

Big dog, old bull, strong horse

Author: Mike Swan

Danish, spoken in Denmark, and Swedish, spoken in Sweden, are closely related languages. This means that they have many similarities.

Read the Danish and Swedish phrases below, and look for patterns, similarities and differences. In particular, look at how articles (the words *the* and *a*) are used. Then complete the exercises below.

English	Swedish	Danish
a dog	<i>en hund</i>	<i>en hund</i>
a big dog	<i>en stor hund</i>	<i>en stor hund</i>
the dog	<i>hunden</i>	<i>hunden</i>
the big dog	<i>den stora hunden</i>	<i>den store hund</i>

A1. Identify which of these phrases are Danish and which are Swedish.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| a. <i>en tyr</i> | a bull |
| b. <i>en gammal tjur</i> | an old bull |
| c. <i>tyren</i> | the bull |
| d. <i>en gammel tyr</i> | an old bull |
| e. <i>den gamle tyr</i> | the old bull |
| f. <i>tjuren</i> | the bull |
| g. <i>den gamla tjuren</i> | the old bull |
| h. <i>en tjur</i> | a bull |

A2. If the words for 'horse' are *häst* (Swedish) and *hest* (Danish), and the words for 'strong' are *stark* (Swedish) and *stærk* (Danish), complete the table below.

--	--

English	Swedish	Danish
a horse		
a strong horse		
the horse	<i>hästen</i>	
the strong horse		

Solution

A1.

a. <i>en tyr</i>	a bull
b. <i>en gammal tjur</i>	an old bull
c. <i>tyren</i>	the bull
d. <i>en gammel tyr</i>	an old bull
e. <i>den gamle tyr</i>	the old bull
f. <i>tjuren</i>	the bull
g. <i>den gamla tjuren</i>	the old bull
h. <i>en tjur</i>	a bull

Swe	Dan
	✓
✓	
	✓
	✓
	✓
✓	
✓	
✓	

A2.

English	Swedish	Danish
a horse	<i>en häst</i>	<i>en hest</i>
a strong horse	<i>en stark häst</i>	<i>en stærk hest</i>
the horse	<i>hästen</i>	<i>hesten</i>
the strong horse	<i>den starka hästen</i>	<i>den stærke hest</i>

Comments: In both Swedish and Danish the indefinite article 'a' is *en*. The main difference between the languages comes with the definite article 'the'. When there is no adjective in the phrase, definiteness is shown with an *-en* suffix in both languages.

But if there is an adjective, a separate word *den* is used, and the adjective gains an ending: *-e* in Danish, *-a* in Swedish. Also, in the case of Swedish, the noun keeps its definite suffix, *den stora hunden*. But in Danish, it is dropped, *den store hund*.

In the assignment examples, you also see that the adjective *gammell-al* undergoes a change after the definite article: the double 'mm' reduced to a single 'm' and the vowel before the 'l' is dropped ... though you are not asked to apply this rule in part 2.

Armed with these observations, you can unambiguously identify which language each of the examples come from. At first glance, (a) *en tyr*, (c) *tyren*, (f) *tjuren* and (h) *en tjur* could all be either language, but the other examples follow the distinctive rules concerning the endings, and tell you that *tyr* must be the Danish word for 'bull', and *tjur* is Swedish. The second part of the question simply asks you to apply the rules to two new words.