Translation and Hybridity in Scenes and Frames Semantics

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Abstract

The present study is a theoretical attempt to illustrate how Fillmore's Scenes and Frames Semantics (SFS) could be employed as a framework to portray the process of understanding and translating hybrid texts. It first reviews the origin of SFS; then it maps SFS onto Nida's linguistic model of translation process and the Interpretive Theory of Translation; it examines in the next section, within the framework of SFS, different forms of understanding and translating hybrid and pure texts with reference to the selection of linguistic frames and more importantly the activation of scenes. The paper explains all four processes of hybridization, dehybridization, rehybridization and hybridity preservation using SFS. The study concludes that, although hybridity is a complex phenomenon, Fillmore's scenes and frames semantics can adequately explain and justify its different aspects and manifestations. Moreover, it revealed that understanding, seen in SFS model, has an element of individuality and this gives rise to a broader perspective on translation where there can potentially be as many valid translations as there are translators. This has significant implications for our conception, analysis and assessment of translation.

Keywords: Scenes and Frames Semantics, Hybridity, Translation, Pure Texts, Scene, Frame, Cognitivism

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1. Introduction

The concept of meaning has always been a crucial issue in the academic study of translation and various semantic models are developed to account for and tackle numerous problems pertinent to this concept. Nida (Nidaand Taber, 1982), for instance, has much concerned himself with the understanding of meaning and has developed analytical linguistic techniques –semantic structure analysis, componential analysis and hierarchical structuring– to serve as an aid to the translator in working out the meaning of linguistic items; one of the remarkable insights of such a view to meaning is that we do not translate words, but bundles of semantic components. However, one drawback to linguistic approaches to meaning, including Nida's, is that they take no account of what goes on in the mind of language user. To overcome this, translation studies, for the last two decades, has drawn on its link to cognitive science. (Kussmaul, 2010).

Cognitive science emerged as a reaction to behavioural sciences which would focus on observable behaviour at the expense of mental processes. However, in cognitive science, human mind is seen as a meaning maker. In other words, cognitive science is concerned with the way in which the human mind thinks and learns (Slavin, 2006). In later developments of cognitive science, three paradigms came into being the first of which was computational-representational understanding of the mind; in reaction to this there emerged another paradigm called parallel distributed processing or connectionism (Snell-Hornby, 2005). Connectionism was a movement hoping to explain human intellectual abilities using artificial neural networks which are simplified models of the brain. This paradigm emphasizes the associations evoked in the human mind by familiar situations and is therefore closely related to Rosch's

prototype theory in psychology and Fillmore's scenes and frames semantics (Kussmaul, 2010).

2. Scenes and Frames Semantics

Prototype theory, in contrast to theories in structural semantics which are definition-based models, is a category-based model in cognitive semantics, developed by Rosch in 1970s. This theory is based on the idea that when we comprehend or produce an utterance, we do not have a checklist of semantic features in our mind; rather, we think in holistic categories that are determined by our experiences (Kussmaul, 2010). In other words, according to Rosch, when people categorize items, they match them against the prototype or ideal exemplar which contains the most representative features of the category (Malmkjær, 2010). Therefore, linguistic categories have a core and fuzzy edges. According to Kussmaul (2010), Rosch's prototype theory is similar to Putnam's model, their difference being a matter of terminology; instead of prototype, Putnam uses the term stereotype and instead of core notions, he speaks of obligatory notions. Neither prototype nor stereotype semantics is directly based on reality, but on people's notions about reality; furthermore, since people are part of a culture, their notions are to some extent determined by that culture (Kussmaul, 2010).

Scenes and frames semantics is based on prototype theory and goes back to 1970s, when Fillmore developed his holistic theory of meaning as against the then prevalent checklist theory of generative grammar (Snell-Hornby, 2006). Scenes and frames semantics relies very much on people's experience of the world as well as their experience of the text they read or hear. In this model, 'the process of using a word in a novel situation involves comparing current experiences with past experiences and judging whether they are similar enough

to call for the same linguistic coding' (Fillmore, 1977, as cited in Snell-Hornby 1988). This linguistic coding constitutes the 'frame', a term Fillmore took from his own work in case grammar. A frame is thus a system of linguistic choices or grammatical structures and as such triggers off a scene in the mind (Snell-Hornby, 2005). According to Fillmore (1977 as cited in Snell-Hornby 1988), a scene, in a maximally general sense, 'includes not only visual scenes but familiar kinds of interpersonal transactions, standard scenarios, familiar layouts, institutional structures, enactive experiences, body image and in general any kind of coherent segment, large or small, of human beliefs, actions, experiences or imaginings'. As Snell-Hornby puts it, scene is the experienced or otherwise meaningful situation or scenario that finds expression in linguistic form. She further explains that scenes and frames constantly activate each other (frame-scene, scene-frame, scene-scene, frame-frame); the activation procedure refers to the situation where a peculiar linguistic form, like a clause in a text, evokes associations which themselves activate other linguistic forms and evoke further associations. This causes every linguistic expression in a text to be conditioned by another one; in the course of reading a text, these are all combined and form the 'scene behind the text' (Malmkjær, 2010; Snell-Hornby, 1988; Snell-Hornby, 2005; Snell-Hornby, 2006).

3. Translation and Scenes and Frames Semantics

It was Vannerem who hit upon the innovative idea of applying Fillmore's scenes and frames semantics to the practice of translation in 1980s. The public presentation of her idea inspired further work on scenes and frames semantics (Snell-Hornby, 2005). In her joint work with Vannerem, Snell-Hornby then contends that text production is an essential component of translation process and under-theorized in translation studies. She therefore connects translation

process to Fillmore's scenes and frames semantics to examine this phase of translation. To build the link between the two, she focuses on 'the process of understanding, of relating to situation and sociocultural background and to one's own experience' – a process essential to both translation and scenes and frames semantics (Snell-Hornby, 1988).

Translation, within the framework of scenes and frames semantics, is defined as a complicated 'act of communication involving interaction between the author of the source text, the translator as both source text reader and target text author, and then the reader of the target text' (Snell-Hornby, 2005). Below is a schematic representation of this interaction (Figure 1).

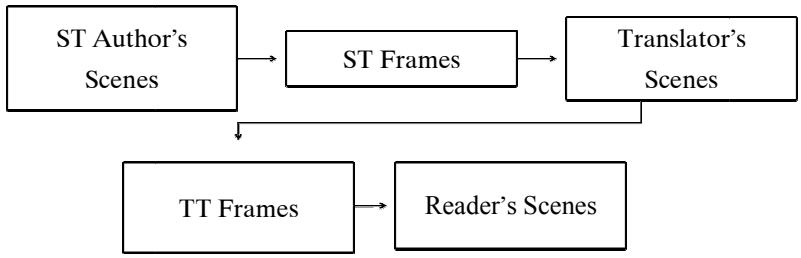


Figure 1. ST Author, Translator and TT Reader Interaction

As the diagram illustrates, the starting point in the translation process is the source text and its linguistic components (i.e., frames). The source text is produced by an author, who in turn has drawn upon his/her own repertoire of scenes; in other words, the source text is an interlocking chain of frames resulting from strong and recurrent interactions among SL scenes and frames. In the next step, the frames of the source text evoke, before the mental eye of the translator, scenes which under ideal circumstances would be identical with those of the ST author. However, since the activation of scenes entails the translator's worldview and personal experiences, there is an outside chance that such a perfect match ever be found. In effect, as Snell-Hornby argues, it is the

mismatch between these two sets of scenes (translator's and ST author's) that results in translational errors, for the activation of a divergent scene leads to the formulation of a wrong frame. Thus, the more profound is the translator's knowledge of the source language and culture, the slimmer the chance of committing error will be (Snell-Hornby, 2005). In the next step, the translator finds proper target language frames; here the degree of success is determined by translator's mastery over target language and culture.

If we square this cognitive frame-scene-frame mechanism with Nida's linguistic model of translation process (Nidaand Taber, 1982), we arrive at the following diagram:

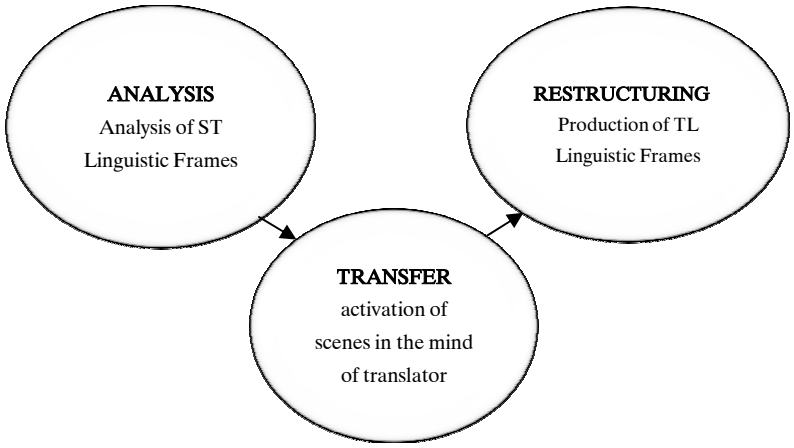


Figure 2. Nida's Model of Translation Process Mapped onto Fillmore's Model of Scenes and Frames Semantic

In the analysis stage of Nida, the translator decodes the ST linguistic frames which are the result of the mental scenes of the ST author. Upon reading those frames, certain scenes are evoked in the mind of the translator; the evocation of scenes in the mind of the translator is similar to what Nida describes as the stage of transfer, which is a transition phase taking place in the mind of the translator. The translator deciphers the linguistic codes (i.e., frames in

Fillmore's scenes and frames semantics) to arrive at their underlying representation named kernels; it seems that what in Nida's linguistic model is described as underlying representation, is what Fillmore calls scenes from a cognitive-social perspective.

Besides scenes and frames semantics, the Paris School with prominent figures like Seleskovich and Lederer, introduced the Theory of Sense or Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT) which focuses on translation as a cognitive process (Alves & Albir, 2010). The main tenet of ITT is that translating is an act of communication. This theory also highlights that it focuses on language in use, not language as a system.

According to this model (Lederer, 2010), a linguistic sign (written or oral) has a meaning and a sense. Linguistic meaning is given in the text, but not the sense. Sense is made up of linguistic meaning plus the relevant extra-linguistic knowledge supplied by hearer or reader; that is, sense is a conscious mental representation and derives in part from the cognitive inputs of individual readers and therefore it is to some degree an individual matter. However, the senses understood by different individuals overlap to a great extent which makes communication possible; and, translators operate in this area of overlap. As soon as there is understanding, deverbalization takes place and the words disappear. The arrival at sense which immediately moves the communication to the deverbalization phase is indeed the evocation of scenes in the mind of the hearer. In the next stage, reformulation, the TT is constituted based on the deverbalized understanding of sense (Munday, 2008); that is to say, the scenes evoked in the mind of the translator activate TL frames, which give rise to the formulation of the target text.

So, we see that in theoretical models that are concerned with the analysis of meaning and understanding, whether cognitive or linguistic, a frame or form is

an elements that triggers off a scene or sense which is in turn laid down in another frame or form.

4. Hybridity and Scenes and Frames Semantics

In the world of translation, we may encounter two types of texts: hybrid and non-hybrid (pure). Hybrid texts, according to Schäffner and Adab (1997 and 2001), are the products of text production in a specific cultural space which is often an intersection of different cultures; hybrid texts can also result from a translation process. Texts which do not exhibit signs of hybridness are deemed non-hybrid or pure. A pure text, within the framework of scenes and frames semantics, can be conceived of as an integrated network of linguistic frames which conjures up scenes that belong to the same community and culture (Figure 3); that is, when reading a pure text, a coherent set of scenes, all belonging to the same culture and society, is evoked in the mind of the reader.

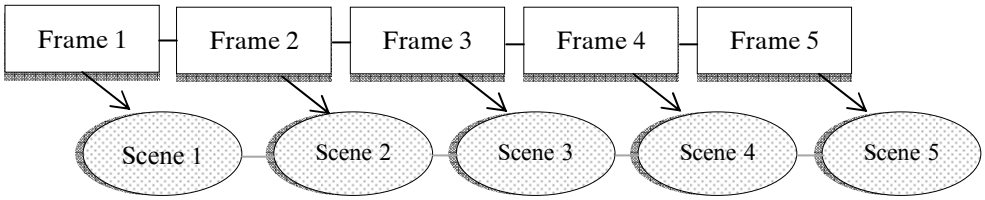


Figure 3. Scenes and Frames in a Pure Text

In actuality, however, as we saw in the discussion of 'sense' in Interpretive Theory of Translation, it is not just the linguistic frames that create images in the mind of the reader; the reader's worldview, topical knowledge and personal experiences make contribution to this image making process. This results in multiple readings of a single text by different readers. At the beginning of the century, literary theorists believed that there was only one correct way to read a piece of literature. Rosenblatt (Spack, 1985) reacted against this belief by

assuming an interactive relationship between individual readers and literary texts. But her ideas were considered subjective and were rejected. However, about thirty years later, it was understood that Rosenblatt was right and it was accepted that each individual's response to a literary text is as valid as the interpretation of authorities and there is not just a single correct response; rather, there are as many responses to a piece of literature as there are readers. If we think of the response of a reader as the scenes which are evoked in his mind, then we can imagine the following diagram:

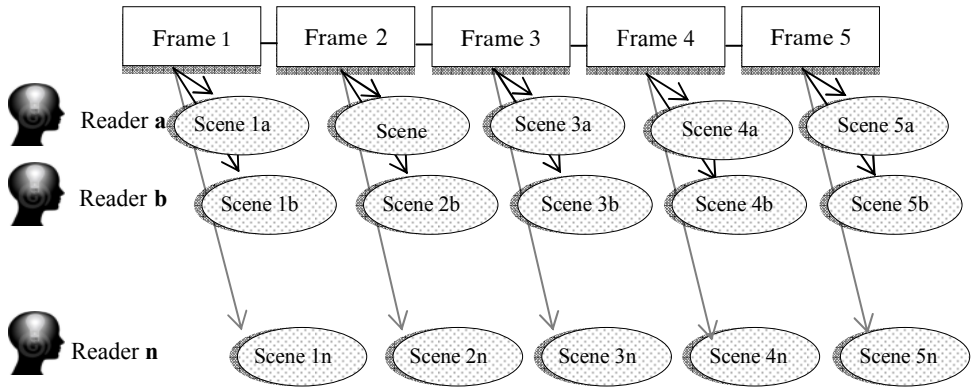


Figure 4. Multiple Readings of a Sequence of Frames

The images evoked in the mind of reader *a* may or may not be similar to that of reader *b*. There is for certain some overlap between the two sets of scenes and this is what renders communication and translation possible. However, the multiple readings of a text is not the focus of this study. What we are concerned with is how the diagram changes when we are dealing with hybrid texts.

In addition to employing scenes and frames semantics as a model to investigate and expound the process of translation, Snell-Hornby (2001) has

suggested this model as the framework best suited for the analysis of the language and reading experience of hybrid texts.

I. As discussed above, a hybrid (original) text is made up of linguistic frames that evoke in the mind, scenes which belong to different cultures and communities. As the diagram below displays (Figure 5), the scenes conjured up in the mind of the reader are not homogeneous; they belong to distinct worlds. This is schematically represented through the use of distinct geometric shapes (ovals and lozenges). Hence, what gives a text a hybrid quality is that the combination of scenes evoked by linguistic signs form a 'hybrid scene behind the text'.

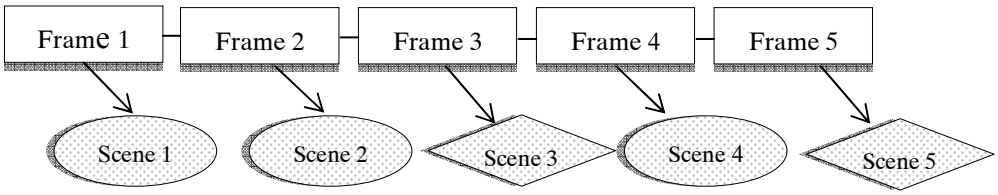


Figure 5. Scenes and Frames in a Hybrid Text – A

II. Sometimes the linguistic frames the author has selected make a contribution to the hybridness of the text too. This can be observed in cases where the chosen frames belong to two or more differing languages.

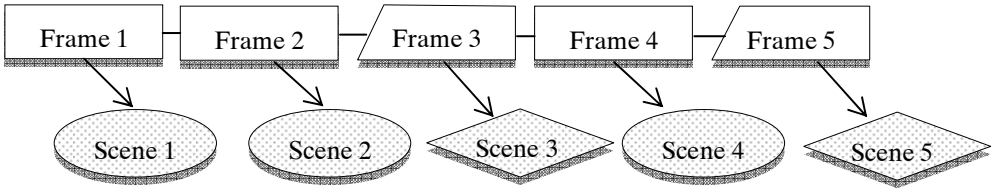


Figure 6. Scenes and Frames in a Hybrid Text–B

Hybrid texts, either in form A or B, when get translated, undergo an entire series of shifts which can be classified into three main categories and examined within the framework of scenes and frames semantics.

The linguistic frames the author of a hybrid ST has opted for evoke scenes that are heterogeneous with regard to the culture and community they refer to. This hybrid network of scenes guides the translator to select TL frames that conjure up in the mind of the reader, scenes that are as close to the scenes evoked in the mind of the translator, as possible. However, the translator's scenes and those of the reader may have different degrees of proximity.

III. If the TL frames homogenize the scenes evoked in the mind of the reader, the dehybridization process is said to have taken place. That is to say, the TL network of scenes loses its hybrid quality for all its scenes refer to a single community and culture (Figure 7).

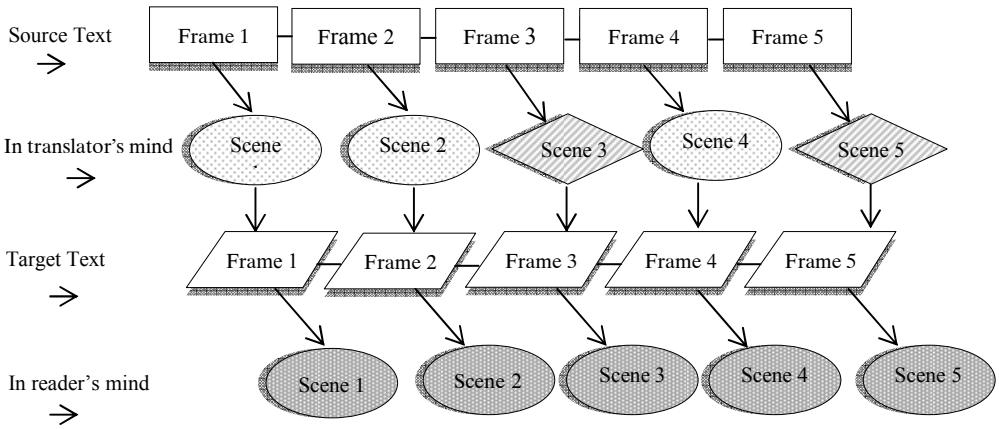


Figure 7. Scenes and Frames in Dehybridization Process

IV. If the translator opts for those linguistic frames in TL that form exactly the same scenes in the mind of reader as was evoked in his/her own mind, then the ST preserves its hybridness in its entirety (Figure 8).

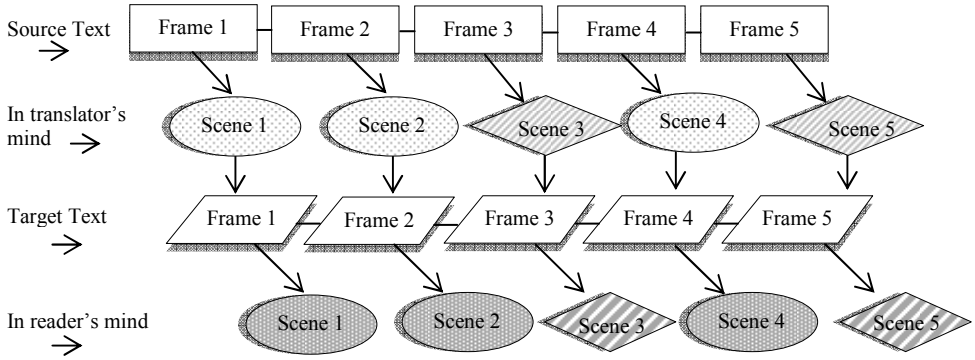


Figure 8. Scenes and Frames in Dehybridization Process

V. Sometimes the translation of a hybrid source text is a hybrid target text, but the nature of their hybridity differs; in the first place, the SL frames bring to the translator's mind a heterogeneous string of scenes; however, the TL frames the translator selects homogenize some of the scenes and heterogenize others. This is portrayed graphically in Figure 9.

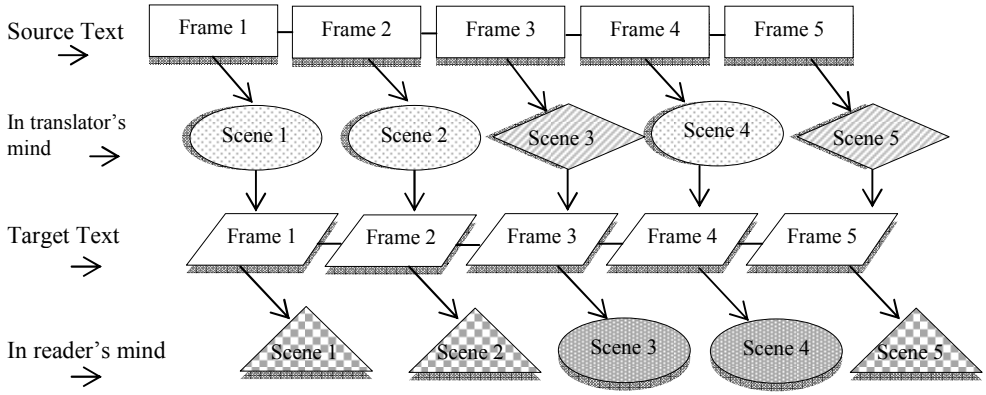


Figure 9. Scenes and Frames in Rehybridization Process

The above discussion illustrated, within the framework of scenes and frames semantics, what differing fates the hybrid elements of a hybrid text can have after they are rendered into another language and culture.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to illustrate how Fillmore's cognitive model of scenes and frames semantics could be employed to portray the process of understanding, a. when we are reading a literary work, b. when a pure text gets translated, c. when we are reading a hybrid text and d. when a hybrid text gets translated. In the case of reading a literary work, since the evocation of scenes in the mind of the reader depends upon linguistic frames of the text as well as the reader's knowledge and experience of the world, multiple valid interpretations can be expected. Pure texts, in contrast to hybrid texts, conjure up in the mind of the reader scenes that belong to a single community and culture; that is, pure texts evoke a homogenous network of scenes; if such a pure text gets translated, it may preserve the same non-hybrid quality, i.e., it may evoke a homogenous set of scenes again or it may go through a hybridization process and be expressed with linguistic frames that evoke scenes belonging to different cultures. However, when the text under scrutiny is a hybrid original text, the author deliberately in most cases, and sometimes unintentionally, has chosen linguistic frames that together form a hybrid scene behind the text; that is to say, a hybrid text conjures up a heterogeneous network of scenes in the mind of the reader, taking him/her to two or more differing cultures and communities. When such a hybrid text gets translated, three different fates await it; the translator may opt for TL frames that evoke the same scenes in the mind of the TT readers; that is, the TT forms a heterogeneous set of scenes in the mind of the readers; this process is observed in rare cases though. The second fate a hybrid text can face after translation is dehybridization; it comes about when the linguistic frames in the TL are selected and arranged in a fashion that homogenizes the heterogeneity of the scenes evoked when reading the original text. Finally, a hybrid text, when

rendered into another language, may undergo the process of rehybridization; the translator, through his/her selection of TL frames, homogenizes some previously heterogeneous scenes and renders some previously heterogeneous ones homogeneous.

In all these cases, understanding is arrived at when the relevant scenes are evoked in the mind of the reader. Since the evocation of scenes is the result of the frames of the text as well as the cognitive input each individual reader provides into the task of understanding, we may conclude that there is an element of individuality to the process of understanding. Therefore, there is no single, absolute understanding of a text; understanding is relative. This view of understanding has strong implications for translation.

An initial crucial phase of the translation process is reading and understanding and since there is an element of individuality to understanding, there can be as many valid understandings of a text (to be translated) as there are readers (i.e., translators). Consequently, there can be potentially as many valid translations of a text as there are translators. With such a broad perspective, expecting a single correct translation of a text will be an untenable argument. Furthermore, such a view to understanding and translation has important implications for the analysis and assessment of translation. If the translation analyst or assessor adopts an absolutist view of meaning, s/he runs the risk of conducting a misguided assessment and pronouncing an inaccurate judgment.

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