Malin Sandberg: *Från beslut till broschyr. Intertextualitet, äldre och kultur i texter inom en statlig satsning.* (= Göteborgsstudier i nordisk språkvetenskap, 40), Göteborg, 2020.

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Introduction

In the course of the last decades, more and more research conducted in the field of Scandinavian linguistics seems devoted to political, cultural, and societal topics. The growing popularity of frameworks such as Social Semiotics and different strands of Discourse Studies in general probably explains this development. Also, there might be an increasing understanding for how linguistics can meet calls for a humanities research that turns to topical themes of today's society. Against this backdrop, the doctoral dissertation *Från beslut till broschyr. Intertextualitet, äldre och kultur inom en statlig satsning* ('From decision to brochure. Intertextuality, the elderly, and the arts in texts within a government initiative') forms an inspiring example of how communicative practices can be analyzed as intertwined with institutional parameters and political policy-making.

More specifically, the purpose of the thesis is threefold. First it aims at exploring intertextual relations in and between texts produced within a Swedish government initiative for the elderly. Second it analyzes how discursive representations of the elderly are conveyed and recontextualized in the aforementioned texts. The third objective of the thesis is to map out how the purposefulness of the initiative is legitimized in the texts.

Summary of the chapters

These overarching objectives are spelled out alongside with detailed research questions in the first chapter of the thesis. In the second chapter, the themes culture and the elderly (in Sweden) are contoured and, moreover, contextualized in light of the government initiative in which the texts analyzed were produced. The third chapter of the thesis presents the theoretical and methodological points of departure, whereas selection criteria and metadata of the analyzed texts are dealt with in Chapter 4. The theoretical foundations are mainly located in the broad

frameworks of text linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which, in this case, means emphasizing that language use is a social practice, that discourses are interdiscursively entwined, and that texts resonate with one another in a dialectical way. The intertextual perspective is crucial to the methodological design of the study at large and draws on Norman Fairclough's well-known definition of intertextuality as "the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts" (cited by Sandberg, p. 29). In order to map out how intertextual and interdiscursive relations are played out in textual chains, Sandberg utilizes the analytical tools of recontextualization and transformation. Aligning with commonly shared assumptions in CDA and other strands of Discourse Studies, the thesis epistemologically leans on social constructionism, thereby underlining the centrality of how the elderly and the purposefulness of the initiative are established by means of linguistic resources.

As the first one out of four empirically oriented sections, Chapter 5 offers an analysis of intertextuality markers in the texts. First, explicit intertextuality markers are explored, and as Sandberg uncovers, such markers might refer to previously existing texts as well as anticipate texts that are yet to be produced in the initiative. Second, Sandberg delves into the intriguing – and more complex – matter of recontextualizations, which, in this case, encompasses the incorporation and reproduction of recurring formulations consisting of at least three word-units thematically connected to the macro topic of culture and the elderly. Two examples of such recontextualized chunks that reecho throughout the body of texts are "aktuell hjärnforskning visar" ('current brain research shows', p. 71) and "ger positiva hälsoeffekter" ('provides positive health effects', p. 72); these and other more or less frequently recontextualized propositions also disclose discursive key meaning conveyed by the analyzed texts. As Sandberg also shows, the recontextualized formulas are often slightly transformed when embedded in new textual settings, and often not explicitly marked as originating from other texts.

In the subsequent empirical Chapter 6 the textual representation of participants is at stake. Sandberg employs analytical tools from Membership Categorization Analysis based on linguistically explicit categorizations in the texts such as "senior", "deltagare" ('participant') and suchlike. This part of analysis explores linguistic means at a more detailed level and is, therefore, limited to a narrower selection of texts from the dataset. The most striking, albeit not surprising, result emanating from the analysis is that the categorization "äldre" ('the elderly') is the most common one, thereby indicating age as the primary basis for categorization.

Chapter 7, then, is devoted to discursive constructions of the initiative as meaningful and purposeful, drawing on legitimation analysis as it has been spelled out first and foremost by Theo van Leeuwen. Sandberg embarks on the analysis

with three basic types of how purposefulness can be voiced: goal orientation, means orientation, and effect orientation. In terms of frequencies the constructions of purposefulness are relatively evenly distributed with a slight overweight for means oriented formulations. When broken down into thematic categories, the purposefulness of the initiative is directed either towards the elderly themselves or towards culture as such, or it is said to enhance other values or qualities such as democracy in the Swedish society at large.

In the last chapter of analysis, 8, visual aspects are examined, i. e., visual representations of the elderly and their interplay with the texts in which they are embedded. Also, in this (comparatively short) chapter aspects of intertextuality and purposefulness take centre stage. Sandberg makes the observation that presentations of decay and sickness – which sometimes are numerous in discourses on the elderly – are absent in this material. She arrives at the tentative conclusion that the texts at hand convey an ideal image of the initiative and, in its extension, of the elderly care as such.

The concluding chapter of the thesis, 9, sums up basic results and makes a few observations regarding the specific contribution of linguistic scholarship when researching the elderly. It becomes clear that the eclectic method design of the study – in a positive sense of the word – underlines the relevance of each and every approach which can meet different desiderata of research.

Concluding remarks

Given the many indisputable qualities of this thesis and the overall impression of a solid, coherent study, there are a few weaknesses that need to be addressed. The most important one concerns the visual analysis of the elderly, which stands out not only due to its limited extent and scope compared to the other parts of the thesis. Comprising less than 20 pages, it summarizes general findings by presenting six selected images out of a total amounting to 58 visual representations. Sandberg observes that the images in general show no tendency of glorifying the situation of the elderly. However, it begs the question what qualitative standard or norm the estimation of an absent glorification was based on. The analysis would certainly have benefited from a thorough contextualization of the results against the background of discourses on elderly in general, and from a more serious engagement with findings from other parts of the thesis. The visual analysis indeed constitutes a promising and relevant approach; however, further elaborations on the analytical procedure would have been necessary in order to accomplish an examination on par with the other empirical chapters.

Another weak point is the circumstance that the analyses in some cases fall short of precision. Thus, when it comes to recontextualizations, the selection of them is partly based on the criterion of displaying recurrence in “flera texter” (‘several texts’, p. 70). However, what “several texts” means remains unclear. While it should be underlined that conclusions are generally not based on quantifications, a meticulous treatment of frequencies would most likely have contributed to a more concise analysis. Another instance of partly insufficient precision regards the notion of discourse. Its definition in the thesis is clear and fully in line with more or less consensual notions in Discourse Studies. When it comes to its utilization within the specific scope of the thesis, however, it seems confused with related concepts such as conceptions, ideas and strands or fragments of discourse. Thus, when Sandberg, in one of her research questions, asks what discourses are constructed through the way in which the initiative is presented as purposeful, it would be more coherent to ask what discourses such assertions – when seen as discourse fragments – are connected to, entangled with and contribute to.

Nonetheless, this thesis poses on the whole a valuable, coherent and well-argued example of timely scholarship with an immediate bearing on textual and discursive practice in institutions. It offers a plausible methodical approach to exploring institutional texts through its compilation of perspectives on text/discourse and corresponding analytical tools. It should be stressed here that both style and textual coherence are commendable. The study constitutes a solid and convincing piece of effortless reading without reduced complexity of the subject matter.