *Even though* and *although* are listed and exemplified among causal subjunctions and adverbs (pp. 127–128). Surprisingly placed under “Coherence”, the following “rule” is presented (p. 142): “[W]e use *the* before the names of countries and organizations which start with *u* in English, such as *the U.S.*, *the U.A.E.*, *the U.K.*, *the U.N.*, when they are not pre-modified ...”. (Wisely, the author does not attempt to list exceptions to this “rule” of his, e.g. *Ulster*, *Utah*, *Uganda ...*) It is repeatedly stated (e.g. in 5.20) but (understandably) never exemplified that it is “acceptable today to use a plural verb ... when referring back to pronouns such as each, every, everybody, someone, anybody, nobody, every

one". The author claims (p. 44) that "there are three different forms for the possessive: ...', ...'s, ...s'." the last of which is yet to be seen (except as a mistake). The rule "Use a comma to separate a series of two or more adjectives modifying a noun" (p. 54) is far too simplistic and wisely not adhered to by the author in his example in the same section. In a discussion of *controlling owners* vs. *controlling-owners* he calls the ing-form progressive. Lack of familiarity with basic terminology seems to lie behind the formulation (11.5) "The main verbs that help form non-finite clauses are: to + infinitive ... -ing participle ... -ed participle". In the chapter on quoting, a list of "the most frequent reporting verbs in English" includes *condemn*, *denounce* and *discourage*, and the suspicion that there is something wrong with the author's definition is confirmed in the chapter on paraphrasing, where (14.23) the following sentences are said to contain reporting verbs: "Parana (2008) demands the return of foreign investors to the region ..." and "Parana (2008) questioned the validity of the Monterrey agreement." In the same chapter (p. 100), a grammatical subject is called object. Finally, erroneous shift between the infinitive and the gerund is described as "lack of consistency in the tense of the verb" (15.1).

From this selection of inadequacies and shortcomings, it should be evident that the book should have been produced differently. It should have been submitted to an editor or referee and it should have been read and corrected by a native speaker of English. In its present shape, it cannot be recommended, and at those universities and colleges where writing is taught by teachers versed in grammar, it will probably never make the reading-list.

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