

Titel: BREV TIL: Louis Hjelmslev FRA: Francis James Whitfield (1955-05-28)

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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
BERKELEY 4, CALIFORNIA

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Dear Louis,

Knowing that you are as unfond of letter-writing as I am, I apologize for sending you this note, which will end up by asking you to write a brief reply (but it can be very brief-- a half-dozen words ought to do it). A matter has arisen, however, in connexion with which I should be very grateful for your advice. Bernard Bloch has asked me to review for Language Siertsema's Study of Dissemata, which strikes me, after a first reading, as muddying many more waters than it will ever clear. I am particularly vexed to see that, although the author evidently knows Danish and although he sometimes discusses differences between your text and my translation, his normal practice is to quote the latter and, as it were, hold you to its formulations. In my review, I shall, of course, repeat that responsibility for the translation is mine alone.

There is one point in particular, in this matter of relationship between the original and the translation, on which your advice would be especially helpful to me. Siertsema (p. 136) notes that on pp. 28-29 of the translation there is a sentence that does not appear in the original: 'Such considerations lead us to abandon the attempt to analyze into 'signs', and we are led to recognize that a description in accordance with our principles must analyze content and expression separately, with each of the two analyses eventually yielding a restricted number of entities, which are not necessarily susceptible of one-to-one matching with entities in the opposite plane.' This he finds so much at variance with his understanding of the theory that he concludes it 'must be a slip and has carelessly been inserted in the English translation....'

This sentence, as you very probably remember, was entirely of my composition and was inserted on my initiative. I still believe it is quite in place and completely consistent with other relevant parts of OSG, for example, on page 54: 'Naar dette princip gennemføres, vil det vise sig, at enhver text altid paa første trin lader sig dele i to og kun to dele...: nemlig udtrykslinien og indholdslinien.... Udtrykslinien og indholdslinien deles derefter videre hver for sig, naturligvis under behørig hensyntagen til deres samspil i tegnene.' If I discuss this point in my review, I shall probably also wish to quote from your article 'La stratification du langage' (p. 185): 'Mais il ne faut pas penser que les figures

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se dégagent par une analyse du signe: elles se dégagent au contraire uniquement par une analyse des unités intrinsèques.'

Now to my question. I am definitely not asking for your 'blessing' on the sentence, for which I bear the responsibility. I am prepared to defend it, but I should not wish to do so if, for any reason, you now consider it an undesirable insertion. I fear that Sierteema is going to cause a great deal of confusion in his readers' minds about the meaning of OSG, and I certainly don't wish to add to that confusion by defending something in the translation that you would prefer not to see there. I simply wish to know, then, whether it would be agreeable to you if I defend the insertion, along the lines I have indicated above, as intended merely to state what is expressed elsewhere in the text in different words. It is not a question of defending myself-- which would be improper in a review written by me-- but of asserting the consistency of the translated text. I shall not, of course, either in the review or elsewhere, quote your authority in this matter; my purpose in writing is only to make sure that I don't do something that you might prefer I didn't.

With cordial greetings from us both to you and Mrs. Hjelmslev,

Yours ever,
Frank