The prominence of English in Danish workplaces: Approaching a bilingual labour market

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We investigate the use of English in Danish workplaces using a representative questionnaire survey (n ≈ 854). Previous qualitative studies show that English is a frequently used lingua franca in white-collar workplaces, but not to the same extent in other types of work. Also, while many Danes have strong English competences, not everyone is able to use English. In order to better understand how much and where English is used in the labour market we investigate 1) How often Danes use English at work 2) How English use at work is related to location, age, education, industry, job title and job tasks. We find that an overwhelming majority of respondents use English at work, but that there are noticeable differences between educational groups, industries and job titles. Managers and IT workers are frequent users of English at work, whereas teachers and healthcare workers report relatively low frequency of use. Contrary to previous studies, we do not find a simple correlation between level of education and use of English. The results point to a labour market where English is a part of everyday working life for the large majority, but also to certain industries where the role of English is limited. Finally, we discuss the implications of these results in terms of labour market inclusion and exclusion.

Keywords: multilingualism in the workplace, English as an everyday language, English in Denmark, English in the Nordic countries, labour market inclusion and exclusion, questionnaire survey

1 Introduction: English in Denmark

The majority language in Denmark is Danish, spoken as a first language by approximately 90% of the population. It is the widespread language used in schools, administration, public media etc. Traditionally, Denmark has been considered a highly ethnically and linguistically homogeneous country. However, as in many Northern European countries, English has come to play an important role as a lingua franca, not least in contexts impacted by migration and mobility, such as the labour market.

This is the situation we wish to discuss in this article: From one perspective, Denmark is a highly monolingual society in which all official business is conducted in Danish. From another perspective, English has a significant presence in society (Lønsmann et al., 2024; Thøgersen & Preisler, 2023). When it comes to the labour market, we can ask whether we

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are approaching a bilingual labour market where workplaces and individual employees are expected to be ready to and capable of using English. we draw on data from a large-scale survey of the Danish population to gauge the extent to which participants in the Danish labour market use English in their everyday work. We want to explore the degree to which English has become an everyday language in the Danish (and by extension the Nordic) labour market.

The discrepancy between a monolingual mindset and a multilingual labour market has several important implications which we will return to in the discussion. First, not everyone in Denmark is competent in English to the same extent. In order to avoid language-based exclusion, it is necessary to know more about how Danes perceive their own English competences and to what extent they need English at work. While we deal with the first issue elsewhere (Thøgersen & Preisler, 2023), this article focuses on the latter. A second implication relates to the inclusion of migrants in Danish society. While debates about the inclusion of migrants in host countries' labour markets often revolve around the need for migrants to learn the local language, we argue that it is necessary also to look at the role of English as a language of inclusion (and exclusion). This is especially relevant in a country such as Denmark where a majority of inhabitants have a relatively high English language proficiency, but the issue is equally relevant in other Northern European countries with similar English proficiency.

In this article we address two research questions. Firstly, *how often do people in Denmark use English at work?* We know from previous, case-based research (see below) that the use of English is unevenly distributed between sectors and job functions, but we lack a general overview. Therefore, our second research question is: *How is English use at work related to location, age, education, industry, job title and job tasks?*

2   Literature review

Formally speaking, English is considered a foreign language in Denmark. In practice, however, the role of English is different from other foreign languages (Gottlieb, 2020; Lønsmann et al., 2022; Lønsmann et al., 2024). Together with the other Nordic countries, Denmark is often singled out as an area with high English competences (Peterson, 2022; Peterson & Beers-Fägersten, 2024), and English does play important roles in many areas of life in Denmark. English has for many years been the first foreign language taught in schools. At present English is obligatory for all students from grades 2 to 11 and optional in the last year of upper secondary school. English also features heavily as a medium of instruction and in teaching materials in higher education (see e.g. Hultgren et al., 2014; Mortensen & Haberland, 2012).

Equally important, English is prominent in the linguistic landscape where shop signs, advertisements and billboards are often in English; in official communication where English is frequently used as a second language alongside Danish; and in music lyrics, films and TV shows with or without Danish subtitles. Danes are often claimed to have very good English competences (EF, 2021), and in the most recent Eurobarometer survey, 90% of Danish respondents claimed competence enough to have a conversation in English (European Commission, 2024). Earlier, the influence from English came mostly from passively listening to English in music lyrics, in subtitled films and TV shows or from reading English on signs or in manuals (Preisler, 2003; see also Leppänen et al., 2011 for similar findings in a Finnish context). In contrast, many people today encounter English in a much wider range of contexts and with more opportunities for the active use of English, both online and face-to-face e.g. when commenting on and posting videos on social media such as TikTok or YouTube, speaking English with fellow gamers during a game of Counter-Strike or Fortnite or engaging in small talk with English-speaking servers, colleagues or fellow students (Lønsmann et al., 2024).

2.1 English in Danish workplaces

English also plays an important role in Danish workplaces. Already in the 1990s, a survey study (Preisler, 1999) found that 51% of men and 40% of women who were active on the labour market used English at work daily or several times a week. The survey also revealed significant differences between different fields of work. Where 100% of people working in IT used English at work, only 50% of people working within fashion said the same. As in other European countries, English is an often-used working language in universities (Hultgren et al., 2014; Mortensen & Haberland, 2012; Negretti & Garcia-Yeste, 2015). English is also often adopted as a corporate language in large international corporations in Denmark (Lønsmann, 2014, 2017; Millar, 2017; Tange & Lauring, 2009; Vrang, 2016). However, having English as a medium of instruction or as a corporate language does not necessarily entail that English is used all the time (Lønsmann, 2011). This means that even though we know that many Danish workplaces use English, we do not have an overview of the number of people using English at work.

2.2 A diverse labour market

Already in 2018, 9% of workers on the Danish labour market had non-Danish citizenship (Troldborg, 2018), and since then the number of work migrants has only increased (Foged et al., 2019; Statistics Denmark, 2023). In June 2024 around 400,000 non-Danish citizens were part of the Danish labour market out of a total of 3,000,000 employed, corresponding to 13% (Ministry of Employment, 2024). Large numbers of work migrants find work in hotels and restaurants, in cleaning and in agriculture, where one third of workers are migrants, but work migrants contribute to all sectors. The biggest groups of work migrants come from Ukraine, Romania and Poland. Eastern European workers in particular find work within the agricultural sector or in construction, while there is a tendency for Indian workers to work within Information & communication (Statistics Denmark, 2023).

Many migrants who aim to stay in Denmark long term invest time and effort in learning Danish, but a large proportion of migrants are transient, working in Denmark only for a limited time, or they work in Denmark but live elsewhere. Around 14% of foreign workers in Denmark commute (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, n.d.). This means that while some are probably in different stages of learning Danish, far from everyone will make that investment. Statistics show that only 53% of foreign workers on a work visa participate in the freely available Danish language education (Danish Agency for Labour Market and Recruitment, 2024). This number suggests that for a large number of foreign workers – and for their Danish managers and coworkers – other languages, most likely English, play an important role in day-to-day encounters at work.

However, previous studies have also shown that not only English is used, and that English is not equally useful in all types of work. Investigations of linguistically diverse blue-collar workplaces in Northern Europe show that English plays a limited role here, e.g. among Eastern European workers in construction (Kraft, 2020a) and maintenance work (Söderlundh & Keevallik, 2023) and as part of a multilingual and multimodal repertoire in the logistics sector (Dijkstra, 2023; Dijkstra et al., 2021; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018). In certain fields, the local language plays an important role as a lingua franca (Arum, 2024; Kraft, 2017). Language brokers may also play an important role as mediators between migrant employees and management (Söderlundh & Keevallik, 2023), or several languages may be used, e.g. Italian, Spanish, Danish and English in a tunnel construction project in Copenhagen (Kraft, 2020b).

2.3 Language ideologies of English as the default language

Contrary to the somewhat more complex linguistic realities, studies of language ideologies reveal that English is often positioned not just as the natural lingua franca in internationalised work settings, but also as a neutral language. Lønsmann's (2015) case-study of English as a corporate language finds that English is constructed as the natural choice in communication with non-Danish speakers, to the extent that the use of other languages is ridiculed. English is also positioned by Danish managers as a language of equality, as unproblematic and as ensuring communicative flow (Kraft & Lønsmann, 2018), and English is often seen as a means for opening up the Danish labour market by allowing companies to recruit internationally (Lønsmann & Mortensen, 2018). These results indicate that although English does not have any official status in Denmark, the unofficial status of English in Danish workplaces is strong and often constructed as unproblematic.

However, because of unequal access to and competence in English, having to use English at work may cause insecurity and status loss for the individual employee (Neeley, 2013; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014). Employees may not feel that they have the required English proficiency to carry out all aspects of their jobs in English. Such an actual or self-perceived lack of English proficiency can have consequences for employees' ability to participate e.g. in meetings (Nielsen, 2020). While the use of English may lead to frustration and feelings of inadequacy among local workers, unfulfilled expectations about the use of English may do the same to international employees who may be surprised by the amount of Danish used in workplaces where English nominally is the corporate language (Lønsmann, 2014).

This literature review suggests that although we know a lot about the prevalence of English in Danish society in general and the role of English in specific types of workplaces, we need to increase our understanding of how English is used in the labour market in general, including where English is *not* used. In some workplaces, English is adopted as a corporate language or has a recognised strong position (e.g. in academia), but this does not necessarily say very much about the extent to which English is used (Lønsmann, 2011). In other workplaces, English has no official recognition, e.g. in public administration and in many shops and restaurants, but this does not necessarily mean that employees in such places never utilise English to manage their job tasks. In order to investigate the use of English in contemporary Danish workplaces, it is necessary to complement the above-mentioned qualitative studies with quantitative studies that provide an overview of the distribution of English in the Danish labour market in general.

The present article reports selected results from a large questionnaire survey about English in Denmark. The Methods and data section discusses how the questionnaire survey was carried out. The results are presented in an Analysis and results section with four subsections: Section 4.1 focusses on how much English is used at work and in what modes (spoken or written, receptively or actively). Section 4.2 presents the results of a regression analysis on the factors that influence the use of English, Section 4.3 presents the results of an analysis of industry and sector, while Section 4.4 focuses on job titles and job tasks in relation to English use. The Discussion tackles the question of whether and how we are approaching a bilingual labour market in Denmark, and we discuss the implications in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

3   Methods and data

The questionnaire study is part of a larger project titled English and Globalisation in Denmark: A Changing Sociolinguistic Landscape.[1] The survey was distributed to 2500 respondents of which 854 submitted complete responses. The survey was carried out with a representative sample of the Danish population in the spring of 2022 with the aim of investigating reported (i) competence in, (ii) use of and (iii) attitudes to English in

Denmark. This article reports on the part of the survey that focuses on the use of English at work.

The questionnaire study was conducted in collaboration with Statistics Denmark, the official statistics bureau of Denmark. We, the researchers, provided the questions to be included in the study (with assistance from Statistics Denmark). Statistics Denmark drew the sample, distributed the questionnaire and tabulated the data. We, the researchers, conducted the analysis. All Danish citizens and foreign citizens residing in Denmark are registered in the Central Persons Registry (CPR) with basic information such as date of birth and address. Statistics Denmark also has information on citizens' employment, income and more, which means that they can draw a representative sample. To the extent that the respondents who actually respond are not representative of the population, Statistics Denmark can target under-represented groups since they know the profile of those who chose not to respond and how it matches the population as a whole. The result is that the sample of respondents in the study is as close as possible to a representative sample, given that participation is voluntary. Additionally, Statistics Denmark provided individual *weights* for each respondent.

3.1 Design of the questionnaire

The full questionnaire contained a total of 90 questions, including demographic and background questions about age, gender, education, industry, job title, job tasks and workplace location. The remaining questions formed blocks relating to 1) self-reported competence in English – tested via a set of "To what extent are you able to…"- questions (7 questions), 2) contact with English – tested by asking about use of English in contexts of media consumption, face-to-face interactions etc. (13 questions) and 3) attitudes to English expressed as degrees of agreement to statements such as "the presence of English threatens Danish culture" or "the presence of English expands Danes' cultural horizon" (20 questions). The majority of the questions were taken from the questionnaire used in Preisler's (1999) study. We were given access to Preisler's raw data, and a significant contribution of the English and Globalisation in Denmark project as a whole is a comparison of responses collected by Preisler in 1995 and by us in 2022. The questionnaire was validated 1) through discussions with our international advisory board, including Preisler, 2) the experts at Statistics Denmark, 3) through pilot interviews conducted by the researchers and 4) for a majority of the question blocks through Principal Components Analysis to test the internal consistency of the underlying constructs (see Thøgersen & Preisler, 2023, 2024).

In Preisler's (1999) questionnaire, respondents were asked only one question about English at work: "how often do you encounter the English language at work, including reading instructions in English?" (our translation from Danish). The phrasing and the fact that only one general question was asked seems indicative of a labour market where English did not play quite the same role as it does now. Because we were interested in investigating English use at work, we opted to expand the topic (and sacrifice direct comparability). Instead of one question, the respondents were asked four questions about their contact with English at work. The four questions (see Table 1) address four 'modes' of language use: read, write, speak and listen. We hypothesise that some modes will be more frequent than others (e.g. that more *read* English than *write* English) and that the mode of English use correlates with job type (e.g. a taxi driver will *speak* more English and an accountant will *read* more English). We also assume that asking about each of the four modes will make it more manageable for respondents to gauge their contact with English. It may be easier to recall e.g. how often you *write* English than the more abstract "encounter English" in general.

TABLE 1. Questionnaire items about English at work (our translation from Danish)[2]

- How often do you <u>read</u> English at work, e.g. on the intranet, in emails, guidelines, instructions etc.?
- How often do you <u>write</u> English at work, e.g. emails, on the intranet, text messages, reports etc.?
- How often do you <u>participate in conversations in English,</u> e.g. at meetings, on the phone, in coffee breaks etc.?
- How often do you <u>listen to</u> English at work without speaking it yourself, e.g. in presentations, instructional videos etc.?

Respondents could choose between the following responses forming a 6-point Likert scale: 'Every day', 'several times a week', 'approximately once a week', 'at least once a month', 'less than once a month' and 'never'. As always with questionnaires, the results are self-reported estimates of use. Respondents may over- or underreport how much English they encounter at work compared to what an observational study would find. Similarly, respondents may vary in their estimate of what should count as reading or speaking English at work. To some, a brief service encounter in English may not register as "participate in a conversation", to others seeing English loanwords in an otherwise Danish text may register as "reading English". We tried to specify our intention by adding examples such as "e.g. on the intranet, in emails, guidelines, instructions etc.". It could be argued that writing three emails in English a day is very different from the daily language work produced by a translator, and that a brief daily chat in English by the coffee machine is very different from working in an 'English Only' call centre. A survey of this kind does not capture these nuances of language usage in the workplace, but it does provide us with the big picture that has so far been missing in the research on English in Danish workplaces.

3.2 Respondents and distribution

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to a representative sample of adults (age 16 and higher) residing in Denmark. The questionnaire was distributed in Danish only. While this may have excluded some potential respondents, it allows for better comparability with Preisler's study[3]. This is potentially problematic for a survey about the use of English in Danish workplaces since this means that we do not capture the experiences of people who use English, but who do not know Danish. Our results then say something about English use at work among the Danish-reading part of the population. Presumably, the numbers for English use at work would have been higher if we had been able to include non-Danish-reading respondents in the sample. In the following, we use 'Danes' as a shorthand for 'Danish-reading people in Denmark'.

Data was collected between 17 February and 20 April 2022. On 17 or 24 February respondents received a link to the questionnaire in their so-called 'e-Boks', the online system which handles correspondence from public institutions to citizens, or a letter if they were exempted from digital public communication. Respondents were reminded to respond after 10 days and again after 17 days if they had not responded. From 23 March to 3 April a number of respondents were contacted via telephone to increase representativeness by directly approaching under-represented groups. A final reminder was sent on 8 April, and data collection was closed on 20 April. The participation rate is 34%, resulting in 854 completed questionnaires out of a sample of 2505.

Of these 854, 51.8% reported that they were working, either as employed, self-employed or freelancers (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Employment in the sample

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Employed, self-employed or freelancer	435	50.9	51.8	51.8
Unemployed	21	2.5	2.5	54.3
Student or doing military service	70	8.2	8.3	62.6
Pensioner, early retiree or disability pensioner	297	34.8	35.4	98.0
On leave, including sick leave	17	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	840	98.4	100.0	
Missing	14	1.6		
Total	854	100.0		

The 14.4% who were unemployed, students, on leave or who responded "other" were asked whether they had previously been working or whether they had a part-time job (both of which would make it relevant to ask about job experiences) (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Respondents with previous or part-time work experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Has a part-time job or has previously held a job	81	9.5	66.4	66.4
Does not have a part-time job and has not previously held a job	41	4.8	33.6	100.0
Total	122	14.3	100.0	
Missing	732	85.7		
Total	854	100.0		

Overall, 66.4% responded that they (had) had a job. The questions about English in the workplace (see Table 1) were thus posed to the 516 (435 + 81) respondents who were working full-time or part-time as their primary or secondary occupation. The actual number of responses to the individual questions may vary slightly as some respondents opted not to provide an answer to a particular question. Other information about the sample, such as age and education is given in Table 4.

TABLE 4. Information about the sample (only respondents working full-time or part time)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	254	49.2	49.2	49.2
	Female	262	50.8	50.8	100.0
Age	16–29 years	89	17.2	17.2	17.2
	30–39 years	69	13.4	13.4	30.6
	40–49 years	114	22.1	22.1	52.7
	50–59 years	159	30.8	30.8	83.5
	60–69 years	81	15.7	15.7	99.2
	70+ years	4	0.8	0.8	100.0

Household income in DKK 1000	Less than 150 (€ 20,000)	45	8.7	10.1	10.1
	150–250 (€ 20–35,000)	99	19.2	22.1	32.2
	250–350 (€ 35–50,000)	146	28.3	32.7	64.9
	350 and more (€ 50,000)	157	30.4	35.1	100.0
	Total valid	447	86.6	100.0	
	Unknown	69	13.4		
Region	Hovedstaden (Copenhagen)	152	29.5	29.5	84.9
	Sjælland	78	15.1	15.1	100.0
	Syddanmark	112	21.7	21.7	55.4
	Midtjylland	107	20.7	20.7	33.7
	Nordjylland	67	13.0	13.0	13.0
Inhabitants of hometown	Capital area (approx. 1.2 mio)	21	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Town over 100,000	167	32.4	32.4	36.4
	Town 50–99,999	155	30.0	30.0	66.5
	Town 40–49,999	85	16.5	16.5	82.9
	Town 30–39,999	38	7.4	7.4	90.3
	Town 20–29,999	44	8.5	8.5	98.8
	Town 10–19,999	6	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Town 5–9,999	21	4.1	4.1	4.1
	Town 2–4,999	167	32.4	32.4	36.4
Education	Lower secondary 7-8 years	6	1.2	1.2	1.2
	Lower secondary 9-10 years	47	9.1	9.1	10.3
	Upper secondary/vocational	120	23.3	23.3	33.6
	2-year tertiary education	68	13.2	13.2	46.8
	Bachelor's degree	158	30.6	30.7	77.5
	Master's degree	116	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total valid	515	99.8	100.0	100.0
	Prefer not to say	1	0.2		
(Part of) education in English	Yes	272	31.9	31.9	31.9
	No	582	68.1	68.1	100.0

4 Analysis and results

In analysing the data, we have taken a mixed-methods approach combining descriptive statistics, linear models and qualitative coding of respondents' own descriptions of their jobs. First, we look at how much Danes use English at work.

4.1 How much do Danes use English at work and in what modes?

In this first part of the analysis, we focus on how much English is used at work and in what ways by the working population as a whole. Any sample deviates to some degree from the population in general. In this section, we attempt to generalise to the population at large. To account for bias in the sample, we use *weighted estimations* based on data provided by Statistics Denmark. For each respondent, Statistics Denmark has provided a weight based on the person's socio-demographic data (age, region, gender, income etc.). Respondents from 'over-represented' groups get assigned a lower weight than respondents from under-represented groups. By multiplying the respondent's response with their individual weight, we get the best possible estimate of the population as a whole.

Generalising to the population, an estimated 32% of Danes indicate that they read, write, speak or listen to English at work every day, and 94% indicate that they use English at work at least occasionally. In other words, only 6% of working Danes report never using English at work. More Danes *read* English at work than any of the other modes of use (write, listen, speak), while *writing* is the least used mode of use. From our results we can estimate that 86% of Danes read English at work, at least occasionally. 28% of working Danes read English at work daily, and about half do it weekly. 75% *listen* to English at work, while 51% report listening as a habitual activity (at least once a month).
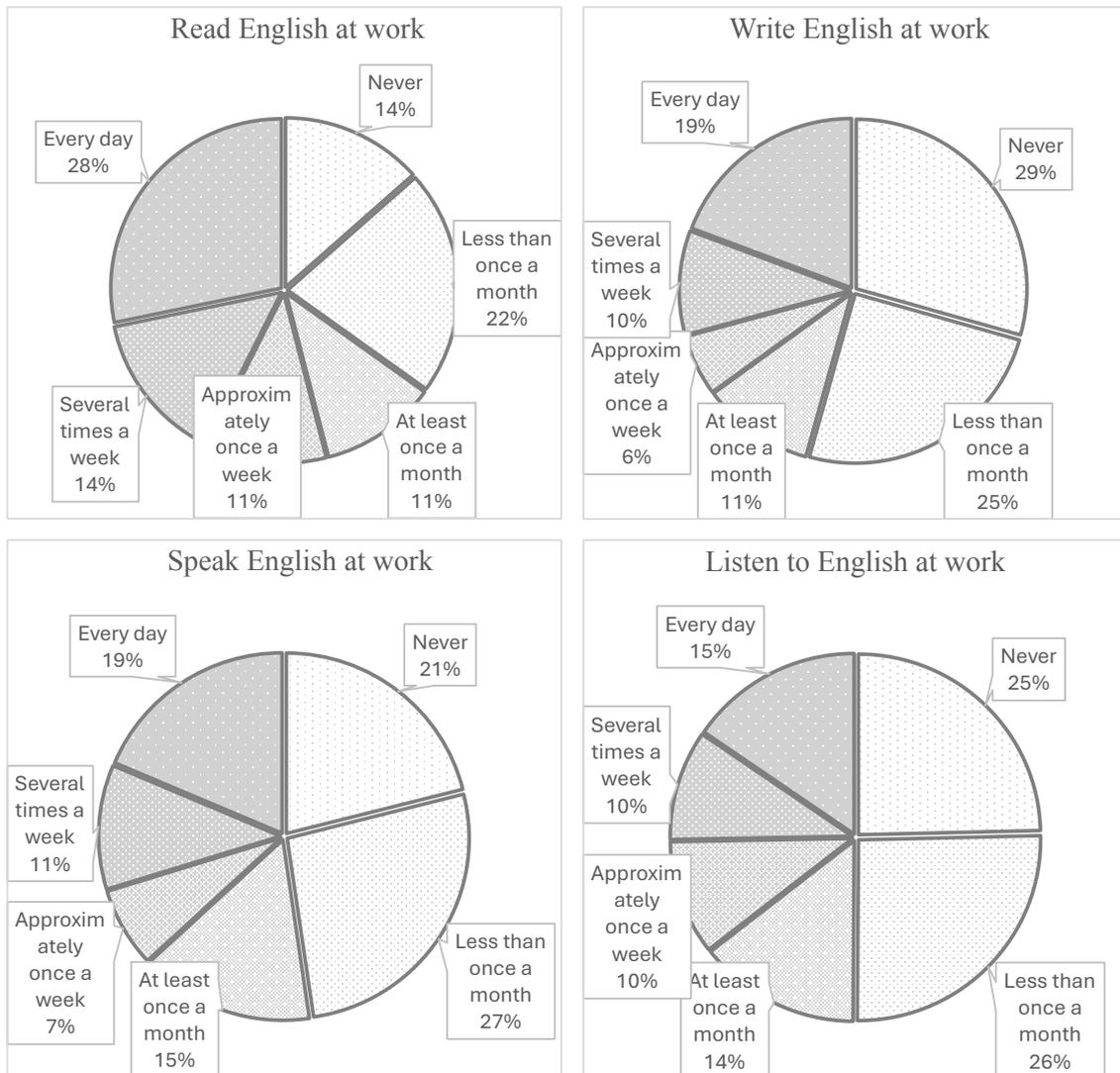

FIGURE 1. Reported use of English at work, weighted estimates

The active uses of English, i.e. speaking and writing, score lower than the receptive uses of English. 19% speak English at work daily, and 79% *speak* English at work at least occasionally. When it comes to writing, 71% *write* English at work at least occasionally (i.e. not 'never'), and more than a third (35%) write English at least once a week. It is thus safe to say that English is an expected language in most Danish workplaces and to most working Danes irrespective of their job function. The initial analysis, however, gives no indication as to who uses English the most, and whether there are jobs in which English plays no role whatsoever. It is the aim of the rest of this article to answer these questions.

4.2 How is English use at work connected with age, gender and education?

Studies of English in the Nordic societies have shown that English is used more by younger than by older speakers, more by men than by women, more by people with higher education than those without, more by affluent speakers than relatively poorer speakers and more by speakers living in major urban than in rural areas (Kristiansen & Vikør, 2006; Leppänen et al., 2011; Preisler, 1999). In our analysis we therefore include as independent variables gender, age group, income and educational level as well as whether respondents had received (some of) their education in English. We also include the location of the workplace[4].

We conducted five separate analyses, one for each of the four modes of use, *read*, *write*, *speak* and *listen*, as well as one based on contact with English *irrespective* of the mode. As the dependent variable for the analyses of the overall use of English, we use an aggregate based on the most frequent of the four modes of use presented above. If e.g. a respondent has reported *speaking* several times a week but *reading* every day, we have noted that they use English every day. The analysis aims to show whether English use (in general and within the four modes) is significantly correlated with gender, age, income, workplace location, education and whether (parts of) the education was in English. Rather than conduct individual analyses for each independent variable, we have analysed the question with a multiple regression analysis (generalised linear regression, ordinal logistic in SPSS 29). In other words, we analyse whether e.g. education still plays a role even when accounting for gender and income and *vice versa*. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis of *overall* English use at work with significant results in bold, and Table 6 shows the effect estimates for the different levels of the independent factors.

Based on previous research, notably Preisler (1999) and Kristiansen and Vikør (2006), we hypothesise that men will use more English than women, that younger respondents will use more English than older respondents, that more affluent respondents will use more English than the less affluent, that respondents with a higher level of education will use more English than those with lower levels and that respondents from the Copenhagen/capital area will use more English than those in the rest of the country. Reference levels for each factor follow the standard in SPSS, i.e. that the highest level in each factor is taken as reference.

TABLE 5. Linear Regression Model of English use at work

| | Tests of Model Effects | | |
| | Type III | | |
Source	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Gender	18.560	**1**	**<0.001**
Age group	8.695	5	0.122
Household income	3.810	3	0.283
Workplace in Copenhagen area vs. rest	8.248	1	0.004
Education	15.859	5	0.007
(Parts of) education in English	22.332	1	<0.001

TABLE 6. Effect estimates of the Linear Regression Model of English use at work

| | | | 95% Wald Confidence Interval | | Hypothesis Test | | |
| | | | | | | | |
Parameter	B	Std. Error	Lower	Upper	Wald Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Gender [Reference: Female]							
Gender = Male	0.793	0.1841	0.432	1.154	18.560	1	<0.001
Age group [Reference: 70+ years]							
Age group = 16–29 years	1.850	1.0363	-0.181	3.881	3.188	1	0.074
Age group = 30–39 years	1.834	1.0363	-0.197	3.865	3.133	1	0.077
Age group = 40–49 years	2.069	1.0211	0.068	4.071	4.107	1	0.043
Age group = 50–59 years	2.176	1.0172	0.182	4.170	4.577	1	0.032
Age group = 60–69 years	1.659	1.0246	-0.349	3.667	2.622	1	0.105
Income [Reference: More than DKK 350,000 (≈ € 50,000)]							
DKK Less than 150,000 (≈ € 20,000)	-0.659	0.3502	-1.345	0.028	3.539	1	0.060
DKK 150,000–250,000 (≈ € 20,000–35,000)	-0.122	0.2570	-0.626	0.381	0.227	1	0.634
DKK 250,000–350,000 (≈ € 35,000-50,000)	-0.233	0.2292	-0.682	0.217	1.030	1	0.310
Workplace [Reference: Outside of Copenhagen]							
Copenhagen area	1.083	0.3770	0.344	1.821	8.248	1	0.004
Education [Reference: Master's degree]							
Lower secondary (7-8 years)	-0.339	0.8031	-1.913	1.236	0.178	1	0.673
Lower secondary (9-10 years)	-1.077	0.3693	-1.800	-0.353	8.498	1	0.004
Upper secondary	-0.824	0.2866	-1.386	-0.262	8.269	1	0.004
2-year tertiary education	-0.408	0.3189	-1.033	0.217	1.639	1	0.200
Bachelor's degree	-0.878	0.2603	-1.389	-0.368	11.389	1	0.001
Education in English [Reference: No English-medium education]							
Some English-medium education	0.952	0.2014	0.557	1.346	22.332	1	<0.001

As shown in Table 5, even when controlling for the effect of other factors, gender, educational level, location of the workplace and whether the respondent has been taught in English are significant predictors of how much they use English at work. Age, however, is not a significant factor in the use of English at work in general (although it has been shown to be important for the use of English *outside* of work (Thøgersen & Preisler, 2023)). Notice though that the 40-59 year-olds experience significantly more English than the reference group (the 70+ year-olds) (see Table 6).

Income is not a significant factor either. This may seem somewhat surprising, but may be because our data only shows the respondent's income as a fraction of the household's total income, not individual income per se. As for the significant factors, men report using more English at work than women (even when controlling for e.g. different levels of education), the respondents taught (partly) in English report using more English, respondents working in the Copenhagen area report using more English, and the general trend is the higher the level of education, the more frequent use of English. Men reporting using more English than women is a recurring pattern, see e.g. Preisler (1999),

Kristiansen and Vikør (2006). On the one hand, there seems to be a general tendency for men to over-report relative to women when it comes to (supposedly) positive traits. For example, Stockemer and Sundstrom (2021) find that men are more likely to over-report voting (i.e. to say that they voted even if they did not). Men's higher reported English use may be a simple consequence of men being more likely to brag (and to find use of English something worth bragging about). On the other hand, it may also be related to the *type* of work men and women are more likely to do. Men are still more likely to work in IT, engineering and management, and women are more likely to work in health, education and public administration. As we will show below, there are large differences in the use of English in different types of work, and the correlation between gender and reported English use may really be a proxy for type of work. Surprisingly, the effect of education is not altogether straightforward. Figure 2 plots the estimated English contact of the different educational groups with 'Master's' given as the reference level, i.e. 0. The values on the Y-axis are estimated means per educational group if all other variables are held constant. That is, the other groups use English between a half and one grade less (on the six-grade scale) than respondents with a master's degree. The absolute numbers are less important than the pattern. What is striking is that there is not a general fall in the use of English associated with lower educational levels.
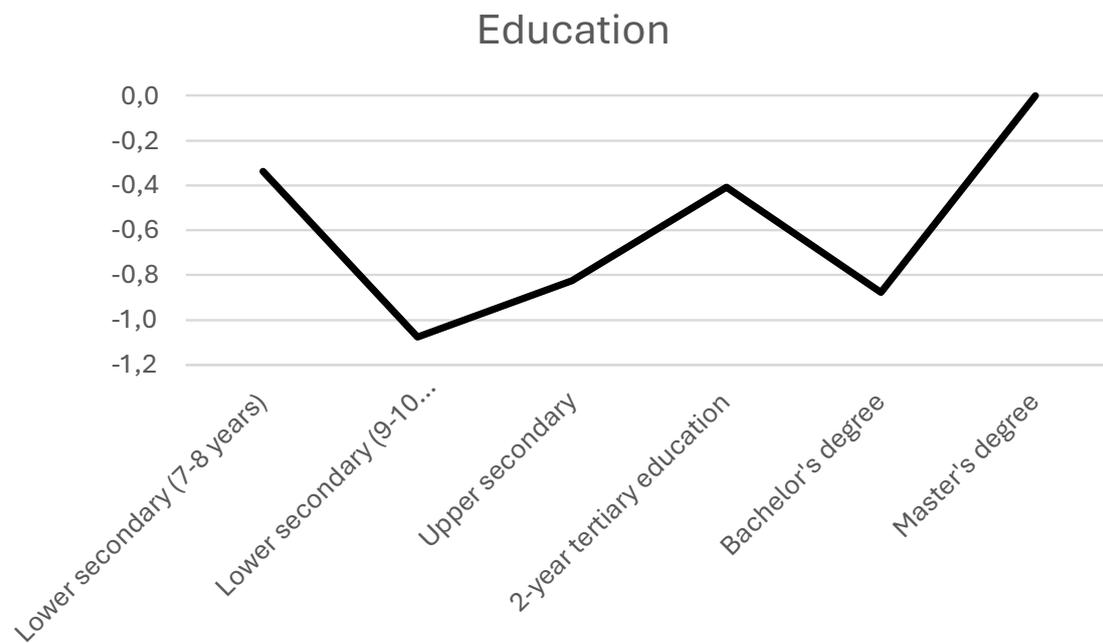

FIGURE 2. Relative differences in English use at the educational levels

What we see instead is that respondents with a bachelor's degree are among the *least* frequent users of English. This is also apparent when we tabulate the proportions of respondents within each educational group who use English 'every day', 'approximately once a week' etc. (see Figure 3). It is worth noting that the distinction between master's and bachelor's level is as much a question of the *type* of education as the *length* of education. The norm in Denmark is for students to stay at university until they have finished their master's. Less than 10% exit university with a bachelor's degree. Hence, respondents who report a bachelor's degree as their highest education have most likely graduated from a university college with a bachelor's degree in e.g. nursing or teaching. We explore the role of English within these types of jobs further when looking at job titles and tasks below.

What we also see in Figure 3 is that more than 50% of Danes with a master's degree use English every day and almost 90% in this group are habitual users of English at work. It seems that beyond a certain educational level, English is used regularly by almost everyone. But a large group of people who left school early also use English regularly. 50% of Danes with only primary/lower secondary school use English at least once a week. Supposedly, some of these respondents work as unskilled labourers or in sales and service, and as we will show below both of these fields have a fair share of frequent English users, e.g. labourers working in multilingual workplaces or sales assistants who use English in service encounters.
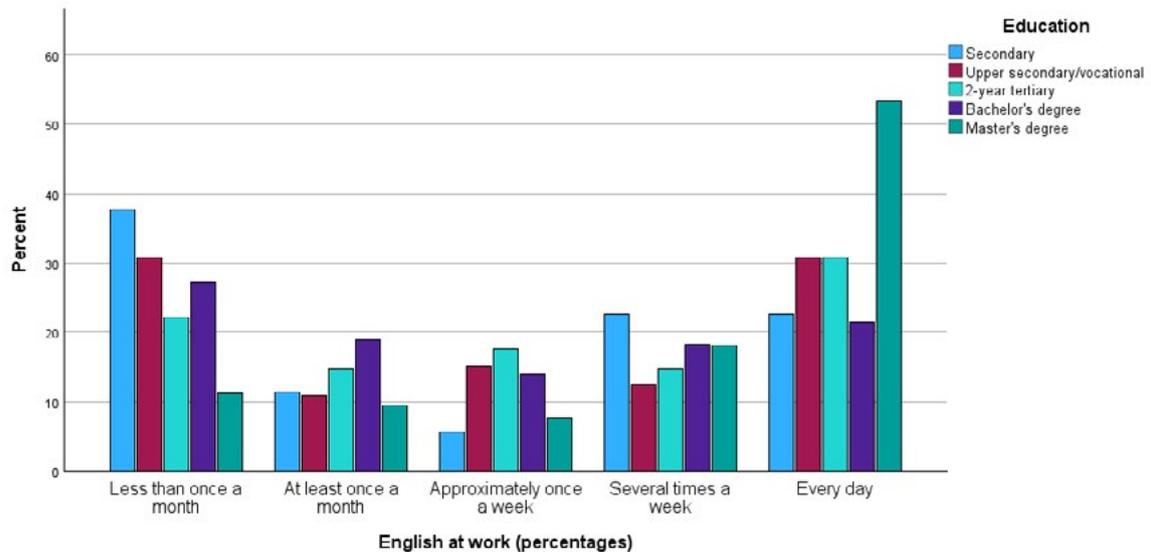
FIGURE 3. English use according to educational level.

We have also analysed the demographic variables in relation to the four modes of *speaking, writing, reading and listening,* but the models for the different modes of use show only marginal variation from the overall picture. What we can see is that men report higher contact with English *except* for writing (i.e. women write as much as men). Respondents working in the capital area report higher English use *except* for reading. Education and education in English affect the reported English use in all modes. Perhaps not surprisingly, *writing* English correlates strongly with educational level – the higher the educational level, the more one writes English.

 The analysis so far has shown that English is widely used in Danish workplaces. It has also confirmed results from Preisler (1999) and Kristiansen and Vikør (2006), viz. that there is a correlation between level of education and frequency of use of English at work. Respondents with a master's degree report using more English than all other educational groups. The effect of education, however, also showed some puzzling trends, viz. small differences between all other educational groups, and that respondents with a bachelor's degree are relatively infrequent users of English at work. Results also showed slightly different patterns for the different modes of use, where respondents with a master's degree stand out for the high frequency of *writing* English compared to the other groups. While these results are interesting in themselves, they also call for further investigation of the industries and types of jobs that the frequent and infrequent users of English are employed in.

4.3 How is English use at work connected with industry, sector and urbanity?

In the questionnaire, we asked respondents to select the industry that best describes their occupation, using the ten fields utilised by Statistics Denmark to designate industry (or 'economic activities').[5] For respondents who had chosen 'other', we assigned an industry based on the title and job description they had provided. For example, a respondent who described themselves as a 'production line worker', was assigned to 'manufacturing'. If a respondent had selected an industry, we maintained their own selection except in a small number of cases where respondents had clearly misidentified their industry, e.g. a 'chef' who had assigned themselves to 'Professional services' (which encompasses accounting, lawyers etc.) rather than 'Trade & transport' (which encompasses hotels, restaurants etc.).

Table 7 shows the different industries in order of falling contact with English. The percentages show the proportion of respondents working within each industry who report using English every day in one form or another.

TABLE 7. Daily use of English in different industries

Industry	Proportion who uses English every day
Information & communication (n=44)	75%
Manufacturing & mining (n=59)	59%
Professional services (n=30)	43%
Financial & insurance (n=12)	42%
Trade & transport (n=97)	36%
Agriculture & forestry (n=14)	36%
Culture, leisure and other services (n=21)	24%
Construction (n=42)	14%
Public administration (n=178)	14%
Real estate activities (n=6)	0%
Rest (n=13)	46%
Total n = 516	

The industry with the highest proportion of daily English users is 'Information & communication', which includes IT companies and telecommunication. The industries with the smallest proportion of daily English use are 'Real estate activities' (sales and rental of real estate), 'Public administration' (which includes e.g. teaching and healthcare) as well as 'Construction' (plumbers, carpenters etc.). Compared with the 75% who report using English every day in the most high-contact industry, in these three industries 14% or fewer report using English daily. We know that large numbers of migrants find work in restaurants and hotels (i.e. Trade & transport), in cleaning (i.e. Professional services), as IT-consultants (i.e. Information & communication) and in Agriculture and forestry (Statistics Denmark, 2023). It is perhaps not surprising then that these industries are at the top of the list when it comes to frequent English users. But Construction is also an industry with a high number of recent migrants, and here we see a much lower proportion of frequent English users. The industries are quite broadly defined, however, and we need more fine-grained analyses to properly understand what is at play.

Another way to compare workplaces is to look at English use in private vs. public workplaces. Of our respondents, 63% work in private workplaces, 35% in public workplaces and 3% respond 'Other'.

TABLE 8. Daily English use by private vs. public sector.

	Never	Less than once a month	At least once a month	Approx. once a week	Several times a week	Every day
Private sector (n=321)	5%	13%	10%	12%	18%	42%
Public sector (n=177)	7%	30%	20%	14%	14%	15%
Other (n=13)	8%	15%	23%	15%	23%	15%
Total n = 511						

In Table 8, we see that whereas 60% of respondents in the private sector use English often (i.e. every day or several times a week), only 29% of respondents in the public sector say the same. Conversely, where only 18% of those working in the private sector rarely use English (here defined as less than once a month), 37% of those working in the public sector fall into this category. The pattern is clear here: English use is much more frequent in the private sector. This is consistent with the results in Table 7. Respondents who work in the public sector are by-and-large the same respondents as those who work in 'public administration' of whom we already know that they are among the least English-using respondents.

The final factor in this section is location of the workplace. While we find no clear differences in English use between workplaces in smaller and larger towns, or between the five Danish regions, we do see a significant difference between workplaces in the Greater Copenhagen area on the one hand and workplaces outside the capital on the other. 73% of employees in Copenhagen workplaces use English often, compared to 47% of employees in workplaces outside Copenhagen. To sum up, those who work in Copenhagen, in the private sector and within information, communication, manufacturing and professional services use English the most, while those who work outside Copenhagen, in the public sector, within real estate, construction and public administration use English the least.

4.4 English use according to job titles and job tasks

While the above division into industries gives us some indication about English and different types of work, those categories are too broad to show the connection between what people do at work and English use. Therefore, we also asked the respondents to indicate their job titles and job tasks in free-text fields. The responses are quite heterogeneous. Those who responded sometimes assigned different titles to what we would consider similar jobs (e.g. 'folkeskolelærer' and 'lærer', both of which can be translated as 'teacher' with the first one specifying someone teaching the first ten grades of school), or the same title to quite dissimilar jobs (e.g. the title "manager" for someone who manages a small store and for someone who runs a major company). Nevertheless, the qualitative coding of these responses gives some insights into job types with more and less frequent English use.

First, we coded the respondents into nine categories found by a bottom-up coding of job titles and job tasks (see Table 9). Within each category, we then looked at the percentage who uses English every day:

TABLE 9. Job types and percentage of daily English users

Job categories	Examples of job titles in this category	Percentage within the category who uses English every day
IT work (n=22)	Software engineer, UX designer, IT supporter	72%
White-collar work (n=166)	Key account manager, project manager, HR business partner	50%
Cultural work (n=8)	Songwriter, sound technician, author	42%
Sales and service work (n=72)	Barista, taxi driver, store manager	29%
Skilled manual labour (n=45)	Carpenter, service technician, farmer	23%
Unskilled manual labour (n=45)	Warehouse worker, cleaning assistant, truck driver	22%
Pedagogy and teaching (n=70)	School teacher, kindergarten teacher, upper secondary school teacher	11%
Healthcare work (n=56)	Doctor, nurse anaesthetist, dental assistant	9%
Other (n=8)	Pilot, student assistant, team leader	50%
Total n = 492		

While IT work arguably is a form of white-collar work, we have treated it as a separate category, and the IT work category does stand out from the rest, with 72% of respondents reporting using English every day (and the remaining 28% reporting using English at least once a week). In comparison, 50% of (other) white-collar workers use English every day. At the other end of the list, we find healthcare work and pedagogy and teaching, where only 9% and 11% report using English every day. Since the healthcare and educational systems undoubtedly see a high degree of linguistic diversity (since everyone in a society needs to access these systems), it is surprising that respondents in these categories are relatively infrequent users of English. It correlates well, however, with our previous finding of a low frequency of English contact among respondents with a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education since graduates with bachelor's degrees often work within pedagogy, teaching and healthcare (as e.g. teachers, nurses or physiotherapists). When looking more closely at the data (i.e. beyond what we are able to show in Table 9), we find that only 5% of people working within pedagogy, teaching and healthcare report speaking English at work every day, compared to 21% of other respondents. Also, 54% of people within pedagogy, teaching and healthcare speak English at work less than once a month, while 77% write English at work less than once a month.

From the combined results about educational background, public vs. private sector, industries and job titles, it seems warranted to say that Danish welfare institutions speak Danish – or at least not English. As discussed in the literature review, English is often seen as the natural and neutral choice in corporate sector workplaces – and English is more frequent here. While we do not yet have a body of research to support this hypothesis, it is not unlikely that monolingual and nation-state-based language ideologies play a similar role in maintaining Danish as the only acceptable choice within Danish welfare state institutions.

Results from qualitative studies (e.g. Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018) indicate that use of English may be related to organisational status. We therefore coded the responses according to whether job titles and job tasks indicate management work or not. When we compare respondents who do management work with the rest, we can see that managers

(across all industries) do use English frequently. Overall, 59% report using English every day in one form or another, while 99% report using English at work at least sometimes.
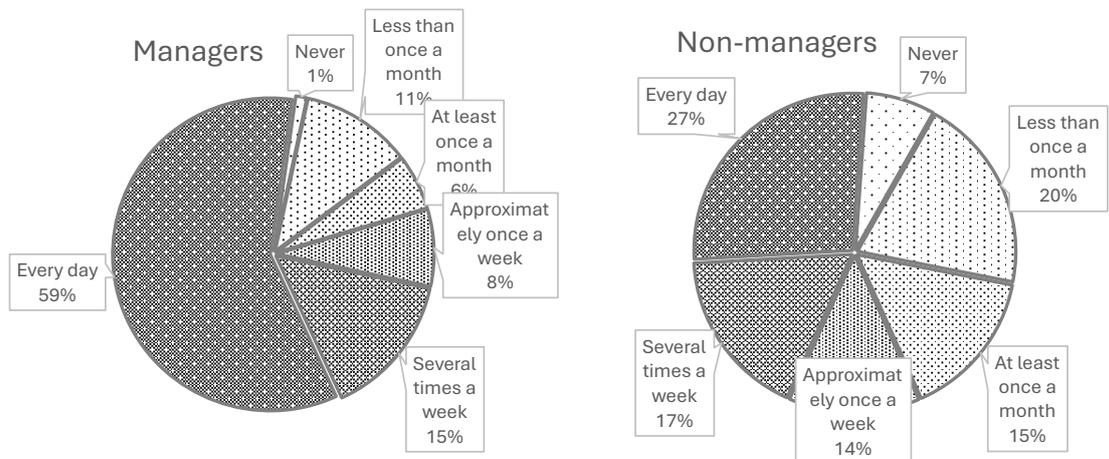

FIGURE 4. English use among managers and non-managers

When we look at the job titles of people who use English at work every day (167 people), it becomes clear that this is a very diverse list. Not surprisingly, it includes managers, IT-workers, researchers and highly skilled employees within administration and communication. However, we also find daily English use reported by baristas, warehouse workers, carpenters, sales assistants and truck drivers – in other words, among a broad range of workers within sales and services and within skilled and unskilled manual labour. The list of respondents who use English every day also includes a kindergarten teacher, a veterinarian, a farmhand, a secretary and the owner of an upcycling company. The qualitative coding thus shows that people in a wide range of jobs, across educational levels, across organisational hierarchies and across blue, white and pink collar work all have frequent contact with English at work.

Looking at job tasks, the group of people who use English every day carry out a very wide range of tasks, including "making coffee", "servicing citizens", "producing news", "anesthetising people for a variety of surgeries", "designing and developing mobile games", "driving a truck", "cooking and cleaning", "management", "putting groceries on shelves" and "fixing cars". Similarly to the analysis of job titles above, this emphasises that people in very different types of work all use English every day. The most striking result is the diversity of job tasks on the list. In contrast, the group of people who report never using English at work is much shorter (only 32 people) and less diverse. Approximately half of this group carry out some kind of care or teaching tasks, including "teaching", "child development", "supervising young people" and "elderly care". Five respondents list "[supermarket] cashier", while carpentry and office work also show up more than once on the list. While English is used across many different types of jobs, the jobs where English is not used seem to be limited to a few types.

After analysing the relationship between job titles, job tasks and use of English at work, we can conclude that working within management often entails frequent use of English, as does work within IT and other white-collar work. For some types of jobs, however, other factors than job type must influence whether English is used or not: While several carpenters and other skilled manual workers report using English every day, several other skilled manual workers report never using English. Also people working within sales and services show up in both the categories of frequent and infrequent users of English. Looking more closely at the job titles, we can make some inferences. While bartenders, waiters, taxi drivers and baristas report using English every day, non-

English users in service work are limited mostly to those working in retail, especially supermarket cashiers. It seems that the services are more likely to be rendered in English if you go to a bar or a restaurant, than if you find yourself in the supermarket. Finally, it is interesting to note that while the majority of job titles are provided in Danish, 45 respondents (or 12%), all from the category of frequent English users, have written their job titles in English, attesting to the large presence of English also in this aspect of the Danish labour market.

5   Discussion: Approaching a bilingual labour market?

Our results show that English is used by an overwhelming majority of workers in Danish workplaces. 94% report using English at least occasionally. Does this mean then that English is a requirement on the Danish labour market? When we compare with Preisler's 1999 study, where respondents also were asked about their use of English at work, we see a clear increase in English use since the 1990s. The data are not completely comparable, neither in terms of the questions asked nor in terms of the categorisation of job types, but Preisler (1999) found that approximately 40% of working respondents encountered English every day while at work, and 25% never encountered English at work. The most apparent change is in the proportion of respondents who report never using English at work, from 25% in the 1990s to 6% now. The apparently *higher* proportion who encountered English every day in the 1990s (40% vs. 32% in our data) may be an effect of Preisler's phrasing: "encounter [*møder*] English" as opposed to ours: "read, write, speak, listen". "Encounter" is open to a more inclusive interpretation in which e.g. a single English brandname or loanword may count as "encountering English" without this amounting to "reading" English.

Our analysis also shows that English today is used not just receptively, but that writing and speaking English are relatively frequent. This finding mirrors findings for English use in society more generally, and it constitutes one of the major changes in English use across time (see Thøgersen & Preisler, 2023, Lønsmann et al., 2024 for a detailed analysis). While English was widespread in Denmark already in the 1990s (Preisler, 1999, 2003), it was mostly present in song lyrics, on TV and on signs. Today people use English actively on an everyday basis, and active use of English in the workplace is an important part of the picture.[6] In this way, we have seen a change in the last couple of decades towards a bilingual labour market.

Our study also attests to the diffusion of English across many different industries and types of work, across educational levels and across organisational hierarchies. While there is a tendency for those educated at the highest level to use English more frequently at work than other groups, the differences between other educational levels is small. Surprisingly, people who left school early are more likely to be frequent users of English at work than people with a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, while managers are frequent English users, many people 'on the shopfloor' also use English frequently in their everyday work. Previous qualitative studies of blue-collar workplaces suggest that a wider range of semiotic resources are useful in these settings (e.g. Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018), but the present study confirms that English is part of the repertoire. The wide spectrum of industries and types of work in which English is used also points to the existence of a labour market that in practice requires competence in both Danish and English.

The presence of English is not spread out evenly across Danish workplaces, however. Jobs within management and IT, in the private sector and work requiring a master's degree correlate with frequent English use; jobs in the public sector, especially in welfare jobs such as childcare, teaching and healthcare, correlate with less frequent English use. So while English is widespread, it is not equally useful or required to the same extent in all industries and for all types of jobs. Some parts of the Danish labour

market are bilingual, but not all. The question is then how linguistic diversity is handled when English does not play a major role, e.g. in the healthcare system. It is one of the limitations of a questionnaire survey that it does not enable us to say anything about linguistic practices more broadly. It would be very relevant for future qualitative studies to investigate multilingual language practices in fields where English plays a minor role, such as care work.

Another limitation of a questionnaire survey is that it is not possible to use this method to investigate exactly how and what kinds of English are used in different types of workplaces. Future studies could investigate for instance whether workers use English alongside or instead of Danish and other languages, or whether the type of English that is used (single words and short phrases vs. complete interactions in English, more or less standard varieties etc.) varies according to job type and job tasks.

While a questionnaire survey cannot say anything about how the use of English at work is experienced, previous studies suggest that for some Danes, despite the construction of English as an unproblematic and universally useful lingua franca (Kraft & Lønsmann, 2018), English may potentially be a source of exclusion in the workplace (Lønsmann, 2011, 2017). The widespread, but varied, use of English in the Danish labour market means that a broad range of workplaces will need to consider how best to support their employees in using English at work. This could entail an open discussion about when and where English is used, and to what extent correctness and native-speaker norms matter. The widespread use of English in the labour market is both a result of and a facilitator for the relatively high number of recently arrived work migrants. For this group, English functions as a language of inclusion that allows them to enter the Danish labour market without Danish competence. Migrants are not only workers in Danish society, however, but also customers and clients. The use of English in a range of service situations, for instance with baristas, waiters and taxi drivers, suggests that English plays a key role for the inclusion of migrants in Danish society, also beyond the workplace. However, when we consider that English does not play a strong role in the healthcare system, in public administration and in many care jobs, it is also clear that English is not universally useful in Denmark. While English is used in a surprisingly wide range of Danish workplaces, across different job types and educational levels, there are still limits to the extent to which English can work as a language of inclusion in the labour market. Future qualitative studies could shed light on how both Danish and migrant workers experience the use of English at work in relation to inclusion and exclusion.

6   Conclusion

Almost all working Danes use English at work to some extent. A third of our respondents report using English at work every day, and a further 43% use English at least once a month. English is in that sense an everyday language on the Danish labour market. English is used both actively and receptively, both in the written and spoken mode and by people of all ages and with all types of educational backgrounds. English use is, however, strongly correlated with industry with information, communication and manufacturing showing up as industries with a high percentage of frequent English users, and public administration and real estate activities taking up positions at the bottom of the list. The analysis of job titles and job tasks reveals very interesting differences between job types. All the respondents working within IT report using English on a weekly basis, compared to around 40% of respondents working within healthcare, pedagogy and teaching. We can also see that English is quite frequent in job types and tasks which have not previously been associated with frequent English use, such as unskilled and skilled manual work. With these results in mind, it is not too farfetched to say that we are now approaching a bilingual labour market in Denmark.

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Endnotes

1. See more about the project here: https://engerom.ku.dk/english/research/centresprojects/english-and-globalisation-in-denmark/.
2. De næste spørgsmål handler om brug af engelsk i forbindelse med dit arbejde:
   Hvor ofte læser du engelsk på dit arbejde, fx på intranet, e-mail, vejledninger, instruktioner osv.?
   Hvor ofte skriver du engelsk på dit arbejde, fx e-mail, på intranet, sms'er, rapporter osv.?
   Hvor ofte deltager du i samtaler på engelsk på dit arbejde, fx til møder, i telefonen, i kaffepauser osv.?
   Hvor ofte lytter du til engelsk på dit arbejde uden selv at tale det, fx præsentationer, instruktionsvideoer osv.?
3. 5% of our respondents indicated a language other than Danish as their most frequently used home language. In that group 16 out of 39 listed English as the home language, three listed Swedish, two Faroese, two Italian, two Polish and one each listed Arabic, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Dutch, Farsi, German, Greek, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Russian/Farsi, Turkish and Urdu.
4. The rather crude binary distinction between the Capital area vs. the rest of the country is based on various attempts with other categorisations. A more fine-grained categorisation based on the size of the population of the town in which one works yielded no significant results. Neither did a categorisation based on the five Danish administrative regions. Only a simple two-way distinction between Copenhagen and the rest of the country yielded significant differences.
5. The categories are equivalent to the EU's NACE (*nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne* or statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community) rev. 2, simplified. In EU parlance, this classification into ten economic activity spheres is known as 'high-level SNA/ISIC aggregation A*10/11'. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5902521/KS-RA-07-015-EN.PDF.pdf/dd5443f5-b886-40e4-920d-9df03590ff91?t=1414781457000 (page 43).

6. The phrasing of questions may in themselves be indicative of this change. The questions about speaking and writing English at work that seem natural to ask in the 2020s apparently did not seem pertinent in the 1990s where a more loosely phrased question about 'encountering' English seemed to suffice.