

Habituals in contrast: Danish *pleje* and its Dutch and German translations*

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*This paper investigates the expression of habitual meaning in the three Germanic languages Danish, Dutch, and German. We first survey habitual expressions in Danish, arguing that the primary means for expressing habitual meaning is the catenative verb *pleje* ‘usually do, used to’. Using a parallel corpus of Danish literary texts from two time periods (1843–1901 and 1973–1987) and their translations into Dutch and German, we then investigate how *pleje* is translated into these two languages. Although closely related verbs are available in Dutch (*plegen*) and German (*pflegen*), our findings suggest that there is no single way of conveying habituality in these two languages. Instead, habituality can be expressed by a number of different strategies which are subject to diachronic and stylistic variation. In addition, the material shows that Danish *pleje* may have a contrastive function along with its habitual meaning, expressing an explicit contrast between the usual and the current state of affairs.*

1 Introduction

This paper has a twofold aim. First, we provide a description of the Danish habitual verb *pleje* ‘usually do, used to’. Second, we investigate how this verb is rendered in translations of Danish texts into German and Dutch. The existing research focussing on *pleje* and its use in Danish is quite limited. The verb *pleje* is, however, clearly relevant for research on habituals, as it appears to be the primary means to express habituality in Danish. By contrast, in the related languages

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German and Dutch, it is not so obvious how habituality is generally expressed. Both German and Dutch have a verb that is historically related to Danish *pleje* and has a similar habitual meaning, namely *pflügen* in German and *plegen* in Dutch. However, *pflügen* and *plegen* do not seem to be as commonly used in German and Dutch as *pleje* is in Danish.

This study takes the Danish verb *pleje* as the starting point for an investigation of habituality in the three languages. After a discussion of the properties of *pleje* in Danish on the basis of earlier literature and examples from existing Danish corpora, we explore the means of expressing habituality in German and Dutch using a small corpus of Danish texts and their translations into German and Dutch. By looking for instances of *pleje* in the Danish texts and studying the ways in which they are translated in German and Dutch, we aim to investigate the various possible ways of expressing habituality in German and Dutch.

The outline of the paper is as follows. In Section 2, we focus on previous literature on the Danish verb *pleje* and illustrate its uses. Section 3 presents the translation corpus that we compiled and explains how we searched the corpus and analysed the examples. The results of our corpus study are discussed in Section 4, which demonstrates the different strategies that are used to translate *pleje* into German and Dutch. Finally, in Section 5 we provide a general discussion of our findings with suggestions for further research.

2 The Danish habitual verb *pleje*

In this section we describe the meaning and use of *pleje* in contemporary Danish. We will show that this verb comes close to the profile of ‘prototypical’ habitual expressions as they are usually described in the literature – *pleje* qualifies as a habitual expression both under Comrie’s definition as ‘a characteristic feature of a whole period’ (Comrie 1976: 27–28) or under the definition employed by Bybee et al., where habituais express states of affairs ‘customarily repeated on different occasions’ (Bybee et al. 1994: 127). We begin with a short survey of the available literature on *pleje*, after which we provide an outline of its meaning and use. Examples will be drawn from the written-language corpus KorpusDK (c. 107 million words), our own collection of literary texts (on which see Section 3), and BySoc, a small corpus of spoken Danish based on interviews with speakers from Copenhagen.¹

¹ Corpus size c. 1.3 million words. The interviews were recorded and transcribed as part of a project on ‘urban sociolinguistics’ (Projekt Bysociolingvistik) which ran at the University of Copenhagen in the period 1986–1990. The corpus was later published online. While there are both bigger and more recent corpora of spoken Danish, BySoc is sufficient for our main goal here, which is simply to illustrate the various uses of *pleje* with authentic rather than made-up examples.

2.1 Earlier literature

The verb *pleje* does not appear to have attracted much attention in the existing literature on Danish. In the recent second edition of their reference grammar, Lundskær-Nielsen & Holmes describe it briefly as a catenative or ‘linking’ verb (2015: 312), and note that it may be used both in the present and past tense to ‘emphasize’ the habitual nature of a situation (2015: 293, 296). Davidsen-Nielsen’s (1990) contrastive study of tense and mood expressions in English and Danish mentions *pleje* in passing at several points (1990: 164, 170, 178, 184), characterizing it as a ‘lexical’ verb used to express ‘decidedly typical behaviour’. The grammar sketch by Herslund (2002) does not mention *pleje* at all.

The comprehensive grammar by Hansen & Heltoft (2011) has somewhat more to say on the matter. There is no separate section on *pleje* or any other habitual expressions, but it is discussed at several points in the chapter on infinitival constructions (Ch. 13). The authors note that *pleje* belongs to a small group of verbs without subject selection (*subjektsstyring*), that is, verbs that do not put any semantic restrictions on their subjects. Such verbs ‘say nothing about the subject referent of the construction, but about processes or states: beginning, end, habituality (*pleje*), potential, probability’.² However, they later suggest that in some cases it may be appropriate to analyse *pleje* as subject selecting, namely when it describes someone’s personal custom or routine (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: III, 1436). We return to these different readings in the next section.

2.2 Meaning and use of *pleje*

In the large descriptive dictionaries *DDO* and *ODS*, habitual *pleje* is treated as a sense of the main verb *pleje* ‘care for, cultivate, maintain’. *DDO* (s.v. *pleje* 2) distinguishes three different meanings of this verb: ‘normally or usually do, etc.’, ‘care for’ (e.g., one’s hair, a sick person), and ‘cultivate, maintain’ (e.g., one’s image, one’s interests) (our translations). The connection between the last two senses is obvious: the object referent is something or someone which one tries to keep in a good condition. In most of the examples of these senses in the dictionary, *pleje* is clearly transitive with a nominal direct object. In the habitual sense, on the other hand, *pleje* either combines with an infinitival phrase marked by the particle (or non-finite complementizer) *at* or occurs with ‘post-verbal ellipsis’ in the sense of Huddleston (1984), where the predication is to be understood from the context. *DDO* gives a number of examples from KorpusDK, two of which we repeat in (1)–(2). We gloss *pleje* as ‘HAB’ throughout. All English translations in the remainder of the paper are our own.

² ‘Disse verber udsiger intet om konstruktionens subjektsreferent, men derimod om processer eller tilstande: begyndelse, ophør, habitualitet (*pleje*), mulighed, sandsynlighed’ (Hansen & Heltoft 2011: III, 1432).

- (1) *Vi **plejer** altid at have pæne bestillinger fra august og frem*
 we HAB:PRS always to have:INF fair:PL booking:PL from August and
 onwards
 ‘We usually always have a fair number of bookings from August onwards.’
 (KorpusDK, 1991 *Berlingske Tidende*)
- (2) *Mayas mor så lidt bebrejdende på hende,*
 Maya:GEN mother look.PST somewhat disapprove:PROG at her
*fordi hun kom senere hjem, end hun **plejede***
 because she come.PST later home than she HAB:PST
 ‘Maya’s mother gave her a disapproving look because she came home later
 than she used to.’ (KorpusDK, 1985 *Familie Journalen*)

As (1) and (2) show, habitual *pleje* occurs both in the present and past tense. Morphologically it is a regularly inflected weak verb (PRS *-er*, PST *-ede*). It may also occur in periphrastic tense forms, although this appears to be a rare phenomenon: in KorpusDK we found only two instances, both of them occurring in somewhat elaborated written style, as in (3), with a present perfect. However, there is also a single example of a past perfect in the spoken-language corpus BySoc, see (4):

- (3) *Demonstrationerne i år, som domineredes af kommunister,*
 demonstration:PL:DEF in year REL dominate:PST:PASS by communist:PL
var frarøvet deres primære sydebuk, tidligere præsident Boris
 be.PST deprive:PTCP their main scapegoat former president B.
*Yeltsin, som venstrefløjen ellers har **plejet** at bruge*
 Yeltsin REL left.wing:DEF otherwise have.PRS HAB:PTCP to use:INF
det meste af deres 1. maj-demonstrationer på at vise deres
 DEF most of their 1st May-demonstration:PL on to show:INF their
foragt for.
 contempt for
 ‘The demonstrations this year, which were dominated by communists, had
 been deprived of their main scapegoat, former president Boris Yeltsin,
 whom the leftists have otherwise usually spent most of their Labour Day
 demonstrations condemning.’ (KorpusDK, 2000 *Politiken*)

- (4) *jeg måtte aldrig sige »du« til ham ellertil tale ham som jeg*
 I may:PST never say:INF 2SG to him or address:INF him as I
havde plejet at gøre
 have:PST HAB:PTCP to do:INF
 ‘I wasn’t allowed to use the familiar pronoun or address him like I had used to.’ (BySoc, M63inf)

The examples in (1)–(4) all have a human subject referent.³ However, as the description quoted above from Hansen & Heltoft (2011) suggests, this need not be the case: *pleje* may also be used with inanimate subjects, as in (5), and with zero-place predicates, i.e., without a subject referent, as in (6):⁴

- (5) *I største Hast blev en Mahogni-Kasse, i hvilken der*
 in greatest urgency become.PST INDFmahogany-case in REL there
ellers pleiede at ligge et Par Pistoler, tømt
 otherwiseHAB:PST to lie:INF INDFcouple pistol:PL empty:PTCP
 ‘With great urgency a mahogany case was emptied in which a couple of pistols otherwise used to lie.’ (Kierkegaard)
- (6) *der er da ikke så koldt her som der plejer at være*
 there be.PRS PTCL NEG so cold here as there HAB:PRS to be:INF
 ‘But it isn’t as cold here as it usually is.’ (BySoc, F20inf)

Our interpretation is that habitual *pleje* may be both ‘participant-oriented’, in which case it expresses a custom or habit of the subject referent, or ‘situational’, in which case it refers to ‘a characteristic feature of a whole period’ (Comrie 1976: 27–28). (3)–(4) would be examples of participant-oriented uses, (5)–(6) of situational ones. In this way, *pleje* differs from a number of other expressions of custom or habit, such as *have for vane* ‘be in the habit’ and *være vant til* ‘be accustomed to’. These normally require a human or at least an animate subject referent, and whereas one can readily substitute both expressions for *pleje* in (3) and (4), doing so in (5) and (6) forces an interpretation of the pistols and the weather as animate entities with a will of their own.

³ We count the subject argument *venstrefløjen* (lit. ‘the left wing’) in (3) as human. It is clear from the context and the use of the plural possessive pronoun *deres* ‘their’ that it is collective here and refers to a group of human beings, as suggested by our translation ‘the leftists’.

⁴ Note that the adverb *ellers* ‘otherwise, else’ in (5) can often be left out in an idiomatic English translation. For clarity, we have rendered it as ‘otherwise’ in the English translations below, even in cases where this may sound somewhat unnatural. We return to the function of *ellers* in Section 4.4.

Another – potential – habitual construction is the use of the verb *gå* (lit. ‘go, walk’) in ‘pseudocoordination’ with another verb. This construction appears to allow a habitual reading in some cases, such as (7). The example is from an autobiographical text written by a child who used to misbehave and get into trouble. The context makes clear that *gik og bankede* (lit. ‘went and beat up’) pertains to a habitually recurring event:

- (7) *Jeg sloges med min storesøster og sagde røvhul til min mor,*
 I fight.PST with my big.sister and say:PST asshole to my mum
og jeg gik og bankede de andre børn, når de var
 and I go.PST and beat:PST DEF other child.PL when they be.PST
flabede.
 bothersome

‘I would get into fights with my big sister and call my mum an asshole, and I would beat up the other kids when they were bothering me.’ (KorpusDK, 1992 *Knuste ruder*)

However, the pseudocoordination construction with *gå* is probably better analysed as a more general imperfectivization strategy. Ebert (2000: 615–617) even treats it as a kind of progressive marking (the ‘motion progressive’), though this does not seem like the most appropriate label for cases like (7). At any rate, the construction is also used in contexts where a habitual reading is either unlikely, as in the continuous use in (8), or ruled out, as in (9), where the ‘motion progressive’ *gik og ryddede op* forms the background of a single event:

- (8) *der har jeg nogle venner der har et hus de går*
 there have.PRS I some friend:PL REL have.PRS INDF house they go:PRS
og bygger på
 and build:PRS on

‘I have a couple of friends there [in the countryside] who have a house that they’re renovating.’ (BySoc, F22inf)

- (9) *Bjarne Tuxen gik og ryddede op i sit atelier, da der*
 B. T. go.PST and tidy:PST up in REFL.POSS studio when there
pludselig opstod en slags fortætning i rummet
 suddenly appear.PST INDF kind condensation in room:DEF

‘Bjarne Tuxen was tidying up his studio when suddenly a kind of condensation [i.e., a ghost] appeared in the room.’ (KorpusDK, 2001 *Jyllands-Posten*)

As for the frequency of habitual *pleje*, a general estimate is made difficult because the verb has non-habitual uses as well. An investigation of this issue would thus need to separate the actual habitual instances from the irrelevant ones in a large corpus sample. This falls outside the scope of this paper. However, an informal preliminary count from KorpusDK suggests that habitual *pleje* is likely the most frequently used sense of the verb: of 100 randomly selected instances of the present-tense form *plejer* in the corpus, 87 were examples of habitual *pleje*.⁵ Assuming that 87 pct. of all instances of *pleje* in the corpus ($n = 5,768$) are habitual, this would give an overall frequency of habitual *pleje* of about 46 per million words. By comparison, the expression *være vant til* occurs about 25 times per million words ($n = 2,769$), and *have for vane* occurs less than 3 times per million words ($n = 304$).

2.3 West Germanic relatives

Danish *pleje* has relatives in several Germanic languages, such as Norwegian (*pleie/pla*), Dutch (*plegen*), and German (*pfllegen*). We deliberately call these ‘relatives’ rather than cognates: the verb was borrowed into Danish and Norwegian from Middle Low German, so the Danish/Norwegian verbs are loanwords rather than true cognates of the West Germanic verbs. In both the Scandinavian and West Germanic languages, ‘main-verb’ meanings like ‘care for’, ‘commit’, etc. are found along with the habitual sense, but the languages differ in a number of respects relating to form and usage. In most of them the habitual and non-habitual uses of the verb are inflected in the same way, but in Dutch the old past-tense form *placht* survives in the habitual sense, while the main-verb use has the regularized past-tense form *pleegde*.⁶

Based purely on our own intuitions and anecdotal evidence, the use of the verbs also differs between the languages. The habitual use of Danish *pleje* seems to be relatively frequent and stylistically neutral, whereas native speakers of Dutch generally judge habitual *plegen* to be archaic or at least very formal. Among speakers of contemporary German opinions seem to differ: some claim to use habitual *pfllegen* regularly, others consider it old-fashioned. The available bilingual dictionaries also seem to imply that there are differences between the languages. The largest Danish–Dutch dictionary (Van Hees et al. 2004, s.v. *pleje*³)

⁵ Of the remaining thirteen hits, eleven were transitive uses of the verb, such as *plejer huden* ‘nourish the skin’, *plejer naturen* ‘care for nature’, *plejer kontakterne* ‘maintain one’s connections’. One example was an intransitive (‘absolute’) use: *Swiss Formula terapi creme plejer naturligt* ‘“Swiss Formula” therapy lotion nourishes [i.e., the skin] naturally’. The last example was a false positive, the noun *plejer* ‘(male) nurse, helper’.

⁶ On the history of the Dutch forms, see *WNT* (s.v. *plegen*). The morphological changes in the history of High German are covered by Paul (2007: § M 80) and Ebert et al. (1993: § M 118). On the etymology, see Kluge & Seebold (1989: s.v. *pfllegen*).

translates *pleje* ‘plegen, gewoon zijn’, but does not actually give any examples of Dutch *plegen* in use. For instance, the Danish phrase *gøre som man plejer* ‘do as one usually does’ is translated *doen zoals altijd* ‘do as always’. Similarly, a standard Danish–German dictionary (Bork 1987, s.v. *pleje* II) glosses *pleje* ‘pflegen’ but paraphrases it in the example sentences. For Danish *alting går som det plejer* ‘everything is going as usual’, the dictionary suggests *alles geht wie gewöhnlich/sonst/üblich/früher* with four different adverbs instead of a form of *pflegen*.

If Dutch *plegen* and German *pflegen* are less commonly used to express habitual meanings than Danish *pleje*, the question arises what other strategies these languages use to express these meanings. This was the question that prompted our investigation here. Because there is no obvious way to search for a notion like ‘habituality’ in a text corpus, we decided to look for habitual expressions in Dutch and German by means of Danish, as it were, by compiling a small corpus of translations. This involved searching for instances of *pleje* in Danish texts which had been translated into Dutch and German and looking up the same passages in the translations. This will be discussed in the next section.

3 Material and methods

3.1 Text corpus

This section describes the texts that we used for our translation-based comparison of Danish, Dutch, and German. The main criterion for inclusion in the investigation was that a given Danish text had to have been translated into Dutch or German or, preferably, both. A second, no less important, criterion was that both the original text and the translation(s) had to be available to us in some form or other. These two criteria proved relatively difficult to satisfy, and the texts that were readily available were almost exclusively works of literature. This genre limitation should of course be kept in mind in the following. To make the search as easy as possible, we prioritized Danish texts that were freely available in digitized form, mainly from Project Gutenberg (PG). One text was downloaded from the Archive of Danish Literature (ADL), one from the online edition of the collected writings of Søren Kierkegaard (SKS). Because of copyright restrictions most of the texts that were available online (but not necessarily their translations) are relatively old, so we supplemented these with a number of more recent texts from the 1970s and 1980s, which were scanned and OCR’d to make the search easier.

Table 1 lists the Danish texts with information about year of publication, source, genre, and text ID. ‘UvA’ in the source column refers to our university library. As the table shows, the available Danish texts fall into two main periods, late 1800s and late 1900s; as Table 2 below shows, this is not necessarily the case

for the Dutch and German translations. The text IDs that we use in the following consist of the names of the author. Two books by Vita Andersen were included, so to disambiguate them the text IDs contain a keyword from the title.

Table 1: Corpus of Danish texts

Author	Work	Year	Source	Genre	Text ID
Søren Kierkegaard	<i>Enten – Eller</i>	1843	SKS	philosophy, short stories, aphorisms	Kierkegaard
J. P. Jacobsen	<i>Fru Marie Grubbe</i>	1876	PG	novel (historical)	Jacobsen
Herman Bang	<i>Tine</i>	1889	PG	novel	Bang
Karl Gjellerup	<i>Møllen</i>	1896	ADL	novel	Gjellerup
Henrik Pontoppidan	<i>Lykke-Per</i> (Part 1)	1898	PG	novel	Pontoppidan
Johs. V. Jensen	<i>Kongens Fald</i>	1901	PG	novel (historical)	Jensen
Suzanne Brøgger	<i>Fri os fra kærligheden</i>	1973	UvA	essays	Brøgger
Kirsten Thorup	<i>Lille Jonna</i>	1977	UvA	novel	Thorup
Vita Andersen	<i>Hold kæft og vær smuk</i>	1978	UvA	short stories	Andersen <i>Smuk</i>
Dorrit Willumsen	<i>Marie</i>	1983	UvA	novel (historical)	Willumsen
Vita Andersen	<i>Hva'for en hånd vil du ha'</i>	1987	UvA	novel	Andersen <i>Hånd</i>

Table 2 gives an overview of the translations and their years of publication. A full list of the translations used, including the names of the translators, is included in the bibliography. We refer to the texts with the text IDs given in the tables followed by ‘German’ and ‘Dutch’. The numbers after the text IDs are page numbers (or, in a few instances, chapter numbers). Hence, for instance, the reference (Kierkegaard [Dutch] 451) is to page 451 in the Dutch translation of Kierkegaard.

Table 2: Corpus of translations

Text ID	German		Dutch	
	Title	Year	Title	Year
Kierkegaard	<i>Entweder – Oder</i>	1885	<i>Of/Of</i>	2000
Jacobsen	<i>Frau Marie Grubbe</i>	1931	<i>Marie Grubbe</i>	1965
Bang	<i>Tine</i>	1919	<i>Tine</i>	1921
Gjellerup	<i>Die Hügelmlühle</i>	1916	<i>De hoge molen</i>	1921
Pontoppidan	<i>Hans im Glück</i>	1906	<i>Peter de gelukkige</i>	1917
Jensen	<i>Des Königs Fall</i>	1931	<i>De val van de koning</i>	1979
Brøgger	<i>...sondern erlöse uns von der Liebe</i>	1973	<i>Verlos ons van de liefde</i>	1976
Thorup	–	–	<i>Kleine Jonna</i>	1985
Andersen <i>Smuk</i>	–	–	<i>Bek houden, mooi zijn</i>	1981
Willumsen	<i>Marie</i>	1986	<i>Marie</i>	1987
Andersen <i>Hånd</i>	<i>Welche Hand willst du?</i>	1991	–	–

3.2 Corpus search

The Danish part of our corpus was searched for instances of *pleje* with AntConc (Anthony 2014). We searched for all potential inflected forms of the verb, including older spelling variants.⁷ The concordances include a small window of 50 words around the keyword. (As we had to locate the examples in the texts afterwards, a larger search window was not necessary.) We then exported the concordances to a spreadsheet. For each of the concordances we first checked if it was indeed a case of habitual *pleje*. We excluded forms with the meanings ‘care for’ and ‘cultivate, maintain’, as well as the nouns *pleje* and *plejer* (see above).

The next step of the corpus search involved gathering the translations of the forms of *pleje* as they appeared in the German and Dutch texts. Apart from two of the German translations (Kierkegaard and Jacobsen), all German and Dutch texts were available to us only in the form of a physical book, meaning that the German and Dutch corpora had to be compiled by manually looking for the translations of the forms of *pleje*. We located these with the help of information such as chapter headings and page numbers in the Danish original. We then copied the relevant German and Dutch sentences to our spreadsheet.

3.3 Analysis of the material

In order to analyse our material, we first looked more closely at the Danish examples. For each example we noted the tense form of *pleje* and whether it was combined with any additional marker of habituality, such as one of the adverbs *altid* ‘always’ or *ofte* ‘often’. The presence of such a marker may have had an effect on the expressions chosen by the German and Dutch translators. The collocation with different adverbs, including *ellers* ‘otherwise’, will be discussed below. For each example we also noted the full predication in the scope of *pleje* as well as the animacy of the subject argument.

We then focussed on the German and Dutch translations of *pleje* and the additional markers of habituality, if present. Note here that we decided to consider the combination of a form of *pleje* and an additional marker of habituality in Danish as a single habitual expression. When an additional marker was present, we looked for the translations of the full habitual expression in the German and Dutch sentences, rather than for the translations of *pleje* only. For instance, in (10) habituality is expressed both by *plejer* and by the adverb *altid* ‘always’. We regard these as a single habitual expression. In the German translation, habituality is expressed by *immer* ‘always’ only. We consider *immer* to be the translation of the full habitual expression *plejer altid*:

⁷ The search terms were *pleje, plejer, plejet, plejede, plejed, pleie, pleier, pleiet, pleiede, pleied*. The spellings with <i> and word-final <d> are now obsolete but occur in some of the older texts in the corpus.

- (10) – *Jeg skal nok selv komme sukker i, så det bliver rigtig.*
I shall.PRS PTCL self put:INF sugar in so it become:PRS correct
– *Jeg plejer da altid at gøre det lille far.*
I HAB:PRS PTCL always to do:INF it little father
‘‘I’ll add the sugar myself so that it’s done the right way.’’ ‘‘But I always do that, little father.’’ (Andersen *Hånd*)
- (11) – *Ich tu wohl den Zucker selber rein, damit es richtig ist.*
I put:1SG:PRS PTCL DEF.ACC sugar self in so.that it correct
– *Ich mach das doch immer, Papa.*
be:3SG:PRS I do:1SG:PRS that PTCL always dad
‘‘I’ll add the sugar myself so it’s done correctly.’’ ‘‘But I always do that, dad.’’ (Andersen *Hånd* [German] 189)

We first wrote down the exact parts of the German and Dutch sentences that reflected the Danish habitual expressions. Subsequently, we classified the German and Dutch expressions according to what general strategies were used. We grouped together expressions with different tense forms of the same German or Dutch verb. Thus, both *pleeg* [...] *altijd* in (12) and *placht altijd* in (13) belong to the strategy *plegen* + adverbial.

- (12) *Met name pleeg je altijd met veel dubbelzinnigheid*
with name HAB:2SG:PRS 2SG always with much ambiguity
‘*achting*’ als solide basis voor een huwelijk aan te bevelen.
regard as solid basis for INDFmarriage on to recommend:INF
‘In particular you always tend, with much ambiguity, to recommend ‘regard’ as a solid basis for a marriage.’ (Kierkegaard [Dutch] 451)
- (13) *Een oude man die ik eens gekend heb placht*
INDF old man REL I once know:PTCP have:1SG:PRS HAB:SG:PST
altijd te zeggen dat het goed vooreen mens was dat
always to say:INF COMP it good for INDFperson be:SG:PST COMP
hij leerde te werken voorzijn brood
he learn:SG:PST to work:INF for his bread
‘An old man I used to know would always say that it was good for you to learn to work for your daily bread.’ (Kierkegaard [Dutch] 676)

In addition, we distinguished one strategy called ‘paraphrase’ for translations that deviated strongly from the Danish originals. We did not label every paraphrase as belonging to this category, only those that immediately affected the translation of the Danish habitual expression, as in (14)–(15). In the Dutch translation in (15), the entire sentence is rephrased with the ‘forester’ not being a genitive attribute as in the original in (14), but rather the subject of the following subordinate clause. This has the effect that an additional verb, *drinkt* ‘drinks’ is added. These changes alter the semantics of the predication and it is not straightforward to identify which part of the Dutch sentence translates Danish *plejer*, although the adverb *graag* arguably reflects some of the habitual meaning.

- (14) *Og saa passer du nok Skovriderens Te, saa den*
 and then take.care:PRS 2SG PTCL forester:DEF:GEN tea so it
bliver, som den plejer – ikke?
 become:PRS as it HAB:PRS right
 ‘And then you’ll take care of the forester’s tea so it gets the way it usually does – won’t you?’ (Bang)
- (15) *En denk er om, dat je de thee zet, zooals de*
 and think:IMP there about COMP 2SG DEF tea set as DEF
houtvester ze graag drinkt.
 forester it gladly drink:PRS:3SG
 ‘And remember to make the tea the way the forester likes to drink it.’ (Bang [Dutch] 23)

4 Findings

4.1 Overview of Dutch and German strategies

The results of the corpus study are shown in Tables 3 and 4. These tables present the strategies found in the German and Dutch translations of the Danish habitual expressions with *pleje*. ‘Zero’ refers to cases where *pleje* was not translated at all, i.e., where no overt expression of habituality was present in German or Dutch. For the sake of completeness, we also give the raw frequencies (*n*) and the frequencies normalized to 1 (*f*) of the different strategies. We must stress, however, that since the corpus is small and the numbers of most of the types are very low, no firm conclusions should be drawn from these. Still, they give an indication of which strategies are the preferred ones by the Dutch and German translators.

Table 3: Strategies in German translations

Strategy	<i>N</i>	<i>f</i>
<i>pflegen</i>	38	0.40
Adverbial	32	0.33
Zero	16	0.17
<i>pflegen</i> + adverbial	6	0.06
Adjectival	2	0.02
Nominal	1	0.01
Paraphrase	1	0.01
Total	96	1.0

Table 4: Strategies in Dutch translations

Strategy	<i>N</i>	<i>f</i>
Adverbial	49	0.42
<i>plegen</i>	38	0.33
Zero	8	0.07
Adjectival	8	0.07
Paraphrase	5	0.04
<i>plegen</i> + adverbial	5	0.04
Nominal	3	0.03
Total	116	1.0

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the most common strategies in both the Dutch and German translations are ‘adverbial’ and *pflegen/plegen*. In German, *pflegen* is the most frequently employed strategy, followed by adverbials and zero. In Dutch, adverbials are the most common strategy. Still, somewhat surprisingly because *plegen* is often reported to be archaic (see Section 2.3), the second most common strategy is to translate *pleje* with Dutch *plegen*. We return to this when we discuss the issues of text type and translation style below. In some cases, *pleje* was translated using both *plegen/pflegen* and an adverbial. This combined strategy of *plegen/pflegen* + adverbial was already exemplified in (12) and (13) above. In both Dutch and German, the strategies ‘*plegen/pflegen*’, ‘adverbial’, and ‘*plegen/pflegen* + adverbial’ account for more than three quarters of the examples.

In (16)–(18) we give a representative example of the translations of the same instance of Danish *pleje* in (16). In the Dutch translation in (17), the adverbial strategy is used. The German translation in (18) uses *pflegen*. The parts that correspond to Danish *pleje* are boldfaced.

- (16) *Søren hørte hende ikke, han var gaaet igjennem Karlekammeret,*
Søren hear:PST her NEG he be.PSTgo:PTCPthrough servant.room:DEF
og ind_i et lille Kammer der bagved, hvor han og Skytten
and into INDFsmall room there behind wherehe and hunter:DEF

plejede at sove.

HAB:PST to sleep:INF

‘Søren didn’t hear her, he had walked through the servant’s room and into a small room behind it where he and the hunter used to sleep.’ (Jacobsen)

- (17) *Sören hørde haar niet, hij was doorgelopen naar het*
Sören hear:SG:PST her NEG he be:SG:PST walk.on:PTCP to DEF

kleine achterkamertje, waar hij gewoonlijk sliep met de jager.
small back.room where he usually sleep:SG:PST with DEF hunter

‘Sören didn’t hear her, he had walked on to the small backroom, where he usually slept with the hunter.’ (Jacobsen [Dutch] 163)

- (18) *Sören hörte sie nicht; er war durch die*
Sören hear:1SG:PST her NEG he be:PST through DEF.ACC

Knechtekammergegangen und in eine kleine Kammer dahinter, wo
servant.room go:PTCP and in INDFsmall room behind where

er und der Jäger zu schlafen pflegten.

he and DEF hunter to sleep:INF HAB:3PL.PST

‘Sören didn’t hear her; he had gone through the servant’s room and had entered a small room behind it, where he and the hunter used to sleep.’ (Jacobsen [German] ch. 15)

The strategy ‘nominal’ consists of a noun meaning ‘habit’ or ‘custom’ and either a form of ‘to be’ or ‘to have’, as in (19).

- (19) *Zij had de gewoonte om tegen de middag en*
she have:SG:PST DEF habit to towards DEF afternoon and

avond over de dichtbegroeide paden te wandelen.
evening on DEF overgrown path:PL to stroll:INF

‘She was in the habit of taking a stroll on the overgrown paths in the afternoon and evening.’ (Jensen [Dutch] 28)

This strategy was present three times in the Dutch material. Its only occurrence in the German material uses the contrastive adverbial *sonst* in addition to the nominal, as shown in (20). We return to such contrastive expressions in Section 4.4.

- (20) *Deshalb hatte sie daheim keine Ruhe finden können und
therefore have:3SG:PST she at.home no rest find:INFcan:INF and
war noch früher gereist, als es sonst ihre Gewohnheit
be:3SG:PST even earlier travel:PTCPthan it else her habit
war.
be:3SG:PST*

‘Therefore she hadn’t been able to rest at home and had left even earlier than what was otherwise her habit.’ (Pontoppidan [German] 207)

Some instances of *pleje* were left untranslated in the Dutch and the German versions (i.e., the ‘zero’ strategy). Examples (21)–(23) show a case where this zero strategy is employed in both translations and Danish *pleier* in (21) does not correspond to any linguistic element in either the German translation in (22) or the Dutch in (23).

- (21) *Aa nei, jeg troer ikke at Gaardeieren pleier van at
oh no I think:PRS NEG COMP farmer:DEF HAB:PRS usually to
spise den bedre.
eat:INF it better*

‘Oh no, I don’t think the farmer usually eats it any better than this.’ (Gjellerup)

- (22) *Nein, ich glaube nicht, daß der Hofbauer einen
no I think:1SG.PRS NEG COMP DEF farmer INDF.ACC
besseren Braten vorgesetzt bekommt.
better:ACC roast serve:PTCP get:3SG.PRS*

‘No, I don’t think that the farmer gets served a better roast.’ (Gjellerup [German] 57)

- (23) *Nee, ik denk niet dat de Hoeve_boer een beter gebraad
no I think:1SG:PRS NEG COMP DEF farmer INDFbetter roast
krijgt opgediend.
get:3SG.PRS serve:PTCP*

‘No, I don’t think that the farmer gets served a better roast.’ (Gjellerup [Dutch] 57)⁸

⁸ We suspect that the Dutch translation of Gjellerup is actually based on the German version of the book rather than the Danish original. There are no statements to this effect in our copy of the Dutch translation, but as (22)–(23) suggest, the Dutch translation is very close to the German version.

The adjectival strategy covers instances where *pleje* was translated by a copula plus a predicative adjective expressing habituality. This strategy occurred eight times in the Dutch and twice in the German material. An example from Dutch is given in (24).

- (24) *In de gang, die vol helmen, koffers en bagage was,*
 in DEF corridor REL full helmet:PL suitcase:PL and luggage be:SG:PST
wachtten een paar van de officieren. Zij zaten op een kist
 wait:PL:PST INDF few of DEF officer:PL they sit:PL:PST on INDF box
en waren gewoon Tine daar vooreen gezellig praatje op
 and be:PL:PST accustomed Tine there for INDF pleasant chat on
te wachten, wanneer zij in en uit ging.
 to wait:INF when she in and out go:SG:PST

‘In the corridor, which was full of helmets, suitcases and luggage, a few of the officers were waiting. They were sitting on a box, where they would usually wait for Tine to have a pleasant chat when she went in and out.’
 (Bang [Dutch] 87–88)⁹

4.2 Stylistic considerations

Comparing the findings for the individual texts reveals that there is much variation between them in how *pleje* was translated. An important difference is found between the older texts, published in the period 1843–1901, and the newer texts, published in the period 1973–1987: the habitual expressions in the older texts are more often translated with a form of *pflegen* or *plegen* – sometimes combined with an adverbial – than those in the newer texts, as shown in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: German *pflegen* (+ adverbial) in older and newer texts

Strategy	Older	Newer	Total
<i>Pflegen</i>	38/71	0/25	38/96
<i>pflegen</i> + adverbial	6/71	0/25	6/96

Table 6: Dutch *plegen* (+ adverbial) in older and newer texts

Strategy	Older	Newer	Total
<i>Plegen</i>	36/80	2/36	38/116
<i>plegen</i> + adverbial	5/80	0/36	5/116

⁹ The Dutch text actually reads ... *in en nit ging*. However, *nit* is obviously a typo for *uit*.

This finding is not unexpected given our assumption that the use of *plegen* in Dutch and possibly also *pflegen* in German is somewhat archaic. For the older texts, we generally have translations from the early twentieth century, and at that time the use of *plegen* and *pflegen* may have been more common. Another possibility is that *plegen/pflegen* were already somewhat archaic at this point, but that translation styles have changed and become more colloquial. At least according to the intuitions of one of the authors (NK), many of the adverbial strategies used in the German translations of the newer texts are more in line with the way habituality is usually expressed in spoken colloquial German. A representative example is given in (25), where *pleje* was translated as *normalerweise* ‘normally’. This interpretation is of course only based on the intuitive judgments of a single native speaker, but a study of the expression of habituality in a corpus of spoken German could possibly corroborate (or refute) this impressionistic observation.

- (25) *Wenn der Kaffee nicht schmeckt, wie Kaffee normalerweise*
when DEF coffee NEG taste:3SG:PRS like coffee normally
schmeckt, ist das nicht ebensogut wie eine ärztliche
taste:3SG:PRS is that NEG as.good as INDF medical
Untersuchung?
examination
‘When the coffee doesn’t taste the way coffee normally tastes, isn’t that just as good as a medical examination?’ (Andersen *Hånd* [German] 117)

That stylistic considerations must play a role is evident when we compare the preferences of individual translators. A clear example of this is the Dutch translation of Kierkegaard, where *plegen* is especially abundant: 25 of the 34 habitual expressions with *pleje* in the Danish original were translated with *plegen* (including *plegen* + adverbial) in Dutch. While Kierkegaard is the oldest text in our corpus of Danish texts (published 1843), the Dutch translation is the youngest in our whole corpus. The high frequency of *plegen* in this text is thus not due to the time when the translation was made, but is clearly a matter of style. The Dutch text is generally very faithful to Kierkegaard’s Danish, which frequently results in turns of phrase which are not current in contemporary colloquial Dutch. This was also noted by at least one reviewer when the translation appeared.¹⁰ While the Dutch Kierkegaard translation may thus not be the best representative of contemporary Dutch usage, the inclusion of the text in our corpus was instructive in highlighting how great a role the stylistic choices of individual translators may play.

¹⁰ See Heumakers (2000), who points to “a certain propensity to archaize” (“een zekere neiging tot archaïseren”) on the part of the translator.

Finally, we also see possible effects of text genre. Jensen (*Kongens Fald*) and Jacobsen (*Fru Marie Grubbe*) are both historical novels, the former taking place around the time of the Reformation, the latter during the late seventeenth century. The Dutch and German translations of both of these texts turned out to contain a relatively high number of translations with *plegen/pflegen*. The translators of these texts may have used *plegen/pflegen* more frequently because they aimed for a style properly reflecting the historical contexts of the novels.

4.3 Adverbial strategies

Both in Dutch and in German, Danish habitual expressions with *pleje* are frequently translated by adverbial expressions. A relatively large number of different adverbial translations is found, as shown by Tables 7 and 8.¹¹

Table 7: Adverbials in German translations

Adverbial	<i>n</i>
<i>immer</i>	8
<i>sonst</i>	8
<i>gewöhnlich</i>	4
<i>oft</i>	2
<i>ab und zu</i>	1
<i>häufig</i>	1
<i>in der Regel</i>	1
<i>normalerweise</i>	1
<i>oft</i> + ‘do’	1
<i>so gern</i> + ‘do’	1
<i>sonst</i> + ‘do’	1
<i>sonst</i> + <i>immer</i>	1
<i>völlig normal</i>	1
<i>wohl manchmal</i>	1
TOTAL	32

¹¹ The German ‘contrastive’ strategies with *sonst* are discussed in Section 4.4.

Table 8: Adverbials in Dutch translations

Adverbial	<i>n</i>
<i>gewoonlijk</i>	16
<i>altijd</i>	15
<i>meestal</i>	6
<i>anders</i>	3
<i>vaak</i>	3
<i>dan</i>	1
<i>dikwijls</i>	1
<i>doorgaans</i>	1
<i>in den regel</i>	1
<i>normaal</i>	1
<i>zoo dikwijls</i>	1
TOTAL	49

Most of the adverbial translations occur only once in our material. Thus, it seems that habituality can be expressed in German and Dutch in many different ways. Nevertheless, German *immer* and Dutch *altijd*, meaning ‘always’, and German *gewöhnlich* and Dutch *gewoonlijk*, meaning ‘usually’, occur relatively frequently. This finding may indicate that these adverbs may be considered specifically habitual adverbs. This suggestion is especially plausible for *gewöhnlich* and *gewoonlijk*, which are transparently habitual in meaning. By contrast, *immer* and *altijd* do not seem to be restricted to habitual meanings. In the standard Dutch dictionary the *Dikke Van Dale*, *altijd* has two senses: ‘at all times, uninterruptedly’ (‘te allen tijde, in onafgebroken voortdurend’) and ‘repeated continuously’ (‘bij voortdurende herhaling’). The first sense is durative rather than habitual, and while the second sense may lead to a habitual interpretation, it can also be used in iterative contexts. In the German dictionary *Duden*, *immer* has three senses: ‘repeated often/every time’ (‘sich häufig wiederholend/jedes mal’), ‘increasingly’ (‘nach und nach’; in the context of a comparative adjective) and ‘each’ (‘jeweils’). Again, only one of these senses, the first, may be interpreted habitually. Correspondingly, it seems that *altijd* and *immer* may be used habitually in a particular context, rather than that these adverbs are habitual adverbs specifically. That is, their habitual interpretation seems to be context dependent, such that it does not seem appropriate to classify them as habitual adverbs *per se*. We assume that most of the adverbial expressions that we found as translations of Danish expressions with *pleje* have a habitual interpretation only in the contexts in which we found them. They are not necessarily inherently habitual. We will have to leave the exact contexts in which these adverbial expressions have a habitual interpretation – as well as their frequency – for future research.

4.4 Contrastive *habituals*

One particular usage pattern of Danish *pleje* was brought to our attention by the occurrence of the adverb *sonst* ‘else, otherwise’ in several of the German translations (of Gjellerup, Kierkegaard, Pontoppidan, Andersen *Hånd*, and Willumsen).¹² We will call this the ‘contrastive’ use of *pleje* because it serves to highlight a contrast between the current situation and what is generally or usually (in other words, habitually) the case. An example from Gjellerup is given in (26), where the character named Lise is contrasting the usual habits of the pastor with the miller’s request that she should get him some tea. As (27) shows, the German version uses the adverb *sonst* to express this contrast:

- (26) – *Lise, sagde Mølleren, det er vel bedst, du sørger*
 Lise say:PST miller:DEF it be.PRS PTCL best you manage:PRS
for lidt The til Præsten [...] – Præsten pleier jo ikke
 for a.little tea for pastor:DEF pastor:DEF HAB:PRS PTCL NEG
at drikke The.
 to drink:INF tea

“‘Lise,’ said the miller, ‘I think it’s best if you go and get a little tea for the pastor.’ ... ‘But the pastor doesn’t usually drink tea.’” (Gjellerup)

- (27) *Der Herr Pfarrer trinkt ja sonst nicht Tee*
 DEF mister reverend drink:3SG:PRS PTCL else NEG tea
 ‘But the Reverend doesn’t usually/otherwise drink tea.’ (Gjellerup [German] 33)

Similarly, but with a nonhuman subject, the example in (28)–(29) expresses a contrast between the way the canopy bed usually looked and the way it looked at this particular point in the story:

- (28) *Himmelsengen var ikke så flot som den plejede at være.*
 canopy.bed:DEF be.PST NEG so nice as it HAB:PST to be:INF
 ‘The canopy bed didn’t look as nice as it used to.’ (Andersen *Hånd*)
- (29) *Das Himmelbett war nicht so schön wie sonst.*
 DEF canopy.bed be.3SG.PST not so nice as else
 ‘The canopy bed didn’t look as nice as usual/otherwise.’ (Andersen *Hånd* [German] 277)

¹² The Dutch equivalent *anders* is used in the translations of Gjellerup, Kierkegaard, and Thorup; in the case of Gjellerup, however, we suspect that this is due to influence from the German text (see fn. 8).

This contrast – between what is usually and actually the case – seems to be expressed by *pleje* alone in most cases in the Danish texts. As (30) and (32) below show, however, the adverb *ellers* ‘otherwise, else’ may also be used together with *pleje*. The German translation of (30) uses both *pflügen* and *sonst*, similarly to the Danish text; see (31). The contrast is between the usual attitude of the character Peter Andreas (renamed Johann Andreas in the German translation) on the one hand and his feelings in this particular situation on the other.

- (30) *Peter Andreas plejede ellers ikke at tage sig*
P. A. HAB:PST otherwise NEG to take:INF REFL
Faderens Vrede synderlig nær; men han havde den negang
father:DEF:GEN anger very near but he have:PST this.time
undtagelsesvisen Fornemmelse af at have begaaet
exceptionally INDF sense of to have:INF commit:PTCP
noget uværdigt
something dishonourable
‘Peter Andreas otherwise usually didn’t really take his father’s anger to heart; but this time he for once had a sense of having done something dishonourable’ (Pontoppidan)

- (31) *Johann Andreas pflegte sich des Vaters Zorn sonst*
J. A. HAB:PST.3SG REFL DEF:GEN father:GEN anger else
gerade nicht sehr zu Herzen zu nehmen, aber er hatte
PTCL NEG very to heart:DAT to take:INF but he have:PST.3SG
diesmal ausnahmsweise ein Gefühl, etwas Unwürdiges
this.time exceptionally INDF feeling something dishonourable
begangen zu haben
commit:PTCP to have:INF
‘Johann Andreas otherwise usually didn’t take his father’s anger to heart, but this time he for once had a sense of having done something dishonourable.’ (Pontoppidan [German] 11)

In the Danish example from KorpusDK in (32), from a newspaper article, the contrast is between the autumn sky in Johannesburg in its usual state and after a recent increase in air pollution.

- (32) *Efterårshimlen plejer ellers at være klar og blå her i maj.*
 autumn.sky:DEF HAB:PRS otherwise to be:INF clear and blue here in May
 ‘The autumn sky is otherwise usually clear and blue here in May.’
 (KorpusDK, 2008 *Weekendavisen*)

The occurrence of this contrastive use of *pleje* is interesting in light of the literature on habituais in English. The existence of examples like (33) with English *used to* is one of the reasons why Comrie (1976: 26–30) defines habitual meanings without reference to iterativity and repetition, but rather as describing ‘a characteristic feature of an extended period of time’ (1976: 28); see also Section 2 above.

- (33) *The Temple of Diana used to stand at Ephesus.*

Binnick (2006), on the other hand, argues that English *used to* is not in fact a habitual marker, but rather expresses an explicit contrast between the present and the past: “The whole point of the *used to* construction is not to report a habit in the past but rather to *contrast* a past era with the present” (2006: 43; italics in original). (33) is one of Binnick’s main examples to illustrate this point (see Binnick 2006: 34–35): the function of *used to* in (33) is not, of course, to express a habit or propensity on the part of the temple, but to indicate that the state of affairs was characteristic of the past in contrast to the present.

Without committing ourselves to any particular analysis of English *used to*, we would venture that the ‘traditional’ habitual analysis and Binnick’s ‘contrast’ analysis are not necessarily incommensurable. Rather, it seems to us, the expression of habituality – what is usually the case – easily lends itself to the expression of contrast – what is not the case right now (see also Comrie 1976: 28–30). We would thus suggest that the main difference between Danish *pleje*, which occasionally occurs with contrastive meaning, and English *used to*, which seems to be more frequent in this function, is one of degree rather than kind. In English the contrastive use may have become dominant, but it is closely related to and most likely historically derived from the ‘true’ habitual use. These differences, however, will have to await further investigation.

5 Conclusions

In this paper we have addressed the use of the Danish habitual verb *pleje* and the different strategies used to translate in German and Dutch literary texts. We hope to have shown that *pleje* is a clear case of a habitual, and that this is a good starting point for investigating possible ways of expressing habituality in German and Dutch. The findings from our study on the basis of a small corpus of Danish texts and their German and Dutch translations indicate that German *pfllegen* and Dutch

plegen – both historically related to Danish *pleje* – as well as various adverbs are (or used to be) the most common ways to translate *pleje*. Especially the frequent occurrence of *plegen* in the Dutch translations is surprising considering our impression that the use of this verb in habitual contexts sounds quite archaic in contemporary Dutch. However, the study also shows large differences between the translations included in the corpus, and the overall frequency of *plegen* may be partly due to a few translators' stylistic preferences. Moreover, we find differences in the frequencies of the strategies used to translate *pleje* between translations of older and newer texts. It is also worth noting that a relatively large number of different expressions are used to translate *pleje* into German and Dutch, showing that these languages have a range of habitual strategies at their disposal. Finally, the material in our translation corpus provides new insights on the use of *pleje* in Danish, as they show that *pleje* may have a contrastive function.

Because our study is limited to a translation corpus of a small number of texts of a certain kind, it should be investigated further whether the findings hold for Danish, German, and Dutch more broadly. It would be interesting to study the strategies used to render Danish *pleje* in German and Dutch translations of other types of texts. An obvious challenge here is to find materials other than literary texts that are translated from Danish into German and Dutch. However, a number of parallel multi-language corpora based on materials from the European Union are available, which might be useful for future studies, such as Europarl (Koehn 2005) and DCEP (Hajlaoui et al. 2014). More generally, further research should investigate habitual expressions in Dutch and German in a larger corpus. It would then also be possible to examine potential variation within these languages. Such research could corroborate or refute our preliminary impression that certain adverbial strategies found in our corpus, such as German *normalerweise*, are typical means of expressing habituality in current language use. Finally, the historical developments in the use of *pleje*, *pflügen*, and *plegen* might be worth investigating. These verbs have a common origin and their developments through time may add to our understanding of the history of Danish, German, and Dutch specifically and of habituality more generally.

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