Sprog på arbejde
– Kommunikation i faglige tekster

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A new textbook for advanced students of communication, LSP, and foreign languages

Few, if any, textbooks as comprehensive in scope as this have been published in Danish for the target group of students at Danish business colleges and universities which offer combinations of professional communication, LSP, and foreign languages at an advanced level. As one of those who teach those subjects, I very much welcome it.

Its target group comprises anyone working with texts and text production in organisations, broadly defined, but it was originally written for cand.ling.merc.-students at the Århus School of Business, where the authors are employed. Even if one may dispute the authors' claim that until recently graduates of translation studies at Danish business colleges spent their time 'swotting translation exercises' and were regarded by their employers and others as 'live dictionaries', one must concede that in future graduates will increasingly become communicators in the widest possible sense and must be provided with general rather than specific methods and skills of communication in Danish and a foreign language.

The title may be translated *Language at Work – Communication in LSP Texts*. Such a translation would not, however, reflect the ambiguity of the Danish phrase 'Sprog på arbejde', which means both 'language at work' and 'language in

function', i.e. language used to achieve some means, referring to the functional approach to language adopted by the authors.

According to the introduction, the aim of the book is to provide the reader with an overview of the methods and tools which are useful to anyone whose job consists in communicating subject-specific information to a given addressee or target group. The authors expect the reader to become able to 'obtain, process, and mediate' subject-specific as well as LSP knowledge and not least to produce functionally adequate texts in Danish or a foreign language, since the authors view translation as simply a special type of text production.

These may be ambitious aims, but as will hopefully become clear from my review, the authors succeed to a large degree in obtaining them. One reason for this is that the textbook is carefully planned and coherent. Thus each chapter begins with a so-called 'advanced organiser' introducing its themes and linking them up with those of previous chapters, and most chapters are aptly summed up at the end. The fact that the book is divided into four main parts according to relevant and logical criteria might have been taken more advantage of by the authors, who refer to it in the introduction only. Below I shall describe and evaluate each of those main parts as a unit, using headings which in my opinion reflect the description given of each part in the introduction.

Part I: Models of communication and text analysis

The overall framework of the book is presented in **Chapter 2**, which defines communication within the theory of action and introduces such fuzzy concepts as 'subject' and 'subject-specific communication'.

In **Chapter 3**, the basic SPA[1] communication model is introduced, comprising the central element, Text, as well as the basic text-external elements determining subject-specific communication. After an introduction to the concept of Text as a sign and to basic semiotic concepts, the concept of textual function is explained on the basis of Bühler's Organon model. How this important concept is to be understood on the background of a combination of the SPA and Organon models might have become more clear to the student if a few more references had been made between the models. On the other hand, the rest of the chapter provides ample information about each text-external element of the SPA model, relating them to the pertinent functions and generally providing useful examples.

As stated in the advanced organizer of **Chapter 4,** Text is the element which connects all the elements of subject-specific communication, and moreover it is often the only element available for investigation. After a thorough introduction to such concepts as analysis and data category, a detailed model of text analysis is presented. Since the elements of text-external analysis were elaborated on in Chapter 3, only text-internal analysis at the macro and micro levels is dealt with in this chapter. Fortunately, a number of informative tables and conceptual charts as

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[1] SPA is an abbreviation of the title: **S**prog **P**å **A**rbejde

well as a survey of the entire model in Figure 9 enable the reader to keep track of all the new concepts and data categories introduced and contribute to making this one of the most coherent and useful chapters of the book. This can not least be attributed to the fact that the lack of detail in some paragraphs is made up for by a detailed exemplary analysis of a text found in the appendix[2].

Chapter 4 may serve as an example that the level of presupposed knowledge varies considerably throughout the book, sometimes from one paragraph to the next. Thus in spite of the fact that, according to the introduction, basic grammatical knowledge is presupposed on the part of the reader, such terms as 'morphology' and 'derivation' are explained in an extremely pedagogical way, whereas terms such as 'treerfigur' and 'nomen actionis' are left undefined and cannot be found in the index. In those and a number of similar cases, the lack of a list of definitions at the back of the book becomes apparent.

The final paragraphs of Chapter 4 lead up to the theme of **Chapter 5** by placing the data obtained in the exemplary text analysis within the so-called triangular model, which illustrates the relations among communicative situation, communicative purpose, and text as a means of obtaining a specific purpose in a specific situation, in short, the factors determining the choice of genre. Considering the importance of genre and the patterns of action associated with genre, it is to be regretted that Chapter 5 may constitute a stumbling block to the reader, mainly as a result of its redundancy and verbose academic style.

Part I is thematically very homogeneous, and even though the level of abstraction and detail is somewhat uneven, it basically serves its purpose of introducing essential models and concepts for Parts II and III to build on.

Part II: Text viewed from different perspectives

Chapter 6, Text and Semiotics, reflects the authors' ambition of presenting not just textual means of subject-specific communication, but an array of non-verbal means as well. The basic concepts of semiotics were introduced in Chapter 3; here the concept of sign is treated in more depth, including the semiotic triangle and Peirce's typology of signs, which is presented with an adequate amount of detail considering the context. The authors also succeed in demonstrating, albeit in a summary fashion, how to exploit the possibilities of various types of signs in order to ensure optimal reception of subject-specific themes.

The relevance of **Chapter 7**, Text and Terminology, may seem obvious in the context of subject-specific communication, and the authors do right in defining the concept of term and relating it to other lexical units as well as to the concept of sign. However, the ultra-brief introduction given to such themes as concept, types of definition, and systems of terms and concepts will hardly suffice to fulfil the aim

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[2] The text is a brochure on the dune plantation of Skagen (Skagen Klitplantage), published by the Danish Forest and Nature Agency (Skov- og Naturstyrelsen)

stated in the advanced organiser, which is enabling students to work with relevant terminological problems or tasks.

The theme of **Chapter 8** is Text and Medium. It is a short, but well-structured chapter, which gives the reader an excellent overview of the complex subject of media, one which may be approached from so many angles and which is consequently often a source of confusion to students. The chapter is concluded with a brief and to the point summary of the aspects of media relevant to subject-specific communication.

Chapter 9, Text and Target group, presents two approaches to dividing, describing, and defining target groups in a structured and coherent fashion, one of them borrowed from modern marketing, the other one evidently borrowed from research into the media. Both approaches seem extremely relevant and interesting to the reader, who will therefore probably wonder why unlike other chapters this one is not properly summed up at the end.

Like Chapter 9, **Chapter 10** on Text and Activation is based on recent research, and like Chapter 9 it contributes to placing subject-specific communication within a broader framework of business and market communication. Here, a branch of research in consumer behaviour is introduced, more specifically the so-called hypothesis of activation according to which human readiness to receive and react to information can be predicted and perhaps even influenced. The speculative nature of the approach is stressed, though perhaps a little late for the reader to become aware of the limitations of its applicability.

Part II may seem thematically heterogeneous, but the apparent heterogeneity simply reflects the fact that it presents a number of widely differing but relevant theoretical approaches to text and communication; how those and other approaches can be arranged and viewed from a broader theoretical perspective becomes clear from Part IV.

Part III: Forms of text production

Chapter 11 first describes the creation of the individual subject-specific text in the framework of a triangular model, similar but not identical to the triangular model introduced in Chapter 4 and 5, a fact which may create unnecessary confusion on the part of the reader. A useful survey of the prototypical sequence of text production, including translation, is shown in Figure 26, whereas the paragraph on how ontogenesis (or prototypical life cycle of products) may be used to categorise the text genres produced to cover the communicative needs of an enterprise seems to provide little new information.

In accordance with the overall approach to communication, text production is subsequently described as a strategic process which may be characterised as a type of intentional, interactive, and consciously creative action. Finally a model of text production is presented along with an 'idealised' production plan. Although the chapter clearly fulfils a summarising function, parts of it are characterized by a lack

of clarity mainly resulting from the academic style applied, a style which is apparently influenced by certain German source texts.

The subject of **Chapter 12** is text summarisation, and this may seem one of the few chapters justifying the authors' claim that enabling the reader to obtain, process, and mediate subject-specific knowledge is an important aim of the book. Defining the production of summaries as just another text production task, the authors come close to conceding that producing summaries, résumés, or abstracts cannot really be taught. Nevertheless, applying Baumann's textual structuring signals on the text analysed in Chapter 4, they actually come up with a few useful guidelines over and above such obvious rules of thumb as are conventionally provided.

Chapter 13 deals with the theme of LSP translation, albeit rather summarily compared to some other themes and considering the target group. Thus a very brief introduction to translation (theory) is presented mainly in the form of a table of historical metaphors used to describe translation, with no explanations added. Considering the overall approach of the book, the arguments stated for choosing the so-called Skopos approach to translation are indeed convincing. Also, the model of the translation process, originally intended to support a didactic argument, is in accordance with the Skopos approach. However, without the simplified version in Figure 30, the reader would hardly have been able to make sense of the full model since once again the style of writing does not seem adapted to the primary target group.

Part III would be expected to be the central part of the book, summarising and integrating what has been said in Part I and II. In many respects it fulfils these functions, and to the extent that it does not, I find that the writing style applied is to be blamed.

Part IV: Perspectives

Aiming at breadth rather than depth of theoretical treatment, the authors state in the introduction that no prolonged theoretical discussions will be included. However, **Chapter 14**, Perspectives, is an obvious exception. It aims at providing an overview of trends and approaches within the ill-defined and heterogeneous discipline which can only be adequately characterised by its object of study, i.e. subject-specific communication. The authors first arrange a number of 'focus areas' or approaches according to the degree in which pragmatic factors are included in the study of communication. This range of approaches is subsequently treated in more depth and supplemented by a chronology of disciplines and focus points, including new approaches such as the cognitive one, which so far has produced few results. The authors deserve praise for this coherent attempt to clarify the present state of the art of the discipline in a way which may appeal to students wishing to gain more than just the amount of theoretical insight required to pass exams.

Conclusion

The authors call their work a practically oriented textbook for advanced students, aiming at breadth rather than depth of theoretical treatment. I fully agree with them that it provides breadth of treatment, in an integrative way and to an extent that no other textbook published in Danish can offer within these specific fields. It also attains depth in many areas, particularly in the concluding chapter.

As the authors repeatedly stress, subject-specific communication is all about using adequate textual means in order to obtain the overall aim of each communicative situation. They definitely succeed in making this clear to their target group, but at the same time the almost 'teutonic' academic writing style[3] applied in several chapters may seem at odds with the very spirit of the book.

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[3] An academic writing style mentioned in the paragraph on intercultural scientific communication in Chapter 14