

SEMANTIC ENGLISH INFLUENCE ON DANISH SINCE 1700: MEANINGFUL CHANGES?

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ABSTRACT • Ever since the French *anglomanie* in the 18th century, a considerable part of the impact of English on recipient languages has been invisible – in the sense that the borrowed words, phrases and structures do not display any visible English clues. This goes for *loan translations*, in which English compounds and constructions are reshaped into equivalents using recipient-language lexical building blocks only. Even less conspicuous than loan translations are *semantic borrowings*, representing internal developments in existing words rather than new combinations of these. Based on data from the Global Anglicism Database, this article will provide statistics on the inventory of invisible vis-à-vis visible Anglicisms in Danish and analyze developments in English-based semantic borrowings in Danish, an invisible type of Anglicism attested in Danish since 1700. The various scenarios and communicative outcomes of the usage of semantic Anglicisms will be compared and evaluated, focusing on ambiguity vs. language enrichment in contemporary Danish.

KEYWORDS • Anglicisms; semantic borrowing; language change; GLAD Database; Danish.

1. Visibility as a key notion in contact linguistics

No language is an island; throughout human history, people have been inspired by speakers of other languages when new concepts or objects had to be named. To that end, two basic ways of incorporating elements from ‘foreign’ (donor) languages have offered themselves: direct and indirect borrowing.

Direct borrowing – lexical import, so to speak – of donor-language (DL) elements generates transparent *-isms* in the recipient language (RL). As the immediate offspring of language contact, these *-isms* are identifiable to (most) speakers of the RL, either because they *look* foreign – typically the case among Germanic and Romance languages – or because they *sound* foreign. This auditive-only identification of direct Anglicisms is typically found in languages using non-Roman scripts, e.g. Greek, Russian and Japanese, and in languages with obligatory formal adaptation of loans, e.g. Polish and Croatian.

The outcome of *indirect* borrowing are words and expressions that show neither visible nor audible traces of any foreign heritage. There are two main categories of such indirect (and invisible) borrowings: *loan translations*, also known as calques, where each element in a DL compound or phrase is replaced by a domestic equivalent, and *semantic loans*, where a domestic term takes on a sense deriving from its DL counterpart.

With the purpose of shedding light on the many types of invisible borrowings from English and assessing their importance as conveyers of English concepts and constructions, this study will – although international in its approach – use examples from contemporary Danish, a language earlier primarily influenced by German (Winge 2000), but since c. 1850 increasingly oriented towards Anglo-American culture and mindset.

Based on the distinction between identifiable (visible) and unidentifiable (invisible) borrowings, the different types of outcome of language contact with English, i.e. Anglicisms, are presented – as a cline – in Table 1.¹ These types are listed in descending order with respect to the transparency of their English roots, ranging from (1) conspicuously English-looking pseudo-Anglicisms coined in the recipient language over (2) transparent, unadapted Anglicisms and (3) less transparent, adapted Anglicisms, via (4) hybrids to (5) fully nativized, inconspicuous loan translations and (6) semantic loans. A contemporary example from a language represented in the Global Anglicism Database (GLAD 2023-) is provided for each type.

	Scenario	Procedure	Outcome	Visibility	Example
1	home-grown foreignness	lexical invention (form or content)	pseudo-Anglicism	full	(French) <i>footing</i> < foot + -ing ‘jogging’
2	maintained foreignness	direct lexical transfer	unadapted borrowing	full	(German) <i>clever</i> < clever
3	assimilation	formal adaptation	adapted borrowing	obscured	(Russian) <i>блюрить</i> [bljurit’] < blur
4	partial domestication	partial translation	hybrid	partial	(Spanish) <i>rock duro</i> < <i>hard rock</i>
5	full domestication	word-for-word translation	loan translation	none	(Greek) <i>Μαύρη Παρασκευή</i> < Black Friday
6	semantic change	transfer of DL sense	semantic loan	none	(Polish) <i>ciasteczka</i> < cookies (IT sense)

Table 1: Basic types of Anglicisms²

Of the scenarios listed in Table 1, this article will discuss types 5 and 6, with special focus on the latter. These types are interesting in that they display neither visible nor audible relations to the English models behind the RL words and expressions in question. Thus, the term ‘visibility’ will be used here also of Anglicisms that may not *look* English, but still *sound* English to RL speakers. Likewise, ‘invisibility’ will refer to Anglicisms that neither spoken nor written reveal their English origin.

In GLAD, with more than 84,000 Anglicisms compiled from 17 languages (Gottlieb et al. 2018; Gottlieb 2021; Niculescu-Gorpin 2026), each entry is categorized as a specimen of one of the six types of outcome distinguished in Table 1. In the following section, taking Danish as our point of departure, we will look into the distribution of Anglicisms in GLAD – the purpose being to quantify the balance between visible and invisible Anglicisms.

¹ In line with the studies in this special issue, also Klégr 2024 focuses on (in)visibility as a distinctive feature in categorizing Anglicisms.

² This table is based on Table 1 in the introduction to the anthology *Anglicisms around the Globe* (Gottlieb et al. 2026).

2. The distribution of Anglicism types in Danish

Danish is a language well-represented in GLAD, which makes it a suitable test case when investigating the numerical relation between visible and invisible Anglicisms – the latter representing contact-linguistic scenarios less investigated than those pertaining to direct borrowings. Table 2 quantifies the various Anglicism types in the Danish GLAD contribution:

	Type of Anglicism	GLAD entries(share)	Visibility	Danish Example < English etymon
1	Pseudo-Anglicism lexical morphological semantic	369 (2.3%)	full full full	<i>bigbag</i> = large delivery bag <i>doorstep</i> < 'doorstep meeting' <i>curle</i> = spoil children
2	Unadapted borrowing English-sounding Danish-sounding	7,043 (44.7%)	full obscured	<i>cool</i> < 'cool'; <i>makeup</i> < 'make-up' (noun) <i>radio</i> < 'radio'; <i>urinal</i> < 'urinal'
3	Adapted borrowing Partly English-sounding Danish-sounding	2,889 (18.3%)	partial none	<i>performe</i> < 'perform' <i>kiks</i> < 'cakes' (= biscuits)
4	Hybrid Partly English-sounding	1,243 (7.9%)	partial	<i>jazzorkester</i> < 'jazz band'
5	Loan translation All-Danish	3,244 (20.6%)	none	<i>skudt og dræbt</i> < 'shot and killed'
6	Semantic loan All-Danish	957 (6.1%)	none	<i>abonnere på</i> < 'subscribe to' (= go in for)
	Danish Anglicisms	15,745 (100%)		

Table 2: Distribution of Danish Anglicisms (as of April 8, 2025)³

Although most Danish Anglicisms display at least some 'Englishness', a substantial number do not show their English heritage. Unsurprisingly, with 11,544 entries, types 1-4 constitute 73.3% of the Danish entries in GLAD, but types 5 and 6 contribute no less than 4,201 entries: 26.7% of all Danish Anglicisms. In other words, more than a quarter of all Danish Anglicisms are invisible, as they belong in the fully invisible categories 5 or 6. Adding to this figure is a number of invisible adapted borrowings of the *kiks* type (see next section).

2.1. Six levels of invisibility in Anglicisms

As shown in Table 2, contrary to the projection in Table 1, invisibility turns out to not be limited to indirect borrowings (types 5 and 6). Also several type-3 Danish Anglicisms, and even type-2 items like *internet*, hide their English heritage to Danish speakers. In fact, invisibility is found at six levels:

³ A few Anglicisms qualify for more than one (sub)classification. For instance, the Danish adjectival Anglicism *upcoming*, used in the sense 'up and coming' (= 'prospective') may be classified as (1) a morphological pseudo-Anglicism, due to the removal of 'and', or (2) a semantic pseudo-Anglicism, as its meaning deviates from the English meaning of 'upcoming', namely 'appearing soon'.

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- a) **Phonology:** Original English (yet Danish-looking) spelling, with adapted pronunciation (type 2: *film* < ‘film’ [with Danish *stød*, i.e. glottal stop]; *database* [four syllables, no diphthongs])
- b) **Orthography:** Adapted spelling and pronunciation (type 3: *splejse* < ‘splice’; *dørtræk* < ‘dirt track’ (racing); *nørd* < ‘nerd’)
- c) **Morphology:** Loan translation of compounds (type 5: *ekkokammer* < ‘echo chamber’; *genforvilde* < ‘rewild’; *flokimmunitet* < ‘herd immunity’)
- d) **Phraseology:** Morphosyntactic calquing (type 5: *gå planken ud* < ‘walk the plank’; *når det kommer til...* < ‘when it comes to...’)
- e) **Semantics:** Alternative meaning (type 6: *mus* < (computer) ‘mouse’; *adressere* < ‘address’ (= deal with); *korrekt* < ‘correct’ (= true)
- f) **Pragmatics:** English-inspired discourse (type 5: *Tak for din tid* < ‘Thanks for your time’; *et godt spørgsmål* < ‘a good question’).

In addition to types a-f above, one may add the phenomenon of boosted frequency as an extreme case of invisibility. Frequency boosting does not imply any semantic changes in boosted words. It simply means that in RL usage, a given English lookalike is increasingly often preferred to its domestic alternatives. Boosted frequencies may be encountered for words that happen to coincide formally with commonly known English (near-)equivalents. Danish examples of frequency boosting include established words of Latin or French origin also used in English, e.g. *relevant* and *intelligent*, as well as all-Danish words with a similar-looking English counterpart, e.g. *begynde vis-à-vis* ‘begin’ (at the expense of the synonymous Danish Germanism *indlede*). Even words only remotely similar to English counterparts may enjoy a frequency boost; a typical example is the verb *ankomme*, often preferred to its unmarked Danish synonym *komme* in translations of English *arrive*, most likely due to its structural likeness.⁴

2.2. Anglicisms: the backbone of Danish lexical neology

In June 2024, the online dictionary of neologisms *Nye Ord i Dansk* (Dansk Sprognævn 2007-), edited by the Danish Language Council, added 45 words, of which 25 were visible Anglicisms (all direct loans): *AI*, *airfryer*, *bodyage*, *citizenscience*, *DDos*, *DDos’e* (verb), *doodle* (verb), *doomscrolle*, *doomscrolling*, *explainer*, *fling*, *frunk*, *hoarde*, *hoarder*, *longevity*, *mankini*, *mental load*, *off limits*, *romancescam*, *romantasy*, *sandwichgeneration*, *scraping*, *seating*, *sexpositivitet*, and *situationship* (Dansk Sprognævn 2024).

In addition to these 25 visible Anglicisms, the list of 45 neologisms included the following 11 invisible Anglicisms, all of them loan translations: *evighedskemikalie* (< ‘eternal chemical’),

⁴ A similar phenomenon is documented in Swedish translations of Anglophone novels (Gellerstam 2005: 206).

fedtfrysning (< ‘fat freezing’), *fryseterapi* (< ‘freezing therapy’), *generationsforurening* (< ‘generational pollution’), *hjerterløber* (< ‘hearrunner’ [a Swedish brand]), *klæbepude* (< ‘adhesive pad’), *kryoterapi/cryoterapi* (< ‘cryotherapy’), *kærlighedslås* (< ‘love lock’), *kærlighedssvind* (< ‘romance scam’), *lsd-frimærke* (< ‘lsd stamp mark’), and *vandsøgshund* (< ‘water search dog’).

The bottom line is that of the 45 Danish neologisms added to *Nye Ord i Dansk* in 2024, 36 are based on English – an Anglicism share of 80%.⁵ With 11 out of 36 entries, invisible Anglicisms accounted for 30.5% of NoiD’s 2024 Anglicism harvest – matching the previously mentioned ‘invisible’ share of 26.7% of all Danish Anglicisms in GLAD.

2.3. The role of invisible Anglicisms in Danish

Not only do invisible Anglicisms constitute more than a quarter of all recently introduced English-based words and expressions in Danish; some of the most common Anglicisms in Danish media and colloquial discourse are invisible, e.g. the loan translation *tænker at ...* (< ‘think that ...’) – a verbal construction popular in speech, despite the existence of the Danish synonyms *synes at ...*, *mener at ...* and *tror at ...*. Over the decade 2011-2020, *tænker at ...* increased its frequency in the Danish *Korpus TiDK* (a news media corpus of c. 365 million running words) from 20 to 39 parts per million (ppm), a high value for content words.

Another extremely popular invisible Danish Anglicism, this time a semantic loan, is the word *grøn* (= ‘green’) in the sense ‘environmentally sustainable’. Thus, the frequency in *Korpus TiDK* of the construction *den grønne omstilling* (< ‘the green revolution’) skyrocketed from 1 ppm in 2010 to 35 ppm in 2020.

Figure 1 presents the 2011-2020 trajectories of the invisible Anglicisms *tænker at ...* (in blue) and *grønne omstilling* (in orange) vis-à-vis two highly frequent visible Anglicisms, *okay* and *computer*:

⁵ This represents a considerable increase compared with earlier counts of Danish neologisms, with Anglicism shares of 42%-67% (Gottlieb 2020: 142). Yet, it tallies well with the corresponding Anglicism share of 87% for neologisms added to NoiD in 2023 (Dansk Sprognævn 2023).



Figure 1: The success of two Danish invisible Anglicisms: *tænker at ...* and *grønne omstilling*

As determining the aggregated frequency of all *invisible* Anglicisms in a language may be more difficult than counting occurrences of *visible* tokens of the English impact, very few studies have been made of the share of Anglicisms held by invisible types, and even scholarly dictionaries of Anglicisms often hesitate to include loan translations and semantic loans. Thus, neither the Norwegian *Anglismeordboka*, the Serbian *Rečnik novijih anglicizama*, the Polish *Słownik zapożyczeń angielskich w polszczyźnie* nor the Spanish *Gran diccionario de anglicismos* include invisible Anglicisms (Graedler and Johansson 1997; Vasić et al. 2001; Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2010; Rodríguez González 2017).

Yet, the two Danish examples discussed earlier show that even when competing with high-frequency synonyms, a calque of ‘think that ...’ makes headway in Danish (as *tænker at ...*), and a basic color term, *grøn*, has become an indispensable part of any talk of sustainability. Such developments indicate that a considerable share of the English fingerprints in contemporary (Danish) speech and writing consists of loan translations and semantic loans. And indeed, a study

on the density of visible vis-à-vis invisible Anglicisms in randomly selected Danish newspapers (Gottlieb 2020: 137-157) showed a marked increase in the share held by the latter types when comparing figures from 2000 and 2014. In 2000, loan translations and semantic loans constituted 9% and 10%, respectively, of all Anglicism tokens in the newspaper corpus; in 2014, 14% of the Anglicisms were semantic loans and 15% loan translations. Thus, the share of invisible Anglicism tokens had risen from 19% in 2000 to 29% in 2014 (Gottlieb 2020: 155).

3. Semantic Anglicisms – the most invisible outcome of English influence

3.1. Semantic borrowing defined

Semantic borrowing is not limited to contact situations involving English – the phenomenon of a less dominant speech community attaching ‘foreign’ senses to domestic words may be as old as language itself. Perhaps the earliest mention of English-induced semantic borrowing is found in a grammar of the then nascent Dutch-based Afrikaans language in South Africa (Changuion 1844, cited in Raidt 1976: 210-211). Among Changuion’s examples of semantic Anglicisms in mid-19th-century Afrikaans is the use of *blijven* in the English sense ‘to stay’ – an expansion similar to what happened in European Germanic languages more than a century later.

Of the some 7,000 titles on Anglicisms in the GLAD Bibliography (2025), less than 200 focus on the semantic developments that *direct* (visible) Anglicisms undergo as part of their primary or secondary adaptation in the recipient language (see, for instance, Sicherl 1999: 99-128). Even fewer studies take an interest in what may happen to the semantics of native words that are cognates or near-equivalents to English etymons. Focusing on semantic borrowing, this article wants to chart such native semantic developments due to English influence – often via false friends becoming ‘true friends’ (Rifelj 1996). Although semantic borrowing from English was long ago singled out as a relevant subcategory of Anglicisms, e.g. by Gaetano Rando (1971), Knud Sørensen (1973: 104-108) and John Humbley (1974), only a few systematic studies of this invisible English impact on recipient languages have been made to date, including Álvarez 2001, Witalisz 2007 and 2014, Zabawa 2017 and Oncins-Martínez 2021.

In the introduction to the anthology *Anglicisms around the Globe* (Gottlieb et al. 2026: 12), a distinction is made between semantic *loan* and semantic *calque* – the difference being that the former type extends formal likeness between RL and DL lexemes to semantic likeness, while the latter type transfers DL meaning to non-cognate RL equivalents (Hope 1960). With English as the donor language, a semantic loan is found whenever an English sense is transferred to an RL ‘lookalike’, whereas a semantic calque represents a more dramatic step, as meaning is transferred to a different-looking (partly synonymous) RL lexeme. According to this terminology, a Danish example of a semantic loan would be the verb *annoncere*, with the established sense ‘advertise’ now supplemented by the English sense ‘tell officially’. Conversely, another Danish verb, *omfavne* (normally ‘embrace physically’) would qualify as a semantic calque when used in the sense ‘encompass’ or ‘accept’ – as in English.

To simplify matters, in this article (as in GLAD) the term *semantic loan* will include both above-mentioned types of semantic borrowing. Accordingly, a semantic Anglicism will be defined as “an existing recipient-language lexeme acquiring a new sense reflecting a semantic aspect of an English equivalent or cognate term”. In other words, a semantic Anglicism is any RL word whose semantic range has developed via contact with English. Typically, what happens is that a new sense is added to the sense or senses already found in the RL, as in the case of *annoncere* and *omfavne* mentioned above.

The above-mentioned blend of cognate and non-cognate relations between semantic loans and their English etymons is obvious when comparing domestic forms in the Danish GLAD contribution (in column 1) and their English etymons (in column 4) in Figure 2. Whereas, for instance, the pair *rejse* < ‘raise’ embodies a cognate relation, the relation between *renvaske* and ‘launder’ is non-cognate, yet just as close.

prototype		prototype		semantic loan	pre-market vehicle	noun
præsident		president		semantic loan	head of university	noun
publikation		publication		semantic loan	making public	noun
pund		pound		semantic loan	£	noun
puste op		blow up		semantic loan	enlarge	verb
putte NP PLACE		put NP PLACE		semantic loan	place on top of	verb
pylon		pylon		semantic loan	bridge tower	noun
pyramidespil		pyramid scheme		semantic loan	scam	noun
pøl		pool		semantic loan	swimming pool	noun
på dåse		canned		semantic loan	industrially produced	adjective
på landjorden		on the ground		semantic loan	(soldiers) in action	adverb
på plads, VP		in place, VP		semantic loan	obtain agreement	verb
pågående		ongoing		semantic loan	present	adjective
radikalisere		radicalize		semantic loan	turn into extremists	verb
rammeværk		framework		semantic loan	context	noun
rangere		rank		semantic loan	order by status	verb
rangering		ranking		semantic loan	ordering by status	noun
rapport		report		semantic loan	rumour	noun
realisere		realize		semantic loan	face a fact	verb
recipient		recipient		semantic loan	person receiving	noun
rejse		raise		semantic loan	collect (money)	verb
rekuperation		recuperation		semantic loan	energy accumulation	noun
rekuperere		recuperate		semantic loan	accumulate energy	verb
relationer		relatives		semantic loan	family members	noun
rend		run		semantic loan	demand	noun
renvaske		launder		semantic loan	make seem legal	verb
renvaskning		laundering		semantic loan	attempting legality	noun
replika	replica	replica		semantic loan	classic car rebuilt	noun
resignation		resignation		semantic loan	statement of intent	noun
respondent		respondent		semantic loan	answerer of question	noun
respondere		respond		semantic loan	answer a questionnaire	verb

Figure 2: Screenshot of random alphabetical sequence of Danish semantic Anglicisms in GLAD

3.2. The outcomes of semantic borrowing

Three different outcomes are found as a result of semantic borrowing, i.e. transfer of ‘English’ meaning to an existing RL word:

- Extension – inclusion of a sense found in the English etymon
- Restriction – replacement by a more specific English sense
- Deviation – a semantic U-turn, amelioration or pejoration.

Two additional phenomena deserve mentioning as (marginal) instances of semantic borrowing, namely lexical *duplicates* and *recontextualizations*. *Duplicates* are direct (English) loans which, when adapted to RL morphology, become homonyms (carbon copies of existing, semantically unrelated RL words) and, as such, ambiguous out of context. *Recontextualizations*, on the other hand, are instances of pragmatic borrowing: expressions that, due to DL impact, may now be uttered in other contexts than the one(s) traditionally found – examples of which are given (listed under point f) in Section 2.1.

Finally, a reverse phenomenon should be added; that of *semantic pseudo-Anglicisms* (see also Gottlieb 2020; van der Sijs et al. 2026). In this subcategory of Anglicisms belong English-

looking words used in an RL with a significantly ‘non-English’ meaning. In Table 3, Danish examples are given of these altogether six scenarios:

Semantic Anglicisms proper (indirect borrowings)	Danish example	English etymon	Danish standard sense	English sense (Danish dating)
1) Extension	muldvarp	mole	animal	spy (1907)
2) Restriction	bæredygtig	sustainable	able to carry its own physical weight	environmentally sustainable (1977)
3) Deviation	overhøre	overhear	not hear	eavesdrop (1927)
Other meaning-impacted types of Anglicisms	Danish example	English trigger	Danish standard sense	English sense (Danish dating)
4) Duplication due to homography (direct loan)	(at) spotte	(to) spot	ridicule	detect (1973)
5) Recontextualization (calque)	Jeg elsker dig!	I love you!	declaration of true love	bye-bye (c. 2010)
6) Semantic pseudo-Anglicism (RL invention)	bake-off	‘bake’ + ‘off’	Neologism, meaning ‘half-baked bread’ (1990)	English sense: ‘baking contest’

Table 3: Anglicisms and change of meaning

3.3. The scope of semantic Anglicisms in Danish

Returning to semantic Anglicisms proper, their distribution across word classes (aka parts of speech) is interesting; when compared with Anglicisms in general, verbs and adjectives are more frequent among semantic Anglicisms:

Part of speech (POS)	Danish GLAD data (April 8, 2025)				Danish dictionary data (Sørensen 1997)	
	Semantic Anglicisms		All Anglicisms		All Anglicisms	
	Entries	Share	Entries	Share	Entries	Share
Nouns	542	56.6%	10,809	68.7%	4,685	75.8%
Verbs	221	23.1%	2,059	13.1%	553	8.9%
Adjectives	155	16.2%	2,011	12.8%	518	8.4%
Interjections	10	1.0%	409	2.6%	72	1.2%
Adverbs	14	1.5%	297	1.9%		
Prepositions	4	0.4%	4	0.0%		
Other	11	1.1%	156	1.0%	352	5.7%
TOTAL	957	100%	15,745	100%	6,180	100.0%

Table 4: Grammatical categories of Danish semantic Anglicisms

The less dominant role of nouns – a word class far largest in the general vocabulary of (Germanic) languages – among Danish semantic Anglicisms may be part of a long-term trend. As seen in the POS distribution in the historical *Dictionary of Anglicisms in Danish* (Sørensen 1997),

three quarters of all Danish Anglicisms coined until the mid-1990s were nouns, down to roughly two thirds in the GLAD data, covering the period from 1700 to 2025. Whether the even lower share of nouns among the Danish semantic Anglicisms (56.6%) is due to semantic Anglicisms being, on average, introduced in Danish more recently, remains to be seen – as shown in Table 5, earliest attestations of a large number of semantic Anglicisms have not been possible to determine. At any rate, the overwhelming majority of Danish semantic Anglicisms have developed in the last hundred years:

First attestation	Number of entries	Share of dated entries	New entries per year
1700-1824	5	1.0%	0.04
1825-1874	5	1.0%	0.10
1875-1924	58	11.4%	1.16
1925-1974	283	55.4%	5.66
1975-2024	160	31.3%	3.20
Total dated items	511	100%	—
Undated items	446	—	—
All semantic Anglicisms 1700-2024	957	—	2.94

Table 5: Dating of Danish semantic Anglicisms

As stated in column 4 of Table 5, the introduction of semantic Anglicisms has shown exponential growth all the way from 1700 to (at least) 1974. According to GLAD, the earliest Danish semantic Anglicism is *parlament*, an old Germanic word meaning ‘altercation’, having acquired the English sense of ‘governmental assembly’ in Danish already in 1707. This was followed by *linjen* < ‘the line’ (= ‘Equator’), attested in Danish in 1719, *overhus* and *underhus* (originally referring only to the upper and lower parts of a house) in 1744, and *opposition* (previously an astronomical Latinism) in 1794 – the latter three words borrowing their political senses from their English etymons ‘the upper house’, ‘the lower house’ and ‘opposition’. These five words make up the oldest batch of Danish semantic Anglicisms and are all frequently used today, more than two hundred years after they acquired their ‘English’ senses in Danish.

While in the 18th century the Danes produced just one new semantic Anglicism every twenty-five years, the mid-20th century saw more than five new semantic Anglicisms every year. After 1975, the yearly output seems to be little more than half of what it was in the previous period – most likely a misrepresentation of the facts on the ground: As all neologisms, recent Anglicisms (not least semantic ones) are often late to appear in dictionaries, and when detected coincidentally in usage, their first attestations may be difficult to ascertain. Also the period 1700-1874 may be underrepresented, as – according to the GLAD house rules (Gottlieb et al. 2018) – Anglicisms no longer in circulation after 1900 do not qualify for inclusion in the database. Besides, there are fewer sources available to determine Danish pre-1875 written and oral usage. Still, there is no doubt that along with the increasing influx of direct (visible) Anglicisms in Danish, the numbers of invisible Anglicisms, including semantic loans, also grew considerably over the centuries investigated here.

4. The trickiness of semantic Anglicisms: *akademiker* as a key example

Of the almost one thousand Danish semantic Anglicisms in GLAD, Table 6 presents five randomly selected entries of different ages, all of them used in modern Danish and representing types 1-3 presented in Table 3:

Danish lexeme	POS	Danish standard sense	English sense	English etymon	Semantic subtype	Dating
<i>skygge</i>	verb	shade	follow	shadow	extension	1914
<i>dørmåtte</i>	noun	small carpet	self-effacing person	doormat	extension	1935
<i>cementere</i>	verb	use cement	consolidate	cement	extension	1835
<i>selvbevidst</i>	adjective	self-reliant	insecure	self-conscious	deviation (semantic U-turn)	2023
<i>akademiker</i>	noun	graduate	university staff member	academic	restriction	1991

Table 6: Random examples of contemporary Danish semantic Anglicisms

Having studied these five Danish lexemes, it is obvious that, as the most invisible Anglicisms of all, semantic Anglicisms

- don't look or sound English (unlike direct borrowings),
- don't reflect English grammar and phraseology (unlike calques),
- don't usually refer to things English,
- are used by people often not realizing their non-standard meaning,
- could be local developments.⁶

A perfect Danish example of the elusive phenomenon of semantic borrowing is the noun *akademiker* – defined in all Danish dictionaries as someone with a university degree, no matter their present occupation. Thus, still in 2025, the authoritative, corpus-based and constantly updated *Den Danske Ordbog* [The Danish Dictionary] defines an *akademiker* solely as a “person som er uddannet (eller studerer) ved en højere læreanstalt” [person educated (or studying) at an institution of higher learning]. Until a few years ago, this definition was a matter of course, and the term ‘akademiker’ was – and still is – used of all kinds of university graduates, a significant part of the Danish population. In other words, most public servants, all doctors and lawyers, veterinarians, dentists, high school teachers and thousands of other professionals are ‘akademikere’ – as are the small number of academics employed at Danish universities.

For Danes well-versed in English, the relationship between the Danish ‘akademiker’ and the English cognate noun ‘academic’ (= scholar) used to be that of false friends. As stated in the corpus-based *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, “An academic is a member of a university or college who teaches or does research.” However, with the increasing exposure to Anglophone news media, Danish journalists and even translators now often ignore the distinction between holding a university degree and being employed at a university.⁷ This is reflected in the

⁶ The challenges of determining foreign-language influence in the development of ‘new’ senses are discussed in Skaftø Jensen 2009.

⁷ Also the much-used Danish online dictionary *ordbogen.com* (2025) mixes things up – by translating the made-up sentences “She is an academic” into “Hun er akademiker” and “Håndværkeren forelskede sig i en

Danish news media, which since the mid-19th century have been a driving force behind the introduction of Anglicisms in Danish (Gottlieb 2023: 6-7; Gottlieb 2025). Hardly surprising, the English-induced oscillation between the standard meaning of *akademiker* and the meaning transferred from the English pseudo-synonym ‘academic’ is noticeable even in Danish quality newspapers. This is shown in Table 7, citing in context the three occurrences of the noun ‘akademiker’ in a random issue of the daily *Information*:

Information, August 15, 2024			
Title of article	<i>Min fjendes fjende</i>	<i>Hvad fejler pensionssystemet?</i>	<i>Presset vokser på justitsministeren</i>
Type of article	Essay on Republican running mate J.D. Vance	News item on Danish pension system	Report from Danish pro-whale demo
Original in Danish?	Yes (but based on English news telegrams)	Yes (only Danish sources)	Yes (but citing a Frenchman in Danish translation)
Excerpt	Siden 2016 har journalister, kommentatorer, akademikere , politiske modstandere og hans egne tætte allierede forsøgt at definere en <i>trumpisme</i> ...	Akademikere vil typisk leve længere end både faglærte og ufaglærte, påpeger han.	en underskrifts-indsamling blandt japanske advokater og andre [other] akademikere ...
English gloss / source	Since 2016, journalists, commentators, academics , political opponents and his own close allies have tried to define a <i>trumpism</i> ...	University graduates will typically live longer than skilled and unskilled workers, he points out.	a petition among Japanese lawyers and academics ...
Interpretation	Semantic Anglicism	Standard usage	Semantic Anglicism

Table 7: Examples of semantic change in the making: ‘akademiker’ vs. ‘academic’

5. Meaningful changes?

Having now discussed Danish semantic Anglicisms at large, and a contemporary example, *akademiker*, as a test case, we may conclude by looking at the semantic and pragmatic benefits and drawbacks of the current developments in Danish vocabulary caused by English influence.

Six scenarios for communication among RL speakers may be outlined, based on categories 1-4 presented in Table 3:

- 1) Extension unlikely to involve confusion (metaphorical sense added seamlessly)
- 2) Extension likely to involve confusion (by creating false friends)
- 3) Restriction obscuring standard RL sense (new sense reflecting changing focus)
- 4) Deviation replacing standard RL sense (new sense reflecting changing realities)

akademiker” into “The craftsman fell in love with an academic”. Reflecting this confusion, ChatGPT4 (2024) claims that “The noun ‘academic’ translates into Danish as ‘akademiker’ for a person involved in academic pursuits.”

5) Deviation likely to involve misunderstandings (mistranslation confuses unrelated entities)

6) Duplication likely to involve confusion (false friends created via import of homograph)

Table 8 gives Danish examples of all types, with communicative **gains** and **losses** highlighted:

	Danish lexeme	Danish standard sense	English sense (dating in Danish)	English trigger	Standard Danish term for English sense [literal translation]
1	råddent æble	rotten apple	= bad team member (2003)	rotten apple	brådne kar [broken pots]
2	moderere	make palatable	= mediate (2014)	moderate	være ordstyrer [chair a discussion]
3	bæredygtig	able to carry heavy weight	= ecologically sound (1977)	sustainable	levedygtig [durable]
4	skyskraber	large sail on vessel	= tall building (1892)	skyscraper	højhus [high house]
5	barakker	shacks	= military barracks (2001)	(military) barracks	kaserne [barracks]
6	slot	castle	= time slot (1987)	(time) slot	ledig tid [unplanned time]

Table 8: Communicative gains and losses as results of English semantic influence on Danish

As seen in this snapshot of the communicative value of different types of semantic borrowing, only two scenarios represent communicative gains for RL speakers. Scenario 1 typically expands the RL speaker's repertoire by adding a metaphorical sense to the existing concrete meaning, and scenario 4 moves the denotement from something obsolete to a contemporary concept or object.

Conversely, scenario 2 may lead to speakers misunderstanding one another, while the success of the English sense in scenario 3 will hamper the decoding of contexts in which the standard RL sense is intended. Finally, scenario 5 may lead readers and listeners up the garden path by misrepresenting a specific entity, and scenario 6 may confuse RL speakers by introducing a direct Anglicism happening to be homonymous with an existing RL word.

Although from a synchronic perspective the semantic changes found in most of the scenarios may not enrich the recipient language, a diachronic view will produce a different verdict. As semantic change is a constant phenomenon in all languages, evaluations of such changes are bound to change over time; when all speakers of a language have lost knowledge of earlier senses of specific words, evaluative judgements of the then completed semantic changes are no longer relevant. Accordingly, qualitative evaluations (as the color-marked ones in Table 8) solely represent usage at a given time in history – in this case early-21st-century usage as experienced by a native Danish speaker. Future generations of Danes will neither miss obsolete senses nor rejoice at added meanings as they speak a version of Danish closer to English than at any time in history – since the Viking age, at least.

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