

Spending Time in English and Swedish¹

Stig Johansson, University of Oslo

1. Introduction

The starting-point for my paper is the observation by Martin Gellerstam (1996: 59) that the Swedish verb *tillbringa* ('spend [time]') is overused in translations from English, presumably under the influence of the English verb *spend*. The same is true of Norwegian *tilbringe*; see Figure 1. For *spend* in expressions of time there is an opposite translation effect. These translation effects show that there is a tendency for translators to move on the surface of discourse and resort to formally similar structures where this is possible, rather than find forms that are more in line with usage in original texts in the target language. The question I would like to ask is this: what do Swedes and Norwegians do when they do not spend time? What alternatives are there for conveying the English notion of spending time? But first we must examine how the English verb is used.

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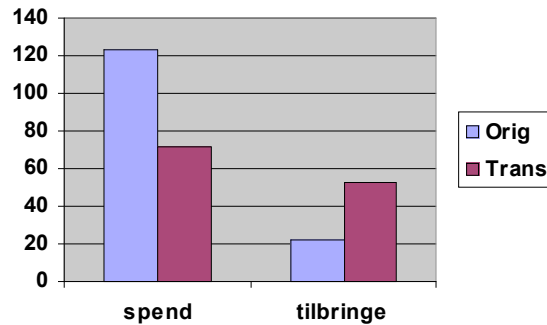


Figure 1 The distribution of English 'spend' and Norwegian 'tilbringe' ('spend') in original and translated fiction texts of the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (30 texts of each type)

2. English spend and its complementation patterns

The verb *spend* in expressions of time is an example of the 'time is money' metaphor (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1981: 7f.). Usually the verb is followed by a temporal NP and an adverbial. The patterns found in the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus are:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>spend</i> + NP _{temp} | |
| <i>spend</i> + NP _{temp} | + ADV _{place} |
| | ADV _{accomp} |
| | ADV _{manner} |
| | ADV _{place+accomp} |
| | ADV _{place+manner} |
| | ADV _{place} + V-ing |
| <i>spend</i> + NP _{temp} | + V-ing |

Judging by the corpus material, you spend time in a place, with somebody, in a certain manner, in a place with somebody, in a place in a certain manner, in a place doing something, or you spend time doing something. Only exceptionally do we find examples of *spend* plus temporal NP without any further complementation:

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- (1) She informed us that she planned to *spend that night*, then go to church with us, and be back in Des Moines by supertime. (JSM1)
Hon upplyste oss om att hon tänkte *stanna över natten* [lit. 'stay over the night'], sedan följa med oss till kyrkan och vara tillbaka i Des Moines vid middagstid.

Here the location is understood from the context.

3. English spend and its Swedish translations

As I have previously examined Norwegian and German correspondences of *spend* (Johansson 2002), I will now focus on correspondences in Swedish, as they appear in the fiction texts of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus (Aijmer and Altenberg 2000).² Figure 2 gives an overview of the distribution of *spend* and *tillbringa* in the fiction texts of the corpus. Although the exact numbers differ, the overall pattern is very much the same as in Figure 1.

² For more information on the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, including explanations of the references for the examples below, see: <http://www.englund.lu.se/content/view/66/127/>

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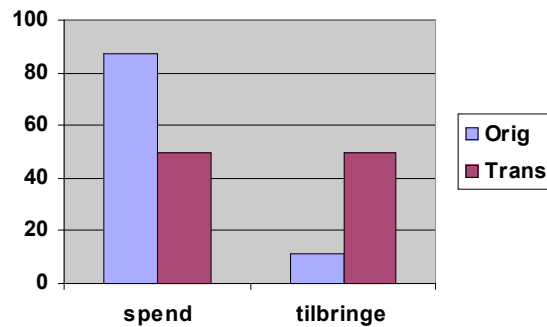


Figure 2 The distribution of English *spend* and Swedish *tillbringa* ('*spend*') in original and translated fiction texts of the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus (25 texts of each type)

In spite of the translation effect, about half of the examples of *spend* are translated by something else than *tillbringa*. The main correspondence types are listed below.

A. Transitive verb

Apart from *tillbringa*, there is a single instance of *spendera*, where not only the pattern but also the verb has been borrowed from English. Incidentally, *spendera* is also used occasionally in the sense of spending money.

- (2) And that's how I *spent* the rest of the day. (SG1)
Och på det viset *spenderade* jag resten av dagen.

Other transitive verbs are *använda* ('use'), *lägga ner* (lit. 'put down'), and *ägnat* ('devote'), which most often translate instances with V-ing complements:

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- (3) According to Hugo, Ted *spends* so much of his time seducing women because he is such an ugly brute that he has to prove he can. (MD1)
Enligt Hugo *använder* Ted så mycket av sin tid till att förföra kvinnor därför att han är så ful att se på att han måste bevisa att han kan.
- (4) Before even pressing the doorbell, he had *spent* a full minute scanning the outside of the door, its frame and surrounding wall area in the passage. (FF1)
Redan innan han tryckt på ringklockan hade han *lagt ner* en hel minut på att syna dörrens utsida, dess karm och de omgivande väggarna i korridoren.
- (5) Celia described how, after a regular day's work, she would spend evenings and weekends reading every drug manual she could get her hands on. (AH1)
Celia berättade hur hon efter dagens arbete ägnade kvällar och helger åt att läsa varje läkemedelshandledning som hon kunde hitta.
- (6) I actually *spend* time thinking about this. (MA1)
Jag *ägnar* faktiskt tid åt att tänka på det.
- (7) We've seen microscopes before, but not at such length; we can *spend* a lot of time with them before getting tired of them. (MA1)
Vi har sett mikroskop förr, men inte i sådana mängder; vi kan *ägna* en massa tid åt dem innan vi tröttnar på dem.

Ägna is particularly common, accounting for about 10% of the translations of *spend* in expressions of time. Apart from translating examples with V-*ing* complements, it is also used to render the ADV_{accomp} type, as in (7).

B. Intransitive verb

Often there is an intransitive verb, such as *sitta* ('sit'), *leva* ('live') or *vara* ('be'), followed by an adverbial of time, as in:

- (8) 'Whatever you do, don't *spend* the whole night comparing notes about the long-lost land.' (BR1)
"Vad ni gör, *sitt* inte hela natten och jämför era minnen av det djupt saknade gamla landet."

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- (9) In Paris I'd been quite confident, as I was that afternoon in Chartres and the night I spent there [...] that I needed Paul and wanted him; wanted to *spend* the rest of my life with him. (BR1)
I Paris hade jag inte hyst några tvivel, och inte heller den där eftermiddagen i Chartres eller natten jag tillbringade där [...] om att jag behövde Paul och ville ha honom, ville *leva* resten av mitt liv tillsammans med honom.
- (10) He'd *spent* the night with me, of course; he'd woken me very early [...] (BR1)
Han hade naturligtvis *varit* hos mig på natten och väckt mig mycket tidigt [...]

Note also *stanna* ('stay') in example (1) above. Usually we find an intransitive verb denoting posture or existence, but there are also more specific verbs, e.g. *jobba* ('work') and *sova* ('sleep'):

- (11) For three years, over half the time he had *spent* with MI5 [...] (FF1)
I tre år, mer än halva tiden han hade *jobbat* på MI5 [...]
- (12) "But I *spent* the night at Rose's." (JSM1)
"Men jag *sov* ju hos Rose i natt."

If you work or sleep in a place, you are there. Occasionally, there is a single verb corresponding to *spend* plus temporal NP:

- (13) And then the aunt comes to *spend a holiday* with them. (BR1)
Och så kommer fastern för att *semestra* hos dem.

The verb *semestra*, derived from *semester* ('holiday'), lexicalises the notion 'spend one's holiday'.

C. No corresponding verb

Quite often there is no verb which specifically translates English *spend*. This is a regular correspondence with V-*ing* complements, as in:

- (14) After leaving school at sixteen, Rawlings had *spent* ten years *working* with and under his Uncle Albert in the latter's hardware shop. (FF1)

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Sedan Rawlings slutat skolan vid sexton års ålder hade han *arbetat* tio år hos sin farbror Albert i hans järnhandel—en bra fasad för den gamle mannen, som själv varit en ansedd inbrottstjuv på sin tid.

- (15) He *spent* another ten minutes *standing* motionless scanning the walls and ceiling. (FF1)
Han *stod kvar* orörlig i ytterligare tio minuter och synade väggarna och taket.
- (16) I'd *spend* hours *sitting* in waiting rooms. (AH1)
Jag *satt* i väntrum i timmar.
- (17) We *spent* a lot of the time *driving* [...] (MA1)
En stor del av tiden *åkte* vi omkring [...]

For *V-ing* complements there are thus two main patterns in Swedish translations: a form with *ägna* (cf. A above) and a form where *V-ing* is so to speak 'raised' to become the main verb.

We also find other instances where a form corresponding to *spend* is dispensed with:

- (18) After matric, Aunt Cathérine invites him to *spend* a long holiday in France. (BR1)
Efter avgångsexamen ur skolan blir han av faster Cathérine bjuden på en lång ferie i Frankrike.
- (19) I went again to *spend* some time with Greville, but he lay unmoving [...] (DF1)
Jag gick in till Greville en stund, men han låg orörlig [...]

In (18) it is sufficient to say 'invited to a long holiday', in (19) 'went in to Greville [implied: and stayed] for a while'.

D. Other types of restructuring

The following examples illustrate some other ways of managing without *tillbringa*:

- (20) I *spent* four years in medical school, another five *being* an intern and resident [...] (AH1)
Jag har *studerat* medicin i fyra år och jag har *praktiserat* som kandidat och underläkare i fem år.

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- (21) He *spent* pleasurable hours dithering over questions of punctuation. (AT1)
Grubblrier över interpunktionsproblem *skänkte* honom många lustfyllda stunder. Lit. 'Brooding over questions of punctuation gave him many pleasurable hours.'
- (22) He *spent* two days tracking down faint possibilities that evaporated the instant he drew close. (AT1)
Två dagar *gick åt* till att spåra upp svaga möjligheter som gick upp i rök så snart han närmade sig.

In (19) there is both an ADV_{place} structure and a V-*ing* complement, the former rendered as 'studied medicine for four years', the latter by 'practiced as intern and resident' with raising of V-*ing*. In both cases the translation uses more specific verbs than the English original. In (21) the V-*ing* complement is nominalised and made into the subject of the sentence. In (22) the time expression is made into the subject of the sentence, with a form of the verbal idiom *gå åt* ('be spent/used'). It is worth noting that in all three cases the English original has, or includes, a V-*ing* complement.

4. English spend in translations from Swedish

The translations provide ample illustrations of how English *spend* in expressions of time can be handled without resorting to *tillbringa*. What happens if we reverse the perspective and examine where English *spend* comes from in translations from Swedish? Notice, first of all, that *tillbringa* is far less common as a source than as a translation; see Figure 3. In other words, English *spend* in translations from Swedish generally comes from something else than *tillbringa*.

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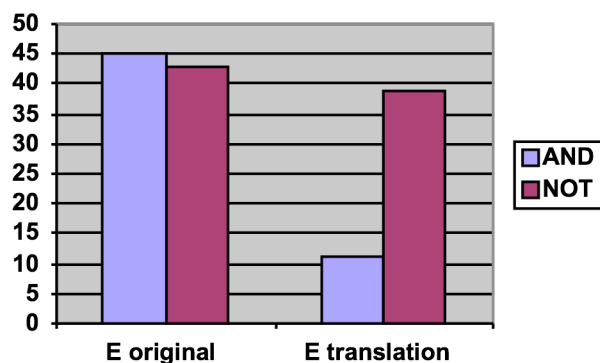


Figure 3 English *spend* in expressions of time vs. Swedish *tillbringa* (AND = the two verbs correspond, NOT = the two verbs do not correspond)

With the exception that *tillbringa* is much less common, the sources of *spend* are much the same as the translations.

A. Transitive verb

Transitive verbs found as sources include *använda* ('use'), *utnyttja* ('use'), and *ägnat* ('devote'), as in:

- (23) Han måste ha *använt* flera timmar åt att fundera ut något som vi hade gemensamt när jag vaknade. (RJ1)
He must have *spent* several hours trying to think of something we might have in common when I woke up. (RJ1T)
- (24) Herr Hazell hade *utnyttjat* mellantiden till att enväldigt utforma stadgar, vilka sänts ut tillsammans med inbjudan. (SCO1)
Mr Hazell had *spent* the intervening time autocratically drawing up rules which were sent out together with the invitations.
- (25) Jag tycker inte om att slangarna rubbas för då måste rondan *ägna* nästan all sin tid åt att justera hunden—åt mig blir bara en slängkyss över. (PCJ1)
And I don't like it when that happens, because the research team *spends* so much time readjusting the dog's gear that they barely have time to blow me a kiss.

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- (26) Jag tror att jag *ägnade* halva tiden enbart åt dem. (KOB1)
I wouldn't be surprised if I *spent* half my time on them.

These correspondences are found particularly with *V-ing* complements, which agrees well with the results presented for translations (Section 3, A).

Other transitive verbs found as sources are found in *leva sitt liv* ('live one's life') rendered as *spend one's life* and *fira weekender* ('celebrate weekends') translated as *spend weekends*.

B. Intransitive verb

Intransitive verbs plus adverbial are commonly found as sources, as in:

- (27) Som vuxen hade jag inte *bott* mer än några år i Sverige. (BL1)
As an adult, I had not *spent* more than a few years in Sweden.
- (28) Otaliga gånger hade de *suttit* just så här; i en bil på någon nattlig gata, väntande. (SW1)
They had *spent* innumerable evenings this same way—in a car on some dark street, waiting.
- (29) Framför bleckslagarens stånd *stod* hon däremot länge och såg på de fåtaliga leksakerna. (KE2)
She did *spend* a long time gazing at the few toys the tinsmith was selling from his stand.
- (30) Själva skulle de arbeta inne i New York och kanske *vara* på västkusten ett tag när det blev för odrägligt hett. (JMY1)
They themselves would work in New York and maybe *spend* some time on the West Coast if it got intolerably hot.

As with the translations (Section 3, B), the verbs typically denote posture or existence: *bo* ('live'), *sitta* ('sit'), *stå* ('stand'), *vara* ('be'). *Spend* plus temporal NP may also expand a single Swedish verb: *spend the night* from *övernatta* (three instances) and *sova över* (lit. 'sleep over'). The latter form should be compared with *sova* in example (12) above, but while *sova* requires a temporal specification, *sova över* is sufficient to express the notion 'spend the night'.

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The verb in the following example is worth noting especially:

- (31) Dessförinnan på hösten 1939 hade jag sett modelljärnvägen jag en gång skulle bygga mest som den commuter line som gick på Long Island och som jag *hållit på* att dokumentera med foto och film hela den sommaren. (JMY1)
Before that, in the fall of 1939, I thought the railroad I would build would be most like the commuter line on Long Island and I *spent* the whole summer documenting it in photographs and on film.

The verb *hålla på* (lit. 'hold on') is used to denote an action in progress and is one of the means of conveying the English progressive aspect. The same is true of the pseudo-coordination in example (29) above: *stod och såg* (lit. 'stood and gazed'). English progressive forms would have been possible in both cases, *was gazing* and *had been documenting*, but these would not focus on the duration of the action to the same extent as the *spend* constructions chosen by the translators.

C. No corresponding verb

The most remarkable pattern is the one which is the mirror image of the 'raising' constructions found as translations (Section 3, C). The difference is that *spend* is inserted and the main verb is 'lowered' and made into a V-ing complement. Examples:

- (32) Jag *slöar* så mycket under dagen att jag saboterar min nattsömn. (PCJ1)
I *spend* so much of my time *idling* during the day that I sabotage my night's sleep.
- (33) Det skulle kunna ta veckor innan jag hittade honom, även om jag tog ledigt från arbetet och *letade* efter honom på heltid. (BL1)
Either way, it could take me weeks to find him, even if I took leave from my work and *spent* all my time *looking* for him.
- (34) Hon fick tag i en taxi på gatan och de *gick* länge omkring i Östersund. (KE1)
She got hold of a taxi in the street and they *spent* a long time *walking* round Östersund.
- (35) Större delen av natten hade han sedan *legat* sömlös och tänkt att han skulle slå tjuvarna sönder och samman om han någonsin fick tag på dem. (HM2)

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He *spent* most of the night *lying* awake, thinking about how he'd beat the shit out of the thieves if he ever laid hands on them.

- (36) Länge, länge *bearbetade* han det han såg.
He *spent* a long long time *contemplating* what he saw.

This correspondence pattern is found in close to a third of the instances of spending time in the material. The effect of inserting *spend* is that special focus is put on the length of the action.

There are other cases as well where *spend* is inserted, although there is no corresponding verb in the Swedish original:

- (37) Denna minutlånga fördröjning av mötet var på sitt sätt en hämnd för de nio dygn som Jonas Mikael Fröij hade tvingats till overksamhet i sin lägenhet [lit. 'idleness in his apartment']. (KOB1)
Delaying the meeting for a minute was in a way Frey's revenge for the nine days of enforced idleness *spent* in his apartment.
- (38) Trots flera år i arbetarpressen [lit. 'in spite of several years in the working-class press'] hade han aldrig tillägnat sig den slängiga umgängesstil som skiljer journalister åt från mera hyfsade medborgare.
Although he had *spent* several years working for working-class newspapers, he had never adopted the slangy colloquial language that distinguished journalists from better-bred citizens.
- (39) Med Oban som bas seglade han ut till öarna runt omkring, ofta bara dagsseglatser, men ibland med en eller flera övernattningar [lit. 'one or more overnight stays']. (BL1)
Using Oban as his base, he sailed to the islands round about, often making only day-trips, but sometimes *spending* a night or two away.

In (37) and (38) the phrases in the Swedish original have been expanded to a finite and a non-finite clause, respectively. In (39) the nominalisation *övernattnings* is expanded to a *V-ing* clause; cf. the translation of the verb *övernatta* (see B above).

D. Other types of restructuring

As among the translations (Section 3, D), we find occasional examples of restructuring which does not fit into the other categories:

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- (40) Han ville inte förlora kontakten med den sidan av jobbet bara för att han blivit chef och sysslandet med den tilltagande byråkratins alla olägenheter upptog allt mer av hans tid [lit. 'dealing with ... took up more and more of his time']. (SW1)
He didn't want to lose touch with this side of the job simply because he'd been made chief and had to *spend* more and more of his time dealing with all the troublesome demands made by a growing bureaucracy.
- (41) Resten av söndagen hade gått åt till att göra en teknisk undersökning av lägenheten och upprätta en utredningsrapport. (HM2)
The rest of Sunday was *spent* doing a technical investigation of the apartment and writing a case report.

Example (40) has been restructured using a different subject and the verb *uppta* ('take up'), (41) has the verb *gå åt* and is comparable with the translation of example (22) above (Section 3, D).

5. Concluding remarks

Judging by the material found in the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, there is a range of correspondences for English *spend* in expressions of time, and there should be no need for translators to overuse *tillbringa*. Correspondences vary to some extent with the type of complementation. In particular, *tillbringa* seems less appropriate where there is an adverbial of manner or a *V-ing* complement. The patterns that emerge are broadly similar for Swedish, Norwegian, and German. 'Raising' constructions are common in all three languages in translating English *spend* plus *V-ing* complements. The most notable difference is that Swedish also uses the verb *ägna*.

There is a need to focus in teaching on ways of handling translationese and to point out alternative expressions. Although *tillbringa* is usually not wrong, the easy access to a similar form may obscure that there are many other ways of handling *spend* in expressions of time. A review of entries in bilingual dictionaries is also called for. This is what I found in two major English-Swedish and English-Norwegian dictionaries (only the relevant senses are included):

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Stora engelsk-svenska ordboken (Esselte Studium):

spend 2 tillbringa, fördriva; ~ a whole evening over [a job] tillbringa (hålla på) en hel kväll med ..., använda en hel kväll till ...

Engelsk stor ordbok (Kunnskapsforlaget):

spend 3 tilbringe, fordrive • she spent some time in Stockholm • spend a whole evening over a job tilbringe en hel kveld med en jobb

Considering the range of correspondences revealed by the corpus study, the entries must be considered quite inadequate.

A more basic question concerns how we can characterise the relationship between English and the other languages. Differences are not absolute, but rather have to do with ‘preferred ways of putting things’, to borrow an expression from Graeme Kennedy (1992). English has a special way of focusing on the duration of an action that is so natural that the verb *spend* may be inserted in translations from other languages, though there is no corresponding verb in the source language. Originally derived from the ‘time is money’ metaphor, it serves as one of a range of means of handling the expression of time, including: *get V-ing* for denoting inception, *keep V-ing* for expressing iteration or continuation, and not least, *be V-ing* for the progressive aspect.

I hope to have shown that a corpus like the English-Swedish Parallel Corpus, produced under the direction of Bengt Altenberg and Karin Aijmer, has important uses in teaching and bilingual lexicography. But it is not only a practical tool. With such corpora, we can see how languages influence each other in translation. We can reveal the complex relationships between meaning and form, and how they differ across languages. Any one who wants to gain new insight into how languages work is strongly advised to explore multilingual corpora.

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