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Preface to the Thematic Section

The thematic section of this edition of “Hermes – International Journal of Language and Communication Studies” comprises six articles which have two things in common: They are all reviewed and revised versions of selected papers read at the 1st conference in the International 360° Conference Series hosted by The Knowledge Communication Research Group at the Aarhus School of Business, University of Aarhus in May of 2006. And they all deal with and take a stand in relation to the topic of the conference “Encompassing the Instructive Text”. But before I go into a more detailed introduction of the six contributions to this issue, allow me to first frame the phenomenon from a couple of relevant perspectives.

From an individual perspective it is safe to say that not much of what we as humans do for the first time could be done without the aid of instructions (at a post-instinctive level, that is). The instructor may have been a parent, a grade school teacher, friends and relatives, a favourite university professor, colleagues, etc. Needless to say, we are not merely at the receiving end of instructions, so to speak, in any number of cases we are, naturally, ourselves agents, i.e. instructors to others.

From a social perspective, instructions can be seen as a fact of social life; more to the point instructions may even to a certain degree be seen as an important thread of the fabric of social interaction. In the sense that social interaction seems to favour the institutionalization (and reproduction) of patterns, of codifications, of dos and taboos – be they labelled habits, conventions or laws. Not to be overlooked, in this connection, is the tendency of religions – predominantly, I take it, for those of a monotheistic persuasion – to tend to resort to instructions.

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If we turn away from the rather lofty realms of social sciences and religion, interesting as these may be, and focus on the more profane world of communication or rather, the perspective of instances of communicated instructions, the examples are as abundant as they are prolific. We encounter instructions wherever we go, i.e. when we drive our cars, when we walk the streets of our towns or the hallways of our companies, and organizations; instructions, that is, which are carved into stone or engraved unto metal, wood, plastic and glass. But not only do we navigate the waters of our physical surroundings by means of instructions, each and every one of us rely on instructions on a regular basis in order to perform the mundane tasks of everyday life. Such as operating the new washing machine, preparing a new dish, getting the expensive Italian coffee grinder calibrated to exactly the right granulation, downloading one's holiday photos from the online photo shop, or installing new anti-virus software etc. As may be extracted from the examples, instructions come in all conceivable shapes and sizes. Also in terms of the medium or media used to convey instructions, the picture is one of many facets. Instructive texts may be:

- oral texts (e.g. receiving an answer when asking for directions)
- printed texts (e.g. booklet, manual, text book, brochure, etc.)
- electronic texts (e.g. online help services on the Internet etc.) and even
- multimedial and/or multimodal texts (e.g. on the Internet you can often read instructions on the screen, listen to them on a podcast, watch video clips or animations, and find directions to a hotline where you can talk to an expert etc.)

This notion of many facets, in turn, takes me back to the six contributions of the thematic section. The organizers of the above conference “Encompassing the Instructive Text” explicitly encouraged the contributors to reflect on the complexity of the instructive text and to point to innovative ways of looking at the phenomenon. This they did; and out of these reflections grew articles which will be or have been published in “Europäische Studien zur Textlinguistik”, “Language at Work – Bridging Theory and Practice”, and, last but certainly not least, this thematic section of “Hermes – International Journal of Language and Communication Studies”.

The first article in the thematic section is **Martin Nielsen's** “Wir laden Sie ein!“ – „Jetzt anmelden!“ Zur Spannweite von Instruktionen

in Werbebriefen“. In his article he deals with the concept of instruction from a (pragma)linguistic perspective. Within this framework he focuses on the face-threatening aspects of instruction and demonstrates how instructive elements may be found in genres not traditionally thought of as instructive. He ends his article by pointing to a tentative classification of politeness strategies derived from his corpus analysis. In the second article of the thematic section, „Iconicity in instructional texts“, **Wolfgang Koch** presents an in-depth study of the semantic and conceptual structure of the instructive text. In his theoretical analysis he challenges long-standing (intuitive) perceptions of the iconicity of instructions. Based on this analysis he demonstrates that linguistic knowledge is not enough if we want to understand instructive texts. **Christina Henk**, in the third article of the thematic section, views instruction through the optics of its usage. Under the heading of „Instruktionen als Teil der Serviceleistung ‚Problemlösung‘ oder: Von der Schwierigkeit, Kunden zum Instruieren zu instruieren“ she focuses on the instruction as an integral part of the problem-solving strategies of a company. In the fourth article, „Translating Instructive Texts“ **Sonia Vandepitte** starts out by defining instructive texts as a subtype of persuasive texts. Based on this classification she goes on to present and discuss findings of a major empirical study, in which the translation of a number of persuasive characteristics in instructive texts is problematized. **Carmen Daniela Maier**’s contribution is called “Instruction and Argumentation in Kodak’s Advertising Practice: A Multilevel Analysis of *The Difference*.” In this fifth article of the thematic section she introduces an exhaustive multilevel (multimodal and multimedial) framework of analysis. This framework is then applied unto instructive material, in which several semiotic modes, media, text types and genres are functionally integrated. In the sixth and final article of the thematic section, **Karen M. Lauridsen** deals with “Language Policy: How do organisations ensure that instructive texts are written in a language that is understood by their end users?” She situates an instance of instruction, i.e. the language policy, at the level of corporate decision-making. This allows her to see and discuss such topics as understandability, cultural, and situational parameters from an organizational point of view.

I’m confident that reading the six articles will give you an impression of the instructive text as not only a multifaceted research object, but indeed also as a very interesting one.

