

6 sense and stylistic sensitivity in translation processes

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Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu
(St. Jerome)

Introduction

The 50th anniversary of ESIT provided the opportunity to discuss theories, combinations of theories as well as many questions relating to Translation Studies, translator training and the profession of “Translator.” The main theory of ESIT, “La Théorie Interprétative de la Traduction,” also called “Théorie du Sens,” and “Déverbalisation” by Danica Seleskovitch were celebrated together with ESIT. “Déverbalisation” means that words and sentences are not clung to and translated literally word for word, and that expressing meaning, content, or thoughts occurs automatically in communication situations. However, relying solely on an automatic ability to express meaning may not be sufficient—not even under optimal conditions, i.e. in situations where competent bilinguals who fully master both their languages translate into their “own language.” In translator training, at least, it is necessary to complement “déverbalisation” by the systematic raising of awareness regarding the form of the source text, actually its “verbalisation,” and, additionally, to point out linguistic and stylistic differences between the languages as to form and use. The linguistic and stylistic design of a source text provides the receiver with essential signals that not only support the process of comprehension but, in many cases, also facilitate the production and revision of the target text.

1. Linguistics—the wicked stepmother

Thirty years ago, Danica Seleskovitch launched an attack on comparative linguistics (1977: 28) saying: "... that a comparison of language leads nowhere except to the discovery that languages are indeed different and to an endless enumeration of the differences." In her attempt to separate interpreting and translation from linguistics and to create an independent translation theory, Seleskovitch had already, nearly a decade earlier (1968: 28), insisted on a clear distinction between "linguistic meaning," the static meaning of language as found in dictionaries or grammars, and "non-verbal sense" which is the *ad hoc* meaning used in communication. Considering the situation of translation and TS in the 1970s, her focus on communication was progressive—today however, it is both surprising and difficult to understand that many scholars in TS still share similar reservations about linguistics as Seleskovitch (1977 and 1996). Modern linguistics has a great deal of explanatory power and it is a pity that it has come to be regarded as the "wicked stepmother" among the disciplines that contribute to the interdiscipline "translation."

The "Théorie du Sens" has been criticized but also defended (see e.g. ISRAËL/LUDRIER 2005). It is not my intent to participate in this discussion but, as this theory seems to be popular in several research groups in TS, I would like to draw attention to certain important aspects. In the following, it will be shown that it is an advantage if the "Théorie du Sens" is complemented by an effort to raise awareness, especially as to the style of the source text. Stylistic signals are useful and sometimes necessary—even for a competent bilingual translator. It will be argued that the term *déverbalisation* could be reconsidered and that a logical segmentation of the different levels of abstraction would facilitate the explanation of observations in TS and translator training.

2. "Théorie du Sens"

"Théorie du Sens" at once turns one's thought to ancient ideas about translation from Cicero, Horatius, and especially also St. Jerome (396) who translated the Bible from the original languages into Latin. His above mentioned quotation: "Non verbum e verbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu" ("Not word for word—but sense for sense") has been repeated in various forms over the centuries, especially in relation to Bible translation, e.g. Luther (1530), Goethe (*Faust* I) and Nida & Taber (1969). Luther (1530: 21)

expressed the necessity of translating idiomatically, i.e. of adapting the target text to the target text receivers' manner of speaking in different situations.

Translating the meaning/content of a text and not its form has long been a fundamental feature of successful translation and the concept of the "Théorie du Sens" is absolutely in line with many of the ancient ideas about translation.

At the end of the last century, the pragmatic turn and the idea of investigating the "text in function" or the "text-in-the-situation" had an enormous impact on linguistics and also on comparative linguistics, text-linguistics and comparative functional grammar based on semantics (e.g. SEARLE: 1969, WEINRICH 1969, SCHMIDT 1973, DIRVEN/RADDIEN 1977). The pragmatic turn also had an impact on translation, at least in German related Translation Studies, e.g. Höning/Kussmaul (1982), the Skopos theory, Reiss/Vermeer (1984) and Holz-Mänttari (1984). Since 1983, in translator training, texts have been translated with a defined communication situation, a target group and a given purpose. It is well-known that the Skopos theory went so far as to "dethrone" the source text and to reduce it to a mere offering of information. The consequence of the pragmatic turn in TS was that in addition to "not word for word—but sense for sense," the situational context, the target text receiver and the text function became fundamental factors to be considered in all translation processes. The Skopos theory resulted in translation briefs in translator training and also in translators' and students' freedom to analyze the communicative situation, the intended function of the target text and then to make their decisions and to argue for them.

Focus had changed from structure and the sentence limit to an investigation of texts in a situation, defined by sender, receiver, occasion, situation and communicative purpose. The pragmatic turn, the ideas of functional comparative linguistics and the Skopos theory fall neatly in line with the "Théorie du Sens" as Seleskovitch already (1968: 65) in mentions the importance of taking the context, the purpose of the message and the interests of the target text receiver into consideration.

For both theories, Skopos theory and "Théorie du Sens," the success of the communicative action is the criterion for the successful process of translation or interpreting. A problem they share is that—as Koller (1990: 24) points out for the Skopos theory—it may be difficult to decide whether the intuitive comprehension of the source text and the automatic production of the target text really has been satisfactory.

3. “Déverbalisation” and translation

The term *déverbalisation*, closely connected with the “Théorie du Sens,” is not only imprecise, it is misleading. The term *verbal* means “word” and a word usually consists of both its form and its content. The prefix *dé-* conveys the meaning of “taking away”—so “*dé-verbalisation*” must be taking away the word with both its form *and* its content—however, at least the content part, “le sens,” is necessary for interpreting and translating. But what happens to the form? Before the conference, this question was asked by the scholars of ESIT: “Does translation reside in confronting two languages or in keeping them apart?”

This is a fundamental question, and not only for Translation Studies. The power of language in relation to thought has long been an issue, especially in philosophy and psychology but also in the natural sciences, because of the fact that the description and denomination of a phenomenon has an impact on the way it is perceived. This has been called a paradox, for example by the psychologist Høffding (1910: 11), who realized the antinomy between perception and reflection: New phenomena can only be described by expressions already known and it is inevitable and unavoidable that the already-existing formulations affect the content of the description. Not even Vygotsky’s “inner speech” (1974, II: 362ff) provided a solution to the problem of the dominance of language over thought or, perhaps, the dominance of thought over language, because “private language” can only be accessed *via* verbalization—i.e. through language.

As to the problematic term *déverbalisation* and as to the question whether translation “resides in confronting languages or in keeping them apart?” findings and models from classical semiotics are useful because they illustrate both *language system* and *language use*.

The Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev (1943: 45) describes the relation between the form and content of a sign¹:

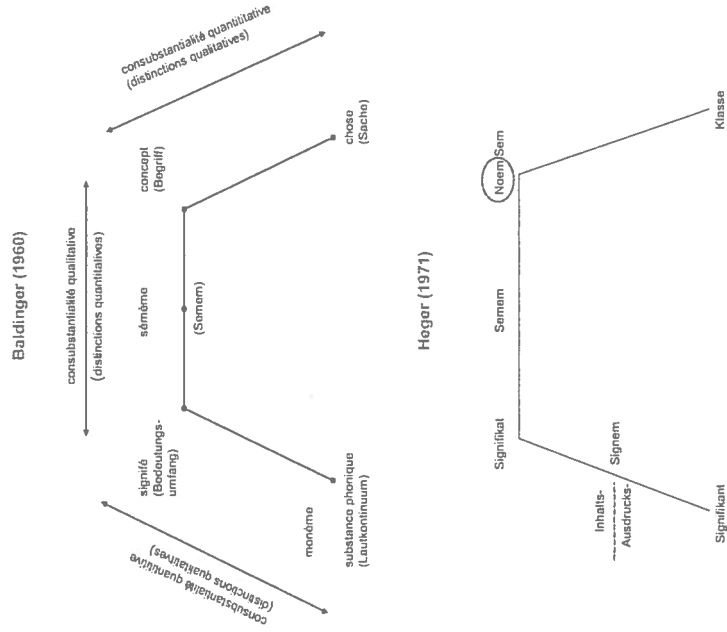
“The ‘sign function’ is an interdependence between the expression and the content of the sign. Expression and content presuppose each other. An expression of a sign is only an expression because it is an expression of its content and a content

1. “Tegnfunktionen er i sig selv en solidaritet: udtryk og indhold er solidariske, forudsæter nødvendigvis hinanden. Et udtryk er kun udtryk i kraft af at det er udtryk for et indhold, og et indhold er kun indhold i kraft af at det er indhold for et udtryk. Der kan derfor ikke — undtagen gennem en kunstig isolering — foreligge et indhold uden et udtryk eller et udtryk uden et indhold eller et indholdløst udtryk.”

of the sign is only its content because it is the content of its expression. That is why no content can exist without an expression or an expressionless content, and no expression without a content—except in cases where they are separated artificially.” (My translation)

As Hjelmslev points it out, it is [...] “*undtagen gennem en kunstig isolering* —” [...], which means that an expression and its content can only be separated *artificially*. This has an impact on comparative linguistics, classical and modern functional linguistics, text-linguistics, stylistics, and definitely also on translation and interpreting.

The close relation between the form and content of the sign is illustrated by semiotic models. In relation to ESIT and the “Théorie du Sens”, I have chosen models created by two renowned German experts in Romance languages, Baldinger (1960) and Heger (1971), who were both contemporaries of Seleskovitch. Especially Heger’s model, which is based on Hjelmslev and Baldinger, provided us with a semiotic explanation that is useful for translation.



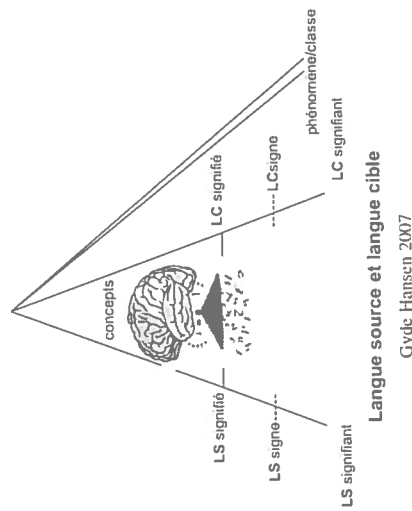
The left side of both models shows the sign with its form and content. At the top, it is shown that the content of the sign, “sémème,” can be divided into concepts. The sign is used to refer to phenomena or classes of phenomena, sometimes also called objects, and it can be used for explaining reference on the *level of the system* and on the *level of use*. As can be seen from the base of the model, there is no connection at all between the form/expression and the phenomenon/class of objects that the sign is used to refer to—only via the content, i.e. only via thought.

Heger’s model is an expansion of Baldinger’s model. Adding the concept “noem” to the distinctive features of the content of the sign, Heger “artificially” (see HEGELMSLEIV) opened up for a content which is *independent* of the form of one single language. He worked with French and German comparatively and he regarded this feature “noem”, which is defined as independent of one single language *but only accessible by a single language* (“übereinzelsprachliches Merkmal”), as being necessary as a *tertium comparationis* in comparative studies.

Based on these semiotic models, the next models demonstrate what happens during the translating process with respect to the question if translation is “both confronting languages and keeping them apart?”

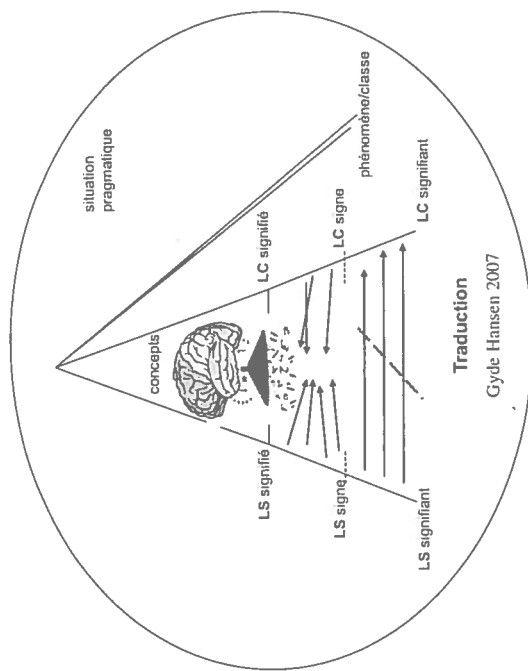
In this context, it is crucial to keep in mind that a “sign” is not restricted only to refer to a “morpheme” or a “word” or a “sentence.” According to Bühler (1934, 1965) the sign (organum) is used for communication and it can have the extension of both words, phrases, sentences, passages, or texts.

In the following model, LS is “langue source” (= source language) and LC is “langue cible» (= target language).



This model illustrates signs in *two languages* that are used to refer to the same phenomenon or class of phenomena. The left side of the triangle enclosing the brain is the sign (e.g. word, sentence, or text) in the *source language* with its expression and content, and the right side of the triangle shows the sign in the *target language*, with its expression and content.

The two almost parallel lines to the right of the model illustrate the action of reference to the phenomenon/class of phenomena. Two lines are used instead of one in order to illustrate that it is not expected that it is always possible to refer with the signs in two different languages to *exactly* the same content—or that the two signs can always express *exactly* the same content. The following model shows what happens in translation when we translate words, sentences, passages or whole texts.



The model includes the communicative situation illustrated by the pragmatic circle.

Based on this model, it can be explained that translation must be both a confrontation as to the meaning/content/sense (signifié/sens/Sinn/Gehalt) and keeping apart as to form/expression. But it is necessary to keep in mind that this process of “keeping apart” is an *artificial* procedure and that comprehension can only take place via the linguistic and stylistic form of the ST. As the broken line is intended to show also in the formulation phase, the “keeping apart” can be carried out to a lesser or greater degree, depending on the linguistic and stylistic means available, on pragmatic and

text-linguistic aspects like, for example, the type or genre of the source text (is it a marketing text, a political speech, a citation, a document, a contract?) and on the purpose and function of the translation—the translation type (see section 4).

4. Stylistic sensitivity and “déverbalisation”

In TS and translation standards, there is talk of textual function, genre, register, conventions and style, but what is the status of, for instance, register and style in the “Théorie du Sens”?

Is the style just a part of the linguistic form and accordingly “static meaning of language as found in dictionaries or grammars?” Style is mentioned in many dictionaries. Can style be ignored in translation processes? Is style to be used only in the comprehension phase of the translation process to then disappear “in a split second” so that it does not hinder the emergence of the same sense and understanding for the TT-receiver as for the ST-receiver? In short, is style part of the system or is it “use”? What is the relationship between system and use? Is style form or is it sense? If style is form, does that imply that in translation processes style can be neglected?

Though Seleskovitch (1977: 31) and Gile (2003) show that the same sense can be expressed by many different translations, some translations are more accurate than others and some fit better into the context of the communication situation than others. As we experience daily, e.g. in marketing, politics and journalism, language is an instrument of power and it is crucial also to take the *manner* of expressing thoughts seriously. Different text genres show totally different styles. That is why students are trained to handle different communication situations, genres and registers.

At the beginning of her career, Seleskovitch (1968:187f) agreed with the importance of the expression part of a message using a little chapter on “Style” to argue this point. Seleskovitch (1968: 188) writes:

Si curieux que cela puisse paraître, il faut, pour rendre le style, être aussi infidèle aux mots que pour rendre le sens.

and:

C'est en comprenant l'attitude de l'orateur que l'on arrive à copier son style par un processus presque inconscient qui permet même de rendre avec une spontanéité parfois étonnante les jeux de mots de l'orateur : [...]

As style (stylistic characteristics, levels of style, use of metaphors and other rhetorical devices or elements) is also part of the *linguistic form* used in communication to express sense, at least this part of the expression of the source text is too important to just let it disappear. Experience and an investigation of translation processes, a longitudinal empirical study at the Copenhagen Business School from 1997 to 2007 (HANSEN 2003 and 2006), have shown that capable and competent bilingual translators and/or translators with a high level language proficiency, can also benefit from specific, problem-oriented comparative stylistic and linguistic training.

Gile (2003) justifies the deverbalization approach in the interpreting and translation classroom, but he also points out that this approach alone may not be sufficient. He proposes (section VII) to assume two levels, a “deep” level and a “surface” level. The “deep” “central” conceptual level is:

[...] fundamentally a set of comprehension operations, in which the informational content of the text and the author's intentions are analyzed, followed by text production operations based on this content, on the author's intentions as perceived, and on the author's interests, weighed against the Client's interests and against local constraints.

At the “surface level,” the implementation level, Gile mentions several different practical or cognitive problems like terminology of languages for special purposes, regional differences, language-pair specific false friends, and linguistic differences between two languages.

The “deep” or “central” conceptual level in Gile's proposal is mainly the pragmatic conditions, intentions, interests, and constraints. Analyzing the informational content—also part of this level—is sense and the comprehension operations are dependent on the ability of the translator to understand the signals of the form—also with respect to special terminology and special regional traits (for example, US English vs. UK English)—part of the surface level.

I would like to propose a different segmentation. With the following segmentation, inspired by Coseriu (1970: 207), all signs used in communication, as well as differences of any kind, genres, styles, special terminology, false friends, and even literary texts, can be described properly at different levels of abstraction. *System*, *norm* and *use* are mutually dependent because without system and norm, communication is impossible (the system is characterized as “not implemented” because it also includes potential future structures).

sometimes incomplete, even incorrect sentences, ellipses, parentheses, and an expressive word order, often supported by non-verbal gestures, there are often situations with little time to reflect on *how* the message is expressed in both source language and target language, but the meaning, including the stylistic dimension of the whole situation, has to be caught intuitively (GILF 2003). Nevertheless, professional interpreters say that during the process of interpreting, they observe an aspect of strategy and even of control over what has been interpreted previously in the process.

In written translation, analysis, control and revision are important aspects of the translation process. Recently, even in the European Standard EN15038 (p. 11), it is mentioned that the source text should be analyzed and that register and style of the translation should be *controlled* with respect to adequacy.

— Bilingualism and/or a high level of language proficiency

Bilingualism or a high level of language proficiency is a precondition of the “Théorie du Sens”, but bilingualism and a high level of language proficiency are not an absolute guarantee for being a good interpreter or translator. This was pointed out *inter alia* by Höning (1995: 25), and it is also one of the findings of the above mentioned empirical study at the Copenhagen Business School.

— Languages and direction

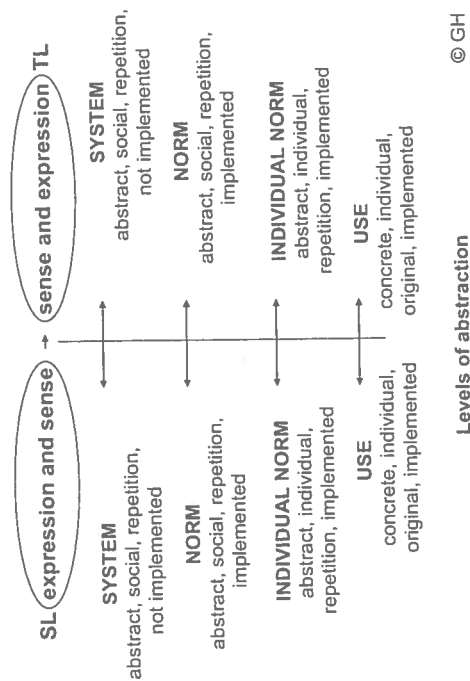
As to linguistic differences between languages or special formal features of a language, the “Théorie du Sens” does not take these into consideration. Differences in syntax or in the use of idioms do not present problems because, as it is argued, a competent person does not have such difficulties. As to the direction of the translation, in the “Théorie du Sens,” it is assumed that interpreters and translators should ideally translate into the language they regard as their A-language (“their own language”).

— Communication situation, purpose, translation brief, genre, the target text receiver

In this context it is needless to mention that in agreement with the “Théorie du Sens,” the communication situation, the purpose of the translation and the translation brief have an influence on the translation strategies and chosen expressions and, furthermore, that the genre of the source and target texts, and the kind of information that has to be given in relation to the presuppositions of the target text receiver, have an impact on translation decisions.

— Translation methods and translation types

The *methods* used in a translation, “word-by-word,” “literally” or “idiomatic” depend on the purpose of the translation and the pragmatic and



In the description of the phenomena, this segmentation would not separate sense and expression, and expressions in contexts in real situations of communication can be described at different levels of abstraction, from use to system.

Empirical comparative text-linguistics, built on investigations of functional norms, has proved to be useful for generations of professional translators (HANSEN 1995b). The focus of empirical comparative linguistics and stylistics is not on language systems exclusively—what is compared is authentic texts in function and the use of linguistic units, based on semantics, text-semantics and pragmatics. Senders’ and receivers’ presuppositions, precognition and interests, as well as the relation between sender and receiver, are taken into consideration. This will be shown in section 5, but first, it is necessary to look at several conditions that may have an impact on the translation process.

5. Conditions influencing the translation process

In relation to the conditions formulated by the “Théorie du Sens,” a few important aspects and conditions influencing the translation process have to be mentioned:

— Translation vs. interpreting

The “Théorie du Sens” is said to refer to both interpreting and translation, but there are differences between these modes of translation. In interpreting processes, i.e. in oral language which is characterized by shorter,

linguistic conditions. The *translation type* is defined by the translation brief, and the fundamental decision regarding the translation type, documentary or communicative, always needs to be taken. It has an impact on the kind and extent of shifts between source text and target text that are acceptable like, for example, the important “deixis” phenomenon and addition or omission of information (HANSEN 1995a).

6. Support by raising awareness

If we imagine the optimal conditions according to the “Théorie du Sens,” the competent bilingual translator with a solid knowledge as to genres, registers, and terminology being asked to translate a text into his/her A-language—even under these best possible conditions, there are cases where it is necessary to raise his/her awareness of linguistic phenomena and style in order to avoid interferences. The less competent the translators are in both languages, the more awareness-raising is necessary, both for comprehension operations and production operations. For competent and trained bilinguals it is not necessary to come up with endless enumerations of linguistic differences, but it is useful for them to be given some hints as to where there might be pitfalls that even they cannot always avoid. Many of the professional translators who work with German and Danish translate technical texts; that is why the following examples are taken from that area. In the area of technical translation, senders and receivers can be characterized roughly as either experts or laypersons. Experts and laypersons have different presuppositions and are addressed differently. Many of the typical cases where bilinguals need support can be described at the *norm* level, where patterns of use are investigated empirically in parallel texts (HANSEN 1995b):

— My investigation of translation processes (HANSEN 2003; 2006) has shown that competent bilingual translators and translators with a high level of language proficiency—even the best I have met—can become influenced by their B-language, especially with respect to word order. When translating into her main language, German, for example, one of the bilingual translators asked for grammatical rules in order to “re-learn” the German word order. The same can be found with respect to the use of articles, which is easily influenced by Danish article usage.

— Experience from translator training and the above mentioned experiments have shown that when translating from German into Danish, even competent bilinguals with Danish as their main language have difficulties

recognizing and translating ellipses (incomplete sentences) without some systematic knowledge of grammar.

— In Danish, not as many *nominalizations* are used as in German. Additionally, when experts talk to laypersons, they use fewer nominalizations than when they talk to other experts. In translation processes from German into Danish, this does not cause any problems. But when competent bilingual translators and translators with a high level language proficiency—with German as their main language—translate from Danish into German, even they often forget the possibility of nominalizing, especially if they are under time pressure. Using a sentence instead of the “equivalent” nominalization is not even an error in German, but it does not sound like authentic German—especially in communication between experts. Experience has shown that this does not come automatically. It is important to teach even translators with a high level language proficiency to be aware of the verb and of the possibilities of nominalization. Some examples:

(1a) Læs hele brugsvejledningen omhyggeligt, før apparatet tages i brug. (OBH Nordica, Cordless Kettle)

(1b) Bitte lesen Sie vor Inbetriebnahme die Gebrauchsanweisung aufmerksam durch.

(1c) Please read the instructions carefully and completely before using the appliance.

— In Danish, attributive relative clauses are often used where we in German find constructions with prefixed attributes. Translating from German into Danish there are no problems but when translating from Danish into German, even competent (bilingual) translators have a tendency to be influenced by the use of the relative clause. Again this is not even an error, but the construction with an attribute is simply more authentic German and it is shorter, and it is necessary to be aware of this:

(2) Excentersliberen sættes med hele slibefladen mod det arbejdssemne, der skal bearbejdes. (Betjeningsvejledningen, Motorsliber)

(2a) Exzenterscheitler mit der ganzen Schleiffläche auf das zu bearbeitende Werkstück aufsetzen. (Bedienungsanleitung, Schleifgerät)

(2b) The eccentric sander is positioned with the entire abrasive surface in contact with the object to be worked.

The translator could also have said:

... auf das Werkstück aufsetzen, das bearbeitet werden soll.

However, that is not the style used by experts communicating with experts.

— With respect to directive speech acts, there are quite complicated linguistic and stylistic differences between Danish and German. The use of articles, special verb forms, the sentence structure, the communicative situation, i.e. the relation between sender and receiver, the presuppositions of the receiver, the pre-information, the style, for example, and the degree of politeness—all these aspects and conditions are relevant and have to be considered simultaneously in order to take the decision as to the most appropriate translation. Even for competent bilinguals, it is useful to be aware of the different possibilities available in both languages (HANSEN 1995b, 1998).

conclusion

It is certainly necessary to teach students not to cling to the source text and this justifies using the method of the “Théorie du Sens,” especially in the beginning of their translator training. However, in order not to leave the students and later professionals lacking other useful knowledge, skills and tools, this has to be complemented with, *inter alia*, pragmatics, linguistics, and stylistics. The “Théorie du Sens” seems to be based on an idea of the “ideal bilingual” who translates intuitively, but translation cannot be equated with bilingualism and the pure intuition of bilinguals cannot be relied on. In translation processes, some translators need strategies to keep languages apart where others need support in confronting them.

As both experience in translator training and research in translation processes at the Copenhagen Business School have shown, even competent bilinguals and translators with a high level of language proficiency profit from raising awareness of pragmatics, grammar and style—though it happens that they only need a little reminder of expressions and stylistic devices or rhetorical elements in their main language that they just have forgotten.

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