What is the English counterpart to the Swedish pronoun *man*?

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“There has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English” (Crystal 2003:189) The English language is a big part of Swedish society today. We often communicate with people from other countries on a daily basis, both in our professional as well as our social life. Therefore, English is very important. It is a part of our identity, and learning it is invaluable. But, English as a language lacks a clear counterpart to the Swedish pronoun man. This is a problem especially for a Swede, as it can be assumed that we try to find literal translations when learning new languages. To a large extent, we compare our own words with those of others. This is generally a great way of learning English since Swedish shares the same syntax as they are both Indo-European languages, they even have some of the vocabulary as well in common. But in some ways they differ and when there is no corresponding lexical item, problems ensue.

1.2 Aim, method and material

The main aim of this essay is to generate a better understanding of how to translate the Swedish pronoun man with its different meanings into English. I will primarily examine this issue with a prescriptive approach “how English should be spoken” (Kortmann 2005:116) with a focus on grammar books. Because even though some teachers use a “communicative approach” today, often leading to teaching without books, there is arguably the same backbone of grammar there. Apart from grammar books, I will look into how a renowned translator treats this issue. By analyzing how a Swedish novel is translated into English, one can compare if it is done by the guidelines that are stated in the grammar books. The translation will be somewhat of my medium for modern English. It will represent the descriptive approach of my research.
2. Defining man

This part will cover the different definitions of man in both Swedish as well as English contrastive grammar books followed by a short summary.

To define the Swedish indefinite pronoun man we must first examine how it is used in the Swedish language. It is important to emphasize that this is done through a Swede’s perspective, and therefore a Swedish book of grammar has to be taken into account. The one chosen is Svenska Akademiens Språklära (Hultman 2003). It defines man as a pronoun with a considerably general meaning. It refers to a person or people, but with a deficiency: one can never know if the speaker is included in the message if the sentence is taken out of its context. But if it is not, the context will expose this either way. A recommendation is to use man with quite a deal of consideration because of the ambiguity it may bring to a text, as it is an indefinite pronoun it may even cause a lack of information where there should be none, and in those cases it is sadly up to the reader to interpret the meaning.

2.1 Modern Engelsk Grammatik

This book is intended for usage in the Swedish upper secondary schools and is written in Swedish. The design of it acts to support the main problems a Swede would encounter, and it is achieved by stating a great deal of contrastive examples focusing on translations between English and Swedish.

There are many examples in the chapter explaining man. I have chosen not to include all of them. The following is partly quoted and translated from pages 39 to 40:

“You, we and they can refer to the Swedish pronoun man

A You refers to man and occurs in descriptions as well as when you talk or pretend to talk to someone in general. In casual Swedish language, du or ni is often used instead of man. Here is an example:

When you get to the station, you När man kommer till stationen, tar turn right. man av till höger.

B We can refer to man when man can be replaced with vi in Swedish:

We don’t play cricket in Sweden Man(Vi) spelar inte cricket i Sverige.
C  *They* or *people* can refer to *man* when talking about strange places or countries. It can also refer to something back in time that the speaker could not have anything to do with:

*They* play cricket in England.  
*Man* spelar cricket i England.

D  Primarily, you should choose a passive construction as an equivalent for a Swedish expression with *man*:

No trace of the murderer *has yet* been found.  
*Man* har ännu inte funnit något spår av mördaren.

E  *One* as a counterpart to *man* should be used with caution.” (Svartvik 2001:39)

What Jan Svartvik states makes a number of details apparent. In translations, the primary alternative for translating *man* should be to a passive construction sentence. Since the agent of it can be removed and therefore make it possible to bypass the complex trouble of actually translating *man* makes it a clever solution. There are a good number of examples in this chapter making the statements about *man* easy to comprehend. But, weaknesses in this chapter might be the fact that it is not mentioned what alternative of translation is more or less formal, or the very little information stated describing the issue *one*. It could even be interpreted as if those two weaknesses are related, because of the usual statement of *one* being the most formal alternative on this matter.

2.2 *Engelsk Universitetsgrammatik*

The intention of this book is to cover grammar sufficiently on both ability and analysis, as well as to open up the reader’s eyes to other styles of English and different functions of the language. The book is written in Swedish for students studying at the university level. Concerning how it advises the reader when it comes to *man*, this is freely quoted and translated from pages 190 to 191:

“You, *we* and *they* referring to *man*, whereas *one* has a limited use referring to *man*, you often have a reason to consider *you, we, or they* in the translation of *man*.

A  *You* when the speaker addresses a listener, reader or audience. (The speaker can sometimes be included):

If *you* want to know the truth about Hitler, *you* should read this book.  
*You* is also used (in informal language) when a listener cannot be included.
B We is used when what is said also includes the speaker. In informal language, we is more common compared to one:

In Sweden we look upon the crayfish season as one of the highlights of the year.

C They is used when talking about another place or time when the speaker cannot be included. (People may also be used):

They (People) paid much less income tax in those days.

D Sometimes, especially in formal writing, they could be inappropriate. In those cases there is a possibility to convert the sentence into a passive construction or use people, another noun could also be used if it is suiting to the context.” (Svartvik 1996:190)

The authors have chosen to start out this chapter by stating that one has a restricted use when translating man, but in B they make a comparison between one and we. They state that the latter is less formal than the former, which is a great point to make. The formality in a sentence and context may depend on a translation like this, and they also manage to incorporate the informality of the alternative you. Interestingly, a parallel is made between the passive construction and people, saying there is a possibility to use the first one if it applies to the context. It differs quite a bit from what was stated in Modern engelsk grammatik.

2.3 Bonniers Engelska Grammatik

The book has this catchphrase: “A textbook for school, a handbook for life”. This book is intended for upper secondary school pupils, especially those preparing for further studies. It is written in a fairly simple way with a great deal of examples concerning translations between Swedish and English.

Focusing on man, the author has divided it into three chapters, “You, one, we – man”, “They, people – man” and “He was asked to leave – passive construction”. This is the gist of the information from the book translated into English:

“A. You is used in informal language and refers to man. For example, when giving instructions to someone. In Swedish it is also possible to use du instead of man when addressing someone in a direct way.

You’ve got to be careful when you handle fire-crackers. Man (Du) måste vara försiktig när man (du) hanterar smällare.
B. **One** is more formal and less usual compared to **you**.

*One* can never foresee one’s future. *Man* kan aldrig förutse sin framtid.

C. **We** is used when you can include yourself, as well as when **man** can be replaced with **vi**.

*We* sometimes say things *we* don’t really mean. *Man (Vi)* säger ibland saker *man (vi)* egentligen inte menar.

D. **They/people** is used when you are talking about people in general.

*They (People)* thought prices were going to increase, but it didn’t happen. *Man (De/Dom/Folk) trodde att priserna skulle gå upp, men så blev det inte.*

Instead of a literal translation of *man*, one can convert the sentence into passive construction to avoid the translation of *man*.

He was asked to keep quiet. *Man* bad honom hålla tyst.”

(Gustafsson 1998:47)

It is clearly stated what alternative concerning translations from *man* is more or less formal, with **one** as the most formal of them. There are many good examples apart from the ones presented in this essay, and they are very easy to understand as well. All in all, it is a very concise and good presentation of *man* in *Bonniers Engelska Grammatik*.

2.4 University Grammar of English

It is written in English for first-term students studying English in Sweden at the university level. It presents the problems a Swede usually encounters while learning English. With its focus on oral communication instead of grammar and translation, this book has filled a gap in teaching aid no other has filled before.

It is written the most in the chapter concerning *man* compared to the other grammar books analyzed. I have quoted parts from it here:

“8.10 Referring generically to anyone

The most formal word is **one**:

If **one** cannot enjoy… *Om man inte kan avnjuta…*

A less formal variant is **you**, which is often used to give advice, instructions etc. **Du** is often used in Swedish:

**You** should avoid eating *Man/du* bör undvika att äta

If you can include yourself, **we** is a possible (sometimes necessary) alternative:

In Sweden **we** dance *I Sverige dansar man/vi*
They and people are typically used when we talk about something far away, in time or space. It can also refer rather vaguely to a group of people, such as one’s neighbours and authorities for example. You cannot be included yourself when using these pronouns. De is sometimes used in Swedish:

In Ghana they have legislated that I Ghana har man/de lagstiftat om

A very frequent way of translating Swedish man is to transform the construction into a passive one:

…Mr Black has finally been caught …har man äntligen fångat Mr Black”

(Vannestal 2005:329)

The writer of this book has covered the “man issue” extensively. With its analysis of the passive construction, as well as the consideration of how formal the different translation alternatives makes this book a great selection for English language teaching.

2.5 Comments

Even though there is a pitfall with using man, in being too general, it is sufficient to say that Swedes use man regularly in both written language as well as spoken language. Therefore, we have to deal with this translation problem fairly often, even though a number of us probably do this unconsciously. How can one help the ones with problems in this area? If wanting to choose a book solely based on this field, a comparison between the books has to be made, because there are inconsistencies between the analyzed books chosen in this essay.

First and foremost, the passive construction as an alternative for man is clearly favoured in Modern engelsk grammatik. The reason for this is obviously open to interpretation, but it might be because of the fact that it is found very simple to translate sentences in that way, so it is something that pupils in that age are easily able to do. Keep in mind that identifying register in translations can be overlooked if translating in that way, since one does not have to do a literal translation of the pronoun man because the agent is removed. It is strange as it is not the only book which is intended for upper secondary school usage in this research. Hence, it is apparent that they follow different agendas on this matter.

Modern engelsk grammatik does not advise the reader about formality when translating man, whereas the other books stress the use of one, it expresses caution on the matter, which indirectly discourages usage of one. The motive for this might be the difficulty of getting the register correct when translating man. As this book is written for upper
secondary school pupils, the author might think including formality during that age is too early, and therefore leaves it out.

I would vouch for *A University Grammar of English* or *Engelsk universitetsgrammatik* if my only information was the respective grammar books’ definitions of *man*. They both give coherent descriptions concerning the passive construction as well as formality. The reason for this might be the age of target, but that should not be argument enough to not include such knowledge in books targeting people of younger age.

3. Previous Research

There has not been much research conducted on this subject. I eventually managed to come across two different works. The first one is an article named “A question of (in)definiteness. A look at the Swedish pronoun *man* in English translations.” It is from the year 1997 and was posted in a paper called *Moderna språk* written by Pia Norell. (Since this article was terribly difficult to find, I have posted it in appendix.) The second one is named “A Study of Swedish Students’ Translation of the Pronoun *Man* into English” and is written by Harriet Otter during the year 2008.

The first article covers the subject of this essay partly, as it states: “The purpose of this article is to show some cases of *man* in its different roles, in fiction and non-fiction texts, its varying degrees of definiteness, how these have been handled in the English translation and what possible consequences this may have for the translated text” (Norell 1997:152). It establishes the different perceptions of *man* through four Swedish grammar books of English in order to deduce the corresponding translation and interpretation of *man*, from an English speaking perspective.

Pia Norell compares different translations of *man* in both fiction as non-fiction texts. She comes to a number of conclusions during this article. At first, *man* comes with a vagueness the English language has a hard time replicating, considering no literal translation exists. In fiction texts this is a bigger problem than in non-fiction texts since the focus is both on language and content. The translator has a responsibility here because, “the text is more sensitive to the translator’s changes.” (Norell 1997:156) as opposed to non-fiction texts whereas the original message is the primary focus. She also comes to the conclusion that “the original text can sometimes…be so specific that the translator does not really have a fair chance to come up with a corresponding translation” (Norell 1997:156). She states that in a
way, the exact same message and feeling cannot be translated from Swedish to English, if that is true, it would be an appealing conclusion for a Swede. It would mean that the Swedish language is richer in that aspect in comparison to the English language.

The second work examined as mentioned before is called “A Study of Swedish Students’ Translation of the Pronoun *Man* into English” and is written by Harriet Otter. Her work is a degree thesis covering “…how the students handle the translation of *man* and if they know when the situation requires formal or informal language.” (Otter 2008:1) The pupils targeted were in upper secondary school. The thesis is written mainly in Swedish. Her method of work was to start out by defining *man* through comparing instances of the use of *man* in both Swedish and English books of grammar. Then she moved on to creating a questionnaire, basically with the intention of motivating pupils to use translations of *man*. The conclusions made are very interesting. She states that pupils are ‘often’ managing themselves well when it comes to the translation of *man*. But they are overusing the alternative *you*, which repeatedly makes their translations too informal. One positive side of this is that they sometimes use passive construction to work around it.

Otter asked in her questionnaire if the pupils had been taught about this translation problem from *man* to English whereupon, the majority of them answered: that they had not. Some of them even expressed that they learnt to manage this from music, movies and television. An endnote here is, according to Otter “very few textbooks for English language learning treat this issue” (Otter 2008:36). That is strange since *man* is used with a high frequency in the Swedish language, as well as the complexity certain sentences may generate, because of the fact that there does not exist a literal translation. Otter surmises that the reason for the lack of teaching aids on this matter could be that it is not seen as a problem, and probably constantly underestimated by teachers.

3.1 Comments

Otter (2008) has examined this from a rather didactic point of view as opposed to Norell (1997), who has analyzed the *man* issue from a grammatical perspective. If comparing both works one sees some similarities. They have managed to find weaknesses concerning this issue from their respective standpoints. Norell found problems tied up in the translators’ profession, whereas Otter discovered the in general informal translations mirrored in the absence of teaching materials on the subject. The question is; can anything be done to solve
these problems? Not with the first concern as it is a fundamental language difference that causes it, but with the latter one there might be something to be done to influence English language teaching in Sweden.

3.2 The Translation

How does a professional translator solve the problem of translating man into English? That is what will be examined in this section. Apart from analyzing the actual translated work, theory as well as the person behind it will be incorporated. It has to be acknowledged that every translator is unique. Therefore, it is important to consider what method is used to project the message of the source language to the target language. Because just as it is stated in Discourse and the Translator: “It is erroneous to assume that one-for-one equivalents exist for all lexical items in Greek and Arabic... One could continue the list: word order, sentence length, ways of presenting information and so on.” (Hatim 1990:5) The same could be said about Swedish and English, it would be fallacious to think otherwise. Categorically, both languages do belong to the same family of languages. Undoubtedly, the quote still applies.

3.3 Translation Theory

Throughout history whenever two cultures have collided, translation has been important to aid in communication. “The translator is first and foremost a mediator between two parties for whom mutual communication might otherwise be problematic.” (Hatim 1990:223) The study of translation is wide and has undergone change with time, from negotiating before going to battle to creating subtitles for movies. Those two activities are far from identical, but the act of translation is not different. For example, the methodology behind it is still the same. According to Jean- Paul Viney and Jean Darbelnet:“...the different methods or procedures seem to be countless, but they can be condensed to just seven, each one corresponding to a higher degree of complexity. In practice, they may be used either on their own or combined with one or more of the others.” (Venuti 2004:128)

1. “Borrowing is the simplest of all translation methods.” (Venuti 2004:129) It is used when there is no equivalent translation in the target language. The translator just
“steals” the expression or word. For example, internet and spam are both English borrowings in the Swedish language.

2. **Calque** is a type of borrowing where a translator borrows an expression from a language and translates it word for word into the target language. For example, idiotäker and foolproof, where fool equals idiot and proof matches säker.

3. **Literal translation** is the most common method when translating between two languages of the same family, like English and Swedish. It is simply a word for word translation of the source language into a structural correct target language. One knows when to not use this approach; if the meaning of a phrase changes, or results in a lack of meaning, or leads to a grammatical awkwardness. Today, this method has become simple due to machines easily solving translations in a word for word fashion. Luckily for translators, a mixture between these seven methods is often needed to not fall short when translating, hence machines are not viable yet for adequate translations.

4. “**Transposition** involves replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message.” (Venuti 2004:132) For example, the phrase “you are a good teacher” can be translated to “du undervisar bra”, where a noun has been replaced with a verb. In contrast to the literal translation of the same phrase, “du är en bra lärare”. This method could also be used when there is a need to change focus, in the example above it is changed from the actual teacher to what the teacher is doing.

5. “**Modulation** is a variation of the form of the message, obtained by a change in the point of view.” (Venuti 2004:133) This strategy should be used when there is a given corresponding translation in the target language. It could also be used if the translator is acquainted with the two languages to the points of knowing frequency of use as well as approval of translation.

6. **Equivalence** is usually described with expressions or idioms that are not the same between the source- and the target language. A translation of lagom är bäst could look like: “not too much, not too little, but just right, is best”. Finding corresponding translations of idioms is one of the many problems a translator encounters. Introducing new expressions is often the solution to keep meaning untouched, consequently calque is often needed.

7. **Adaptation**, “with this seventh method we reach the extreme limit of translation: it is used in those cases where the type of situation being referred to by the source language message is unknown in the target language culture. In such cases translators have to create a new situation that can be considered as being equivalent. Adaption
can, therefore, be described as a special kind of equivalence, a situational equivalence.” (Venuti 2004:134) Often are titles of movies or novels amongst the examples of adaptations. As *The Girl with the Dragon* is to *Män som hatar kvinnor*.

Apart from the translation method, one has to consider the uniqueness of a language. Between some phrases it might be impossible to find a corresponding translation. Therefore, in some circumstances the reader has to accept a translation being as close as possible to the source language. Although, as a translator, “…familiarity with the ideas and underlying meaning of the writer of a source language text is a vital aid to translating, whereas unfamiliarity breeds lack of confidence.” (Hatim 1990:11) Hence, it has to be acknowledged that translators having lived in the culture of their target language could be a factor in their profession, as with Steven T. Murray.

### 3.4 Hypothesis

There is bound to be a difference between the Swedish indefinite pronoun *man* and the English counterpart since *man* provides a unique feeling of generality when used in a sentence that cannot be matched by any word or pronoun in the English vocabulary.

### 4. The Analysis

#### 4.1 Behind the Curtain

Steven T. Murray is the translator of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. He used the pseudonym Reg Keeland when he translated it. Murray was born in 1943 in Berkeley, California. Having lived in Denmark, teaching “English conversation and American literature at Herning Højskole in Jutland” (Wikipedia) made Murray familiar with Scandinavian culture.

Today he is an award-winning freelance literary translator from Swedish, German, Danish and Norwegian. “In 2001 he won the Gold Dagger Award in the UK for his translation of *Sidetracked* by Henning Mankell, and in 2009 the Anthony Award for Best First Novel for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson.”

After translating the three books in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* series, Steven T. Murray stated that: “Stieg’s yarn was stupendous and had me gripped all the way
through -- since I don't read thrillers before starting the work, because I like to be as surprised as the reader will be. I think that preserves some additional freshness in the tone.” (Murray) Sadly, it is impossible to evaluate if this circumstance has any impact on the translation itself, one can only speculate that it is in some measure a positive factor.

4.2 Analysis

My analysis will revolve around *The Girl with the Dragoon Tattoo* and the translations of the Swedish pronoun *man* in it. I will investigate how the translator has solved the issue of not having a clear counterpart in the English language. By doing so, I have firstly established where every *man* are in its context in the Swedish novel. Secondly, I have identified the English translations of those passages in the English translated novel. Thirdly, a comparison between the contents of step one and two is made in a number of the instances.

The results of the translations of *man* are presented in the table below. It accounts for the number of occurrences of the different translations chosen by Steven T. Murray.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of translation</th>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>You</em></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>One</em></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive construction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An exchange of noun/pronoun</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A different sentence construction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the numbers, either *one* is too formal or there is a fundamental reason for its absence in the translations. Because, out of the 38 detected *man* there is no translation with *one*. Not shockingly, the amount of *you* is highest with 20 in count. The preferred route in *Modern engelsk grammatik* of converting sentences with *man* to passive voice only appeared three times. One could speculate that the argument for this is to keep the amount of information up to par with the Swedish sentence, since you have to remove the agent when
translating. Hence occasionally, meaning a decrease in generality rather than a decrease in meaning. Here is the first sentence that was chosen for further analysis from the data;

1a. Däremot beaktade man socialchefens rekommendation om förvaltarskap. (Larsson 2006:164)

1b. On the other hand, the social welfare director’s recommendation of guardianship was taken under consideration.

What is apparent in the translation (1b) is the absence of a literal or word for word translation of the sentence. The preferred route of *Modern engelsk grammatik* (“Primarily, you should choose a passive construction as an equivalent for a Swedish expression with *man*.”) was taken by the translator, hence a removal of the agent in (1b). Question is; why was it taken? One can argue that the translation has made the focus shift from (1a)’s verb to its object. Whereas form is changed, the feeling of generality achieved by *man* is still intact. If Murray would have gone for a literal translation resembling this;

1c. On the other hand, they considered the social welfare director’s recommendation of guardianship.

When using a word for word translation of *man*, commonly the span of generality gets narrower. It is exactly the circumstance in (1c). Because in this hypothetical example, if one translates it back to Swedish, this span of generality will be mirrored as *dom/dem* instead of *man* as in (1a) if a literal translation was done. Therefore, content is changed between (1a) and (1c), whereas only form is changed between (1a) and (1b). Additionally, looking at *one* as an alternative the latter sentence would result in a sufficient generality, but an increase in formality. Keeping that in mind, Murray has done a successful translation the way it currently is. The next sentence is from a conversation where *man* is used twice.

2a. Se det så här: om *man* är medlem av familjen Vanger lär *man* sig väldigt tidigt att tala klarspråk. (Larsson 2006:234)

2b. Look at it this way: if you’re a member of the Vanger family, you learn early on to speak your mind.

The translation procedure chosen in (2b) is the most common one, literal translation. First off, the person saying this is a member of the Vanger family to someone that is not. Recalling what was written in the four grammar books, one could take into account that *you* is usually
translated to *du* or *ni* in Swedish, as stated by three of them. For example, by *Modern engelsk grammatik*: “*You* refers to *man* and occurs in descriptions as well as when you talk or pretend to talk to someone in general. In casual Swedish language, *du* or *ni* is often used instead of *man.*” (Svartvik 2001:39)

Only one of them took into account that *you* could also incorporate the person saying it. Hence, the translation is most likely interpreted as less general since the person saying this is left out of the statement. To a degree, that is awkward because of the fact that the gist of the statement could be intended for the person saying it, as that person is a member of the Vanger family. However, if word for word translating, the only other suitable translation available in English is *one*. And going the route of *one*, Murray would risk sounding too formal, because of the fact that the characters are conversing in this section. As well as, changing the contemplated feel of the sentence, for that reason it is not a viable option for translation.

The alternatives for the translator is either keeping the sentence as it is, or going in a different direction. For example, changing the translation method or converting the sentence to passive voice would also be a feasible translation.

This sentence is from a conversation between the main character in the novel and a woman from the Vanger family:

3a. "*Man* skiljer sig inte i familjen Vanger."
Hon skrattade för första gången.
"*Nej, man* gör inte det…" (Larsson 2006:481)

3b. "*No-one* does in the Vanger family."
She laughed for the first time.
"*No, they* don’t. …"

Translating *man* with a corresponding pronoun is done in a great manner with the first *man* in (3a). The first sentence is also shortened as it refers to a former sentence instead of repeating the verb *skiljer*, as the Swedish version of it does. As for the latter *man*, one might ask whether or not to use *we* or *one* as a substitute of *they* in that sentence. Since the woman talking belongs to the Vanger family, using *they* makes the statement significantly less likely to apply to herself, as well as this is somewhat changing the author’s message, as it is a broad span of generality in the original Swedish sentence, hence another alternative should be contemplated. However, *one* is often too formal, because someone in conversation states this.
They could therefore be exchanged for *we/vi* in both the Swedish along with the English sentence. The only downside with *we/vi*, it is less general compared to *man*, but it still addresses herself as well as others compared to *they*, which is positive. The next sentence is from a conversation where *man* is used twice just like in (2a).

4a. Beroende på vem *man* frågade och hur *man* räknade. (Larsson 2006:510)

4b. Depending on whom *you* asked and how it was calculated.

This instance of *man* is brilliantly solved by the translator. The first part of the sentence is word for word translated, whereas the second part is written in a passive construction to evade the direct translation of *man*. Imagine this translation instead which totally evades any literal translation of *man*:

4c. Depending on whom was asked and how it was calculated.

This could lead to an inadequacy of information, since the agent would be completely removed from the sentence, leaving the reader unaware of the subject of the original clause. Depending on how one interprets the Swedish sentence, there is a chance it could be evaluated as too quantitative, since the agent is clearly stated twice. Not that too much information is overwhelming, either way the translator Murray has grasped this and made the sentence more efficient by only utter the agent once.

The translation of *man* to *you* in (4b) is acceptable. The question is, could *one* be used instead, since it has a more general meaning compared to *you*? Because in the text, it is the narrator communicating with the reader and not any character conversing. It should be regarded as a clear alternative as it is not sensitive to sound formal in that type of context. Clearly, *one* is more formal in English, in contrast to what *man* is in Swedish. The translator is either too formal or reducing the amount of generality of the sentence too much. What is preferred or most successful is a matter of judgment. The next sentence refers to something that happened back in time;

5a. *Man* hittade stearinfläckar på henne som visade att ett ljus hade använts, men händerna var så förkolnade att de måste ha hållits inne i en kraftigare brasa. (Larsson 2006:372)
5b. They found paraffin stains on her, which showed that candles had been used, but her hands were so charred that they must have been held over a more powerful fire.

(5b) is one of the few instances where *they* is used as a literal translation of the Swedish pronoun *man* in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Firstly, the author is referring to any crime scene investigator with the use of *man*. Therefore, could translating it to that noun be a viable option? In actuality, it would not be ideal as the span of generality would not be close to what it is in the Swedish sentence. According to *University Grammar of English*: “*They* and *people* are typically used when we talk about something far away, in time or space. It can also refer rather vaguely to a group of people, such as one’s neighbours, authorities etc. You cannot be included yourself when using these pronouns.” (Vannestal 2005:330) This is what the translator applies in (5b), the optimal alternative. *They* is the most general word in this instance, and the most suiting literal translation compared to *people*, since *people* could refer to any person whatsoever. *They* is also more compatible with the context as it as a word alike *man*, it gets influenced by the context it is in. Again, the next sentence contains two instances of *man*.

6a. Bor *man* i Norsjö besöker *man* förr eller senare järnhandeln, resonerade Mikael. (Larsson 2006:352)

6b. He reasoned that *anyone* living in Norsjö would sooner or later pay a visit to the hardware store.

In (6a), one can again see two instances of *man* in the same sentence, and just like in (4a), this could be considered as a quantitative amount of agents. The translation of it is very good, the form is somewhat changed but the message is still intact. Additionally, both occurrences of *man* are mirrored in *anyone*, as the first one is replaced and the second one overlooked due to a suiting sentence structure. Ultimately, it is an appropriate solution and translation of the Swedish pronoun *man*. 
4.3 Comments

We have to conceive that, in general, translators are confronted with a great deal of other matters apart from the issues of translating man. Therefore, it is quite possible that Murray compensated for another concern or approach, rather than kept the span of generality up to par of the Swedish sentence with man in it.

How the translation of (6a) was conducted is generally the way one would prefer any translation. The sentence was interpreted by the translator, and then the message was converted into the English language. Since the removal of one agent, one could argue that the sentence is more effective in English. One of the arguments for it is the lower risk that it sounds repetitive with a total of only one agent.

What was most astounding was the total absence of translations of the Swedish pronoun man into one. Interestingly, even in the narration as well as the conversations in The Girl with the Dragoon Tattoo do not have any translations to one. In general, the narration is often more formal because of the informality of the conversations of the characters. However, the absence of one makes one believe that the circumstance of one is making any context too formal, even when the narrator is addressing the reader.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The main aim of this essay has been to generate an understanding of the distinct difference of the Swedish indefinite pronoun man and the English counterpart. It is established that man provides an extraordinary feeling of generality in its context. The materials used to do this consist of two parts. Firstly, four different grammar books describing how the translation from Swedish to English should be done. Secondly, how a translator deals with the issue of not having a corresponding component in the English language. This essay also incorporates theory of translation to identify other problems a translator might get confronted with.

The study consisted of a comparison between the different definitions of man in the grammar books chosen. As well as, analyzing how the award winning translator Steven T. Murray approaches this from a prescriptive standpoint. Earlier research has acknowledged weaknesses concerning this issue from their respective point of views. Usually upper secondary school pupils tend to express themselves informally in translations from man to English. Additionally, Pia Norell came to the conclusion that “the original text can sometimes...be so specific that the translator does not really have a fair chance to come up
with a corresponding translation.” (Norell 1997:156) since there is no clear counterpart on this issue. Further studies could investigate how to settle the matter of upper secondary school pupils having problems in this area, with the main goals to assist as well as advise them.

Comparing the different grammar books generated a number of conclusions about them. There are inconsistencies concerning formality. Some stresses this topic a great deal, whereas it is dismissed in one. Although, two of the books gave coherent and concise descriptions of how to deal with the issue of translating man, it is plausible that the target of age is the reason for this.

The conclusion that the translator of The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo is successful concerning the issue of man was made. Although, the span of generality was not kept at all times, it was at least striven for. In a number of contexts it is often a matter of interpretation. Either the context gets somewhat changed in the direction of a thinner span of generality, or to being too formal. As there is no corresponding device like man in the English language, the translator is obliged to choose. Also, not being enlightened of all of the situations a translator is confronted with plays a part here. It makes it difficult to reason if another part of a context was kept intact when translating, at the expense of generality. Therefore, judging if a translation is viable should not be predicated on the translation of man, but it should be based on if the author’s message has radically changed.

Finally, there is a difference between the Swedish indefinite pronoun man and any translation to English, since man provides a unique feeling of generality in the context it is executed in. Accepting that not fully accurate translations are possible is only a very small part of this topic. One is urged to see a bigger picture, as providing adequate language teaching components to furnish learning, as well as support of the English language for Swedes.
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7. Appendix

7.1 A question of (in)definiteness

Pia Norell

A question of (in)definiteness. A look at the Swedish pronoun man in English translations.

Pia Norell är verksam vid engelska institutionen i Uppsala. Hon diskuterar här ett av de klassiska problemen vid översättning från svenska till engelska: det svenska pronominet man med sina många olika betydelser.

A look at four Swedish grammars of English, Modern Engelska Grammatik, Engelsk Universitetsgrammatik (Svartvik-Sager), Gleerups Engelska Grammatik (Ljung-Ohlander) and Hargeviks Engelska Grammatik, shows that they all treat the correspondence to the Swedish indefinite pronoun man in a fairly similar way. One is often mentioned among the first options but at the same time it is also pointed out as being too formal and instead you, we or they are recommended. Instead of a pronoun, people, or, as Engelsk Universitetsgrammatik (p. 187) puts it, ‘another noun which fits the context’ can be used. Another common translation is a passive clause in more formal language and when a they may seem unmotivated. Gleerups Engelska Grammatik and Hargeviks Engelska Grammatik also mention that an English it/there-clause sometimes corresponds to a Swedish clause with man.

These recommendations work very well in cases where man is ‘truly’ indefinite, but this is not always the case. In spite of the fact that man is traditionally classified as an indefinite pronoun, i.e. that it ‘refers to an unknown person’ (Thorell 1973:96) it is often subtly tied to a referent in the (con)text. Moreover, man can take on various referential functions, including being non-referential; it may include or exclude the speaker and it can replace both singular and plural antecedents (SAOB M 201, Andersson 1972, Norell 1996). Man has an ability to turn up anywhere on the continuum of the indefinite – definite scale, i.e. it will occur with varying degrees of modification. This changing or ‘chameleon’ character of man is something that Swedish grammars of English do not take into consideration, but which becomes obvious when a text is to be translated. The purpose of this article is to show some cases of man in its different roles, in fiction and non-fiction texts, its varying degrees of definiteness, how these have been handled in the English translation and what possible consequences this may have for the translated text. The article will concentrate on two ways
of rendering a clause with *man*, translations with nouns in non-fiction texts, and with personal pronouns in fiction texts.

The material is taken from a corpus of original Swedish texts and their English translations. The corpus is based on both fiction and non-fiction texts (for a detailed list of the corpus texts, see Norell 1996). The corpus contains 1,032 instances of *man* and its translations, 501 instances from non-fiction texts and 531 from fiction texts.

**Man in non-fiction texts**

The pronoun *man* is no doubt a very ‘handy’ linguistic device. In non-fiction texts it is often used non-referentially, i.e. it has no real content. Sentences with *man* can often be rephrased without using the pronoun in question: it is by no means always an unavoidable pronoun. But by using *man* a passive clause is avoided, which may make the sentence easier to interpret (Wellander 1970). Also, by using *man* the sentence is given a human subject, which however tenuous, also adds to the readability of the text. To replace *man* with a noun in the translated text is often a way to retain the indefiniteness and also to give an exact and not too wordy translation. This noun is often taken from some other constituent in the immediate context. This way, the second most common rendering of *man* in non-fiction text (the most common is, not surprisingly, a passive clause) is by a noun phrase. This may at first give the impression that the translated text has become more specific than the original text, but this is not necessarily the case. If we look at (1) below it is clear that the possible referent of *man* is really not important. The text could just as well – if we see to the information value – have been formulated *går det att avläsa, är det möjligt att avläsa, eller kan avläsas (it is possible to discern, can be discerned)*, but using *man* gives a ‘human touch’ to the text. In the translation, the object in the original clause, *de stora ländernas regeringar (governments in major countries)* has been turned into the subject, thus making a translation of the indefinite pronoun unnecessary. Two other possible translations were given above, also a third variant may possibly be acceptable; *one can discern* (this, however, has consequences for the referentiality). These translations are also correct, but they are not as direct as (1b). This translation takes as its starting point the active part of the sentence, the actor.

1a. Redan i dagsläget kan *man* emellertid avläsa en betydande beslutsamhet hos de stora ländernas regeringar att nedbringa inflationstakten. (Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU) 1975:89. p.17)
1b. However, governments in major countries are already displaying considerable determination to reduce the rate of inflation (The 1975 Medium Term Survey (MTS 1975) of The Swedish Economy, p.16)

Also in (2) man is a linguistic device for the fluency of the text. Again, it is the object clause of man that is the important part of the sentence.

2a. En anledning till denna förändrade syn på invandringen var bl.a. att man observerat att en betydande andel av utvandrarna hade en anställning i hemlandet för utvandringen (SOU 1975:89, p.57)

2b. One reason for this was the observation that a considerable proportion of the emigrants had been employed in their home country (MTS 1975, p.54)

Here, the translation takes the verb of man and turns it into a noun. The only alternative translation would seem to be a passive, it has been observed. Again, translation by a noun has the advantage of being an active construction and of focusing on the topic.

The scope of man, as mentioned above, is often limited in various ways and it is in these cases that a constituent of the modification is picked out to serve as the corresponding subject in the English translation. The modification in the original clause may be ‘more or less’ limiting, and when the noun in the translation is taken from the modifying phrase, the translation will result in the corresponding degree of (in)definiteness. An example of this is shown in (3) below:

3a. En anledning härtill kan vara att man i Sverige sedan åtskilliga decennier varit inriktad på just de problem som först under senare år fått aktualitet i vissa andra länder, (SOU 1975:89, p.17)

3b. One reason for this may be that Sweden has been concerned for many decades with problems which have become topicaö only recently in certain other countries, (MTS 1975, p.17)

In (3a) the usefulness of man is clearly demonstrated. The adverb of place contains the real message, but man is smoother in the context. To do as the English translation, to have Sverige as the subject would also affect the participle, which would have to be inflected for neuter, inriktat, with an almost uncomfortable ring of impersonality to it. The adverbial indicates that we are talking about the policy of a nation, and, moreover, a policy decided on, not by every individual in that country, but by a certain group of people. Thus, man is here restricted in two ways; geographically and also by the activity involved. (3b) is a good translation since it
perfectly keeps the vagueness of the referent. *People in Sweden* or *Swedes* would be to focus too much and too indiscriminately on the individual.

In (4), below, *man* is anaphoric in the sense that it refers back to an antecedent from the preceding sentence.

4a. Det andra arbetarmötet, hållet 1882, framförde i huvudsak samma fordringar som det första. Beaktansvärt är att *man* uttalade sig för kyrkans skiljande från staten, (Tingsten: Den svenska socialdemokratins idéutveckling, p.66)

4b. The second workers’ convention, held in 1882, advanced in the main the same demands as the first. Of note is the fact that the second convention espoused separation of church and state, (Tingsten: The Swedish Social Democrats, p.55)

By simply reiterating the subject from the preceding sentence the translation retains exactly the same information content as the original. In both the original and the translation it would have been possible to be more specific – *delegaterna* (*the delegates*), *de närvarande* (*those present*) or other similar nouns would have fitted the context. *Man*, however, does away with the necessity of specification, just as a repetition of the subject does in the translation.

**Man in fiction texts**

Above we have seen how, in non-fiction, the original vagueness of *man* can be successfully rendered by using the appropriate noun. Fiction texts, however, sometimes pose different problems. The Swedish pronoun may occasionally be replace by an English noun of a general character like *people, man, woman*, as in (5) below, taken from Christer Kihlman’s *Se upp salige*, parts of which have been translated as *All the Blessings of This Life* in *Modern Swedish Prose in Translation*, edited by Karl-Erik Lagerlöf.

5a. Runtomkring oss sjöng *man* högtidligt, innerligt jubileigt om mörkrets furste och hans onda stämplingar mot Lexå befolkning och om Guds underbara storhet, (p.47)

5b. All around, *people* sang in solemn, sincerely jubilant voices about the prince of darkness and his evil machinations against the people of Lexå and about God’s wondrous greatness, (p.135)

In this example, *man* does not really constitute a problem. But it is not always as easy as this. Sometimes *man* is clearly used as an anaphoric pronoun, as in (6) from Moa Martinsson’s *Kvinnor och äppelträd*, translated as *Women and Appletrees*.

6b. *The young farmer* is twenty-six years old and knows a few things. *He* knows that Mother hasn’t lain with Father for nearly ten years, and that’s good, *he* gets out of more mouths to feed. But people talk about Mother. Now she isn’t so well liked anymore. She’s disgraced in some way, disgraced because she bathes. *He’s* young and strong and wise, and *he* has to laugh. How can a mother be disgraced because she bathes? (p.8)

It is obvious that in at least four of the five cases *man* refers to ‘the young farmer’. But even so the use of *man* adds something to the text, it adds an air of generality; it hints at the possibility that this situation need not be limited only to this person. Neither the noun phrase *the young farmer* (which is needed in order to use the personal pronoun in the following) nor the personal pronoun *he* convey this at all. In the translation there is a question of anaphora and nothing else. Still, it is difficult to think of a translation that keeps the original message. Quite apart from any other considerations, *one* would not be stylistically appropriate. *You* would be stylistically more appropriate, but on the other hand, even when used generically it retains too much of its 2nd person meaning and it may be asking too much to invite the reader to identify with this particular situation. Nor would a verbal construction fulfill the same function in a natural and idiomatic way. The translator is really left with very little choice. The fifth instance of *man*, however, (*väl är det så att man slipper fler munnar att mätta*), differs from the rest. (It also shows the versatility of *man*, how, within only a few sentences, it can change its reference.) in this case it need not necessarily be limited strictly to the young man since he is probably not providing food for the family single-handedly. A translation that would have kept the original vagueness would have been *there will be no more mouths to feed*, a rendering which does not specify exactly who is doing the feeding.

**Conclusion**

The different roles of *man* in non-fiction texts also leads to different strategies for the translator.

In non-fiction, where information content is in focus the translator is given more room to manoeuvre; as long as the information value is kept the translation will be seen as successful. The examples above also show that when translating Swedish sentences with *man*
one should not get too blinded by the pronoun itself and always try to find a translation for it, since it is often best left untranslated and its function filled by some other constituent in the clause.

In fiction texts, however, the situation is different. Here, with focus being as much on language as on content, the text is more sensitive to the translator’s changes. Also, the original text can sometimes, as in (6), be so specific that the translator does not really have a fair chance to come up with a corresponding translation.