The title of this edited book, *To Understand Is to Be Free*, is a condensation of the thoughts of 17th-century Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza from his work *Ethics* (1677). He gave Part V of the work the title "Of the Power of the Understanding, or of Human Freedom". This body of thought has given rise to the well-known quote "To understand is to be free", which has become a widely used popular saying. The fundamental message of the philosopher for humanity is the value of freedom, and of understanding as a tool that leads to it.

On the book's cover is a statue of renowned Slovak scholar and polymath Matej Bel (1684–1749), who also advocated the prioritization of understanding in teaching and communication. This year we commemorate the 340th anniversary of his birth.

We hereby present to our esteemed readers an international edited book that approaches the dual theme of comprehensibility/understanding and freedom from multiple perspectives. Authors from 10 countries have come together to explore these themes from the standpoints of such varied fields as linguistics, translation studies, literature studies, language didactics, medicine, and legal communication.

The idea of accessibility informs this book in several ways: in the subject matter of the various chapters, but also in the way they are presented, making their respective fields accessible to those from other (closely or distantly) related fields. It is in this spirit that each chapter is followed by a plain-English summary. It is also for accessibility's sake that we have chosen to publish this book in English only: to make all the chapters accessible to a worldwide audience.

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9

Translationswissenschaft und ihre Zusammenhänge

Zuzana Bohušová & Michael E. Dove (eds.)

PRae

Translationswissenschaft und ihre Zusammenhänge
Translation Studies and Its Contexts
Translatológia a jej súvislosti

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To Understand Is to Be Free

Interdisciplinary Aspects of Comprehensibility and Understanding

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PRAESENS VERLAG

The founder and editor of the series Translation Studies and Its Contexts is Zuzana Bohušová.
This edited book was created as part of the project VEGA 1/0549/22 Accessible! Linguistics of Easy-to-Understand Languages.

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Introduction

Zuzana Bohušová
Michael E. Dove

About the book

The title of this edited book, *To Understand Is to Be Free*, is a condensation of the thoughts of 17th-century Dutch philosopher (of Sephardic-Portuguese origin) Baruch Spinoza from his work *Ethics* (1677, translated from Latin into English by R.H.W. Elwes, 1884). He entitled Part V "Of the Power of the Understanding, or of Human Freedom". The *Metzler Lexikon jüdischer Philosophen* interprets his thoughts thus:

> At the same time, intellectual activity is an active affect and is entirely under the control of the human being. It therefore represents the highest form of self-determination and therefore freedom that humans can achieve. (English trans. Bohušová)

> Zugleich ist intellektuelle Aktivität ein aktiver Affekt und ganz in der Kontrolle des Menschen. Sie stellt folglich die höchste Form der Selbstbestimmung und damit Freiheit dar, die der Mensch erreichen kann. (German orig., Metzler Lexikon 2003)

This body of thought has given rise to the well-known quote "To understand is to be free", which has become a widely used popular saying. The fundamental message of the philosopher for humanity is the value of freedom, and of understanding as a tool that leads to it. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe also expressed an important related thought in his life's work, *Faust* (Part I, 1808):

> Original: Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein!

> English: Here I am human, here I can be free!

The English translation even more precisely explains the content than the original: To be human means to be free. (English translation by Martin Greenberg in 1992; see chapter *Neutralizations as Tools of Comprehensibility – Using Translation as an Example*.)

We hereby present to our esteemed readers an international edited book that approaches the dual theme of comprehensibility and freedom from multiple perspectives. Authors from 10 countries have come together to explore these themes from the standpoints of such varied fields as linguistics, translation studies, literature studies, language didactics, medicine, and legal communication.

The book was created as part of the project VEGA 1/0549/22 Accessible! Linguistics of Easy-to-Understand Languages. This project explores the necessity of clear communication for all groups of recipients and in all situations. There are visible (physical, material) and invisible (psychological, linguistic) barriers, both of which must be overcome. This is an extremely relevant topic, and nowadays, there is also talk of so-called respectful language. It is important to have access and to ensure accessibility (Koufala 2024, 35). The idea of inclusive language provides the space for communication between a scientist and a non-scientist, and the bridge between them is comprehensibility (Orgoňová 2024).

For the cover image of the book, we have chosen the statue of Matej Bel, Slovak polymath, Protestant priest, educator, and historian, who was one of the most prominent European scholars of the 18th century. He described himself and his multifaceted identity with the phrase: “lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus,” meaning by language a Slav (Slovak), by nation a Hungarian, by education a German. The artwork depicted on the cover was designed by the Slovak sculptor Peter Gáspár and has been located in front of the Faculty of Arts at Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica since 2017.

Matej Bel insisted on teaching grammatical rules according to the principles of comprehensibility, scientific rigor, brevity, and clarity. His Latin lessons were particularly valued by his students for their memorability (Očenášová). In 2024, Slovakia is commemorating the 340th anniversary of Matej Bel’s birth (1684–1749). The cover of our book is a tribute to this prominent figure in science and culture.

Accessible summaries

The idea of accessibility informs this book in several ways: in the subject matter of the various chapters, but also in the way they are presented, making their respective fields accessible to those from other (closely or distantly) related fields. In this we were inspired by approaches such as the "decoding the disciplines" model conceived by Joan Middendorf and David Pace at Indiana University, aiming at clearing up "bottlenecks" which prevent a field from being understood by newcomers (Middendorf & Pace 2004). While that model is primarily focused on students, we believe that it can also be applied to scholarly communication in order to facilitate interdisciplinary understanding and cooperation.

It is in this spirit that each chapter is followed by a plain-English summary. "Plain English", unlike Basic English and Learning English, is not a specific variety of English, but a general term for English written (or spoken) in an easily understandable way, thereby making our co-authors' findings accessible not only to scholars from entirely different fields, but also to students, those outside academia, and anyone else who finds this helpful.

It is also for accessibility's sake that we have chosen to publish this book in English only: to make all the chapters accessible to a worldwide audience.

The book's parts and chapters

In the self-contained first chapter of the book, "Accessible! An Opposition-based Focus on Understandable Language", Zuzana Bohušová establishes the need for understandable language and describes various means of achieving it, as well as providing a theoretical framework for analyzing its various aspects.

Part I: Interlingual Translation and Comprehensibility

The remainder of the book is divided into six thematically cohesive parts. Part I is dedicated to issues of comprehensibility in interlingual (as opposed to <u>intra</u>lingual) translation.

In "Neutralizations as Tools of Comprehensibility: Using Translation as an Example", Zuzana Bohušová uses a range of examples of interpreted speeches and translated texts to demonstrate how neutralization can, in addition to the various rationales most often attributed to it, improve comprehensibility.

Part I continues with "Improving Students' Understanding of Translation Flaws: Error Analysis as a Formative Assessment Tool in Translator Training", where author Eszter Asztalos-Zsembery presents error analysis as way to hone translation students' ability to self-reflect. In doing so, she makes the case that understanding one's own work and its shortcomings is a key skill for future translators.

Part I concludes with "Balancing the Tension Between Comprehensibility and Preserving Authenticity in the Translation of Muslim Fashion Designations" by authors Ivana Pondelíková and Veronika Majdáková, who examine the translation of Muslim women's apparel terms from English into Slovak, specifically in the works of novelist Khaled Hosseini. This example of intercultural "game of telephone" (a story set among Pashtun in Afghanistan, written in English and subsequently translated into Slovak) provides fertile ground for an exploration of how the translator renders a story full of foreign cultural specifics comprehensible for the Slovak readership.

Part II: Intralingual Translation as a Tool for Accessibility

Part II comprises chapters that examine the use of intralingual translation, i.e. translation within a single language, for accessibility's sake.

Part II begins with Michael Dove's chapter "Putting the Right to Understand into Practice: Translating into English as a Lingua Franca", where he lays out the specific accessibility demands of translations into English when used outside the anglosphere – namely, the necessity of adapting them to the needs of non-native anglophones, who comprise the majority of English users. To achieve this, Dove proposes and demonstrates various text adaptation techniques.

In the second chapter of Part II, "Accessible Language Through Intralingual Translation", Isabel Rink and Rebecca Schulz focus on translation into *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language), a form of German specifically designed for accessibility, and defines the barriers it can be used to overcome – namely, communication barriers.

Part II continues with "Intersections of Hermeneutics, Intralingual Translation, and Comprehensibility" by Desana Kiselová, who presents the case that intralingual translation is, in fact, translation, and thus benefits from a hermeneutical approach to the comprehension and interpretation phase.

Martina A. Bruno concludes Part II with her chapter "Diamesic Translation: A Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment of Intralingual Live Subtitles", where she introduces the practice of re-speaking (which can be considered a type of intralingual interpreting) and systematically evaluates the re-speaking performances at an accessibility-themed conference. Among Bruno's conclusions is the argument that making utterances accessible demands that they not be simply adapted, but transformed.

Part III: Interpreting and Comprehensibility

Part III is dedicated to the accessibility questions related to interpreting.

In Part III's first chapter, "Speech-to-Text Interpreting in Secondary Schools: Requirements, Strategies, and Challenges for the Parties Involved", Judith Platter and Sandra Ableidinger shed light on the practice of speech-to-text (STT) interpreting for hearing-impaired secondary school pupils in Austria, including an overview of the legal framework supporting it and the results of a focus group of SST interpreters from two schools in Vienna.

Part III continues with "Simplified Language as a Dream of Every Conference Interpreter", where Jaroslav Stahl looks at the various methods that interpreters can use to simplify language – though not content – in order to conserve cognitive effort and time, but also to make their interpreted utterances more appropriate for their listeners or, as the case may be, for further interpreting in the case of relay interpreting.

Part III's final chapter takes us from education in schools to the challenges faced by medical students in hospitals: "Language Barriers of International Medical Students in Hungarian Hospitals".

In it, Csilla Keresztes et al. present and analyze the results of a mixed-method study on conversations between mostly native-Hungarian-speaking patients and non-native-Hungarian-speaking international medical students. Based on these results, the authors compare the various ways of tackling such language barriers and formulate several recommendations for medical education practice.

Part IV: Language Accessibility in Education

Part IV looks more closely at questions of language accessibility in other areas of education.

Part IV begins with "The Value of Accessibility in Language Education: Insights from the Field of TESOL", where authors Zuzana Tomaš and Christa Niemann apply accessibility principles to the use of texts in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

In the next chapter, "From Complexity to Clarity: Teaching Plain English to PhD Students", ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teacher Lenka Môcová lays out the challenges facing Slovak doctoral candidates aiming to write academic papers in clear, understandable English, as well as various possible solutions.

In "Crafting Culturally Sensitive Texts: Visual Attention and Reading Direction", Jana Javorčíková and Richard Gramanich Štromajer present the results of a study of native-Slovak-speaking university students, which appears to support the claim that native readers of left-to-right scripts tend to pay more attention to information on the top-left of a page or screen. Since this may not be the case for native readers of scripts with other directionalities, such differences, the authors argue, should be taken into account when determining texts' layout to ensure their accessibility.

Another difference among students that should be taken into account is natural neurodiversity. In "Shaping Writing Skills in Students with Learning Disabilities", Katarína Chválová and Diana Židová, drawing from a range of studies, present various techniques to help SEN (special education needs) students overcome the specific challenges when writing in English as a foreign language.

Children's specific language backgrounds also, of course, play a key role in their needs as language learners. In "Intelligibility

Limits of Slovak-French Bilingual Children", Jana Pecníková and Daniela Mališová provide an overview of the distinctive ways that bilingual children and their families use languages and the distinctive challenges they face. The partial results of a survey conducted by the authors appear to confirm that, in the language not widely spoken in their country of residence (in this case, Slovak), writing presents the greatest challenge to such children.

On the other hand, for learners of French as a foreign language (FFL), conscious acquisition of grammatical structures constitutes a major challenge. François Schmitt, in the chapter "Metalanguage for a Better Understanding of Grammar in Textbooks of French as a Foreign Language", investigates the long-term trends in the amount of metalanguage conveying grammatical concepts in FFL textbooks as well as the character and comprehensibility of such metalanguage. His findings indicate that the use of such metalanguage has increased since the 1990s.

While Latin is not generally thought of as a "foreign language" per se, comprehending it is an essential skill in many fields, including, of course, medicine. In "The Multiverse of Medical Latin: The Problems of Comprehension and Translation of Anatomical Terms in a Multilingual Educational Environment", Anita Kruták and Gergely Brandl make a case for the increased integration of medical students' (native) languages – including English in the case of international students – into their medical Latin courses. As an example of putting these principles into practice, the authors present their approach to their own courses of medical Latin.

Part V: Understandable Language in Legal Communication

Part V reviews the current state of ongoing efforts to make legal language more accessible to the lay public, who, given that they (in democracies) elect those who draft legislation and are indisputably affected by it, should also be able to understand it.

In Part V's first chapter, "Linguistic Factors in the Readability of Czech Administrative and Legal Texts", Silvie Cinková attempts to empirically ascertain the factors that actually influence Czech legal texts' comprehensibility. To do so, she tested readers' comprehension of Czech legal texts and their plain-language adaptations, inspecting the resulting data for characteristics that correlated with higher or lower comprehension. Surprisingly, neither overall lexical diversity nor syntactical complexity (with the exception of passive constructions) appeared to considerably influence comprehensibility, but hapax (words that only appear once in the entire text) frequency and entropy (i.e. lexical (un)predictability) did. Cinková further conjectures that the latter metric may serve as an index of coherence (a quality that is difficult to precisely define).

Part V's second chapter turns to the accessibility of law-related texts in German: "A Comparative Analysis of Legal Texts for German as a Second and Foreign Language Learners: Comparing Official Documents, Guides, and Textbooks". In it, Petra Bačuvčíková and Renata Šilhánová take a descriptive approach to elaborating the characteristics of plain language in German by comparing the texts of EU regulations, the websites of governments, industry associations, and initiatives, a textbook of German as a foreign language, and government texts written in plain language.

Part VI: Understandable Language in the Linguistic Landscape

Part VI investigates the accessibility of language (including visual signs such as pictograms) used in public spaces.

In Part VI's first chapter, "Simple and Understandable (?) Language of Slovak Pre-election Large-scale Signs", Petra Jesenská conducts an analysis of the language of far-right and -left political parties' billboard advertisements in Slovakia. Among her results is the finding that, while such billboards are intended for a wide audience, their ostensibly "plain language" can also be used as a means of obfuscation, dog-whistling, and downright manipulation.

In the final chapter of Part VI (and the book), "Linguistic Landscapes and Translatoriality: Pictograms as Vehicles of Accessibility", Tamara Mikolič Južnič and Agnes Pisanski Peterlin study the signage in areas with a distinctive bilingual character: two national parks near or on the Slovenian/Italian border. Among their interesting findings is that, despite the multilingual character of the locales (including the languages used by foreign tourists, such as

English as a lingua franca), most of the signs studied did not use pictograms to convey information, but only text.

A word of thanks

In closing, we extend our heartfelt thanks to both reviewers – Dr. habil. Katalin Fogarasi of Semmelweis University in Budapest, Hungary, and Prof. Agata Buda of Casimir Pulaski Radom University in Poland – for their thoughtful examination of the book and valuable feedback.

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Accessible! An Opposition-Based Focus on Understandable Language

Zuzana Bohušová

Abstract

In this chapter, the author presents her concept of understandable languages and explains it based on opposing factors that best illuminate the essence of the phenomenon of understandability/comprehensibility.

This topic is part of the Slovak project VEGA 1/0549/22 *Accessible! Linguistics of Easy-to-Understand Languages.* The concept is based on the general right to social participation for all language users, whereby the resulting requirement of communication-related accessibility becomes the focus of attention. The German linguistic approaches of *Leichte Sprache* and *Einfache Sprache*) (easy language and simple language) and the English approaches of adapted/accessible/easy-to-read languages form the starting points of the author's research into comprehensibility, tools, and areas of application.

The explanatory focus on comprehensible language in this chapter is binary or dual. The following oppositions are explained: comprehensibility as potential – comprehension as consequence, rules – principles, producers – recipients, intrasocietal communication – intersocietal communication, directly produced texts – translated texts, professional style – colloquial style, authentic communication – didactically adapted communicates, instruments of comprehensibility – simplification interventions.

Keywords: comprehensibility, accessibility, communication, translation, understanding, comprehension

Introduction

The focus of attention in this chapter is understandability. It is the result of an in-depth study of what is known as the language adaptation approach. The aim is to explain the manifold aspects of understandability based on immanent oppositions. The method of explanation is used in this chapter. The terminology of adapted languages includes the following English terms: accessible language, easy-to-read, plain English, plain writing, and plain language (Cutts 1996). The German linguistic terms, which are already precisely defined, are *Leichte Sprache* (easy language), which is intended for people with mental and/or physical disabilities (cf. Bock 2019), and *Einfache Sprache* (simple language), for people with insufficiently developed language skills or learning difficulties.

Simple language lies between easy language and standard language (Leichte und Einfache Sprache). Easy and simple language are two different varieties of the German language (Inklusiv.online). Easy and simple are not opposites. They are in a gradual relationship with each other; so-called easy language has a high degree of simplifying interventions (see the section on simplifying interventions). The collocations simplified, easier, or adapted language can be used in addition to this. In Slovak, the equivalents are *ľahko čitateľný text* / *štýl* or *ľahko čitateľné informácie*, *ľahko zrozumiteľný jazyk* (Engl. easy-to-read text / style, easy-to-read information, easy-to-understand language, cf. Bohusova 2024).

The terminological diversity indicates different approaches to the subject matter and accentuates a pragmatic approach to adapted languages. These enable more efficient communication for large groups of recipients who do not have specialist knowledge in the given field, but primarily for people with special needs, marginalized communities, or communities that do not speak the language in question. This means that several language user groups (and they can be very diverse) can participate in social discourse more visibly and audibly.

The project VEGA 1/0549/22 *Accessible! Linguistics of Easy-to-Understand Languages* is a response to today's increasing need for vital social and scholarly communication to be moved into virtual spaces. The project aims to establish principles and rules for the creation of texts in Slovak as a simplified language. From a cognitive standpoint, the project is based on the strategy of feature neutralization (Bohušová 2017a, b) on the one hand, and the linguistics of Slovak as a foreign language on the other. From a pragmatic standpoint, the project incorporates the accommodation of communication in adapted languages to a wide range of recipients and experience using other simplified versions of languages such as German and English. The arguments in the project are related to all three languages, the focus on Slovak linguistics is an enrichment of the topic. The project emphasizes asymmetries of the so-called easy-to-understand languages (cf. Bohušová 2024)

For the project-related explanations (Project Accessible!), the terms German "Leichtverständlichkeit" – Slovak "ľahkozrozumiteľnosť" ("Easy-Understandability") were created, which compactly express the generally valid and synergic phenomenon. The perspectives of the accessible language must be perceived in balance: it is crucial to be equally aware of the potential as well as the limits of using simplified languages – while they herald the opening of the gates of communication, they also carry risks of excessive simplification and reductionism.

The terminology concerning intelligibility is followed in the explanation – the collocation accessible **language** is used, but in the examples, we show specific **texts** that are easy or difficult to understand. At one end of the argumentation spectrum is the use of easy-to-understand language tailored to specific audiences. At the other end is comprehensibility for everyone. Accessibility for all is a practical outcome of the theoretical considerations.

1 Comprehensibility/understandability as a potential versus understanding as a consequence

The noblest pleasure
is the joy of understanding.
Leonardo Da Vinci

Clarifying the content of the concepts of comprehensibility/ understandability and understanding is what I consider the most important. In classical Slovak linguistics, we can find a well-known article by Professor Jozef Mistrík on measuring the understandability of communication (Mistrík 1968). Mistrík attempts to use an exact method of measurement, in this case quantification to evaluate texts based on selected quantitative criteria, e.g. word length, sentence length, repetition/frequency of words. The article evaluates well-known Slovak fairy tales of Mária Ďuríčková *Danka a Janka* (Danka and Janka), *Ahoj, prvá trieda* (Hello, first-grade class) by Eleonóra Gašparová, articles from daily newspapers, popular science articles and scholarly texts from the pens of academics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

In his paper, Mistrík cites the recommendations of author Walery Pisarek as a “Polish recipe” for the clarity of journalistic texts (cf. Pisarek 1966, cited by Mistrík 1968, 173):

1. write concretely,
2. avoid foreign words,
3. use short sentences.

These recommendations for the producer are relativized by Mistrík’s remark: the adequacy of the means used will only become apparent when the text is perceived (Mistrík 1968: 171). Mistrík (pp.173–174) formulates the determinants of understandability as follows:

- the position of the examined paragraph in the text (introduction, core, or conclusion)
- syntactic conciseness – in Mistrík’s research, studied exactly as sentence length
- lexical abstractness, terminological demandingness, meaning exclusivity of terms, non-frequency – studied exactly as the length of a word
- thematic diversity – studied exactly as repetition/frequency of words in a given text

After evaluation, the fairy tales with the highest number of comprehensibility metrics show themselves to be the best, or the most understandable. I note that Professor Mistrík “measured,” i.e., counted selected units, and evaluated the **potential** of selected texts in terms of comprehensibility. In the title of his article, he did not provide the result/evaluation of the measurement but only the research method. Because he did not work with situational context, topic, lexical dynamics (text and vocabulary aging factor versus rapid internationalization), style, or recipients, he determined the fairy tale as the most understandable or ideal text. Based on the diversity of communication situations, however, we know that the style of a children’s fairy tale is not sufficient in other communication spheres. (Note: Paradoxically, he found that the style in Slovak newspapers at that time was less understandable than the style in Slovak scholarly texts. He did not further address this fact.)

Based on the described interpretation, I deduce the most important opposition of this explanation: comprehensibility as potential versus understanding as a concrete realization through recipients. The following table makes the relevant aspects clear:

Understandability	**Understanding**
potential	realization, measurable phenomenon
category • subjective • abstract • relative	category • specific • absolute Who decides/determines? Recipient.
quality	receptive outcome/consequence

Table 1: Comparison of understandability and understanding

Category means the most general basic concept. Understandability is a category, similar to the category of time or space. Understandability is also a potential, understanding is a recipient-dependent result. It can be measured/quantified for a specific text and a specific recipient.

This result is non-transferable; it does not speak to the abstract quality of the communicated message, but rather to the linguistic, reader-based, physical, testing, personality, age-related, educational, etc. characteristics of the specific recipient, listener, or reader. The recipients do not test the comprehensibility, but the understanding of the recipients.

Of course, it’s more complex than that: there are specific communiqués that have been produced to create an easy-to-understand text. The rules for producing such texts or intralingual translation into another style could have been used (with limitations). However, this effort may not result in a truly easy-to-read text, even though this is the author’s stated aim.

Understandability is not self-evident and it should lead to understanding, to comprehension. Comprehensibility can be seen as a category or as an instrument of communication. Incomprehensibility, on the other hand, is seen as a factor or instrument that makes communication more difficult, as an obstruction, especially if it is used deliberately. The problem here is that comprehensibility is regarded as a very subjective characteristic of communication/texts. There are already rich sources for understandability research, for an overview of which cf. e.g. Wortliga.

2 Rules versus principles

Trivialize, but don't banalize. (on TV reporting)
Karel Hvížďala

That's an alchemical task.
Martina Kocianová

In this subsection, we discuss the opposition between the rules for creating (easily) comprehensible varieties of languages and the principles behind these rules. We begin with a specific example of authentic social media communication in which the rules for understandability are not followed. This text was sent to me by friends of mine in Austria and has been anonymized for this chapter. The advertisement is looking for a new tenant for an apartment that is 51 sq. m in size and located in the 12th district of the city. German text: Nachmieter 51m2 Wohnung im 12 Bezirk gesucht. Engl. Looking for a new tenant for a 51m2 apartment in the 12th district.

Figure 1: Social media communication

Response:	**Turkish:** Bu ürün hâlâ satılık mı **English:** Is this product still for sale (?)
German, phonetic spelling, contrary to the norm:	ELO SONEN GUTIN ABIND IHVIL DIZE 2 CIMA VONUNG NEMEN BITE SIRAYBIN FIRMIH.
German, standard orthography:	Hallo. Schönen guten Abend. Ich will diese 2 Zimmer Wohnung nehmen. Bitte schreiben für mich.
Now the message, although syntactically and stylistically incorrect, can already be understood and literally translated into English thus:	Hello. Have a nice good evening. I want to take this 2-room apartment. Please write for me.

Table 2: Phonetic spelling as a barrier to comprehension

The biggest obstacle to comprehension in this example is the “distinctive”, non-standard phonetic spelling style. In this case, the writer does not follow the spelling rules – probably due to a lack of linguistic and writing competence. In this particular example, the hybridization of written and oral media has failed to achieve clarity. This hybridization is unintentional.

The rules for creating (easy) to understand languages are mostly related to written text, which is called easy to read. However, we observe orality practices that are applied as simplification tools. When the expansion of orality into writing is used purposefully and intentionally (not counterproductively, as in the opening example of the German advertisement response), this hybridization yields bonuses for understandability. If the communication is primarily written, but created by the procedures of orality, we speak of the concept of orality. As a consequence, oral communication strategies are used to simplify the written text (cf. Bohušová 2015, Gutenberg 1994), e.g.:

- segmentation of content into shorter utterances
- linear ordering of ideas
- brevity repetition of the same words and syntactic

structures (without stylistic effect and negative stylistic connotation)

- redundancy (without negative connotation)
- verbal style
- active voice of the verbs
- emphasis on the rhythm of the sentence, etc.

In the following table, I clarify the relationship between the rules for creating easily comprehensible language and the stated principles that these rules are intended to achieve:

Rules are:	**Principles are:**
• specific: they relate to understanding • particular: they pertain to a specific language **Concept:** written communication	• abstract: they relate to understandability • supralinguistic: they have supralinguistic validity **Concept:** oral communication
They relate to the producer and production of the text, serve intersociability without reciprocity, and exhibit asymmetries.	
The rules, which I refer to as simplifying interventions, are presented, for example, in the brochure Information for Everyone (translated into 16 languages) or in Maaß 2015. Some of them can be briefly summarized as follows: • the text should be arranged • vertically • one sentence per line • write numbers with digits and not words	The core principles of easy-to-understand languages are characterized by asymmetric preferences. I formulate these principles as follows (see also Bohušová 2023, 2024). **Preferably:** • the explicit over the implicit • redundancy over condensation/language economy • non-iconicity over imagery

• make German compounds or derivations more transparent with a “Mediopunkt”, e.g. Abend·rot, röt·lich) • do not separate words at the end of a line • use clearly legible typefaces on a contrasting background, etc.	• selection of inflection over complexity • repetition of syntax over (elegant) style

Table 3: Comparison of rules and principles

These rules are recommended rather than mandatory. It happens that a text explicitly presenting itself as comprehensible has elements that do not aid comprehension (e.g. less frequent grammar or specialist vocabulary). It therefore depends on the producer – the author or translator – of the text. Principles are abstract generalizing properties that are always present in the background and are derivable from rules.

“Normales Deutsch ist schweres Deutsch. Deshalb gibt es für Ausländer und Lern- oder Lesebehinderte Texte in „Leichter Sprache”: Mietverträge, Bibeltexte, Parteiprogramme” (Normal German is difficult German. That’s why there are texts in “easy language” for foreigners and people with learning or reading disabilities: rental agreements, Bible texts, party programs), is claimed in Zeit Online (Straßmann 2014). It goes on to say that easy-to-read texts can appear “conspicuously simple” to “awkward”. They are written with the help of simplifying rules that one tries to adhere to, at least in part (to the best of one’s ability or knowledge). The effect of a clumsy style can occur. It is important to note that repetitions, redundancies, or bland syntax do not signal any negative connotations or bad style; they are neutral means of ensuring better comprehension.

3 Recipients versus producers and direct versus translated

Of course, all producers are supposed to be set up to produce understandable language. However, there are several specifics when it comes to adapted languages.

The pragmalinguistic approach to easy-to-understand languages distinguishes between the producers and the recipients of adapted language. They have already been mentioned several times, as the factors overlap and are interrelated in many ways. In standard language communication, it is assumed that we are all language producers and recipients simultaneously and alternately. However, this is not absolutely true – not all newspaper or novel readers are also journalists or writers, not all consumers or patients are also professionals or doctors, not all television viewers are also newsreaders, etc. In Table 3, I point out the absence of reciprocity (for easily understandable languages, see also the following subsection): i.e. recipients and producers are separate groups of interlocutors, it is not reciprocal as in “natural” communication. Of course, we observe a tendency to involve the future recipients of adapted texts in the production and validation of such texts; this challenge is known as English “Do not write for us without us!”, Slovak “Nepíšte o nás bez nás!”, German “Schreiben Sie nichts ohne uns” (the brochure is available in all EU languages).

The opposition of direct versus translated, i.e. the history of the creation/production of easy-to-understand languages, can be broken down as follows. The producers can be either:

- direct, i.e. they are language users who are already familiar with the rules for the production of easy-to-understand languages,
- or translators who carry out the intralingual translation.
  This is an intralingual translation from a complicated style into a simpler one, from a substandard language form into the standard language, or from an older stage of development into the contemporary language (on the nature of intralingual translation, see Weiss 2014).

The topic of the present discussion primarily concerns the first type of intralingual translation. If, at European universities, the so-called Erasmus buddies (companions and interpreters) for foreign students or so-called student tutors for domestic first-year students are also counted among these intralingual translators, then this activity has, among other things, attributes of community interpreting (cf. Bohušová 2020, 164ff).

The recipients of **comprehensible** texts are all language users, citizens, voters, teachers, students, patients, parties in court hearings, readers of websites, worshippers, etc. The recipients of **easy-to-understand languages** are also very heterogeneous, I divide them as follows:

- a large group of "ordinary" recipients who are not professionals, i.e. "standard recipients" who want to keep up to date or orient themselves in current social and political events (aktuality.sk, gmx.at, translations of legal texts written by the Pelikán travel agency)
- people with mental disabilities
- people with special/specific needs, with dyslexia or other learning difficulties, either seniors or children
- people with insufficient language skills, migrants, foreigners, tourists
- learners who are learning the language in question as a foreign language

In a new publication on easy, simple, and comprehensible German language (Bock & Pappert 2023), the target groups for easy-to-understand languages are categorized as follows:

- people with so-called intellectual disabilities
- German as a foreign and second language learners
- low-literate adults

My categorization is obviously more extensive or differentiated and the fact that the recipient groups are extremely large is striking. The groups of recipients listed in this section are still to be hierarchized and the linguistic interventions are to be treated gradually.

So what is the degree of simplification and how should it be understood? The simplifying intervention can either be very mild (e.g. if it is only a matter of a changed layout and a more reader-friendly page design) or quite massive (a product of intralingual translation). It seems that one could estimate the intensity of the interventions to be adapted depending on the recipients: at first glance, one would assume that texts for people with disabilities must be the simplest, with the degree of simplification being the highest. However, judging by the complexity of the source text, one could also conclude that the "translations" from one style into another require the most massive interventions. Journalistic texts based on legislative documents serve as good examples. During the COVID-19 pandemic, short and simple retellings of the most important contents/paragraphs of the generally binding decrees on anti-COVID measures were produced either by journalists, a spokesperson for a health authority, or a travel agency. We know this situation from the Slovak context when the Pelikán travel agency summarized the 15-page decrees in a concise style (3-4 paragraphs) and only related to tourism. The translators were non-professional translators, e.g.: spokespeople – Slovak *hovorcovia*, journalists, lawyers, and travel agents (The signs of de-professionalization signal connections to PSIT – Public Service Interpreting and Translation. In these services, interpreting and translating are often done by individuals without training or qualifications in translation.)

The question that logically arises is: for whom were such translations or "translations" intended? For the largest target group, i.e. all citizens and readers, for potential customers and tourists, so for people without any handicaps. The last social group I mentioned above is the believers. A brief explanation of this using quotes from Pope Francis: In 2013, his Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium – The Joy of the Gospel was published. He recommends: "The homily/sermon must be short... and not a lecture..." He does not give an exact indication of the length of the sermon, but his sermons at that time were 6–15 minutes (evaluated at the University of Innsbruck, Lumma 2013), averaging probably around 10 minutes. 2018 Pope Francis has given priests tips for a good sermon. "It is important to prepare well and not to speak for more than 10 minutes" (Papst. Note: All quotations from sources not in English have been translated by the author of this chapter unless otherwise noted.). A good sermon is therefore short, understandable, and interesting. Pope Francis is still busy making recommendations for priests and future priests in this regard. His admonition from 2022 is well known (Domradio.de): “Remember that after eight minutes, attention wanes and people demand content!”, and his appeal from 2023 (Vaticannews.va): “Dear priests, eight, ten minutes and no more, please, do you understand?” In August 2023, he shortened the speeches at World Youth Day in Lisbon because young people are not able to listen attentively for more than eight minutes, he told journalists on the flight back to the Vatican (Svet kresťanstva). In summary, it can be said that Pope Francis himself strives to be a direct producer of comprehensible texts and thus a role model – his speeches currently last around 8 minutes, and at World Youth Day 2023 in Portugal he did not read his speeches from the pre-submitted manuscripts but retold them freely. He advocates the appropriate length of speeches and an appropriate speaking style; however, he also advocates appealing, enriching content. Churches are also adapting to new circumstances.

Artificial intelligence is another good tool for interpreting specific reception and the relationship between production and reception. Some aspects can be better explained based on its capabilities and features. Alexa software is an intelligent voice assistant by Amazon. In a German voice, Alexa has stated:

2020	**Alexa:** „Ich habe im Augenblick leider Schwierigkeiten dich zu verstehen…” (Anschließend bittet sie darum, es später noch einmal zu versuchen.) (Amazon Alexa) “I’m afraid I’m having difficulty understanding you at the moment...” (She then asks you to try again later)
2023	**Alexa:** „Ich habe Schwierigkeiten zu hören. Kannst du das noch mal sagen?” (my own communication with Alexa, 2023) “I’m having trouble hearing. Can you say that again?”

Table 4: Utterances from Alexa

The striking thing is that over time, Alexa communicates less human-like and more mechanically or simplified. In 2020, she used words like “at the moment” or “unfortunately” and “understanding”, but now it’s just a straightforward message, referring to the lack of hearing (no auditory comprehension). In contrast, she has no problems as a speech producer; she only reads out pre-fabricated sentences. In a certain sense, Alexa is a recipient like everyone else, at the mercy of the producers to whom she has to react. They do not have to adhere to the rules of barrier-free communication or are unable to do so. In any case, she does not influence the language behavior of the producer/communication partner. By changing her replies, Alexa programmers may want to point out to users that Alexa understands absolutely nothing because she is guided by algorithms and her program. She often confirms in writing that she has heard correctly, and she correctly transcribes what she has heard, but often replies with nonsensical information. However, the result is as follows: Alexa does not admit that she does not understand.
The following claim is made in the advertising text on the website: “The red circle of light and the microphone, which also lights up red, indicate that Alexa is not listening.” (Amazon Alexa). **The opposition at play here concerns cognition versus senses.**

All advice on comprehensibility relates to the PRODUCTION of more transparent, easy-to-understand, or comprehensible texts. This requires a great deal of knowledge on the part of the producers and therefore a cognitive approach on their part. My approach, however, is a RECEPTIVE one: it also examines the possibilities that recipients have when they are left to their own devices. This means that they should reflect on what they can do themselves and how they can help themselves. Consequently, they should be aware of the tools that are available to support and expand human sensory perceptions. (For more detailed explanations, see the section on simplification interventions).

4 Intrasocietal versus intersocietal and professional style versus everyday style

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.
Leonardo Da Vinci

The dynamics and needs of understandable communication are most intensively evident in intersocietal communication. To explain this assertion, I use a quote from Friedrich Nietzsche and a current book title from Germany. Friedrich Nietzsche writes in his work *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* 1882, 1887, Engl. *The Gay Science* 1974 translated by Walter Kaufmann, Czech *Radostná věda* 2003, translated by Věra Koubová in his penultimate aphorism No. 381 “Zur Frage der Verständlichkeit”, Engl. “On the Question of Intelligibility” as follows:

> Man will nicht nur **verstanden** werden, wenn man schreibt, sondern ebenso gewiß auch **nicht verstanden** werden. (Nietzsche 1882, Fünftes Buch. § 381, own emphasis)

> One not only wants **to be understood** when one writes but also quite as certainly **not to be understood**. (Nietzsche 1974, Book V, Aphorism No. 381, own emphasis)

For the present topic, the quotation is interpreted to mean that the text producer is considering two options: to communicate in such a way that it is understood by everyone, or in such a way that it is understood only by a select few (colleagues, like-minded individuals, insiders, his own community, etc.). The second could be called an elitist form of communication. The communication partners remain within their own group, and the communication is intrasocietal.

The German professor Bettina M. Bock, who has studied so-called Leichte Sprache – easy language in detail and co-authored a book entitled Leichte Sprachen – einfache Sprachen – verständliche Sprachen (Bock & Pappert 2023, Engl.: Easy Languages – Simple Languages – Understandable Languages), comes to a different conclusion: she introduces the generic term “understandable language” because for her it is the desired result after all the efforts to achieve comprehensibility in the intersocietal social spheres as well. The following parties may need to communicate intersocially:

migrants and authorities, doctors and patients, disabled people/people with learning disabilities and authorities, lay people and professionals, children/seniors and adults, people without education and school institutions, foreign-language speakers and natives, etc.

As parallels are constantly being drawn with intralingual translation, this table illustrates the relevant equivalents from interpreting studies:

Type of communication	**Type of translation**	**Directions of translation**
intrasocietal communication	conference interpreting	interlingual transfer
intersocietal communication	community interpreting, public service interpreting and translation	inter- and intralingual transfer

Table 5: Communication – Translation – Directions

The relationship between the oppositions intrasocietal – intersocietal and specialized style – everyday style is not a mechanical one. It is only asymmetrical at first glance. We ask ourselves the following questions: How does the colloquial style develop, what tendencies can be observed, are they in favor of comprehensibility or do they work against it? In this section, I present the reflections of the Slovak master of language, translation, and excellent style as well as film critic Pavel Branko on the evolution of everyday communication in comparison with professional style:

> Kým v terminológii sa jazyky usilujú o maximálnu jednoznačnosť, aby vylúčili čo i len tieň možnosti nedorozumenia, vo všeobecnej komunikačnej sfére prevláda skôr tendencia k znepresňovaniu a rozostrovaniu. (Branko 2014, 216–217)

> A ten rozostrovací princíp má však medze. Siaha spravidla iba po hranicu, kde by prekrývanie už vyvolalo nedorozumenia a komunikačné šumy... Jazyk chudobnie o jemné rozlíšenia, ale komunikačnú zrozumiteľnosť zachováva... Vo vzduchu však ostáva visieť otázka – prečo si doba jazyk vlastne rozostruje,

> prečo namiesto skalpelovej presnosti volí sémantickú ležérnosť. (Branko 2014, 218–219)
>
> While in terminology, languages strive for maximum clarity to exclude even a shadow of a possibility of misunderstanding, in the general sphere of communication, the tendency towards imprecision and blurring is more prevalent.
>
> That blurring principle has limits, however. As a rule, it reaches only the point where overlapping would begin to cause misunderstandings and communication interference... Language is losing its fine distinctions, but communicative clarity is preserved... But the question remains in the air – why does our age actually blur language, why do we choose semantic casualness instead of scalpel-like precision?

The plausible answer to this final question is: because the most important things that everyone knows are omitted. In an intact linguistic community, where culture, language, and awareness of self and the world are passed on in everyday communication and across generations, there will not be an intense need for detailed or precise expression or documentation. The principle of economy and saving of mental and articulatory energy is in the foreground. These are, of course, factors that can make understanding difficult. It is only in the secondary-specialized style that we concentrate on appropriate and technical expression with terminological precision that can aid understanding. So the indicated relationship should not be understood in black and white.

Within understandability research, we encounter hybrid, inter-style transfers and neutralizations that facilitate social discourse. These include, for example, popular science style, journalistic texts, individual initiatives of experts to retell complex information (e.g. taxation, insurance) in ‘human language’, etc. The area of administration, local government, and bureaucracy remains a major challenge (cf. Leichtverstädliche Sprache in der Verwaltung).

Soon, it might also be worth considering using more easily understandable language (in Slovak) in the university context for texts, forms, instructions, information brochures, etc. Interventions in existing texts could range from minimal changes (such as clearer organization) to more fundamental alterations (through simplifying interventions). These processes would have multiple benefits: Translation studies students could work on intralingual translations and learn a lot in the process (there are already relevant exercise books for the German easy language, see Bredel & Maaß 2016). Furthermore, they could use artificial intelligence sensibly in this regard and correct their work.

The products would have a wide administrative application – for students with specific needs, for foreign students in the Erasmus+ exchange program, from Ukraine and third countries, and for students of Slovak as a foreign language. Buddies and student tutors could learn and efficiently utilize the rules of easier understandable written and oral communication. The establishment of student helpers – buddies and tutors – primarily aimed to combat bureaucracy and provide student-friendly assistance for orientation processes. In many cases, it has become a necessity due to bureaucratic dynamics.

5 Authentic versus didactic

When it comes to this topic, two very important aspects come into play: linguistic authenticity and cultural rootedness. Easily accessible language is authentic and culturally anchored. This means that accessible texts are authentic, written by native speakers for native speakers, intended for practical use rather than for education, and have extralinguistic consequences. They are lifelike and culturally influenced. Their production occurs – as mentioned earlier – either directly or indirectly through intralingual translation. The realization is that easily understandable language can be used as teaching materials for foreign language learning and teaching. The challenge lies in didacticizing for the initial and/or transitional phases of foreign language progression.

Thus, the authentic use is primary, the didactic use is secondary. Accessible texts can be used secondarily as suitable teaching and learning material for people who are not proficient in the language and want to learn it. The texts in adapted language naturally provide good services only temporarily and for certain, initial phases of language learning as well as for motivating encouragement. An important step is to recognize their didactic and learning-intensive efficiency.

Didacticization is considered a bridge for multiple school uses and beginner lessons. My student Adriana Tarajová (2023) tried this by organizing a motivational GFL (German as a foreign language) lesson at a Slovak elementary school with a simplified version of the fairy tale “About the Twelve Months” (Die zwölf Monate).

To summarize, the primary use of accessible texts is practical – for various groups of recipients, the secondary use of easily understandable languages and texts is didactic – for foreign language teaching. The groups of recipients are greatly reduced (although there is also age- and culture-related diversity among the learners).
It is important not to ignore the CEFR, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (A1, A2–C2). It can be used in two ways:

- First, the language material is compiled so that it does not exceed predetermined markers of the specific level. At the same time, language competencies and mental prerequisites are prescribed for virtual/potential recipients, which enable them to ensure understanding at the given level.
- However, the opposite direction is also constructive: the level of language competence of the recipient/learner is determined based on evidence of understanding.

6 Simplifying interventions versus aids for comprehensibility

Once again, we need to address the division into producers and recipients: the simplifying interventions, so far referred to as rules and principles, relate to the producers. This demands cognition because simplification according to rules is a demanding mental activity. Comprehensibility aids, on the other hand, relate to the recipients, where sensory perceptions are fostered. This section focuses precisely on these options.

When we enter the word *zrozumiteľnosť* into Google Translate for translation into English, the result is only two English terms: Slovak *zrozumiteľnosť* – Engl. *understandability, comprehensibility*.

In the language pair English–German, we can find a lot more equivalents in the secondary offer of equivalents (based on higher frequency and better revision by users within major languages).

English	**German**
understandability	Verständlichkeit
intelligibility	Verständlichkeit, **Leser**lichkeit
comprehensibility	Verständlichkeit, **Überschaubar**keit
audibility	**Hörbar**keit, Verständlichkeit
coherence	Kohärenz, Zusammenhang, Stimmigkeit, Zusammenhalt, Verständlichkeit
perspicuity	**Klar**heit, Verständlichkeit

Table 6: Google Translate results for *understandability* – Verständlichkeit (accessed April 19, 2024)

This means that we have many more options concerning the sense organs, as they can be aided or combined. This thesis is based on well-known quotations from the past:

- *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensibus*. Engl.: *Nothing is in the mind that has not previously been in the senses.* This sentence can already be found in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, but it was the 17th-century English physician and influential philosopher John Locke who made it the core of his thinking.
- *What you read or hear, try to understand*, says Thomas Aquinas, a 13th-century philosopher, theologian, jurist, and Dominican monk (cf. Lumma 2023).

Furthermore, I will mention some tools that promote better comprehensibility through the potentiation of the senses and can therefore have a learning-intensive effect. These aids mainly focus on combined listening-speaking-reading skills:

- use of subtitles for speech units in the same or familiar language (simultaneous listening and reading)
- videos in simpler/easier/simplified language (also with subtitles), e.g., news in simple language of ORF news or children's news on ZDF (Austrian and German TV: ORF Österreichischer Rundfunk, ZDF Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen)
- reduction of speech speed in internet videos (slowed-down listening)
- DW (Deutsche Welle) slowly read radio news
- selected child-friendly audio and video recordings
- learning videos with text examples and/or exercises for repetition
- websites with adapted literature
- websites in easily understandable languages
- barrier-free web design
- segmenting the written material (symbolic of speech continuum and for identifying sense units)
- reading aloud (by computer or native speaker)
- use of the CEFR for languages for selecting texts according to the given level, etc.

A targeted effort towards linguistic accessibility enables better communication between parties within the education or healthcare systems, authorities, schools, tourism offices, service providers (transport), foundations, administrations, bureaucracies, state administration, political parties, governments, parliaments, legal aids, media, TV, etc. Two principles must be followed by the recipients:

- Be aware of the tools available.
- Competently appropriate means or such a website and institution should be chosen that offer what is helpful.

A consensus should be established that we are amateurs in most areas of social and economic life. Generally, assistance is needed, and it should be considered a matter of course.

Summary and outlook

As stated on the website of Harvard University, *"An accessible world is a better world for everyone"* (Harvard University). In 2022, this was one of the topics that the university addressed scientifically and socially. In the meantime, many websites already have parallel pages in easy-to-understand language, e.g. the German Bundestag, Austrian public television ORF (video news in plain language), daily newspapers and magazines, some cities (Berlin, Munich, Aschaffenburg, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Slovak municipalities Betliar, Batizovce, Jaslovské Bohunice and many more (see the mini-corpus on the Accessible! project website). For English-speaking Wikipedia users, the Internet encyclopedia in Simple English or the children's encyclopedia Kiddle are available (see Simple English Wikipedia, Kiddle – Kids encyclopedia facts). European translation agencies now offer translations into accessible languages (see Interlingua, Inklusiv.online). Literary works will find more readers if they are available in easy-to-read language (cf. capito Vienna network). The portal vorleser.net offers free audiobooks, including those in easy language (cf. vorleser.net). These diverse activities indicate a focus on comprehensibility and a willingness to accommodate.

At the same time, however, it should also be noted that there are many dissenting voices on easy-to-read and warnings against it (for objections, see e.g. Maaß). Of the most serious allegations, I consider the following aspects to be a danger to the content and the users:

- simplification
- elementarization
- schematization
- invalidation
- infantilization
- reductionism
- persuasion/manipulation

These well-known phenomena can be prevented by acting competently, conscientiously, and ethically. Simplifying does not mean banalizing. Of course, the production of easily understandable language and texts involves reduction. These reductions of features can be perceived as neutralizing interventions and examined against the background of the theory of neutralizations in translation (cf. Bohušová 2017a, b).

This chapter has presented a synergetic, holistic, and integrative approach to comprehensibility. For many, it is an inspiring path. The approach is practical and can help many people in need or involved to develop further. The basic tendency is to move from the easy-to-understand concept to the **understandable-for-all** requirement. The topic presented deals with the so-called barrier-free communication. It is intended to contribute to a more thorough, comprehensive, stimulating, and sustainable intersocietal exchange. The scope of the topic involves several beneficial tasks. Shortly, it will be necessary to check again and again whether the rules that are supposed to lead to easily readable texts actually contribute to better understanding; whether the principles can be verified based on texts that have been produced, and whether the potential of intralingual translation (by humans or by AI) has been discovered as a product and as a process.

Summary in plain English

The author of this chapter is Zuzana Bohušová. The topic is understandable language and easy-to-understand language. The chapter aims to explain 1. the need for understandable communication, 2. the possibilities of achieving it, 3. simplification tools, and 4. auxiliary instruments for better sensory perception of texts.

The examined factors stand in opposition. They create duality or binary opposition. These specific factors are: understandability as potential – understanding as consequence, rules – principles, producers – recipients, communication within a society – communication between societies, directly produced texts – translated texts, specialized style – everyday style, authentic communication – didactically adapted communication, instruments of understandability – simplification interventions.

The opposition concerns generally understandability, but also so-called plain languages, plain writing, accessible languages, easy-to-read; in German: *Leichte Sprache – Einfache Sprache*; in Slovak:

zrozumiteľný jazyk. The result is these findings: 1. Understandability should be a property of every text; 2. Understandability should be present in every communication situation; 3. Communication partners are all people.

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Part I

Interlingual Translation and Comprehensibility

Neutralizations as Tools of Comprehensibility: Using Translation as an Example

Zuzana Bohušová

Abstract

In the present chapter, the thesis is put forth that the strategy of neutralization serves the purpose of enhancing the comprehensibility of oral and written translations.

The translation process exemplifies good practice when researching the accessibility of content. Neutralizations can be regarded as instruments and auxiliary tools for better communication. In the present chapter, the author's theory of neutralization is introduced and demonstrated through existing achievements in professional translations and interpretations.

The neutralizing interventions are natural strategies that are frequently used in the interpreting process and underlie many other interpreting strategies (such as compressing, generalizing, paraphrasing, etc.). The neutralization of features is also frequently employed in translation. Such techniques are categorized, hierarchized, and subjected to an in-depth analysis by the author.

Neutralizations function in bicultural communication situations, and their status is fundamentally language-independent and transferable to any language pair.

Keywords: comprehensibility, neutralizations, features, strategies, interpreting, translating

Introduction

When we want to connect comprehensibility and translation, the etymology of the words interpreting/interpretation is important. These terms play a central role in interlingual and intercultural transfer. Interpreting, in the sense of the oral form of translation and interpretation, as well as the explanation of content, contains a stem morpheme originating from Latin and other languages, pret-, originally also prat-, plat-. The meaning of these morphemes

(Bohušová 2018: 268) has always been to smooth, interpret, explain, narrate, suffice, remove barriers, understand, comprehend, and achieve communication.

Neutralizing interventions serve as auxiliary tools for accessibility through interpretation (analysis), interpreting (oral translation), and (written) translation. They are used where fidelity to detail appears counterproductive, cumbersome, unrealistic, or impractical. Neutralizations occur either intuitively or intentionally, based on professional judgment. In the present chapter, they are systematically addressed, interpreted, and supplemented with explanations.

The theory of neutralization already exists; the author has been studying the subject for years, see Bohušová 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2020, and others. Accordingly, the aim of the chapter is a brief explanation of:

- the nature and types of neutralization
- the nature and types of features
- the categories of individual cases of neutralization
- examples of the frequency of intuitive or professional neutralization in translation practice

Neutralizations are cognitive strategies used to neutralize various **features**. The theory has many connections to earlier internationally well-known theories in translation studies: equivalence types, interpreting strategies, shifts, functional translation, etc. This chapter is prepared as part of the project VEGA 1/0549/22 Accessible! Linguistics of Easy-to-Understand Languages.

1 How neutralizations function

This chapter adopts an inductive approach. The nature and types of neutralizations and features are explained using well-known slogan examples.

Figure 1: dm-drogerie markt: Slogans in Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, and Slovak (Marek)

Figure 1 shows slogans from the German and international drugstore chain dm-drogerie markt in various languages depending on the market where they offer their goods: in Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, and Slovak. The common message of these slogans is the German original: “Hier bin ich Mensch, hier kauf ich ein.” In English: “Here I am human, here I shop.” However, there are voices on the internet claiming: “The DM slogan lost its charm on the way from Germany to the Czech Republic” (Marek). Specifically, it is alleged that the slogan:

- is not harmonious
- seems bizarre
- seems incomprehensible
- the instrumental case expresses temporal transience (e.g. a role) and does not make sense in the case of a permanent identity such as “human”

How do we explain the concept of “charm” from the perspective of translation studies? This requires us to go back to the origins – *ad fontes*. We will examine the intertextual motivation for the creation of the original slogan. An overview is provided in the following table:

Faust (original quotation):	**Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein!** Here I am human, here I can be free! English translation by Martin Greenberg in 1992 Here I am Man, here dare it to be! English translation by G. M. Priest in 1808
dm-drogerie markt original:	**Hier bin ich Mensch, hier kauf ich ein**. Here I am human, here I shop.
Localization/ translation for the Slovak market:	**Tu som človekom, tu nakupujem.** Here I am human, here I shop.

Table 1: Slogan – Original and Translation

Who would expect the poetry of Johann Wolfgang Goethe behind the Slovak slogan of a German drugstore chain? Yet the great writer is indeed present using a modified quotation, even if invisible to some. In German-speaking culture, however, the original verse is generally known. It is from the first part of *Faust*: *Vor dem Tor – Outside the Town Gate* (English translation by Martin Greenberg in 1992). The concept of intertextuality is rendered inoperable in the absence of a shared cultural context. Consequently, any allusion would remain opaque and unintelligible. The commercial translation into Slovak and other languages is the result of multiple neutralizing interventions. The following features were neutralized:

- rhythm
- beat
- intertextuality
- intericonicity i.e. poetic features, well-known features, the poet and his opus

Nevertheless, the slogan works and is understandable. It represents a known brand and fulfills the same function as in the original culture. The interpretations of why it works vary according to the theory applied. In this chapter, neutralization theory is used, and it is within this framework that the arguments are developed. Neutralizations are not losses or errors. They are accepted and oft-used strategies.

2 Features that can be neutralized

After extensive research and comparisons of various source and target texts, an overview of features that can be subject to neutralization has been determined:

rhythm and beat	terminology
foreign accent	substandard elements
pluricentricity	idioms
factual errors	ethnomarkers
allusions	meta-language and jokes
connotations	intertextuality and intericonicity
expressivity	excessive internationalization
invectives	monotonous syntax
insults	stylistic bungles

Table 2: Features subject to neutralization

3 Categorization of neutralization

Neutralizations exist in various types. They can be arranged hierarchically – corresponding to vertical classification, or linearly – corresponding to horizontal classification.

Types of neutralization	
Horizontal classification	**Vertical classification**
obligatory (inevitable)	functional (intentional)
optional (possible)	emergency neutralization
undesired (wrong)	non-functional (accidental)

Table 3: Types of neutralization

As previously mentioned, neutralizations are not considered errors. However, there is one exception to this rule: undesired neutralizations can be evaluated as defects. These defects may result from various factors, including time constraints, the complexity of the content, unfavorable aspects of reception, or an insufficiently developed translation competence on the part of the translator.

4 Text examples with analyses

In this section, I provide several examples that illustrate and explain neutralizing interventions. The example with the slogan from dm-drogerie markt has already been examined. Features that were neutralized in translation were mentioned.

Below, I provide additional examples, with the neutralized main feature indicated in the headings. In each instance, translators made efforts to convey the message in a manner that was as readily understandable as possible. The overarching objective is to ensure that the message is conveyed in a readily understandable way.

4.1 Elon Musk – choppy style

In this section, a brief speech by Elon Musk, delivered in Berlin, is analyzed. The transcripts of the English original and the German interpretation are as follows:

Original:

> So, I'm uh I'm incredibly excited to uh hand over the first production cars from our incredible team here at Giga Berlin Brandenburg. This is a great day for the factory, and uh you know it's uh I'd just like to thank everyone who helped. Thank you, thank you very much uh it really made a very big difference uh, and to the community, and I mean Tesla will will make sure that this is a gem you know a gemstone for the area, for Germany, for Europe, and for the world.

Target text:

> Ich bin unglaublich erfreut, dass wir hier heute die ersten Autos von Bandrollen sehen, produziert von unserem großartigen Team hier in Grünheide in Brandenburg. Ein großartiger Tag hier für unsere Produktionsstätte und ich möchte wirklich allen danken, die hier beteiligt waren, die das möglich gemacht haben. Das hat wirklich den Unterschied ausgemacht und natürlich auch der Gemeinde vor Ort. Tesla wird sicherstellen, dass dies hier ein

Schatz für die ganze Region sein wird, für Deutschland, für Europa und weltweit.

Literal back-translation of target text:

I am incredibly pleased that we see the first cars rolling off the assembly line here today, produced by our great team here in Grünheide in Brandenburg. A great day here for our production facility and I really want to thank everyone who has been involved here, who has made this possible. It has really made a difference and of course to the local community as well. Tesla will ensure that this will be a treasure for the whole region, for Germany, for Europe, and worldwide.

The following features were neutralized:

- spontaneity and choppy style (redundancy, repetitions, short sentences)
- idiolect
- authenticity
- hesitations, filler *words*
- internationalization
- expressiveness (excited – erfreut)

The interpreter opted for a smooth, noticeably more expansive style adapted to the native local audience. Nevertheless, we can consider it as a good and understandable interpretation, even though little of the speaker's style remained.

Original text in English	**Target text in German**
Giga Berlin Brandenburg (international)	Grünheide in Brandenburg (local)
So, I'm uh I'm incredibly excited to uh hand over the first production cars from our incredible team...	Ich bin unglaublich erfreut, dass wir hier heute die ersten Autos von Bandrollen sehen, produziert von unserem großartigen Team…
…and uh you know it's uh I'd just like to thank everyone who helped.	…und ich möchte wirklich allen danken, die hier beteiligt waren, die das möglich gemacht haben.
a gem you know a gemstone	ein Schatz

Table 4: Elon Musk – examples

4.2 Angela Merkel – idiom

In a paragraph from the speech by Angela Merkel, which she delivered at the European Parliament, we see that a rhetorical device – an idiom – is not always translated.

Original:

> …es ist mir eine Freude, zu Beginn der deutschen Ratspräsidentschaft vor dem Plenum des Europäischen Parlaments zu sprechen. Wie die meisten von Ihnen habe auch ich die direkten Begegnungen mit Menschen, **die Gespräche von Angesicht zu Angesicht,** vermisst und für mich ist dies nun die erste Auslandsreise nach Ausbruch der Pandemie…

Literal translation:

> ...It is a pleasure for me to speak before the plenary of the European Parliament at the beginning of the German Presidency. Like most of you, I too have missed direct encounters with people and **face-to-face conversations,** and for me, this is now the first trip abroad since the outbreak of the pandemic...

The English, Slovak, and Czech target texts were evaluated. No interpreter translated the phrase "von Angesicht zu Angesicht" (face-to-face). One possible reason is that figurative language consumes a lot of mental energy, and therefore, only the denotation is often interpreted. The following features were neutralized:

- repetition
- redundancy
- idiom/pictoriality
- rhetorical feature

Of course, we ask ourselves why the speaker used this expression at all (on the requirement of understandable source texts cf. Stahl 2024, 162). The simplest answer is: to add some rhetorical flair to the speech. It may have been important for the speaker herself and the German-speaking Members of Parliament, but for other listeners, such as those who speak German as a foreign language, or for interpreters, it was probably a complicating and redundant element that was often neutralized. However, this did not jeopardize comprehensibility at all.

4.3 Different segmentation of the world – ethnomarkers

My former doctoral supervisee conducted a comprehensive investigation in her dissertation entitled “Neutralization Interventions in Translation – Using the Example of Features in Non-literary Texts”. She examined the translation of specialized terminology and so-called cultural markers, that are lexical units distinguished by ethnomarkers and deeply rooted in a specific language/culture. She found that many units, even those where one would not expect it, are transferred into another language using neutralization.

The neutralization of such units is dependent upon the particular communication scenario in question – this must be emphasized – and on a different segmentation of the world in the respective languages and cultures. It includes the following lexical and semantic groups:

- professionalisms (a prominent example is medical terminology and the necessity of clear communication between doctor and patient. The priority is comprehension/understanding between the doctor and the patient – verbally or in writing).
- dialectisms (see the last example in this chapter)
- pluricentric terms, especially in the language of law
- historicisms, archaicisms, Germanisms
- units with ethnomarkers

An example I have mentioned in my recent papers as particularly enlightening is the Slovak cultural item “syrové nite zo Zázrivej”, which translates to “string cheese from Zázrivá.” This term has the following ethnomarkers:

- a dairy specialty of Slovak cuisine
- special production method, appearance, texture, and taste
- localization of the production facility in the northern Slovak village of Zázrivá, which enjoys the best reputation for string cheese

The collocation was used in two completely different situations, both of which I also attended:

1. during a visit of the Irish ambassador in Banská Bystrica
2. in a Moravian restaurant as a waiter communicated with local/Czech-speaking guests

In the first, more international communication situation, where unnecessary details (such as “Zázrivá,” possibly also “nite”) did not facilitate understanding, it would have been desirable to neutralize these ethnomarkers (e.g., “Slovak cheese specialty”), as an explanation might have been too cumbersome. In the second example, the communication partners were informed and appreciated the quality of the specialty. In the second case, neutralization would have been out of place.

In the translation of the slogan of dm-drogerie markt, the local relationship to a specific literary work of a particular culture was neutralized. In other cases, world segmentation differs from place to place. A good example is airport names:

Slovak: Medzinárodné letisko Milana Rastislava Štefánika v Ivanke pri Dunaji

English (literal): Milan Rastislav Štefánik International Airport in Ivanka near the Danube

English (international): Bratislava Airport

Irish: Aerfort Dhún na nGall An Charraig Fhionn

English (international): Donegal Airport

In both examples, the common English or international version uses a linguistically economical, practical, and clearly understandable naming convention, in which unnecessary details have been neutralized.

4.4 Literary translation – substandard

The following quote from the Swedish novel *The Hundred-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* (2009) by Jonas Jonasson (the quote is from the author’s dedication to his grandfather) demonstrates the stylistic hybridization of the source text by blending standard and substandard language. As the example sentences from various translations available on the internet show, this feature of hybridity is either not neutralized or partially replaced:

> **Original, Swedish:** Di söm bara säjer dä söm ä sanning, ä inte vär’ å höra på.
>
> **German:** Wenn ein’n man jümmers bloß de Wohrheit vertellt, denn is dat de Tid nich wert, dat je em tohört.
>
> Translator Wibke Kühn. Substandard language, Low German dialect; intralingual translation into Standard German: Wenn jemand immer nur die Wahrheit sagt, dann lohnt es sich nicht, ihm zuzuhören.
>
> **Slovak:** Tý, kerý povýdajú enem to, co je pravda, tých sa any neoplatý očúvat.
>
> Translator Jana Melichárková. Translated into substandard language, West Slovak dialect, which is perceived as expressive.
>
> **Czech:** Ty, co říkaj jenom to, co je pravda, nemá cenu poslouchat.
>
> Translator Zbyněk Černík. Translated into standard language nearly exclusively; only the first verb form contains a colloquial feature.
>
> **Polish**: Tacy, co to ino prawdę godoją, toż to ni warto ich słuchać. Translator Joanna Myszkowska-Mangold. Translated into the Lesser Polish dialect spoken in southern Poland with the center in Kraków.
>
> **English:** Those who only says what is the truth, they’re not worth listening to.
>
> Translator Roy Bradbury. Translated with foreign elements: deviation in collocation and conjugation (says instead of say or tell), repetition of the subject (those, they), characteristic syntax with two subordinate clauses, as well as characteristic word order (is); intralingual translation into Standard English: Those who only tell the truth aren’t worth listening to.

Even if we don’t understand Swedish, in the translation into German, Polish, and Slovak, we can infer the dialectal, or at least substandard, qualities of the original. These features were neutralized in English and Czech, making them less pronounced, which possibly means that some features were mitigated in favor of understanding.

Summary

Translation studies imposes demands on interpreters/translators regarding their ethics, language skills, and transcultural erudition. Interpreting/translation should be done:

- completely
- according to the original, faithfully
- objectively

Indeed, omissions, ignoring, softening, filtering, euphemizing, smoothing, etc. are not established interpreting strategies, and certainly not translation strategies. However, reality brings us more complicated situations: when the interpreter improves the so-called bad speaker and slightly diminishes the performance of the so-called brilliant orator. Or when the interpreter weakens the characteristic features of the speaker's idiolect. Translators are aware that they must not translate the dialect of one language with the dialect of another language, so they have to neutralize it to supra-regional colloquialism (but even so, they are sometimes bold and do not neutralize it). Interpreters avoid idioms, imagery, expressiveness, and vulgarity, or they search for paraphrases for ethnomarkers. Translators cannot translate every feature of a literary text; some they neutralize, replace, or even add. These procedures, too, can be considered neutralization interventions and complementary harmonizing strategies.

It is important to realize that the theory of neutralization provides the following insights:

- Neutralizations are neither errors, nor losses, nor shifts.
- Neutralizations are common strategies, frequently used – either intuitively or deliberately.
- The theory of neutralizations is descriptive, not prescriptive (it describes the state but does not prescribe solutions).
- Studying neutralizations better elucidates the principles of translation.

Summary in plain English

The author of this chapter is Zuzana Bohušová. She is also the creator of the theory of neutralizations in translation.

Neutralizations are strategies used in interpreting and translation. They neutralize features of source texts. In this chapter, the author connects neutralizations with understandability. The text provides examples of how neutralizations of features can make translations easier to understand.

Neutralizations are tools for better understandability. They are not errors, not losses, and not shifts. Neutralizations are common translation strategies, and they are used often – either automatically or on purpose.

The theory of neutralizations is descriptive, not prescriptive; that means it describes how translators and interpreters work but it does not say how they should work. Studying neutralizations makes the principles of translation clearer.

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Improving Students’ Understanding of Translation Flaws: Error Analysis as a Formative Assessment Tool in Translator Training

Eszter Asztalos-Zsembery

Abstract

This chapter examines the significance of error analysis as a formative assessment tool in translator training programs. It explores the challenges students face in understanding their translation errors, and how error analysis aids in this process. The chapter defines relevant terms and provides an overview of translation error typology with an insight into the most relevant literature in the field and highlights the effectiveness of error analysis in enhancing students’ translation skills. It also discusses practical applications, methodologies, and future directions for implementing error analysis in translator training curricula. It reviews the most important models applicable in institutional translation assessment and offers a way error analysis may be used to better understand the translation process. The study focuses on the importance of understanding translation errors to produce high-quality translations and the role of assessment in competence development.

Keywords: translation error, translation competence, formative assessment, error analysis, error categorization, corrective feedback

Introduction

Translation courses, as part of post-graduate specialized translator training programs, are designed to provide future translators with the necessary skills and knowledge to produce high-quality translations. High-quality translations are products of the translation process. The primary goal of these courses is to develop various competences in the field of translation, which requires constant and continuous feedback for successful development.

To produce high-quality work, mediate between two languages effectively, and meet the expectations of the target audience, the competence to select the relevant terminology, find the most effective translation method(s), and understand the assessment of the work submitted are the three most important competences. Therefore, assessment is an essential component of competence development.

However, the competence necessary to produce such high-quality translations requires more than linguistic proficiency alone; it requires an understanding of cultural differences between the source and target texts, the understanding of the context and genre of the source text, and effective communication in both the source and target languages. During the competence-building process, students learn through errors. Therefore, to make them understand why the rendering of some expressions, thoughts, or grammatical points is erroneous, students need to learn to identify and understand the corrective feedback of the errors they make in this process; otherwise, learning will be fruitless.

This chapter defines the relevant terms, provides an overview of translation error typology with an insight into the most relevant literature in the field, reviews the most important models in institutional translation assessment, and aims to offer a way error analysis may revive and may be used today once more in the process of better understanding.

1 Terms and definitions

The process of achieving understanding initially requires the most relevant terms to be defined. This chapter uses the definition of 'translation' termed by Kinga Klaudy, the founder of translation studies in Hungary. In her term list (Klaudy 1999, 152), translation is considered both a product and process. As 1) a product, it is the source text created through a translation process, and 2) a process, it expands from understanding a written source language followed by a shift from the source language text to the target language text by creating a written target language text. However, this definition of translation requires amendment as the translation products and processes within specialized translator training cannot be considered as professional rather than quasi-real translation tasks, 'pedagogical exercises' (Klaudy 1996, 197), as both the sender and addressee in this process are course instructors.

As mentioned above, high-quality translation is the primary aim of the translation process. 'High-quality translation' in the scope of this research entails an accurate and faithful rendering of a text from one language to another, while also considering the original meaning, cultural context, readability, coherence, accuracy, and adapting to the cultural and linguistic preferences of the intended audience (Chesterman 2000, 36; Larson 1998, 59; Newmark 1988, 82; Nida & Taber 1982, 12; Reiss & Vermeer 2014, 117; Venuti 2008, 4).

The nature and understanding of 'translation errors' has been the subject of various translation quality models and studies (for example, Baker 1992, Bassnett & Lefevere 1990, Bell 1991, Dróth 2011, Hatim & Mason 1990, Klaudy 2005, Kussmaul 1995, Nord 1997, Lengyel 2013). Any deviation, inaccuracy, or mistake in the process of translating a text from one language to another, which leads to differences between the source text and the translated text, can be considered an error in translation. Such errors may arise at various levels of linguistic and cultural transfers for various reasons and may influence the clarity, accuracy, and faithfulness of the translation.

Utterances will become errors through 'assessment' and 'evaluation.' They are related concepts as both study and 'measure' various aspects such as linguistic accuracy, cultural differences, terminological consistency, stylistic coherence and function in translation. Since assessment is primarily concerned with the extent to which the translation process and/or the product can fulfil their intended purpose, the extent to which a student possesses specific skills or knowledge, and the evaluation of the results based on established criteria or objectives (Galán-Mañas & Hurtado Albir 2015, 63), within the scope of this study, translation assessment is the term used when discussing the quality of translations.As 'understanding' of translation errors corrected is the major aim in this chapter, this concept has to be discussed in greater depth. The following subsection was designed to observe this aim.

1.1 Understanding and its barriers

Although the terms ‘comprehension’ and ‘understanding’ are often synonyms and interchangeable in translation studies, here, it is inevitable to make a distinction between them. For the purposes of this chapter, the term ‘understanding’ was used. However, the choice of the term is not arbitrary. In translation, ‘understanding’ is a broader term which shows the cognitive grasp of the meaning of the source language text, while ‘comprehension’ refers to the cognitive process of grasping the meaning of the source language text. In this context, it is not the process of learning but rather the result of learning that is in the focus of attention; consequently, here, ‘understanding’ is the term that will fulfil the aim better.

Understanding may be hindered at various stages and for various reasons during translation. The first barrier may be the source text itself; the text may be outside the students’ area of expertise, which may not correspond to their level of linguistic or cultural proficiency. The first point that requires attention is an understanding of the genre of the source text, which may also help the translator to understand the source language audience (ideas and expectations).

A second barrier may be the level of equivalence required to meet the requirements of high-quality rendering between the source and target languages. In translation criticism, equivalence is an important concept used to assess translation quality. Novice translators and translator trainees must learn that their role is to identify equivalent elements in the target language that align with the source language and can function effectively in the target language, ultimately achieving the goal of functionality by meeting the needs of readers. Consequently, the target language audience determines the need for translation and the level of equivalence required when selecting the most appropriate terms.

In specialized translation, the assessment process assumes that there are no single equivalent, but rather multiple, equally appropriate ways of translating a text or a set of texts. Understanding expands to the field of specialization itself, it has an impact on the semantic, stylistic, and linguistic requirements and constraints of the target language text. What makes specialized translation different from non-specialized or literary translation in this aspect is that, in this respect, the most appropriate path to choose will be determined by the understanding of the target (the communication aim of the translation process, the needs and requirements of the client and the target audience). With due consideration of the translation brief, and through continuous bilingual text analysis, both the source language text and the shaping target language text can be assessed for equality. This can be a tool for better understanding, which, in turn, will aid in the selection of the most appropriate translation path to produce high-quality translated specialized texts. In non-specialized and literary texts, the constraints of the aim of communication and the client's needs and requirements are less pronounced.

A third, and most likely, individualized, personal barrier in understanding is the individual translator's ability to comprehend and develop her/his skills through submitted and instructor-corrected assignments. Students typically receive assignments with suggestions and actual re-worded expressions, sentences, and/or paragraphs that they must accept and learn from. In this aspect, the question of 'how' to understand these this corrective feedback has to be addressed.

In this regard, the question of 'how' arises: 1) How can the instructor who is assessing or evaluating the translation product understand the students' choices? 2) How can the translator trainee understand the assessed and frequently evaluated assignment based on a specific grading scale? When answering these questions, the translation process should be monitored to provide meaningful feedback to students and continuous correction of recurring errors, which, respectively, will aid the development of translation competence and result in translated texts with better quality. This will help fill the gap in translation education, as noted by Kiraly (1995, 111–112). Formative assessment is thus an essential tool in the development of translation competence as well as a critical component of training.

The improvement in quality is inevitably the result of a learning and understanding process that translator trainees face partly by understanding the corrective feedback received for their submitted assignments. In addressing the process of 'how' to make corrections understandable, the next subchapter seeks to shed new light on the significance of thorough error analysis in the process of developing translator competence.

2 A theoretical background to error analysis

Traditional assessment methods of rewriting and crossing out erroneous utterances often lack constructive feedback that facilitates learning and improvement. Thus, error analysis has emerged as a valuable formative assessment tool. Error analysis involves systematic identification, classification, and analysis of errors made by learners in their translation work. By examining these errors, translator trainees gain insight into their weaknesses and areas for improvement.

As a diagnostic tool, error analysis can play an important role in promoting self-reflection and autonomy in the process of becoming self-reliant professional translators. This can be achieved by completing translation tasks with self-study error typologies (Gonzáles Davis 2004, 6, 217). By analyzing errors in authentic translation tasks, translator trainees can gain a deeper understanding of both the source and target language and culture, thus enhancing their ability to produce accurate and culturally appropriate translations.

By systematically analyzing errors in translation work, the possible causes of errors may be mapped; thus, the corrective feedback given will prove remedial, and trainees can gain valuable insights into their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn will enable them to make professional decisions and encourage them to continuously improve. With clear error analysis classification built into translator training curricula, trainees will become competent and reflective translators capable of meeting the demands of the profession. Therefore, error analysis in translation may be viewed as an opportunity for growth and development, and not as a tool highlighting failings and what trainees cannot do.

In the literature on translation error analyses, various unique approaches have been addressed to ‘measure’ quality and classify the flaws in the translation process from various aspects serving different purposes. As the method of classification must serve the purpose of the training course, a universal, fit-for-all model is impossible to create. The following subchapter reviews some commonly cited error models that are most useful for translator training.

3 Error models in translation studies

Several error models have been proposed in the field of translation studies to analyze and categorize errors made by translators. The error models in translation studies that helped us in forming our translation error model for pedagogical translations of specialized translator training programs are introduced in this subchapter.

Eugene Nida's contrastive analysis model (1964) compares the source and target languages to identify errors arising from language transfer and interference. Comparing the two languages' structures and systems helps analyze translation errors.

Juan C. Sager (1989) believes grading errors on a scale is justifiable in large-scale examinations. He emphasizes objectivity in translation evaluation, viewing translation as an independent piece of writing and linguistic transfer.

Daniel Gile's translation error model (2009) can be termed an effort model that focuses on understanding the relationship between the cognitive effort of translators and the quality of translation output. He distinguishes between two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. By classifying errors according to their nature, frequency, and severity, researchers can determine the factors that influence translation performance and learn the effectiveness of different translation strategies.

The PACTE research group's model (2003) is a competence-based model that defines the dimensions of translation competence and provides a systematic framework for understanding and addressing translation errors. It serves as an error-analysis model by defining the dimensions of translation competence and providing a systematic framework for understanding and addressing translation errors. It identifies various cognitive, linguistic, and strategic sub-competencies that contribute to translators' overall competence in translation tasks.

Juliane House's error typology model (1997) may be categorized as a classification framework model that classifies translation errors into various types or categories based on their linguistic characteristics and impact on translation quality. Similarly, Mona Baker's model (2018) is also a linguistic error typology model that classifies translation errors into various types or categories based on their nature, frequency, and severity. Through systematic error analysis, instructors can deepen their understanding of translation difficulties, develop targeted strategies to minimize errors, and facilitate continuous improvement in the translators' competence. This allows instructors to identify recurring patterns and trends in translation errors and tailor their instructional approaches accordingly.

Christiane Nord's model for translation-oriented text analysis (1997) follows a functionalist approach, focusing on the intended function of the target text and client's needs. She distinguishes between a 'translation problem' and a 'translation difficulty,' which are subjective phenomena arising from an individual's linguistic, cultural, or translational competence or lack of appropriate documentation. She believes that a trainee's progress can be assessed more objectively using the model for translation-oriented text analysis and the translation brief as a 'frame of reference.' A translation error is defined as a deviation from the selected model of action or frustration with expectations concerning a certain action.

Anthony Pym's model (1992) on assessing translation competence uses binary and non-binary errors. Binary errors occur during the language learning stages and are corrected at that stage, resulting in either correct or incorrect translation solutions. Non-binary errors are closer to translator training and require a detailed discussion. Both types of errors occur at both stages, and attention should be paid to their corrections. Binary errors require little discussion, whereas non-binary errors require a detailed discussion and cannot be authoritatively decided.

Kinga Klaudy, in her error model for the summative assessment of translator trainees (Klaudy 2005, 78), argues that the aim of correcting is to see whether the 'candidate' is able to carry out translation assignments in the specialised field of her/his choice. In her typology, there are major and minor errors set up based on international literature, and these errors are weighted.

These are just a few examples of translator error models that are commonly used in translator training and research. Each model offers unique perspectives and approaches to analyzing and categorizing errors in translation work, providing valuable insights into translators' skills, competencies, and areas for improvement.

In general, error models used in foreign language learning and mediation use error categories and classification. For example, Carl James (1998), a language education and sociolinguistics scholar, has studied various dimensions of language rendering errors, with a focus on second language acquisition. While not exclusively focusing on translation studies, and there is no specific classification model attributed directly to him, he has explored various dimensions of errors in language rendering, and his findings can be used in specialized translator training programs. In his approach, errors are divided into language-specific categories, such as grammar, vocabulary, syntax, punctuation, and translation-specific categories, such as fidelity to the source text, cultural equivalence, register, and style.

All these models view errors and error analysis from a different aspect but there are common approaches and viewpoints. Highlighting and introducing them as elements of a model applicable in translator training programs can serve translation competence development and enhance translator trainees' understanding of the corrected feedback.

4 Methodologies for error analysis

The translation process is a continuous, collateral, bilingual text analysis as was mentioned above. It requires a constant assessment of the author's ideas and intent, the audience and their understanding of the source language text in order to successfully convey these ideas across in the target language through carefully selected target language equivalents. Providing corrective feedback with errors classified under different categories will enhance understanding of the assessment.

Distinct categories can help both the instructors and the trainees to identify the different patterns and areas of weakness more effectively. This further enables the instructor to provide individualized suggestions how trainees can avoid them in the future, and offer targeted pedagogical tasks to improve their translation competence. Such communication between instructors and trainees provides a common language for discussing and addressing errors in translation work.

In addition to categorization, error correction exercises commonly used in language teaching can be effectively used in translation courses to eliminate mostly linguistic errors identified by individual or peer corrections, or error identifications (e.g.: González, 2004; Vince, 2003; Klaudy & Simigne, 1995).

In specialized translation courses, trainees usually submit feeble translations at the start of the training program, and submit translations close to being ready for printing towards the end of it. To aid the trainees' understanding of the corrective feedback of their submitted assignments and to enhance learning from these assessments, errors need to be classified into different categories through error analysis, a systematic examination of errors made by the trainees in their translation work.

Each methodology in error analysis offers unique benefits and contributes to enhancing students' understanding of their translation errors. Error categorization provides a structured framework for analyzing errors and tailoring instruction to specific needs. Error correction exercises promote active engagement and reinforce learning through hands-on practice. Error feedback guides students towards continuous improvement by providing timely and constructive feedback on their errors.

4.1 A case study

A study proposed by the author of this chapter (Asztalos-Zsembery, 2008) was conducted between 2016 and 2023 examining the impact of error analysis on students' translation skills in a university setting. The subjects of the study were medical translator trainees participating in a two-year post-graduate training program. The error model constructed built upon the findings of international and Hungarian translation error research and the marking schemes of language exams with a mediation module. In the research, 117 trainees were involved. The study aimed to assess how error analysis, as a formative assessment tool, influenced students' understanding of their translation flaws and contributed to their overall development as translators.

Over the course of the study, each trainee was monitored in two courses. The trainees had various translation tasks in which they had to analyze their own translation work, identify errors, and reflect on their translation choices and strategies. They engaged in regular feedback sessions with their instructor, and they received regular constructive feedback on their errors and guidance on how to improve their translation skills. In addition to instructor feedback, the trainees also had the opportunity for peer collaboration in the form of a group translation project simulating a real-life professional project. This scenario allowed the trainees to apply error analysis techniques in quasi-authentic contexts and prepares them for professional challenges. Moreover, by peer-correction, they exchanged feedback and insights on each other's work. In the error analysis and correction, they received the model of error correction tailored to the translation program.

The assessment error model that was designed for the case study purposes had three main categories of errors. The first major group contained errors resulting from a lack of or inappropriate transfer operations: such errors meant structural errors, flaws in the use of cohesive elements that disrupt the 'operation' of the entire text and problems of punctuation which may mislead the target text reader and cause a shift in the conveying of the message in the target text. The types of errors in this category were repeated grammatical, grammatical and major grammatical; repeated lexical, lexical and major lexical, syntactical and major syntactical, and punctuation errors.

The second major group consisted of the elements ('formatting' errors) that disrupt the format of the target text that may, on the one hand, can be obvious at a glimpse of the target text and some that become apparent when comparing the source and the target texts. The types of errors were the following: spelling, a missing expression[1], a missing clause, a missing sentence, incomprehensible/nonsense, word order and paragraphing.

The third major group was made up of discourse-related errors that show a deviation from the register or pragmatics of the source text. The error categories were: incorrect (e.g. unscholarly) use of language, stylistic or cultural differences between the source and target languages, mistranslation, communication aim affected, very good solution.

The model had a fourth ‘invisible’ element that was used in evaluation of the translated text as trainees had to receive grades for these assignments as course grades. This global assessment criterion that is a weighting element in the final evaluation stage was applied only in the evaluation of the translation product but was not regarded in the diagnostic assessment process. It was calculated on the basis of the number of major errors from the three major pillars with the discourse-related errors added to them. In the research, assessment of the translation assignment was mostly used as formative assessment during the training period, therefore, for didactic reasons, a positive feedback is also vital. In case of an excellent solution (which is a highly subjective element), positive points can be given and so, the trainee’s performance may be rewarded.

Throughout the assessment process, the instructor’s correcting role is limited to the identification, classification and indication of an error and to the indication of a very good solution.

The findings of the case study revealed several key outcomes. Firstly, the trainees became more aware of their translation flaws and showed a deeper understanding of the challenges inherent in the translation process. Through error analysis, students were able to identify some recurring patterns and areas of weakness in their translation work, and they could target these areas for improvement.

Furthermore, the study found that error analysis aided a reflective approach to translation among trainees. By critically examining their own translation choices and strategies, students developed metacognitive skills and became more self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses as translators. This reflective approach enhanced students’ understanding of their translation errors and empowered them to take ownership of their learning, strengthened their autonomy and responsibility in decision making and their strive for continuous improvement.

Moreover, the study highlighted the positive impact of error analysis on the trainees’ translation accuracy and proficiency. Students who engaged in error analysis activities showed significant improvement in their translation skills over time, as evidenced by their ability to produce more accurate and culturally appropriate translations in their final thesis translations at the end of the translator training program.

Overall, the case study underscores the effectiveness of error analysis as a formative assessment tool in translator training. By providing students with opportunities to analyze their own translation work, receive constructive feedback, and reflect on their learning, error analysis played a pivotal role in enhancing students' understanding of their translation flaws and fostering their development as competent and reflective translators.

5 Discussion

Error analysis provides numerous benefits to trainees in translator training programs. By systematically analyzing their translation flaws, they can gain a better understanding of the challenges of translation. This awareness allows them to make better translation decisions and strive for greater accuracy. Error analysis also promotes metacognitive skills like self-monitoring and self-regulation, which are necessary for professional translators.

Furthermore, error analysis has enormous potential as a formative assessment tool for translator training programs. By systematically examining translation flaws, translator trainees can better understand the translation process, improve their translation skills, and adopt a reflective approach to their work. As translation studies evolve, integrating error analysis into curriculum design and pedagogical practices is crucial for developing competent and self-aware translators who can meet the demands of a globalized world.

As technology advances, translation memory modules in computer-assisted translation tools and automated error detection algorithms could be designed to speed up the error analysis process and provide personalized feedback. In addition, longitudinal studies that track trainee progress over time may provide useful insights into the long-term effects of error analysis on translation competence and professional development.

Summary in plain English

This chapter looks into how error analysis can be used as a tool for formative assessment in translator training programs. The work looks at the difficulties that students face when trying to understand translation errors and how error analysis can help them in this matter. The chapter also shows the practical uses, methods, and future possibilities for using error analysis in translator training programs. With error analysis, trainees are able to identify, categorize, and examine errors in their translation work. This process helps them to create correct, culturally acceptable translations. I also wrote about how important it is to get feedback on errors made when building skills, because without it, learning won't happen. The chapter ends with showing how error analysis can help translators become more competent and self-conscious.

Notes

[1] Please note that the expression 'missing' here means that it has not been expressed or implied in the target text. Obviously, the omission of an element in the target text that was present in the source text would not necessarily become an error.

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Balancing the Tension Between Comprehensibility and Preserving Authenticity in the Translation of Muslim Fashion Designations

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Abstract

The veiling of Muslim women, along with their rights and freedoms, is currently a subject of intense debate. Veiling rules exhibit variations based on regional, financial, and social statuses. Beyond its religious connotations, veiling serves as a significant social and cultural symbol. This chapter delves into the translation of culture-motivated expressions of Muslim fashion depicted in Khaled Hosseini's works from English into Slovak. It examines the challenges and nuances involved in translating not only linguistic elements but also culturally specific aspects related to fashion and identity. By investigating how the translator navigates and conveys the cultural complexities of Muslim attire, the chapter seeks to illuminate the impact of translation choices on the representation of these expressions in a new cultural context. This exploration contributes to the broader understanding of the intricacies in translating culturally rich literary content, emphasizing the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity while making adaptations for the target audience.

Keywords: culture-motivated expression, cultural transfer, Muslim fashion, foreignization vs. naturalization, Khaled Hosseini, translation, understanding

Introduction

Understanding and comprehension are key elements when it comes to evaluating the quality and effectiveness of translated texts. Whether translating literature, technical documents, legal texts, or any other type of content, the primary goal is to ensure that the translated text accurately conveys the intended meaning of the original while being clear and understandable to the target audience.

Translating texts originating from the rich tapestry of Eastern (Oriental) cultures presents a formidable challenge due to intercultural differences and culture-motivated expressions.

A translator's responsibilities extend far beyond mere linguistic proficiency; they must possess a keen ability to identify, comprehend, and appropriately convey the socio-cultural intricacies woven into literary works. In the translation process, the translator assumes the role of a multifaceted specialist. The act of translation into another national language serves to enrich literature and culture, offering readers insight into the inherent "otherness" of diverse cultures. Within the contemporary discourse on translation in Slovakia (Gromová 2009; Müglová 2009; Bohušová 2009; Welnitzová 2007; Petrášová 2015), the translator is perceived not only as an intermediary between two languages but above all as an intermediary between two cultures, the so-called cultural or intercultural mediator. This chapter delves into the translation of Muslim fashion designations appearing in novels by Khaled Hosseini. In considering the variance between the cultural codes of the source and target cultures, our attention is drawn to the concepts of foreignization and naturalization.

1 Theoretical background and literature review

1.1 Intercultural factor in translation – naturalization and foreignization

Translating culture-motivated expressions presents a unique challenge. These terms typically name objects or phenomena specific to the source language and culture, deeply embedded in the experiences of its speakers. However, the target culture might lack equivalent terms or even the necessary vocabulary to express them accurately. Since translation as such is problematic in such cases, the translator must find a way to cope with it.

The tension between different cultural systems is expressed as a semiotic opposition "we–they". Anton Popovič (1975) emphasized the tension between the original and its translation not only with the time gap between their creation but also with the disparity between two distinct cultural environments (the culture of the source context and that of the recipient milieu). In the encounter of two cultures, tension emerges between "us" and "them", "own" and "foreign". The reader of a translation perceives elements resonant with their domestic culture and environment as "their" and reflect the cultural collective "we", while attributes attached to the original culture are identified as "they". The challenges of cultural clash can be seen in translation through three main aspects (Vilikovský 1984, p. 131):

- foreign elements prevail over domestic ones – **foreignization**
- domestic elements prevail over foreign ones – **naturalization**
- domestic and foreign elements are in balance – **creolization**

Within Western translation theories, Lawrence Venuti (1995) and Eugen Nida (1964), positioned at opposing ends, address the concept of equivalence in translation through the lenses of foreignization and domestication. Venuti championed foreignization, advocating for the retention of foreign elements in translation. Conversely, Nida promoted naturalness, aiming to create a similar or equivalent impact for readers of the target text.

Translators face a unique challenge when encountering culturally specific expressions in source texts. Language acts as a tool, highlighting cultural differences through foreign elements in both the source text and translation. These expressions, often named after unique phenomena or objects within the source culture, lack direct equivalents in the target language. This absence creates a gap, as the target language might not possess the necessary vocabulary to convey the full meaning. To bridge this gap, translators must adopt creative strategies to effectively communicate the essence of these expressions.

1.2 Literary review

Postcolonial literature permeates our daily lives more than ever before and enjoys significant popularity among contemporary Slovak readers. The expanding readership, rising translations, and greater interest of literary and translation critics signify that these works have a dedicated audience. One such author is Afghan-American writer Khaled Hosseini, who impressed millions of readers worldwide not only with his brilliant storytelling talent but above all with a powerful story embedded in a country torn apart by a decade of turmoil.

Hosseini's literary career began in 2003 with the novel *The Kite Runner* (translated into Slovak as *Majster šarkanov* by Danica Hollá in 2008). This novel has touched the whole world, and filmmakers also reached for the story of two Afghan friends. His second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* was published in 2007 and translated into Slovak language as *Tisíc žiarivých sĺnk* by Mária Galádová in 2009. Galádová also translated his third novel *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). Slovak translation researcher Emília Perez (*née* Janecová) researched the translation of *The Kite Runner* and pointed out that the task of the translator, in an effort to orient themselves to the recipient of the translation, is not to neutralize the tension resulting from cultural differences. On the contrary, their task is to be able to identify individual differences and transform them appropriately (Janecová 2011). Samsudin Hi Adam with his colleagues from Jakarta State University studied what strategies of translation were applied in the translation of *The Kite Runner* into the Indonesian language. In contrast to Perez's views, the strategy of naturalization was dominant in translating *The Kite Runner* into the Indonesian language.

Regarding the translation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Ivana Pondelíková (*née* Styková) (2018) conducted a study on the precision and accuracy of translating culture-motivated expressions, particularly focusing on the transfer of names of oriental dishes and ingredients. In addition, Haslina Haroon (2019) from Universiti Sains Malaysia focused on the use of footnotes in the Malay translation of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* arguing that footnotes must be used judiciously in a translation. Informative footnotes can play an important role in enhancing the readers' understanding of the text and in bringing the text closer to the readers. In the present study, our attention will be directed towards terms associated with attire, considering that veiling represents a fundamental aspect of Muslim culture and stands out as one of its most defining elements.

Scholarly sources such as *The Veil Unveiled: The Hijab in Modern Culture* by Faegheh Shirazi (2003) and *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*, edited by Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors (2013) illuminate the multifaceted role of fashion in the lives of Muslim women. Shirazi explores the veil as a symbol of religious identity and political resistance, challenging Western perceptions and investigating its meaning in Muslim-majority societies. Tarlo and Moors, for their part, delve into the cultural nuances of Muslim women's fashion and explore how migration, globalization, and cultural exchange have influenced current trends and styles.

1.3 Veiling – an essential part of Muslim culture

When researching and interpreting the names of Muslim women's clothing, as they are named in the literary and media sources presented in this study, it is necessary to look at them in a cultural-historical context. In the Islamic world, fashion and clothing often have a strong religious context. Muslim cultures and religious norms influence the way people dress and express their identity. According to Eva Al-Absiová (2022), religion significantly influences the attitude towards nudity and physicality. In Muslim societies, in general, the female body is under strict family and social control.

The veiling of women in Muslim cultures has strong historical roots that go back to pre-Islamic times. Emíre Khidayer (2010) describes five reasons for veiling women in Islamic society. These may not only be social, political, or financial but may also be related to geographical conditions and the environment. However, some functions of covering the outside may have much more pragmatic reasons than lack of money, it concerns many women from the lower and middle class who, for example, do not have money for a hairdresser and solve the problem of untidy hair in this way. Another reason for veiling, which at first glance may not be related to religion, but is believed to be a consequence of it, is to become invisible. Khidayer continues that a woman should not attract male attention in any way in public. In addition, she says that if a woman, relatively young, goes out on the street with loose hair, in a shorter skirt, or with exposed cleavage, she will be the target of boos, shouts, and sexual insinuations. They will become invisible in the scarf; it will also provide them with some protection and anonymity.

The interpretation of specific garments in contemporary Muslim societies offers insight into the complex interplay of tradition, religion, culture, and personal expression among Muslim women. Through an ethnological lens, we can appreciate the multifaceted meaning attributed to clothing as well as the socio-cultural dynamics that shape women's fashion and identity in the Islamic community.

2 Research methodology

Researchers in social sciences and humanities are turning to qualitative methods with growing frequency, utilizing them not only as a complementary approach but also as the main investigative tool for specific phenomena. Our chapter analyzes two novels by Khaled Hosseini – *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) – through translatological lenses, focusing on achieving translational fidelity for culture-motivated expressions. Both stories delve into the cultural landscape of Muslim communities, particularly concentrating on the impact of Islam on interpersonal relationships. The narratives expose the harsh realities of Afghan society under Sharia law and Taliban rule, highlighting the prevalent oppression of women and mistreatment of children. Hosseini's masterful storytelling delivers deeply affecting portrayals of individuals' struggles with a system that enables and conceals abuse, ultimately exposing the consequences of overlooking fundamental human rights. Drawing on his insider knowledge, the author guides readers through the rich tapestry of Afghan culture, from its customs, and holidays to its cuisine and traditional attire.

This research aims to not only analyze the portrayal of cultural differences, particularly in clothing but also propose a suitable translation solution in this domain. We view fashion as a representative manifestation of cultural otherness. Recognizing the complexity of this task, we investigate the following research question **(RQ1)**:

Research question No. 1: *What translational solutions were used by the translators of* The Kite Runner *and* A Thousand Splendid

Suns *to achieve accuracy in conveying culture-motivated expressions from the source language to the target language?*

In exploring literary works across diverse cultures, researchers delve into the concepts of foreignization and naturalization, driven by the unique complexities inherent to each cultural environment, which belong to the “non-equivalent lexicon”. This encompasses the (un)translatability of culinary delicacies, beverages, currencies, traditional dances, attire, and other aspects intertwined with specific cultures. The challenges of translation are further amplified by the distance between the source and target cultures, and the abundance of such cultural references within the text itself (Huťková 2003). Our chosen novels, set in Afghanistan, exemplify this challenge, as they are exceptionally rich in these culture-motivated elements, demanding careful navigation for their successful translation. We adopted interdisciplinary approaches, drawing insights from fields like cultural studies, postcolonial studies, sociology, or ethnology to enrich the analysis of culture-motivated expression transfer.

3 Research results and their interpretation

Currently, Khaled Hosseini stands as one of the most renowned and widely read authors focusing on Afghanistan. Through his literary works, Hosseini endeavours to bring this Eastern culture closer to Western readers. The author hopes that his readers will identify emotionally with the destinies of people in this country (BookBrowse 2003). His novels depict the enduring pain and suffering that Afghans have been experiencing for a long time.

Hosseini’s debut novel, *The Kite Runner*, stirred considerable controversy upon its release. While it gained overwhelmingly positive feedback, it also faced substantial criticism, leading to its ban by the American Library Association in 2008. Primary objections revolved around its depiction of sexual content, notably the rape of a young boy, and its use of offensive language. Other reservations were about its depictions of homosexuality, violence, religious views, support for Islam, and incitement to terrorism. Due to these objections, it was deemed unsuitable for high school readers. The novel has also attracted scholarly attention in Slovakia; for example, translation researcher Perez (*née* Janecová) claims that this "novel does not create stereotypical images of 'bad Afghans or Taliban' and 'good Americans', nor vice versa" (2011, p. 33). Hosseini himself acknowledges that the novel delves into themes that necessitate discussions with young readers before it is introduced to them by educators or parents. However, he views it as a window into distant Afghanistan, offering insights that encourage respect for family, friends, one's own culture, and respect for otherness (Jacinta 2018). Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, narrates the intertwined lives of two women, distinct in both age and social standing, bound together by marriage to a single man and a war that drives countless individuals to seek refuge abroad.

At the core of crafting an effective translation lies comprehension and understanding of the realities embedded within the text. Only through this understanding can a translator make decisions regarding the various translation techniques available, including calque, borrowing, generalization, substitution, transcription with explanation, or omission. In examining these particular expressions, we draw upon the insights of Peter Newmark's *A Textbook of Translation* (2003), who incorporates clothing within the realm of material culture. Newmark suggests that various forms of attire serve as manifestations of culture, emphasizing the necessity of providing readers with a thorough explanation in the target text. For translators, conveying such expressions entails becoming acquainted with these terms and presenting them appropriately to the intended audience. Dressing encompasses both material and spiritual aspects of culture. Our analysis primarily centres on traditional Muslim attire.

Certain foreign names have assimilated into our cultural milieu, negating the necessity for emphasis or explication:

> Mariam had never before worn a burqa. Rasheed had to help her put it on. The padded headpiece felt tight and heavy on her skull, and it was strange seeing the world through a mesh screen. She practiced walking around her room in it and kept stepping on the hem and stumbling. The loss of peripheral vision was unnerving, and she did not like the suffocating way the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth. (Hosseini 2008, p. 71)

Rashid ordered Mariam and later Laila to wear a *burqa*. *"I also ask that when we are out together, that you wear a burqa"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 217). Not only in Afghan culture but also in other Muslim countries, *"a woman's face is her husband's business only"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 69), which emphasizes the patriarchal nature of these societies.

The term *burqa* was transferred to Slovak as "burka". Neither in the original nor in the translation is the term italicized or explained, which confirms that it is a commonly used and well-known expression. In Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner*, the *burqa* as a component of Afghan attire is not explained as well; however, it is emphasized with italics. In the Slovak translations of both novels, the translators applied foreignization as a translation approach for this term. This decision helps preserve the cultural authenticity and specificity of the original text, allowing readers to encounter and engage with unfamiliar cultural concepts.

In Muslim countries, various garments exist to conceal a woman's face, hair, or whole body (Figure 1). Another illustration of veiling is the *hijāb*, referenced in both novels. From a linguistic point of view, the Arabic verb *hajaba* means "to hide, to separate". A *hijāb* serves as a form of head covering, specifically for concealing the hair. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* Mariam *"[…] wore her best hijab for him"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 22). Although this word is not explained in the original, the translator leaves it Slovak transcription and explains it as a scarf: *"[…] a zobrala si svoj najlepší hidžáb, najlepšiu šatku, akú mala."* (Hosseini 2009, p. 21), but omits the fact that she wore it for her husband. The translator opted for an intertextual clarification while rendering the term *hijāb*, yet the simplification of *hijāb* to merely a scarf is inaccurate. The reservations about this translation solution stem from its failure to capture the full essence of the term. We regard it as already "domesticated" term and thus suggest refraining from further explanation.

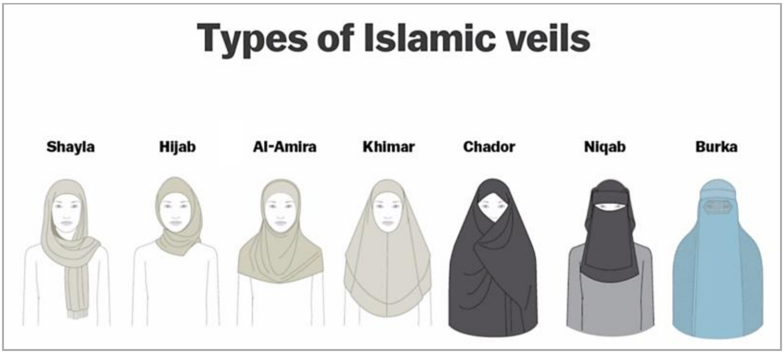

Figure 1: Types of Islamic veils
(Barrington Stage Company 2022)

A further example of a highly inaccurate translation can be found in the Slovak translation of the novel *The Kite Runner*. In this instance, there is a notable discrepancy in the depiction of the *hijāb*. In the original text, the *hijāb* is described as follows *"Women clad in black dresses, their heads covered with traditional white hijabs"* (Hosseini 2018, p. 160), indicating specific *hijabs* were white in colour. However, in the Slovak translation: *"Ženy v čiernych šatách na hlavách mali hedžáby – biele šatky, niektoré boli so závojmi"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 160), there is a divergence in the transcription and even in the explanation of the *hijāb*, which is characterized as a white scarf thus reducing it to white colour only. Moreover, the translator adds the information that some were with veils. The word *hijāb* must be carefully viewed in the context of the country, culture, and religious traditions. It is necessary to check whether the expression is used in this form in the given country and in what context. The Qur'an does not use the word *hijāb* as a part of women's clothing, but passages from the Qur'an discuss women's clothing using the other terms *jilbab* and *khimar* (Al-Sbenaty 2015). James Vyver (2017) explains that *hijāb, khilmar, or shaylah* do not require covering the face in contrast to *burqa* or *niqab*.

Not only women but also men in Afghanistan wear head coverings. One such example is *pakol* mentioned in both novels. *"He wore a potato-colored coat, and a brown wool pakol on his head"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 135) is translated into Slovak as *"Mal* *hnedožltý plášť a hnedý vlnený pakol na hlave"* (Hosseini 2009, p. 107). In *The Kite Runner*, the author portrays the characters' attire, with an emphasis on traditional Afghan clothing, e. g. *"He was dressed much as I was, thought I suppose it was really the other way around: a rough-woven wool blanket wrapped over a gray pirhan-tumban and a vest. On his head, he wore a brown pakol, tilted slightly to one side, like the Tajik hero Ahmad Shah Massoud – referred to by Tajiks as 'the Lion of Panjsher.'"* (Hosseini 2018, p. 212). In Slovak translation *"Ja som bol oblečený ako on; hrubú utkanú prikrývku mal prehodenú cez sivý peran-tumban – široké nohavice s dlhšou košeľou a vestou. Na hlave mal nasadený mierne našikmo hnedý pakol, čiapku podobnú tej, akú nosieval tadžický hrdina Ahmad Šáh Masúd, ktorého Tadžici volala i Padžšírsky lev* (Hosseini 2008, p. 211). The translator of *The Kite Runner* provided an explanation of a *pakol* as a cap. We suggest clarifying that it is a typical Afghan cap similar to a beret. The alteration in spelling from *pirhan-tumban* to *peran-tumban* was unnecessary. In the second novel, the translator maintained the original form *pirhan-tumban* with the same explanation provided in the first novel: *"Cez široké nohavice s dlhou blúzou, pirhan-tumban, má prehodený kaftan, čapan"* (Hosseini 2009, p. 310). In the original text: *"He is wearing a chapan over his pirhan-tumban"* (Hosseini 2008, p. 384).

The analysis of the selected translation strategies shows that the translators' approach to the transfer of the foreign language elements present in both novels is not uniform. It can be assumed that the translator of the second novel may have been influenced by the first translation and adopted the explanations of culture-motivated expressions. Both translators employ foreignization techniques **(RQ 1)**. However, in comparison to the second novel, the first novel establishes closer proximity to the reader by incorporating intertextual explanations. Given the existence of a prior translation of *The Kite Runner* in the Slovak cultural context, the translator of the second novel opted for increased foreignization in the translation.

4 Conclusion

Translating literary works into another language serves as a bridge to understanding diverse cultures. Through translation, these texts assimilate into the cultural milieu, bringing fresh insights. The process of translating texts, particularly those originating from diverse Eastern cultures, requires more than just linguistic proficiency. It demands a deep understanding of the socio-cultural intricacies embedded within the original works. Translators serve as cultural mediators, tasked with accurately conveying not only the words but also the cultural nuances and meanings of the source text to the target audience. This study, focusing on the transfer of Muslim fashion designations in Khaled Hosseini's novels, highlights the importance of considering concepts like foreignization and naturalization to bridge the gap between cultures. Hosseini's novels offer readers a plethora of cultural, religious, political, historical, and literary themes for discussion, often serving as their initial gateway into this particular culture. However, keeping this gateway transparent in the resulting translation is undoubtedly a huge challenge (Janecová, 2011). Ultimately, effective translation is crucial for enriching literature and fostering intercultural understanding.

The analysis of translation strategies employed in the two novels reveals a lack of uniformity in the translators' approaches to handling foreign language elements. Both translators utilize foreignization techniques, but the first novel stands out for its inclusion of intertextual explanations, fostering a closer connection with the reader. The decision to increase foreignization in the translation of the second novel could be attributed to the existence of a prior translation in the Slovak cultural context. The quality of translations reflects a society's openness to embracing these kinds of literary texts (Biloveský 2011). Social, cultural, and fashion trends gradually become part of the national culture. Countries should do everything they can to ensure that the differences, particularities, and peculiarities inherent in national cultures or countries do not disappear. They are their most valuable wealth, their heritage, which must be further developed (Ibid.).

To keep a balance between the tension in clarity and comprehensibility of the translation and preserving authenticity in transferring Muslim fashion designations, we advocate faithfulness to the original text while ensuring clear and understandable translations culture-motivated expressions. Embracing foreignization as a translation strategy proves apt, as it not only enriches the readers' experience but also mirrors the essence of the source text. Hence, integrating in-text explanations becomes imperative, serving as nuanced annotations that introduce fresh cultural perspectives to the reader. This approach, known as "equivalent concretization" (in Slovak "ekvivalentná konkretizácia") (Levý 2012), ensures the seamless transmission of cultural intricacies across linguistic boundaries.

Summary in plain English

This article focuses on how to translate names of Muslim clothing in novels by Khaled Hosseini from English to Slovak to make the text easy to understand while keeping the authenticity of the original text. It is not just about the words themselves, but also the cultural meaning behind the clothing and how they are connected to personal identity. One way to do this is to use a strategy called foreignization. However, just using the original words might not be enough. To make sure readers understand everything, it is helpful to add short explanations within the text. These explanations can be used in the form of footnotes that explain the cultural meaning of the terms. This approach is called "equivalent concretization" (in Slovak "ekvivalentná konkretizácia") (Levý 2012), and it helps bridge the gap between different languages and cultures. To ensure the accurate transfer of these expressions, the translator needs to, first of all, know the source culture, understand it and then they can provide a comprehensible translation.

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Part II

Intralingual Translation as a Tool for Accessibility

Putting the Right to Understand into Practice: Translating into English as a Lingua Franca

Michael E. Dove

Abstract

This chapter considers how the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca (ELF) should affect translation into English. English is the world's most widely spoken language, but the majority of the world's anglophones are non-native and, most likely, not advanced English users. Translation can thus only serve as a local-to-global mode of communication if target texts are adapted to lower proficiency levels, thereby making them accessible to ELF users. To this aim, text simplification techniques are demonstrated on two travel guide excerpts originally intended for native anglophone readers. In conclusion, Dove argues that such an approach to translation into English is key to global communication and understanding, which can be conceived of as rights.

Keywords: English as a lingua franca, translation, text simplification, right to understand

1 Introduction: English as a lingua franca (ELF)

In the years shortly after it was established as a field of study by "founding mothers" Barbara Seidlhofer, Anna Mauranen, and Jennifer Jenkins (D'Angelo 2014, 97), English as a lingua franca (ELF) tended to focus on hypothetical distinguishing features, or even putative emerging varieties, of English used among its non-native speakers worldwide (Selvi et al. 2023, 21). By the early 2010s, scholars' (including those already mentioned) conception of ELF had shifted; instead of denoting a specific set of features, it was used to describe the fluid, context-dependent phenomenon of "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice" (Seidlhofer 2011, 7). In this conception of ELF, it is seen as a complex system, codetermined by a variety of potential factors, which may (but need not always) include the (by definition) different native languages of the interlocutors. (Jenkins 2017a, 343–344). Finally, in recent years, the field of ELF has broadened to include "translanguaging", the use of English alongside other languages in multilingual communication, which Jenkins dubbed "English as a *multi*-lingua franca" (Jenkins 2017b, 601).

1.1 The current state of ELF

While the taxonomy of the forms of English used by speakers of other languages (ESOL) around the world is a matter of ongoing scholarly debate, it is an indisputable fact that English is spoken as a non-native language by well over one billion people in various corners of the globe, far more than native speakers of English, who amount to less than 400 million (Salomone 2022, 9). It is also clear that this rise in the numbers of non-native speakers of English has been accompanied by an increased interest in non-native English use in research, as well as its representation in ESOL teaching materials. A telling example of the latter can be seen in the British Council's series of educational videos *What to Say!* (British Council 2024a). Though the British Council's stated aims include "[promoting] cultural relationships between the people of the United Kingdom and other countries" (British Council 2024b), it may still come as a surprise that these videos feature some speakers with markedly non-native accents, not only as characters, but also as the main presenter. This is not a coincidence – the videos' creators took an approach informed by ELF research (Jo Budden, personal communication, 9 Feb 2024). As such research reveals the realities of how English is used in the world today, it provides a clearer picture of English learners' needs. For the same reason, translation and translator education should also take such findings into account.

1.2 Definition of terms

For the purposes of this chapter, when I use the term *English as a lingua franca*, or *ELF*, I am referring to any form of English that is used among non-native anglophones. More specifically, when referring to *translation into ELF*, I use a reception-focused definition: translation into English for a (partly or mostly) non-native anglophone readership.

2 Translation into ELF

The implications of ELF for translation into English have been a subject of discussion among translation scholars for some time. One of the important questions in this discussion is, similarly to TESOL, the role of native-speaker norms. As Juliane House observes,

> the assumption underpinning the debate on [translation into English by non-native English users] is that translators should adhere to the expectations of native-English readers, rather than those of readers using English as a lingua franca. (House 2013, 289)

While I subscribe to the view that the pedestalization of native-speaker norms is out of touch with the reality of how English is used today, I also recognize that such norms still play an important role (see Hewson 2013, 269), because when people from disparate parts of the world communicate with each other in English, having a common point of reference contributes to mutual understanding (Bøhn & Hansen 2020, 14; cf. Holliday 2015, 22–23).

As language policy expert Rosemary Salomone relates, non-native speakers of English now vastly outnumber native speakers, and thus

> it is argued that anglophone countries, and particularly the United States and the United Kingdom […] don't have the right to determine the standards for what is authentic or acceptable. English now belongs to the world." (Salomone 2022, p. 9)

On the other hand, Salomone also points out that:

> Only one-quarter of the world's population has some minimal degree of competence in English. Even those who claim to have conversational skills in English often don't operate at a very high level of proficiency. And so monolingual anglophones cannot effectively communicate with three-quarters of the world, nor can they tap into knowledge created in those languages." (Salomone 2022, p. 13)

While Salomone emphasizes the disadvantage at which this circumstance places monolingual anglophones, the reverse is also surely the case: the overwhelming global majority who do not speak English are also disadvantaged, lacking access to communication not only with monolingual anglophones, but also with those of the world's approximately 1.5 billion English speakers with whom they do not share a common language. In other words, English's status as the most-spoken language in the world, but one still only spoken by roughly one-quarter of the world's population, presents a problem for access to communication and information.

2.1 English proficiency levels across the globe

Though Salomone cites statistics on the number of English users, unfortunately, there do not appear to be reliable longitudinal data on these users' proficiency levels at the regional or global scale.

Two sources often cited for such data are the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) and the 2012 Eurobarometer 386. In a study correlating the results of these two sources, however, Takeno and Moritoshi conclude that

> there currently exists no valid, reliable and practical instrument or methodology by which a sufficiently large and representative dataset can be collected to compare one country's population with another with respect to their proficiency in any language. (Takeno & Moritoshi 2021, 19)

Despite being influential and widely cited, the Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) has major problems in terms of sampling bias, as it is based on non-representative samples: namely, respondents who voluntarily take the company's online English test (thus excluding anyone without internet access). And since, to point out only one of the many flaws in this method, those who are motivated to test their English are unlikely to include those with low-to-nonexistent English proficiency or those with very high proficiency, it logically follows that the results of these surveys are of very limited utility. Furthermore, EF EPI's methods vary significantly from year to year (De Angelis 2023, 5). Education First states some of these limitations in their reports (see EF EPI 2023, 44–45), but this does not stop scholars, policy makers and media outlets from extrapolating conclusions from their data, given the lack of other data sources on the subject. In the European Union, for example, the first and last European Survey on Language Competences (European Commission 2012a), as well as the most recent Eurobarometer survey on languages (European Commission 2012b), were both published in 2012.

Nevertheless, given the influence of the EF English Proficiency Index, it is worth looking into the overall impressions it conveys, the questionable data notwithstanding. Their 2023 report, for example, states,

> "We're a long way from the catastrophic predictions of worldwide English hegemony, but we're also no nearer to equalizing access to the opportunities speaking English affords." (EF EPI 2023, 4)

This seemingly contradictory statement points to an important distinction: the disparity between the demand for access to English-language discourse and the supply of such access. Given the fact that Education First is an education company, it is not surprising that their proposed solutions to this discrepancy emphasize expanding English instruction and raising English proficiency criteria within businesses, education policy and schools. Apart from promoting the use of subtitles instead of dubbing, the role of translation in addressing this deficit is absent (EF EPI 2023, 42).

According to the 2012 Eurobarometer survey, roughly one-quarter of respondents could understand TV or radio news in English, read a newspaper in English, or communicate in English via the internet. Given such figures, it is likely that the number of very highly proficient (C1–C2 on the CEFR scale) users of English remain a small minority in the non-anglophone EU and, it is reasonable to assume, elsewhere outside the anglosphere as well. As the value of English increases (encompassing more and more of the media, information, gaining social capital, expected by employers), so does the need for it. One way this small minority of highly proficient English users in countries outside the anglosphere can respond to this societal need (grant the others access) is through translation.

3 Case study: Parallel texts?

Parallel text is a term with at least two separate senses in translation studies. In this chapter, I am using *parallel text* not in the sense of side-by-side L1 and L2 texts, as in a parallel corpus, but in the sense defined by Neubert:

> L2 and L1 texts of similar informativity which are used in more or less identical communicative situations. True parallel texts are not the results of previous translation. (Neubert & Shreve 1992, 89)

The most extensive source of parallel texts for translations into ELF is *Simple English Wikipedia*, which Coster & Kauchak used to create an English–Simple-English parallel corpus (Coster & Kauchak 2011). However, as of this writing there is no Simple English version of *Wikitravel*, and so for parallel texts for genres such as travel guides, we must look elsewhere.

3.1 The example texts

In this part, I examine two potential parallel texts for translations of travel guides for tourists from Slovak into English.

Text 1 (Lonely Planet's introduction to Slovakia):

> Right in the heart of Europe, Slovakia is a land of castles and mountains, occasionally punctuated by industrial sprawl. More than a quarter-century after Czechoslovakia's break-up, Slovakia has emerged as a self-assured, independent nation. Capital city Bratislava draws visitors to its resplendent old town and tankard-clanking drinking culture. But Slovakia shines brightest for lovers of the outdoors. Walking trails in the High Tatras wend through landscapes of unearthly beauty, with mirror-still glacier lakes backed by 2000m peaks. (Lonely Planet 2024)

Text 2 (Rough Guides' introduction to Central Slovakia):

> If you're partial to an undulating hill or a winding mossy way, Central Slovakia is your kind of place. Quiet and agrarian, it's the heart of Slovakia; the cradle of Romantic Nationalism in the nineteenth century and the seat of the Slovak National Uprising in

> 1944. The way of life is slow, as are the trains, but what it lacks in zip it repays in beauty. (Turner 2021)

Both texts contain many elements characteristic of contemporary professional travel writing: an eclectic, yet seamless synthesis of registers, combining the familiar, colloquial register (contractions, colloquialisms such as *zip* and *break-up*) with somewhat loftier, more literary words (*undulating*, *resplendent*, *agrarian*) and turns of phrase (*partial to*, *punctuated by*), even some transparent, idiomatic nonce compounds (*tankard-clanking*, *mirror-still*). Lonely Planet's use of descriptive, dynamic verbs in nearly every sentence (*emerged*, *draws*, *shines*, *wend*) would certainly please most teachers of composition and editors alike. And both texts feature complex sentence structures, particularly a variety of parenthetical phrases (introductory prepositional – *Right in the heart of Europe*, adjectival – *Quiet and agrarian*, participial – *occasionally punctuated by industrial sprawl*).

The result conforms to native anglophone norms for this type of text, and it would thus presumably appeal to (or at least serve its purpose for) literate native speakers of English. But what about non-native readers? For many of them, those who read at the C1 level or below, the features listed above present an impediment to comprehension – at the very least slowing or discouraging B2 and C1 readers, and being ineffective (from a *skopos* standpoint, i.e. not effectively fulfilling the text's purpose) or even incomprehensible to B1 or lower readers. Consequently, such texts are not appropriate as parallel texts or models for translations into English as a lingua franca.

3.2 Choosing the appropriate CEFR level – a conundrum

The CEFR level descriptions can provide guidance on adapting target texts to their intended readers, but only once the target reader profile is specified. The difficulty of determining such a profile in community translating is pointed out by Määttä (2020, 289–290), and this extends to other types of texts as well, including those for tourists (Stewart 2013, 219). English texts in public spaces, for example, contain information of potential importance not only to native English speakers, or high-proficiency (C1–C2 level) English users but to the majority of the planet's inhabitants. And if we assume that the majority of the Earth's English users are at a level below C1, this should be taken into account in the translation process – if the sender is interested in reaching a broad global audience. For a text intended to reach the broadest possible audience, such as a public safety announcement, the most basic possible level of English should be chosen that can still convey the message accurately and otherwise fulfill its aim (e.g. getting the reader's attention and being memorable).

Informative texts for tourists are a less straightforward case. One might, for example, assume that a tourist relying on English while traveling outside the anglosphere would be able to "exploit a wide range of simple language to deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling", which is part of the oral interaction component at the B1 level (Council of Europe 2020, 72). On the other hand, depending on the context, there might be a significant minority, or even majority, of potential readers at a lower level. The sender and translation should thus deeply consider the target text's particular reception context and aim in order to determine the proper target level.

Knowledge presuppositions, in keeping with the *skopos* school of source-text analysis (Nord 2006, 53), should also be taken into account. The Oscars (i.e. the Academy Awards) cannot be assumed to be common knowledge of all the world's English users, but the CEFR description mentions them not as common knowledge, but as "an event that follows a predictable pattern" (Council of Europe 2020, 59).

Imagine for a moment that the Rough Guides and Lonely Planet texts above were to be used in an information booklet for tourists in Slovakia – including the non-native anglophone majority. Clearly they would need to be adapted for such a purpose. And given that B1 English users are, by definition, "independent users", and thus can be expected to be capable of using ELF while travelling, I have chosen B1 as the target level.

3.3 Adaptation target: B1 reading comprehension

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, English users at the B1 level can be expected to have the following reading comprehension skills. The bold print is my emphasis, pointing out potential barriers to reading comprehension:

- Can read **straightforward factual** texts on **subjects related to their field of interest** with a satisfactory level of comprehension.
- Can scan through **straightforward**, **factual** texts in magazines, brochures or on the web, identify what they are about and decide whether they contain information that might be of practical use. Can find and understand relevant information in **everyday** material, such as letters, brochures and short official documents. […] Can understand the important information in **simple**, **clearly drafted** adverts in newspapers or magazines, **provided there are not too many abbreviations**.
- Can identify the main conclusions in **clearly signalled** argumentative texts.
- Can understand instructions and procedures in the form of a continuous text, for instance in a manual, **provided they are familiar with the type of process or product concerned**. Can understand **clearly expressed**, **straightforward** instructions for a piece of equipment. Can follow **simple** instructions given on packaging (e.g. cooking instructions). Can understand most **short** safety instructions, (e.g. on public transport or in manuals for the use of electrical equipment).
- Can understand **simple** poems and song lyrics provided these employ **straightforward language and style**. Can understand descriptions of places, events, **explicitly expressed** feelings and perspectives in narratives, guides and magazine articles that employ **high frequency everyday language**. […] Can follow the plot of stories, **simple** novels and comics **with a clear linear storyline** and **high frequency everyday language**, **given regular use of a dictionary**. (Council of Europe 2020, 54–59; my emphasis)

3.4 Example texts adapted to B1 for ELF

As an example, I have adapted the travel-guide texts mentioned above to the B1 level. My goal was not to produce roughly tuned input (language that presents a manageable challenge to learners at the given level), but finely tuned input (language that stays at or under the given level as much as possible) (Harmer 1991, 40), in order to maximize comprehension with minimal effort or B1 users and even allow lower-level users to understand, albeit with more effort.

Text 1 (Lonely Planet)	
Original text	**Adapted text**
Right in the heart of Europe, Slovakia is a land of castles and mountains, occasionally punctuated by industrial sprawl. More than a quarter-century after Czechoslovakia's break-up, Slovakia has emerged as a self-assured, independent nation. Capital city Bratislava draws visitors to its resplendent old town and tankard-clanking drinking culture. But Slovakia shines brightest for lovers of the outdoors. Walking trails in the High Tatras wend through landscapes of unearthly beauty, with mirror-still glacier lakes backed by 2000m peaks. (Lonely Planet 2024)	Slovakia is right in the middle of Europe. It has many beautiful castles and mountains. But it also has a few areas that are not so beautiful, like factories. In 1992, Czechoslovakia separated into two countries: Czechia and Slovakia. Since that time, Slovakia has become a confident, independent country. Tourists like to go to the capital city, Bratislava, to see its beautiful old centre and go to its fun, friendly bars. But Slovakia is most popular with people who love nature. In Slovakia's highest mountains, the High Tatras, hiking paths go by fantastically beautiful places, like still, mirror-like glacial lakes next to 2000m mountains.
Text 2 (Rough Guides)	
Original text	**Adapted text**
If you're partial to an undulating hill or a winding mossy way, Central Slovakia is your kind of place. Quiet and agrarian, it's the	Slovakia is right in the middle of Europe. It has many beautiful castles and mountains. But it also has a few areas that are not so

heart of Slovakia; the cradle of Romantic Nationalism in the nineteenth century and the seat of the Slovak National Uprising in 1944. The way of life is slow, as are the trains, but what it lacks in zip it repays in beauty. (Turner 2021)	beautiful, like factories. In 1992, Czechoslovakia separated into two countries: Czechia and Slovakia. Since that time, Slovakia has become a confident, independent country. Tourists like to go to the capital city, Bratislava, to see its beautiful old centre and go to its fun, friendly bars. But Slovakia is most popular with people who love nature. In Slovakia's highest mountains, the High Tatras, hiking paths go by fantastically beautiful places, like still, mirror-like glacial lakes next to 2000m mountains.

Table 1: Texts adapted to ELF

3.5 Techniques for adapting texts to ELF

In the second column in Table 1 above, I adapted the texts in several ways, applying the CEFR's expectations of B2-level readers and the techniques presented in Rets et al. (2022), a descriptive study of the approaches to text simplification taken by EFL teachers who were native speakers of Chinese, Spanish, and Russian. The primary techniques I used were:

1. **Replacing low-frequency expressions with high-frequency ones** (Rets et al. 2022, 37), e.g. *beautiful* instead of *resplendent*. This brings the text closer to the "high frequency everyday language" the CEFR expects of texts at the B1 level (Council of Europe 2020, 59). For this I used the Oxford Text Checker[1]. Note that different senses of words can have different frequencies; for example, according to Oxford University Press's categorization, *heart* in the physiological sense is an A2-level word, while *heart* in the figurative sense of a central area or part is a B2-level word (Oxford University Press 2024). I left the word *glacial* because I could not find a more-frequent semantic equivalent, and while the word conveys useful information, one

can still understand the overall text without understanding *glacial*.

2. **Adding clarification** (Rets et al. 2022, 40), e.g. *the Slovak National Uprising* *<u>against the Nazis in 1944, during World War II</u>*, as European history may fall outside of some readers' "field of interest", a prerequisite for B1 comprehension of factual texts according to the CEFR (Council of Europe 2020, 54).
3. **Splitting complex sentences into simpler ones** (Rets et al. 2022, 38), as in the first sentence of text 1. Note that this makes the text longer, but not at the expense of intelligibility.
4. **Replacing the passive voice with the active** (ibid., 39), e.g. *punctuated by → it also has a few*.
5. **Adding logical connectives** (ibid., 40–41), e.g. *<u>But</u> it also has a few areas that are not so beautiful*.
6. **Adding emotional emphasizers** (ibid., 37–38), e.g. *industrial sprawl → areas that are not so beautiful, like factories*. This explicates implicit attitudes and connotations in the text, fulfilling the CEFR's criterion of "explicitly expressed feelings and perspectives" for the B1 level (Council of Europe 2020, 57).[2]
7. **Replacing contractions with full forms**. Note that the United States government's "Plain language guidelines" recommend the use of contractions to "make legal writing […] less stuffy and more natural", citing lexicographer Bryan Garner (US General Services Administration 2011, 27). However, these guidelines are clearly oriented towards US residents, those who "are accustomed to hearing contractions in spoken English" (ibid., 27), unlike many English users outside the anglosphere. By contrast, Simple English Wikipedia's guidelines recommend avoiding contractions, as long forms are more recognizable to learners of English (Wikipedia contributors 2023).

Note that this list of techniques is by no means exhaustive. In administrative, legal, and academic texts, for example, using verbs to refer to actions instead of nominalizations and other nouns is a common practice for improving intelligibility (Rets et al. 2022, 40; Määttä 2020, 298–300).

3.4 Large language models: A word of caution

Large language models (LLMs), and the text generators based on them, offer the possibility of automated text adaptation, including text simplification. However, LLMs' tendency to "hallucinate", that is, to "[generate] content that is nonsensical or unfaithful to the provided source content", introduces new and unpredictable types of errors (Huang et al. 2023, 6). Such errors, including subtle semantic shifts, are very difficult to spot, even for the most proficient users of English, as demonstrated by Marián Kabát's workshop at the 2024 Winter Translation School (Kabát 2024). And since such errors may be "an innate limitation of large language models" (Xu et al. 2024, 1), it is important to ask ourselves whether LLM-based tools' apparent convenience is worth the risk of such errors or, even in an ideal scenario, the time it takes to detect and correct them.

3.5 Potential drawbacks of ELF adaptation

Lacking many of the traditional features of professional travel guides in English (see above), these texts may be unsatisfactory for highly proficient readers of English, such as native anglophones, for whom they may appear boring or childish. And since translators themselves should be highly proficient at both source and target language, producing a text such as this may feel disappointing to them, as I have sometimes noticed among my students of translation. But if the target readers are at a lower level of English proficiency, the translator would be well advised to heed that oft-repeated maxim of composition teachers and editors: "Kill your darlings!" In other words, the text should prioritize the sender's aim and the target reader's needs, and these should not be subordinated to the translator's reading preferences, desire to display their high proficiency, or personal writer's voice.

On the other hand, a cure to such disappointment is to point out that, to use the common writer's adage, "the easiest reading is damned hard writing!" Indeed, text simplification is a sophisticated process, demanding high language proficiency, skill, and ingenuity.

Moreover, translation into ELF is a rewarding, worthwhile activity. It shares these qualities with translation, including the closely related practice of intralingual translation.

4. Conclusion: The right to understand?

What makes translating into ELF such a worthwhile activity? One reason for translating into English as a lingua franca is illustrated in the travel guide excerpts above, which provide a useful but incomplete overall impression of (Central) Slovakia. Travel guides written by cultural outsiders, even if they are well researched and provide a valuable perspective, are unlikely to provide a complete picture of an area. The body of texts written by cultural insiders, on the other hand, contains multitudes, and the only way to convey these multitudes to the outside world (not just to native anglophones) is to translate them into English as a lingua franca. For a country like Slovakia, where the number amount of literature translated <u>from</u> English dwarfs that of translation <u>into</u> English (Staviarska 2021, 118–119), this constitutes an unfulfilled cultural and economic demand.

Another argument for translating into ELF is the conception of communication and understanding as rights. In several articles, scholar, translator and teacher Bill Templer proposes implementing simplified English varieties such as Ogden's Basic English in education systems outside the anglosphere. He argues for a "*TESOL of equity*", asserting that "all individuals on this planet should have the right to learn an efficient, compact lingua franca for trans-cultural and trans-national communication" (Templer 2012, 60). And if we accept that people are entitled to learn such a language, it can be logically inferred that this should be accompanied by access to information provided in such a language. Otherwise, knowledge of a simplified version of English or simply English at a lower level cannot engage in such ELF discourse. In his essay on translation ethics, translation scholar Andrew Chesterman makes the case for a putative responsibility of translators to provide for such needs:

> One corollary of this general argument would be that translators should be aware of whether they are translating for native or also non-native readers of the target text: this may affect their

> translation strategies, choice of lexis and idiom, etc. To exclude readers, albeit non-native readers, might even be construed as denying them their right to understand. (Chesterman 1995, 156)

To make such accessibly-written information available, the traditional approach to translation – using target-language native-speaker norms as a touchstone – is inadequate. Instead, these norms should be replaced with an adapted, more accessible model of English. From this standpoint, TESOL and text production can be imagined as two lengths of string opposite each other: only when both extend toward each other – by improving students' English proficiency through education on the one hand, and by making English texts more accessible on the other – can the two lengths of string finally meet and be tied together, enabling communication and understanding.

Summary in plain English

This chapter is by Michael Dove. It is about translating into English.

More people speak English than any other language. Some of them are native English speakers. Native English speakers are people who grew up speaking English, because it was the first language they learned. Most people who speak English do not understand English as well as native English speakers. When these people talk to each other in English, we call it "English as a lingua franca".

Translators should write translations that are easy for most people to understand. Michael shows how to make written English easier to understand. He uses two examples. They are both from tourist guidebooks. They were made for native English speakers. Michael makes them easier to understand, and he shows you how he did it.

People should be able to communicate and understand. Translators can help people to communicate and understand by making their translations easier to understand.

Notes

[1] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/text-checker/

[2] Keep in mind that there are also situations where *reducing* expressivity can facilitate understanding, as Zuzana Bohušová notes above in the chapter "Neutralizations as Tools of Comprehensibility: Using Translation as an Example".

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Accessible Language Through Intralingual Translation

Isabel Rink
Rebecca Schulz

Abstract

This chapter focuses on communicative participation within the context of accessibility as defined by the German Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (BGG). While accessibility encompasses various areas of life, this chapter focuses on language as a pivotal element for expression, discourse participation and knowledge acquisition. The authors address the diverse communication barriers and present the concept of translation as a way to overcome these barriers. The chapter explores intralingual translation, specifically into Easy Language, highlighting the competences required for translating and interpreting. In this article, Easy Language refers to German Easy Language, *Leichte Sprache*. Easy Language serves as a crucial means to overcoming communication barriers, fostering social participation.

Keywords: accessible language, intralingual translation, Leichte Sprache, Easy Language, translation competences, communicative barriers

Introduction

On closer examination of the definition of accessibility in the German Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (BGG), it does not appear to highlight communicative participation. However, accessibility affects different areas of life and therefore, is a cross-sectoral issue. Language, when defined as an either oral or written connection to the world, is one important prerequisite for people's ability to express their opinion, participate in discourses and acquire knowledge. Very often, however, we forget that language can pose barriers by excluding many recipients.

According to Maaß & Rink (2020, 39), barriers can reject access to buildings, contents or social discourses. Correspondingly, they can be of a physical, communicative or discursive nature (ibid.).

Physical barriers refer to inaccessibility with regard to space: An event, a public authority, medical practice, workspace or place of learning is only accessible for as many individuals as possible if different means of access are ensured (Maaß & Rink 2020, 40). **Communicative barriers** deny access to language and content. Accordingly, texts or information and communication products in general can pose barriers to different target groups and limit their participation if they are not adapted adequately to diverse audiences with special communicative needs (Rink 2024, 33ff, Rink 2020, 27ff). **Discourse barriers** affect parameters such as expertise, status and role models. Our advanced society still deprives people with disabilities competence and profound knowledge in different fields of action: A deaf-blind student, a politician with prelingual hearing loss or a cognitively impaired receptionist at the dental practice are hard to imagine (Maaß & Rink 2020, 42). The reason is that large parts of society assess people with disabilities primarily on the basis of their handicap and in turn, people with disabilities can hardly be found in professional positions such as in politics, universities or public authorities (ibid.).

In this chapter, the focus is on accessibility through translation as a part of accessible communication. This is a new field of action in practice and research, promoted by legal requirements on the national and international level. First, a definition of accessible communication is given. After that the focus is on translation, augmented by a new conceptualization of translation as overcoming communication barriers. Subchapter 2 deals with accessible language through intralingual translation; competences for Easy Language translation are presented. A short conclusion summarizes the results.

1 Accessibility through translation

In translation studies, translation can be understood as the umbrella term for translating on the one hand and interpreting on the other. Thus, a distinction is made between transferring information in writing (translating) or orally (interpreting) (Kade 1968). Jakobson (1959, 233) divides the term translation into three categories, interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation:

> […] Interlingual translation [...] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
> [...] Intralingual translation [...] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
> [...] Intersemiotic translation [...] is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.

In the sense of translation proper (ibid.), translation can be understood as the interlingual transfer of information between two languages. This definition dominated Translation Studies for many years, with the result that the other two types, intralingual and intersemiotic, were excluded (Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2019, 1) or less appreciated. However, functionalist approaches such as Reiß/Vermeer (1984) proposed that the language barrier is not the only one that plays an important role in translation as texts are also adapted to different cultures and/or target situations (Risku 1998).

1.1 Accessible communication (and target groups)

In recent years, a new conceptualisation of translation was brought forward by research on accessible communication. In this field the basic assumption is that target groups may face different communication barriers regarding concrete communicative settings or target situations.

The underlying assumption is that these target groups may face communication barriers if the content is not properly adapted to their communicative needs and expectations. The content as such excludes the recipients as it is not accessible to them: A **sensory barrier** may come into play if the target groups cannot perceive the content. Texts can also represent a **cognitive barrier** if the information is too abstract for them to process. If the text's physical presentation is not suitable for the users, it represents a **motor barrier**. An **expert knowledge barrier** may arise if domain-specific knowledge is necessary to understand the text. This barrier is often accompanied by an **expert language barrier** if the language variety used is too domain-specific. If the text's channel of distribution and media presentation do not correspond to the target groups' preferences and expectations, the text may represent a **media barrier**. And finally, a text can represent a **motivational and**

emotional barrier if the content does not appear useful or if it leads to strong emotions that consume their comprehension resources (see also Schubert 2016, Rink 2019 and 2020, Lang 2021).

Overcoming these communication barriers is perceived as the main goal of accessible communication, and this intended aim overlaps in large parts with that of a translator (see Bredel & Maaß 2016, Maaß & Rink 2019, Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2019, Maaß 2020, Rink 2020 and 2023). This suggests that these barriers can be adopted into a new concept of translation where translation is defined in a broader sense as overcoming communication barriers (see Subchapter 1.2).

It leads to the following understanding of accessible communication according to Maaß & Rink (2024, 24):

> Accessible communication encompasses all measures of reducing communication barriers in various situational fields of action. Communication barriers can exist with regard to the sensory organs and/or the cognitive prerequisites of the communication participants as well as with regard to the language, expert language, expert knowledge, cultural and media requirements that texts impose upon recipients. Communication barriers arise where texts are not adequately adapted to the target situation and the target audience.

This is why professional translation is needed.

1.2 Translation as overcoming communication barriers

In this context, accessible communication suggests that several communication barriers have to be overcome in order to make information accessible for different target groups. That is because the prototypical understanding of translation as translation proper "no longer adequately reflects the changed job profile of a translator based on current market developments" (Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2019, 1; own translation). Current developments including machine translation, artificial intelligence, an increasing amount of information, digitalisation etc. create a new job profile for translators and interpreters. Moreover, these developments do not display communicative variety in all its facets as presented in Article 2 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (CRPD 2006, 4). The new definition of translation as overcoming communication barriers includes pre-existing definitions of translation (e.g. Jakobson 1959, Reiß & Vermeer 1984) but increases the understanding of the translation process and expertise that is needed.

In accessible communication research, two perspectives are taken into account: text perspective and user perspective (see also Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2020). With regard to the text perspective, “[t]exts must have certain features in order to enable users to perform in the described way” (Maaß 2020, 28). Therefore, it has to be a given that the texts are of high quality, which, in turn, creates different requirements for the translator as a professional (see 2.1).

In addition to the prototypical understanding of translating, the focus is not only on language and culture, but the translator has to systematically reduce a number of barriers within the translation process (see Subchapter 1.1).

In the production of a target text, the translator strategically revises the communication barriers so that the users are able to process the given information in order to reach the point that enables them to act on its basis (Maaß 2020, 28). Successful communication is an interplay between text and user perspective. First of all, the texts should be retrievable for the target groups; target groups should be able to find the content with the means at their disposal. Texts should also be perceptible; target groups should perceive the content with the sensory channels at their disposal. Comprehensibility is also vital for content to be accessible; target groups should be able to comprehend the text. If information is linkable to previous knowledge, it is easier for the target groups to recall information. Texts should also be acceptable for the target groups. And finally, content should be action-enabling for the target groups; they should be able to act on the text’s information.

This accessibility concept (Maaß & Rink 2019, 24; English version in Maaß & Rink 2024, 15) supports translation professionals in the creation of content suited to their target groups’ communicative needs and expectations. It helps to recognize which steps are being obstructed by communication barriers in order to find strategies to overcome them. With a view to intralingual translation, this will be the focus of the next subchapter.

2 Accessible language through intralingual translation

One of the unique features of accessible communication is that this field is interwoven with legal requirements (Lang 2021, 31ff). People with special communicative needs can claim accessible communication offers, viz. communication products without communication barriers, in order to ensure linguistic participation (CRPD 2006, 4; for the German context see also the Ordinance on Barrier-Free Information Technology, BITV 2.0 and the German Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, BGG §11). This means that different groups have the right to use communication aids, for example Easy Language translation, screen-reader-optimised documents or audio description as a means to fulfill equality policies.

Many components of these communication offers and products are a result of professional intralingual translation processes in which information or content is "adequately adapted to the target situation and the [concrete] target audience" (Maaß & Rink 2024, 24) by lowering communication barriers. But, in contrast to interlingual translation, this approach is far more user-centred as the offers are broader in addressing vulnerable groups (see also Rink & Schulz 2022, 210). This means that the quality of the translation product is of special significance. It has to empower its recipients in the sense of being action-enabling (Ahrens et al. 2022, 13).

Referring to translation as the umbrella term for translating and interpreting, this distinction can also be made for intralingual translation. In the following, the focus will be on translating and interpreting into Easy Language as one form of accessible communication.

2.1 Translating into Easy Language

Rink (2023) states that for Easy Language translation as a form of intralingual translation, similar professional competencies are required as for interlingual translation. This pertains to both translating and interpreting (see below) as the translation product has to be adequate and functional within the respective target situation.

With regard to the new conceptualisation of translation as overcoming communication barriers (Rink 2019, 2020) and based on the PACTE model 2003, Rink (2023, 244) lists the following skills as a basis for producing professional communication products that meet the special communicative needs of heterogeneous target groups:

- linguistic and extra-linguistic competences
- knowledge about translation competence
- instrumental competence
- strategic competence

Pursuant to Rink (ibid., 245) **linguistic competence** "covers knowledge about pragmatic conventions, registers or dialects, textual knowledge, knowledge about text types and structures or lexicon, grammar and morphology [...] [and can be] supplemented by knowledge about the features of comprehensibility enhanced varieties such as Plain Language, Easy Language Plus or Easy Language (see Maaß 2020)." As it relates to substantial knowledge of a language system it enhances accessibility by primarily lowering the language barrier, but the cognitive, expert language and partially the cultural barrier are also addressed (ibid.).

Extra-linguistic competence is related to knowledge about the different target audiences. As a kind of (dia-)cultural competence it "comprises knowledge about the differing communicative needs of the primary target groups which varies with regard to available language, discourse and subject knowledge as prerequisite for text comprehension" (ibid.). This competence qualifies for strategic lowering of cognitive, language, expert knowledge, cultural and media barriers.

Knowledge about translation competence relates to translation-specific expert knowledge and comprises translation strategies and techniques as well as an awareness for job market conditions and ethos. Moreover, it involves a professionally structured working method using tools "such as dictionaries, parallel texts, translation memories, terminology databases etc." and can be summarised with the term **instrumental competence** (ibid.).

Strategic competence can be seen as an umbrella term affecting all the aforementioned competences. It is about researching, analyzing, planning as well as implementing and evaluating the translation process (ibid.).

While all these skills primarily affect the translation process as professional action, the **psycho-physiological components** concern the translator's mental and cognitive conditions, "motivation and creativity" as well as his/her range of experience (Rink 2023, 246f).

As accessibility in this context is concerned with language, the communication product must be accessible. This means that, with regard to the concrete target audience and situation, all communicative barriers are removed by translation.

2.2 Interpreting into Easy Language

As interpreting into Easy Language – just like translating into Easy Language – crosses a variety border within the same language, it "can [...] be classified as intralingual interpreting" (Schulz et al. 2020, 167). While the need for accessible communication in the context of comprehensibility-enhanced written text has been established in research and practice, simplifying oral communication is a relatively new discipline (Schulz et al. 2020, 163). The aim is "to make orally represented content in a standard language or specialized language accessible to people who do not or only insufficiently understand it" (ibid., 167). Since 2013, when Easy Language interpreting was first implemented, the German market for interpreting services has noticed an increasing demand for intralingual interpreting (ibid.). Easy Language interpreting is a discipline that arose from practice: at an international cultural event where – among others – people with cognitive impairments participated, it became clear that the organizer had booked interpreters for foreign languages, but interpreters for Easy Language were lacking. Since then, Easy Language interpreting has been offered for conferences on inclusion, culture, law and politics (ibid., 174f). Due to the settings in which it is used, Easy Language interpreting mostly refers to simultaneous interpreting. The increasing demand for interpreters implies professionalisation in this job field in order to be able to fulfil the task of making information accessible to as many people as possible. In the process of professionalising the field, it was necessary to define the competences interpreters should have. In order to do so – and similar to the approach for Easy Language translation (see above) – existing models from the field of interlingual interpreting were used, making it possible to identify similarities and differences between interlingual and intralingual interpreting. Based on Pöchhacker's model (2000), Schulz et al. (2020, 170) define the following competences for Easy Language interpreting:

- linguistic competence
- translational competence
- cultural competence
- ethical competence

Linguistic competence includes "the ability to apply [...] rules [of written Easy Language] to oral communication and the ability to actively speak Easy Language [...]" (Schulz et al. 2020, 168). The interpreter should have an understanding of comprehensibility, grammatical knowledge and good expression (ibid.).

Cultural competence for Easy Language interpreting means "the culture of the addressees, which is why communication with them is necessary'' (ibid.). In order to gain this knowledge, there are two options: either interpreters learn about the target group in an academic context (top-down) or they have direct contact with them (bottom-up). The best solution is uniting the two options. Cultural competence is needed in order to make decisions on the language used in the interpreting process. This task is easier when the interpreter can "assess which topics and social discourses are important for the addressees" (ibid.). One big difference compared to interlingual interpreting is that the Easy Language interpreter intervenes in the source text and has to filter which information is relevant for the target group. Regarding the interpreting process, the Easy Language interpreting process is a little different. The interpreter has to balance leaving out information and adding further explanations by considering the cognitive capacity of the target group.

Another important aspect in **translational competence** is that the interpreter needs to have a high degree of specialised knowledge depending on the topic of the interpreting job in order to add necessary information. "This expertise is also necessary if the speaker requires knowledge of the target audience, which cannot be assumed for the target group of Easy Language" (Schulz et al. 2020, 169). In Easy Language interpreting, one very important aspect is the power associated with the role of the interpreter. By intervening in the source text via explanations or filtering information, the interpreter for Easy Language has a higher influence on the comprehensibility than is the case in interlingual interpreting. The role of an Easy Language interpreter can be compared to that of community interpreters who often act as clarifiers (ibid.). Besides that, **ethical competence** also includes competences known from interlingual interpreting such as "enjoyment of communication, [...] language mediation, extroversion, a certain degree of stress tolerance, empathy and tolerance" (ibid., 170).

The competence model for intralingual interpreting by Schulz et al. (2020) was one step towards the long-term goal of examining how Easy Language interpreting can be integrated into Translation Studies and existing interpreting courses. "It is only as a result of growing awareness that a real demand for Easy Language interpreting will develop and lead to the implementation of quality standards in training and practice" (Schulz et al. 2020, 175). The current situation of Easy Language interpreting is that it is offered in practice as the demand is increasing. However, it is still rather unknown to the target group of Easy Language which leads to interpreting services not being requested by those who need them (ibid., 173). While in translating into Easy Language practice and research complement each other, research on Easy Language interpreting is developing slowly.

However, it can be determined that intralingual translation is a means to overcoming communication barriers and thus enabling access to language as a carrier of information.

3 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show that accessibility with regard to language can be achieved through intralingual translation, which we conceive of as part of a new field: accessible communication.

Language has the potential to exclude certain user groups from social participation, which is why accessible communication with all its subareas is a necessary field of action and interdisciplinary research. As accessible communication is linked to legal requirements for different target groups, the quality of texts is of high importance. Only if the potential communication barriers inherent to a text are considered and addressed within the translation process can a communication product that enables the user to act on its basis be achieved. In this chapter, the two perspectives of accessible communication – text and user perspective – have been presented by underlining the important interplay between them. Based on the new definition of translation as overcoming communication barriers (Rink 2019; Hansen-Schirra & Maaß 2019), the focus was on Easy Language translation and interpreting as a means of ensuring communicative inclusion for large parts of society. Different prerequisites and special communicative needs may lead to inaccessibility and dependence on third parties. This creates special requirements to translators and interpreters of Easy Language, which is why professional competences are necessary. Although there might be overlaps between the two areas, we presented the competences for Easy Language translation and interpreting separately. Even if both fields are connected, each requires different professional competences in order to make information accessible for the target group within the specific target situation. One reason is the different nature of the source texts which leads to simplification in writing or in the oral form.

As the title of this issue suggests that "to understand is to be free" accessible communication products can bridge potential gaps in comprehension and understanding serving as communication aid and means to social participation.

Summary in plain English

This text is about accessible language. Accessible language means: Any person can understand and participate in our information society. Because physical barriers can deny access to public institutions or cinema, communication barriers can deny access to content. Our article is based on a new definition of translation as overcoming communication barriers. For this, several competences are needed to make information comprehensible. In this text, we focus on translating and interpreting into Easy Language as two forms of accessible language.

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Intersections of Hermeneutics, Intralingual Translation, and Comprehensibility

Desana Kiselová

Abstract

The relationship between hermeneutics and translation is well established. Both fields share a common interest in understanding and interpreting texts, albeit from different perspectives. Hermeneutics is concerned with the theory and methodology of interpretation. At the same time, translation puts these principles into practice: the task of translation is to convey the meaning of texts throughout languages and cultures, to produce a new text that is as faithful as possible to the original. Recently, intralingual translation has emerged as a less explored area of translation. While some argue that intralingual translation is not true translation, its proponents insist that it meets the same criteria as translation proper. New translation practices with an increased emphasis on accessibility and new forms of rewriting such as Easy Language and Plain Language have been developed. Several points of contact regarding interpretation of meaning, time, context, or linguistic nuances can illustrate the relationship between hermeneutics and intralingual translation.

Keywords: intralingual translation, hermeneutics, comprehensibility

Introduction

The concept of intralingual translation emerged in the mid-20th century. Its first definition can be found in Roman Jakobson's influential essay, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959). At the time, the majority of translation theorists were primarily concerned with translation between two languages, which is commonly referred to as "translation proper" (Jakobson 1959, 233; Korning-Zethsen & Hill-Madsen 2016, 692; Korning-Zethsen 2018, 80).

Intralingual translation was often regarded as a marginal practice. In this era of information overload and the increasing demand for intelligibility and accessible communication in different areas of society, the significance of intralingual translation is becoming increasingly evident. However, the argument persists that this type of translation does not fulfill the same criteria as translation proper. This chapter aims to support the claim that intralingual translation is full-fledged translation and to highlight the points of contact between intralingual translation and the philosophical field of hermeneutics, which is concerned with the mediation of meaning.

1 Intralingual translation

Intralingual translation is defined as translation within the same language (Popovic 1983, 219), an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language (Jakobson 1959, 233), crossing language barriers within the same language (Whyatt 2017, 178; Korning-Zethsen & Hill-Madsen 2016, 693), the language-internal rewriting of a source text into a target text with the purpose of neutralizing a potential comprehension barrier (Hill-Madsen 2019, 538), and as processes of reformulation, rewording, or paraphrasing (Whyatt 2017, 176). In other words, it is the translation or interpretation of a text or speech where the source and target languages are the same, aiming to overcome barriers of understanding and facilitating access to information for a new readership group for which it was not primarily designed or intended. Korning-Zethsen (2018, 83) provides us with several examples of such translation: easy-readers for children, localization, expert-to-lay translation, new translations of religious texts, etc. The motivation for intralingual translation (INTRA[1]) can be varied, including ideological reasons such as reducing power distance and the degree of control, addressing differences in the recipient’s cognitive environment, language modernization, or dialectal differences.

The place of INTRA in the hierarchy of translation typology was determined by Jakobson (1959) as a marginal one, and his view is both questioned[2] and supported. His division of translation into intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic forms the point of departure for most scholarly texts dealing with translation. A different conception is found in Umberto Eco (2008, 100), who presents us with transcription, intrasystemic (translation within the same language falls into this category), and intersystemic (between two languages) modes of interpretation. Eco deliberately speaks of interpretation instead of translation, as he considers this term to be more encompassing. He speaks of interpretation within the same natural language using synonymy, paraphrasing, etc., i.e. expressing the same content through different means of the same language. His conception is that the word "translation", in the case of intralingual translation, is used only as a metaphor. In terms of sign systems, Toury (in Whyatt 2017, 177) distinguishes between intersemiotic (two language systems involved) and intrasemiotic translation (within the same language system), while within intrasemiotic translation, he differentiates intralingual and interlingual translation.

While translation between two languages occupies a larger part of the focus of translation studies, INTRA has been marginalized. However, recently we have seen a surge of scholarly interest in this type of translation. This interest may occur particularly in the context of the need to rephrase or explain a text to make it clearer or more understandable, even if it remains in the same language. INTRA is used to simplify complex language, remove ambiguities, or adapt content to the needs of a wider target group, which may have varying levels of language literacy within the same language.

In reality, individuals often use intralingual translation to convey information to someone who does not share their frame of reference, such as in communication between experts and laypeople, teaching new concepts to students, or communicating with individuals with special needs. In practice, strategies in INTRA may involve, e.g., rephrasing difficult-to-understand or technical terms, shortening sentence constructions, or adding explanatory notes to improve communication and comprehension. This approach can be useful in various fields, including education, law, medicine, or public administration, where achieving the most effective communication is important. As Bohušová above points out, "translations" from one style into another require the most massive interventions (Bohušová 2024, 31).

The significance of eliminating communication barriers and power distance caused by using expert language, which often excludes ordinary language users within the same linguistic community due to unfamiliarity with specialist terms, is becoming increasingly evident. This is particularly relevant in fields such as patient care or law (medical records that use Latin terminology or legal documents that employ complex legal language). Barrier-free communication can facilitate collaboration among all members of society. INTRA has the potential to significantly contribute to accessible communication, as there is a huge demand for expert-to-layman translation because the majority of the experts consider it difficult to express themselves in simple language (Korning-Zethsen, 2018, 90).

In his 2019 article, Hill-Madsen provides a categorization of INTRA based on the original categorization by Gottlieb:

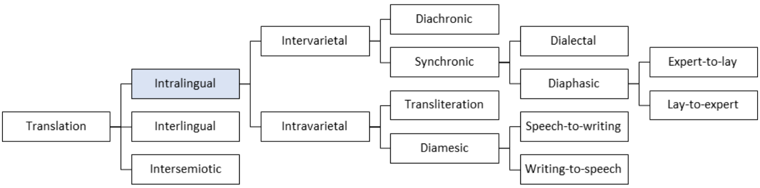

Figure 1: Heterogeneity of INTRA (Hill-Madsen 2019, 544)

The chart illustrates that INTRA comprises multiple subcategories that consider factors such as time, linguistic varieties, form of speech, and register. Thus, this multifaceted and understudied field of INTRA deserves greater attention and extensive research.

2 Hermeneutics and translation

Translation is an inherently interpretive process that is inextricably linked to an understanding of the source text. In addition, understanding the context, its temporal circumstances, and all the conditions under which the original text was produced are crucial factors in this process. Language is a cognitive tool, and cognition is essential to understanding.

Translation enables communication between the two parties of the communicative exchange. The essence of any translation is understanding the source text and communicating it to the audience, for which it was not primarily intended. As House puts it,

> …[translation] gives people access to a message that already exists in another language. So, translation is, of its nature, a type of secondary communication. In the process of translating, an original communicative event is repeated in order to enable persons to understand and appreciate the original event, from which they would otherwise be excluded. (House 2023, 9)

Every process of translation consists of two phases: first a translator must grasp the text through their own knowledge, understanding of the subject matter, and translation competence, and then the translator's interpretation is rendered in the target language. Only the meaning that has been grasped can be translated into the target text. Stolze (2012, 31) considers the translator a main factor in the process of translation, with their knowledge of languages, cultures, and translation competence. And as Tomkins and Eatough (2018, 9) point out, the space between the author and the interpreter is not a gap; it is a bridge.

The conditions under which understanding is possible are best illuminated by hermeneutics, a philosophical discipline which offers insights into the essence of understanding and interpretation. Hermeneutics originated several centuries ago as a discipline concerned with the interpretation of texts in the fields of law and theology, especially the interpretation of sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of modern hermeneutics, is also considered the founder of translational hermeneutics. In his essay "On the Different Methods of Translating" (1813, 1), he discusses various forms of translation and acknowledges that translation also occurs within the same language. Thus, the idea of applying the hermeneutic method in translation studies is not new.

Understanding as a prerequisite for the translation process in terms of hermeneutics involves many aspects: the context, the person of the translator, the historical context of the creation of the work, the aspect of time and its impact on the reader, and the effect of these aspects on the message encrypted in the work. The elements of hermeneutical translation competence include

> …readiness for self-critical reflection, the openness for constant learning, the ability to integrate new cognitive input, the courage

> for linguistic creativity, and an empathetic identification with the message. Only then will the message be translated in an authentic way by the translator as a co-author. (Stolze 2012, 34)

Given the interrelationship between translation and understanding, there are points of contact between hermeneutics as a philosophical discipline concerned with the understanding of texts and intralingual translation.

3 Hermeneutics and intralingual translation

INTRA has only recently come to the forefront of translation studies. However, Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his 1813 essay "On the Different Methods of Translating", recognized that we are confronted with translation in its various forms all around us, and we do not even have to cross the borders surrounding the same language. We encounter different dialects and forms of the same language over time. He also pointed to contemporaries who speak the same language but come from different social classes and have different educational backgrounds, so that their communication with each other is a process similar to translation, apparently accompanied by much explaining and reducing the complexity of debate. Moreover, the different temperaments and opinions of the other person force us to translate the other person's utterances for ourselves, and occasionally we translate our own words as well. Schleiermacher attributes such translation to a momentary emotional need.

Given the above, if we agree with the idea put forward by scholars dealing with INTRA that INTRA requires translation competence and has the same features as translation proper and thus deserves to be considered a translation, we can find certain intersections between INTRA and hermeneutics, which we present in the following subsections.

3.1 Context

Both hermeneutics and INTRA emphasize the significance of context in shaping meaning. Cultural, historical, social, and situational context plays a crucial role in deciphering meaning and reformulating it in the form of a new text tailored to the needs of a particular readership, even within the same linguistic community. Maintaining coherence and relevance is inherent in both hermeneutics and INTRA.

3.2 Language nuances

INTRA shares common ground with hermeneutics in the study of language nuances. It involves translating a text within the same language and dealing with issues such as linguistic differences, stylistic changes, and text shifts from one style to another. The process is not a superficial rewording, but a deep exploration of the complexities of expression and communication within a single language. Adapting language nuances to the reader's situation is crucial for conveying meaning effectively. Tailoring the linguistic devices in the text to the specific readership results in greater intelligibility, ensures accessibility of information, retention of attention without distraction, and greater effectiveness of communication.

3.3 Interpretive nature

The connection between hermeneutics and INTRA is evident when considering both processes' interpretive nature. INTRA includes retelling, paraphrasing, description, synonymy, and explanation. All of these strategies are designed to help readers make sense of symbols, texts, and experiences that may initially seem obscure, ambiguous, distant, overly technical, or open to multiple interpretations.

Hermeneutics emphasizes understanding the deeper layers of meaning and provides a theoretical framework for the practical application of INTRA procedures, as in translation proper. Similarly, INTRA can be seen as the practical application of hermeneutic principles. The text must be comprehensible to all readers, regardless of their age, social status, or disability. This requires clear and concise language, logical structure, and a balanced approach, lowering the level of the language and limiting the use of specialized terminology in expert texts to a tolerable level. The language should be objective and free from bias.

3.4 Subjectivity and objectivity

Moreover, both hermeneutics and INTRA deal with a certain degree of subjectivity and objectivity. Subjectivity necessarily comes into play with the person of the author, whose unique nature of creativity and inimitability makes them exceptional. Cercel et al. (2015, 19), analyzing Schleiermacher, note that the original work is always a subjective expression of the author, and therefore in translation it is necessary to understand the author's intention and motivation as part of the creative process behind the text. On the other hand, there is the person of the translator, equipped with their own perception and a certain degree of general insight and knowledge, but also prejudices, who plays an active role in constructing meaning. Together with the factor of time and its passage, the translator is in a constant search for a balance between subjectivity and objectivity. For, as Stolze points out,

> […] every new reading brings about a change in meaning. This issue of subjectivity applies to different individuals, however, also the same person upon rereading the text over time. It should be noted that no translation can be completely objective, it can only strive for objectivity. (Stolze 2022, 115)

Translation is not a neutral process, as it is influenced by cultural background, context, and the subjective experience of the translator. To support this idea, we can paraphrase Gadamer saying that the interpreter's thoughts enter into the reawakened sense of the text (Gadamer 2019, 335). Moreover, Gadamer noted that to interpret a text is to bring one's prejudices into play (ibid., 341) and that the problem of the interpreter is that they are not aware of bringing themselves and their concepts into the interpretation. In this context, it can be said that the translator works under constant pressure and a burden of responsibility to accurately convey the original meaning of text through their translation. The translator must constantly broaden their horizons, become familiar with the subject matter, especially when translating specialized texts, and keep their general outlook up to date.

Subjectivity, however, is considered an undesirable feature when dealing with technical texts. Objectivity is crucial when it comes to technical writings and their simplified versions within the same language for lay readers. The translator must maintain the accuracy of the information, which is often vital, especially in medicine, such as patient information leaflets or medical records. Such translation must remain without interference and the text must not bear any emotional undertones introduced by the translator.

3.5 Perception of time

Similarly, there is an intersection between INTRA and hermeneutics in the perception of time. Before hermeneutics spread to various areas of the humanities, it was primarily focused on the interpretation of religious texts and, thus, communicating their message across the time barrier.

Depending on the time, individuals may interpret the same text differently, and rereading the text even within a short chronological gap can reveal new contexts. As Stolze (2012, 33) pinpoints, today one speaks differently from yesterday because one has learnt something in the meantime.

The factor of time allows individuals to acquire new information and broaden their knowledge horizons. However, due to the finite nature of human existence, there is a limit to this expansion, and it is necessary to pass the acquired knowledge further on if we are to preserve it. Knowledge can only be passed on to our successors through a certain 'pre-understanding' and understanding of the context, followed by interpretation of meanings, and their transfer to the next individual. They will again mentally grasp the meaning and pass it on to the next generation.

One of the subcategories of INTRA, as defined by Hill-Madsen (see above), is diachronic INTRA. It deals with the translation of the same work considering the time lapse since its creation and often leads to language modernization. As Hill-Madsen, quoting Gottlieb, points out,

> [d]iachronic INTRA […] is concerned with translation between different historical varieties of the same language, typically in the form of modernized versions of pre-modern literary works. (Hill-Madsen 2019, 541)

To support his idea, Hill-Madsen offers examples of the Old Testament and other translation works.

INTRA can also be an asset in terms of cognitive fluency. According to Whyatt, this type of translation benefits the reader by reducing the cognitive effort demanded by the text, thereby facilitating comprehension:

> Diachronic INTRA involves updating “aging” texts and making them relevant and comprehensible for the contemporary reader. The purpose of INTRA is to reduce the excessive cognitive effort that otherwise might have been needed to understand a message encoded in an outdated language with archaic forms and references that are no longer a part of the reader’s cognitive background. (Whyatt 2017, 180)

Furthermore, the element of time manifests within the text and influences the translator’s personal growth. The translator’s exposure to the text leaves an indelible mark, expanding their horizons of knowledge. As Stolze (2022, 113) notes, the translator’s personal development occurs through lifelong learning, which shapes their attitude towards other texts.

3.6 Dynamic nature

The passing of time leads us to consider the dynamics of the understanding process, as previously mentioned. Knowledge is not static, it rather evolves for each individual based on the stimuli to which they are exposed. These stimuli provide a frame of reference for further reasoning and understanding of the context.

INTRA is also concerned with the dynamic nature of language. Meaning is not fixed and can be influenced by cultural, social, and contextual factors. It highlights the significance of conveying meaning in a manner that is appropriate for the intended audience. This approach aligns with interpretation as a dynamic, ongoing, and developing process. Due to the constant modernization of the language, updating the meanings of words and whole texts with new interpretations, it is often necessary to avoid losing content and information conveyed.

3.7 Understanding, communication, and mediation

Acts of communication and mediation are inherent in both hermeneutics and INTRA. Hermeneutics deals with understanding and dialogue as the central subjects of its interest. Facilitating understanding through translation is an integral part of hermeneutics; their interdependence is pinpointed by Cercel et al. (2015):

> […] hermeneutics is concerned with how texts – both oral and written – are understood, i.e., it deals with the conditions that must be met in order to understand. Thus, hermeneutics serves as a valid background for translation […] (Cercel et al. 2015, 18)

Similarly, INTRA mediates between different expressions or versions of a text tailored to the needs of various user groups to enhance comprehension, clarity, or accessibility within the same language. The pragmatic aspects of both the source and target text must be considered to ensure, that the meaning is conveyed effectively. This includes understanding the intended audience, the communicative purpose of the text, and the choice of linguistic means accordingly. As Bohušová (2024, 17) states above,

> [i]n an intact linguistic community, where culture, language, and awareness of self and the world are passed on in everyday communication and across generations, there will not be an intense need for detailed or precise expression or documentation. The principle of economy and saving of mental and articulatory energy is in the foreground. These are, of course, factors that can make understanding difficult. It is only in the secondary-specialized style that we concentrate on appropriate and technical expression with terminological precision that can aid understanding.

Facilitating understanding and communication between parties who may not share the same language or level of language proficiency is referred to as mediation. It involves a variety of strategies and methods to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, ensuring that communication is accessible, effective, and meaningful for all participants. This process can be oral, written, or multimodal and may include interpreting, translating, simplifying texts, summarizing, or even adapting communication to different levels of comprehension. According to Whyatt,

> [i]ntralingual translation seems a less obvious kind of linguistic mediation. […] To facilitate communication in situations, when two parties speak the same language but do not share the same frame of reference, the verbal message needs to be reformulated (e.g. paraphrased into plain language). (Whyatt, 2017, 178)

Whyatt (2017, 179) furthermore notes that INTRA, with its various subforms, makes relevant information accessible by removing communication barriers. On the other hand, Korning-Zethsen highlights the distinction between understanding and access. Access to information does not necessarily equate to access to meaning, particularly when the information is encoded in technical language. This can lead to a further deepening of previous obscurity:

> […] having access is not the same as understanding. In fact, having access without understanding may in some cases be worse than not having access. (Korning-Zethsen 2018, 86)

Making information accessible and also understandable can make a significant contribution to reducing the power distance between different social classes, creating a fairer society, establishing inclusion, and reinforcing active individual involvement in both personal and community life, ultimately leading to the betterment of all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that both hermeneutics and INTRA are aligned in their pursuit of comprehending and deciphering language. The hermeneutic methodology furnishes a conceptual foundation for INTRA, in the same way as it does for translation proper, highlighting the interrelatedness of language, culture, and significance. These fields present valuable perspectives on the continuously changing landscape of communication and motivate individuals to unveil the layers of meaning embedded within language(s). Even within a single language.

Summary in plain English

This text is about translation and the philosophy of understanding. Translation helps people to understand texts written in a foreign language. Translation within the same language is about simplifying texts. This is a type of translation where the translator makes complex expressions simpler, makes sentences shorter, and explains unfamiliar concepts. The simplified text is then much easier to understand. Translation within the same language helps make the texts simple.

Hermeneutics is a philosophical field. It is about facilitating meaning. This text looks for connections between translation within the same language and this philosophical field.

Simplified texts can be easily understood. Translation within the same language and hermeneutics gives people better access to the meaning of texts.

Notes:

[1] abbreviation used in Hill-Madsen, 2019

[2] Several scholars, including Whyatt (2017), Korning-Zethsen (2018), and Hill-Madsen (2019) have emphasized through research that the same processes occur in intralingual translation as in translation proper and that intralingual translation requires translation competence. According to them, INTRA deserves its place in the typology of translation. For an account of conflicting claims, see, for example, Mossop, Newmark, Schubert, and others (Hill-Madsen 2019, 539).

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Diamesic Translation: A Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment of Intralingual Live Subtitles

Martina A. Bruno

Abstract

At the crossroads between simultaneous interpreting (SI) and subtitling, respeaking is a technique that enables live events to be accessible to a wide audience, as in the case of the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing. To do so, respeakers use automatic speech recognition (ASR) software to repeat or paraphrase the original speech, thus producing live subtitles (LS). This chapter focuses on furthering the studies of this discipline by analysing an LSed conference called *Les Assises Régionales de l'Accessibilité* (The Regional Accessibility Conference). The LS service was provided by the cooperative *Le Messageur*, whose work aims at facilitating communication for the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Both the audio and video transcripts are analysed from the point of view of quality and accuracy thanks to a new taxonomy for diamesic translation (DT). Then, the various strategies are classified and analysed. In particular, the research focuses on the following: 1) the quality of the subtitling, with particular reference to DT strategies: *litteratim*, *verbatim*, *sensatim*, *signatim*; 2) the overall quality of the subtitles assessed against renditions and semantic and non-semantic non-renditions; 3) the number of words per minute (*wpm*); 4) the delay between the speech and the subtitles appearing on screen; 5) the reduction of the subtitles compared to the source text (ST).

Keywords: respeaking, accessibility, quality assessment, diamesic translation, usability, intralingual live subtitles

Introduction

At the crossroads between simultaneous interpreting (SI) and subtitling, respeaking is a speech-to-text technique that makes live events accessible to a wide audience, including people who are d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing (Eugeni & Zambelli 2013). Respeaking allows for the production of intralingual (within the same language) or interlingual (across two languages) subtitles (Eugeni 2006). This is done via speaker-dependent automatic speech recognition (ASR) software that transcribes a simultaneous repetition, translation, or reformulation of the source text (ST) (Marsh 2006). Respeaking provides higher-quality subtitles than those produced by the ASR software alone. This is because professional respeakers are trained before performing their task, dictating with a clear and flat pronunciation to avoid potential misrecognitions and mistakes (Arumí-Ribas & Romero-Fresco 2008, 117). Moreover, the ASR software boasts a big vocabulary that can be updated, enlarged and trained according to the user's accent and pronunciation (*ibid*., 118).

Research on the quality assessment (QA) of the respoken output is undergoing a shift from quantitative-based to qualitative-based approaches for live subtitling (LS) evaluation (Romero-Fresco & Pérez, 2015), with the latter being more concerned with the global transmission of the source speech and the final users' reception, hence d/Dead and hard-of-hearing viewers.

Leveraging on the urge for more qualitative-oriented approaches to QA and user-centred approaches, this research aims to investigate the quality of intralingual LS by employing a new taxonomy for diamesic translation (DT) analysis proposed by Eugeni & Gambier (2023, 83–91). DT concerns the passage from the oral channel to the written form. Hence, the production of LS can be defined as a form of DT. The taxonomy provided by Eugeni & Gambier (*ibid*.) allows for the analysis of the various strategies and tactics used consciously or unconsciously by a respeaker in the production of LS. More specifically, the DT taxonomy accounts for four different strategies, comprising 10 tactics each. These strategies are *litteratim*, for dealing with phonetical elements in the ST, *verbatim*, for lexical components in the ST, *sensatim*, for the rendition of the semantic meaning of the ST, and *signatim* for conveying non-verbal and paraverbal features of the ST.

1 Testing Diamesic Translation

Before delving into the DT analysis and the QA results, it is necessary to outline the methodological framework for the data selection and collection. This also includes information on the conventions used during data annotation and transcription processes.

1.1 Data

The conference chosen for the present research, *Les Assises Régionales de l'Accessibilité* (The Regional Accessibility Conference), was accessed from its dedicated YouTube channel[1] and was deemed appropriate to our scope as it deals with accessibility. The LS service was provided by the French cooperative *Le Messageur*[2] which works in respeaking and accessibility services and aims to provide subtitles that remain faithful to the speaker's intended message without omitting semantic information, as the interview to be found in Bruno (2023, 389–390) reveals.

The full conference duration is 3h 38' 22". However, the portion chosen for the present analysis corresponds to the last 50', characterised by *impromptu* and prepared speeches. This variety allows studying the different strategies of the respeakers based on different speech types.

1.2 Method

The data was treated using ELAN (2023), a software for annotations and transcription. First, the spoken and the respoken output were transcribed, segmented and aligned. The method adopted for chunking the transcripts relied on what Eugeni (2008, 108) defines as idea units, i.e., each proposition expressing a finite idea. The conference portion amounted to a total of 747 parallel spoken and respoken units. ELAN (2023) also allowed adding time-ins and time-outs for each spoken and respoken unit – thus making it possible to draw considerations on the delay of the TT compared to the ST – and adding tiers' names for all participants plus the respeaker.

In the second phase, we processed the collected data with an initial LS evaluation system through the lenses of the DT taxonomy. We identified the tactics used for each *litteratim*, *verbatim*, *sensatim* and *signatim* strategy. Next, the accuracy of the subtitles was estimated using the IRA index[3] (Eugeni 2017, 107), which allows for a maximum overall error rate of 5% for the evaluation of intralingual subtitles. Finally, we analysed other features, such as the average *wpm* enunciated by the respeaker, the delay in the LS appearance on screen, and the reduction of the LS compared to the ST.

2 Analysis

In using the DT taxonomy, the initial hypothesis was that DT analysis could be conducive to an all-encompassing assessment of LS. In particular, it was expected that 1) word-for-word tactics, hence *verbatim*, would prevail in the case of plain and simple language in the ST leading to a repetition of the oral speech into the written form; 2) meaning-for-meaning tactics, hence *sensatim*, would prevail in the case of a more complex ST resulting in reformulations, compressions, omissions, or additions performed by the respeaker during LS production; 3) sound-for-sound tactics, *litteratim*, and sign-for-sign tactics, *signatim*, would be the least used tactics in that the former would mainly concern the omission of interjections and the latter would mainly involve the delivery of the main semiotic elements. The goal of the DT analysis was to investigate other variables concerning the chosen LS produced by a professional respeaker, such as the overall intralingual quality score evaluated in terms of renditions and semantic and non-semantic non-renditions (Eugeni 2017, 107), the average *wpm* rate, the average delay of the LS appearing on screen (Romero-Fresco 2011, 20), and the quantitative reduction of the TT in comparison to the ST.

In presenting the results, we will first illustrate a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the *litteratim*, *verbatim*, *sensatim* and *signatim* tactics used. We will discuss the results concerning the LS's overall quality. Finally, we will draw some considerations on delay and speed, which seem to be key issues for a comprehensive

QA (Romero-Fresco & Pérez, 2015), and reduction of the ST in the TT.

2.1 Quantitative Analysis

Litteratim tactics are not numerous in DT formats addressed to a large public. Such tactics are more frequent in court reporting or phonetic transcriptions, which are types of translation for specific users, such as judges and university researchers (Mariottini & Orletti 2017). Overall, the *litteratim* strategy came in third place in terms of frequency. Out of the 747 spoken and respoken turns analysed through the lenses of DT, 435 *litteratim* tactics were found. These account for 15.70% of the overall 2,768 tactics used in the analysed portion. The most frequent *litteratim* tactic used is the omission of phonetic sounds, such as interjections, representing 84.80% within this strategy.

Verbatim tactics are expected to be more frequent in forms of DT that are intended for a vast public, as for the present conference. As per the initial hypothesis, this strategy proved to be the most frequently used. Out of the 747 spoken and respoken turns analysed through the lenses of DT, the results show that 1491 *verbatim* tactics were found. These account for 53.9% of the overall 2,768 tactics used in the analysed portion. The most frequently used verbatim tactics are 1) the insertion of punctuation (54.5%) and 2) the omission of false starts carrying wrong information and followed by a reformulation, as well as the omission of repetitions, accounting for 30.2% within this strategy.

Sensatim tactics involve conveying the meaning of the ST in the TT without necessarily reproducing it in the same form and often entailing a change of structure from the ST to the TT. Meaning-for-meaning tactics were expected to be numerous in this kind of DT as LS production involves reformulations, additions, omissions, and the postponing of information. This strategy proved to be the second most frequently used after *verbatim*. Out of the 747 spoken and respoken turns analysed through the lenses of DT, the results show that 745 *sensatim* tactics were found. These account for 26.9% of the overall 2,768 tactics used in the analysed portion. The most widespread *sensatim* tactics used are 1) omission or addition tactics

(57.4%), for the compression or expansion of semantic elements in the TT, 2) cohesions or coherence changes in the TT, accounting for 13% within this strategy, and 3) grammatical changes in the TT, representing 11.5% of this strategy.

Signatim tactics were not expected to be numerous within this conference and proved to be the least used. Out of the 747 spoken and respoken turns analysed through the lenses of DT, the results show that 97 *signatim* tactics were found. These account for 3.5% of the overall 2,768 tactics used in the analysed portion. The most common *signatim* tactics used are 1) character identification devices to signal a change of speaker to the audience, accounting for 40.2% within this strategy, and 2) layout expedients to break the line whenever the speaker changed, which is why this tactic scores the same percentage (40.2%) as the one previously discussed.

2.2 Qualitative Analysis

The results of the DT analysis conducted confirmed the initial hypothesis with *verbatim*, *sensatim*, *litteratim* and *signatim* tactics per order of frequency. In the following paragraphs, we will provide one example of the most relevant tactic for each strategy.

The first example concerns a *litteratim* tactic and focuses on the omission of interjections which may cover an entire turn or be intra-turn. These occur when a speaker hesitates, makes tongue-clicking sounds, murmurs in agreement, disagreement and surprise, and poses a rhetorical question. Interjections may occur in several instances in oral speeches as they are typical features of impromptu discourse. The DT analysis of the present conference revealed that interjections were punctually omitted by respeakers. The following example illustrates the omission of a rhetorical question where the interjection *hein* ('eh'), used by the speaker is not rendered in the TT as it does not convey any additional meaning for the LS reception:

> ST: *on a entendu plein de choses* ***hein****? depuis le début de de ces Assises* ('we have heard many things eh? since the beginning of of this Conference')
>
> TT: *On a entendu plein de choses depuis le début des Assises.* ('We have heard many things since the beginning of this Conference.')

Verbatim tactics, as per the initial hypothesis, were prevalent when the source speech expressed one concept per paragraph, preferred short sentences and linear syntax, as well as the active form, avoided ambiguous words and technicalities, and avoided acronyms (Eugeni 2020, 25). The following example concerns the omission of a false start. All false starts are omitted in the LS as these usually relate to incorrect information and reformulations. As can be seen in the ST, the speaker starts the sentence by providing incorrect information which he promptly corrects by giving the correct figure:

> ST: ***90% des choses****… 99% des choses existent* ('90% of things… 99% of things exist')

> TT: *99 % des choses existent.* ('99% of things exist.')

Sensatim tactics come in second place in the order of frequency of use, as per the hypothesis. In particular, these were detected when the oral speech required rephrasing, compression or expansion by the respeaker. The following example concerns the *sensatim* tactic of omission of a parenthetical segment in the ST:

> ST: et la sensibilisation des Bretons **un peu de chauvinisme** aux questions du handicap de l'accessibilité et de l'inclusion n'est pas une légende ('and the awareness of Bretons a little chauvinism to the issues of disability accessibility and handicap is not a legend')

> TT: et la sensibilisation des Bretons aux questions du handicap, de l'accessibilité et du handicap n'est pas une légende. ('and the awareness of Bretons to the issues of disability, accessibility and handicap is not a legend.')

Finally, as per the hypothesis, *signatim* tactics were fourth in terms of frequency of use, as in this case:

> ST: *alors… euh on va on va continuer* ('so… uh let us let us continue')

> TT: _ *On va continuer.* ('_ Let us continue.')

Since this strategy was mainly used to emphasise a change of speaker, the previous example illustrates how the respeaker made this change explicit in the subtitles through a line break and an underscore.

2.3 Quality Assessment Results

After analysing the relevant tactics for each DT strategy, each of the 747 turns was assessed in terms of rendition and non-rendition, the latter further categorised into semantic and non-semantic non-rendition. Semantic non-renditions had a negative impact on the subtitle because of a serious omission or mistake within the TT. On the other hand, a non-semantic non-rendition did not affect the subtitle's understandability as it concerned minor mistakes of grammatical agreement, and the omission of secondary information, such as parenthetical segments or idiomatic expressions, as in the examples presented above.

The DT analysis results show that out of 747 spoken and respoken turns, 76.3% (570 turns) correspond to renditions, while 23.7% (177 turns) correspond to non-renditions. Out of this last figure, only 4.8% (36 turns) represent semantic non-renditions where serious semantic distortions, morphological and lexical errors, and omissions occurred. The remaining 18.9% (141 turns) concern non-semantic non-renditions of turns that did not carry any relevant meaning in the LS such as overlapping speech, interjections covering an entire turn, rhetorical repetitions, as well as other information that the respeaker did not consider necessary during LS production because of their secondary importance.

Afterwards, we tested the other relevant variables for this study, i.e., the overall quality, the average *wpm* speed of the respeaker during dictation, the average subtitles' delay, and the reduction of the TT compared to the ST:

	Quality	***wpm***[4]	**Delay**	**Reduction**[5]
STR ***Le Messageur***	95.2%	123	6.2 s	26.16%

Table 1: QA Results

To establish the overall accuracy of the LS analysed we used an index called IRA (Eugeni 2017, 107). To perform this evaluation, only semantic renditions and semantic non-renditions were considered, while non-semantic non-renditions were omitted from the accuracy measurement as these mainly concerned interjections, overlapping speech, rhetoric repetitions, and non-verbal and paraverbal elements. As shown in the summary table above, the IRA index indicates a 95.2% accuracy rate, thus fulfilling the IRA's requirement of a maximum error rate stated at 5%[6].

The summary table also presents the results for other important aspects involved in the QA, such as an average speed of the respeaker's dictation of 123 *wpm*; an average delay in the appearance of subtitles on the screen of 6.2 seconds, as per the standard; and a 26% reduction from the original ST to the resulting TT.

3 Conclusion

The present QA, which aimed to determine the accessibility and usability of the respoken output through the lenses of a new taxonomy for DT evaluation, confirmed that the LS produced by *Le Messageur* were an accessible and usable product for the users attending the conference. The 95.2% accuracy rate obtained for the subtitles produced for the portion of the conference analysed fostered full participation via the transmission of the semantic content of the event. Moreover, testing the initial hypothesis confirmed that *verbatim* and *sensatim* tactics are the most frequent in the context of live events, where time constraints and the need to keep up with the speaker lead the respeaker to resort to omissions, reformulations, compressions, repetitions, and explanations while reducing unnecessary extralinguistic features.

Although no reception study was carried out to assess the real comprehension of the target users, the conference itself is a positive example of what Greco (2018, 213) defines as an *ex-ante* accessible conception of an event. The conference's organisers planned for full accessibility by offering the possibility to attend the event both on-site and remotely, respoken subtitles, French Sign Language interpreting, and French Cued Speech[7].

These findings allow us to state that access to the event as well as the co-construction of accessibility were met. One of the main principles emerging from DT and its connected taxonomy (Eugeni & Gambier 2023, 83–91) points to a transformation of the ST to foster its fluidity and comprehensibility, and ultimately, its inclusivity. Social inclusion is a core principle of *Accessibility Studies* that aims to build, in the words of Ed Roberts, “our preferred future”. This is why accessibility must be seen as transformation and not as mere adaptation, otherwise, as Romero-Fresco & Chaume (2022, 85) argue, we will continue to build ramps instead of changing the design of the entire building.

Summary in plain English

This chapter studies the quality of live subtitles created during an accessibility conference. The subtitles had to be understandable for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing people.

We studied the quality of the subtitles using the standards of diamesic translation. This form of translation involves the shift from spoken speech to written words, as in the case of subtitles. Diamesic translation explains that when you make subtitles you can choose to add or omit sounds, words, meaning and body language. The analysis shows that the subtitles of the conference contained words and meaning, but they included no sounds and little body language.

The analysis confirms the good quality of the subtitles, the accessibility of the conference, and the usefulness of using diamesic translation analysis.

Notes

1 *Assises Régionales de l’Accessibilité*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIZhZr-nZoE [Accessed on: 9 Mar 2024].

2 *Le Messageur*. Available at: https://www.lemessageur.com/qui-sommes-nous/ [Accessed on: 9 Mar 2024].

3 IRA is the acronym for Idea-unit-Rendition Assessment, i.e., the evaluation of the rendition of idea units in automatic intralingual subtitling (Eugeni, 2017, 102).

4 Calculated by dividing the total number of LSed words by the total LSed duration of the conference.

5 Calculated by using the formula: (Final value-Initial value)/Initial value) x 100. The initial value is 8192 (words of the transcription of the source oral speech) and the final value is 6049 (words of the transcription of the target LS).

[6] Other authorities do set quality parameters with a maximum error rate at 5% such as ISO standards and RAI, Italy's public national broadcaster.
[7] French Cued Speech is a manual visual code that facilitates lip-reading for deaf people. It distinguishes between various sounds of the French language that may look identical, such as /k/ and /g/, /p/ and /b/, /f/ and /v/ among others (Leybaert, 2011).

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Part III

Interpreting and Comprehensibility

Speech-to-Text Interpreting in Secondary Schools: Requirements, Strategies, and Challenges for the Parties Involved

Judith Platter
Sandra Ableidinger

Abstract

Speech-to-text interpreting (STTI) in secondary schools in Austria is implemented at individual schools as a support service for pupils with hearing impairments. STTI has been professionalized in Austria since the end of the 2000s. To date, however, there have often been many uncertainties in the actual implementation of this service. Pupils, teachers, other professional educators in schools, decision-makers, and funding bodies often deal with requests for STTI for the first time, to a great extent not knowing how cooperation with professional interpreters may be initiated and managed.

A recent regulation sets the binding legal basis for how interpreters may be integrated into educational settings, providing rules for the service in order to ensure inclusive and accessible teaching and participation. Which specific measures are required to raise awareness of the different parties involved are discussed in this chapter: to this end, best practice by interpreters providing STTI at two schools in Vienna are presented.

Keywords: speech-to-text interpreting, sign-language interpreting, education, hearing impairment, secondary schools

Introduction

In Austria, speech-to-text interpreting (STTI) in educational settings has been a possible form of interpreting and thus communication service for students with hearing impairment at universities in the area of Vienna since 2010, alongside sign language interpreting (SLI) (GESTU 2023). Students can contact a coordination center and book speech-to-text interpreters (STT interpreters) or sign language interpreters (SL interpreters) for communications at the university, predominantly during lectures or extracurricular events, like participation in conferences. The coordination center provides advice for the students, books interpreters for the assignments, manages a pool of trained and certified interpreters and raises awareness among teaching staff about the requirements of communications in which interpreters are involved.

Within secondary education, though, the situation differs in a significant way, as many pupils with hearing impairment are not aware of STTI which should be offered by the school they are attending. Furthermore, even amongst school coordination staff, STTI is largely unknown; sometimes, the pupils themselves have to request it or, in the event that they are aware of STTI, tend to avoid the time-consuming bureaucratic effort of applying to the coordinating staff or authority for them to bear the costs – in this specific case, the Federal Ministry of Education.

In addition, STTI in Austria is still in its infancy, in contrast to SLI. The latter has been professionalized since the 1990s with the first professional training courses for Austrian sign language teachers and SL interpreters in cooperation with the Graz University and the founding of the Austrian sign language interpreters' professional association in 1998 (Grbić 2023, ÖGSDV 2023). The first institutionalized professional training course for STT interpreters was offered in Austria in 2010 (Norberg et al. 2015, 43–44, ÖSDV 2023), the Austrian STT interpreters' association was founded in 2019 (ÖSDV 2023), and a professional code of ethics for STT interpreters has been established since then. STTI was added to regular curricula in training for interpreters and translators at Graz University in the summer term of 2018, whilst the University of Vienna followed in the winter term of 2023/24, offering an elective course (Platter 2022, 77).

How may STTI use be fostered within a secondary school setting? What challenges do STT interpreters face in this specific setting? How may a readable target text be provided for users who are still developing their reading skills? Those are just some of the research questions we would like to answer in this chapter.

This chapter aims, therefore, to shed light on existing definitions of STTI, SLI, and the very large segment of education interpreting, contained in section 1. In the second section, the authors focus on practical aspects collected by means of a focus group conducted with

10 SST interpreters[1]. The aim of this focus group was to discuss challenges and best practice examples at two different schools in Vienna, where STT interpreters work alongside and together with SL interpreters and learning support teachers in assisting pupils with hearing impairment in inclusive classes. Firstly, therefore, the educational setting is limited to the secondary school and the legal framework for STTI is explained. Furthermore, the professional STT interpreters give insights into the service, focusing on requirements, strategies, and challenges as well as on the added value of STTI in schools. In section 3, the chapter draws the final conclusion, by assessing the status quo for future scientific approaches.

As authors, we would like to point out that the topic is addressed from our point of view as white SST and spoken language interpreters and limits insights into SLI practices within the educational setting to general aspects of professionalization and requirements cited in the respective publications.

1 STTI, SLI, and the educational setting

STTI consists in the quasi-simultaneous intra- or interlingually conversion of a spoken source text into a readable target text for people with hearing or other communicative impairments in a specific communication – in this process, a human translator uses situationally appropriate methods/techniques (Norberg et al. 2015, 38, Platter 2022, Pöchhacker 2022, 191). The interpreter transforms the mode of a spoken source text at the level of verbally expressed content as well as its audible and content-carrying elements into a written, readable text as quickly as possible – to do this, interpreters listen to the source text, transform it either using a standard keyboard or a speech recognition software on their working device and make the converted text available to the reader on a suitable projection device (Norberg et al. 2015, 3–39, Norberg & Stachl-Peier 2018, 131).

SLI also takes place quasi-simultaneously with the presentation and reception of the source text, which is spoken (Pöchhacker 2022, 19). The verbally expressed content is converted into sign language using standardized signs or signs specifically developed for certain communications. The interpreter uses a complex set of signs, including facial and bodily expression performing the signs in three-dimensional space using the head and face, neck, arms, or the whole body (Kruger 2020, 433–434).

As common ground in the educational setting, both STT and SL interpreters perform their service therefore quasi-simultaneously: STT interpreters translate the spoken language alongside audible linguistic information into visible and readable linguistic information, while SL interpreters translate the spoken language and the audible linguistic information into visible and visual linguistic information. In both cases, the aim is to minimize the time lag between the source text and the target text in order to ensure that all modal information is understood alongside the presentation of the spoken source text and interactants are able to participate and interact in a timely manner (Norberg & Stachl-Peier 2018, 151–152). In order to do so, various strategies such as condensation and omission are used, for example, to reduce the complexity of the content, to adapt the linguistic design of the source text to the written mode or the structure of SL, or to ensure that the target text corresponds to the conceptual design of the written mode by adding markers to identify who is speaking and how the speaker expresses itself (Platter 2019, 133–134).

Interpreting in educational settings covers a broad spectrum of institutions and realities, as in Austria like everywhere institutionalized and individual educational careers differ and are heterogenous (ÖGSDV 2023, ÖSDV 2023, Tipton & Furmanek 2016, 165):

> Interpreter mediation in educational settings may be understood as the facilitation of communication in 'any and all settings where learning takes place' and includes formal educational and noncredit-bearing courses. (Tipton & Furmanek 2016, 165)

Following this definition, educational settings include statutory education in primary, in secondary, and tertiary schools for adolescents and young adults (GESTU 2023), as well as further and continuing education measures for adults or people of advanced age.

In primary and secondary schools, interpreting in educational settings is characterized by a strong focus on teaching in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is also used at events with more diversified interactions, such as events organized by the school to inform the parents, or in conversational events held between parents and teachers or teachers and pupils (Smith 2015, 266). The spectrum of communications is therefore very broad and diverse, ranging from monologic passages presented by single speakers, usually teachers, the pupils themselves, or invited lecturers, to more collaborative forms of teaching and learning during group works, which tend to be more dialogically oriented. In the communication itself, spoken and written language and a vast variety of texts (teaching books, presented audio and video files, readings) are used.

In the field of education, SLI is clearly more prevalent than "traditional" spoken language interpreting. In professional practice, it is stated that "education interpreting is one of the chief professional domains" of SLI (Pöchhacker 2022, 170); there are also numerous scientific publications on the subject (Pöchhacker 2022, 170; Tipton & Furmanek 2016, 166), but these are largely limited to later stages of educational pathways. At schools, spoken language interpreting does not predominately take place in the classroom itself, but rather at school events or in bilingual lessons, for example, when spoken language interpreting users with migrational backgrounds are addressed. STTI and SLI, the latter being the more established and known form of interpreting for users with hearing impairments, are aimed at deaf and hard-of-hearing users[2], as based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Article 24, focusing on education, considers inclusive schooling as an essential approach. Both STTI and SLI are used to ensure that users with hearing impairments understand their respective communication interactants (UN 2006).

The parties involved in secondary schools are, therefore, in the context of this chapter, teachers, learning support teachers, users with hearing impairments – pupils or students, STT and SL interpreters interacting in the classroom itself. Broadening the context and the kind of involved interactants outside this limited space, there are parents, coordinators at school and school district level involved in managing the interpreter's assignment, their enrolment, and the payment for their services. And broadening this approach even more, STTI and SLI in secondary schools fall within the remit of the Federal Ministry of Education and the respective departments for equality and diversity management in the field of education (BMBWF 2023a).

2 STTI in Austrian secondary schools

2.1 The legal framework

Even though STTI has been practiced in secondary schools in Austria for a number of years, a solid legal basis was only established in 2023 after consultations and discussions among the ÖSDV and the Federal Ministry of Education (BMBWF 2023b)[3]. It is only in the regulation issued by Ministry in September 2023 that STTI is explicitly mentioned as a publicly funded support service for pupils with disabilities. There are a number of national laws that have been implemented in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and which serve as a legal basis for the regulation, i.e. the Federal Disability Equality Act (BGStG 2015), the Federal Constitutional Act on the Rights of Children (2011), the Federal Constitutional Act (B-VG 2022) and the Federal Higher Education Act (HG 2021).

The regulation applies to all pupils who attend a public school funded by the federal government and classifies support services into “personal assistance,” “school assistance,” and “interpreting services.” The regulation further specifies interpreting as “translation services among different languages or language systems.” (BMBWF 2023b, 6). It clearly distinguishes between SLI and STTI, explaining that SL interpreters interpret from an oral source language into SL as target language whereas STT interpreters work with an oral source text and create a written target text. Furthermore, the regulation mentions that interpreting services are available to pupils who are hard of hearing or deaf.

In addition, the regulation includes the application modalities for interpreting services (BMBWF 2023b, 12): The parents submit an application for SLI or STTI to the regional authorities. Once the application has been approved, the individual school or school coordinator consequently decides on how to engage the interpreters and implement the interpreting services. This, of course, depends on the coordinator's experience and familiarity with STT and SL interpreters.

The regulation forms a joint legal basis for STTI and SLI and highlights the importance of an "appropriate support service" (BMBWF 2023a, 2), specifying the equal status of both forms of interpreting to ensure "accessible participation" (ibid., 12). The option to "engage STT interpreters, if required" underlines the pupils' freedom to choose between STT or SL interpreters on the basis of the individual preferences and circumstances of the specific communication[4].

The regulation itself also specifies professional aspects of the work of STT interpreters in the educational setting. This comprises standardized rates, which highlights the appreciation of STTI and SLI and reflects an equal positioning of both services as an instrument to ensure the best possible support for pupils. At a higher level of professional practice, the regulation is an important step towards making STTI more visible and professionalizing this field of work. As a matter of fact, STTI has definitely not achieved the level of professionalization which we can see in the field of SLI (Grbić 2023).

2.2 Challenges of Accessibility

Now, the authors would like to highlight the extent of the challenging situations that STT interpreters encounter in the classroom. Thus, in the following sections, we give a short overview of researched aspects, enriching them with the results of the STT interpreters focus group.

In education interpreting, scientific research and publications mainly focus on the challenges for SL and spoken language interpreters, such as dealing with linguistic registers like teenage slang, colloquialisms and expressions (Tipton & Furmanek 2016, 177). These linguistic aspects also represent one of the main challenges for STTI, as choices at the level of lexical and syntactic structures in the written medium differ considerably from spoken language (Maaß 2020, 25, 175; Tiittula 2018) in having a direct impact on the availability, retrievability, readability, perceptibility and thus also comprehensibility of information (Maaß 2020).

Based on the definition of STTI as the intra- or interlingual conversion of a spoken source text into a readable target text, the specific requirements for STTI can easily be derived according to accessible communication criteria (Maaß 2020, 29–48). After all, when is a text readable for the target group? It is defined as readable in terms of retrievability and perceptibility if its layout and projection medium are designed in such a way that the pupil can access it in communication.

With regard to comprehensibility and linkability, the pupil's reading competence is decisive – this, for interpreting in schools, entails one of the central challenges for STT interpreters, as shown by the focus group: the special needs of a very heterogeneous target group.

As shown by the authors' data gained within the focus group, there are 10 STT interpreters working in the secondary school sector in Vienna at two different schools, supporting pupils with hearing impairment who are between 15 and 18 years old. Those pupils are part of five different classes and very often attend their lessons together with pupils without hearing impairment. The users of STTI mostly include pupils who are hard of hearing but show different levels of residual hearing. The majority of them are often encountering STTI for the first time; however, we see a rising level of STTI provided for deaf pupils who use STTI in addition to SLI. This especially applies to lessons in foreign language or with a high amount of specialized language, where STTI has proven to be particularly useful. Apart from foreign language classes, the general teaching language is German.

When it comes to STTI provided for deaf pupils, interpreters face a target group whose mother tongue might be SL. Written German could be considered a first foreign language for those pupils. In foreign language classes, we are confronted with an additional language barrier. Interpreters have to take into account these challenges so that they can create a text that is, indeed, helpful and beneficial to the pupils. In this specific example, interpreters are required to use interpreting and texting strategies that contradict a verbatim approach in the form of a "simple" transcription of the source text. Interpreters in these circumstances might even decide to add information to the text that goes beyond usual comments on auditive information, such as additional translations of new vocabulary or remarks about pronunciation, as shows the below target text taken from an English lesson.

> (Teacher) OK, everyone. Please take out your worksheets from last week. We will do exercise 2 on reported speech together. Lisa, can you read out the solution to the first sentence, please?
>
> (Classmate speaking) Mr. Smith said that the ship was very big.
>
> (Teacher) Thanks. The tenses are correct: "is" has to become "was." And "said" at the beginning is also correct. However, please be careful with pronunciation. Can you hear the difference when I say ship or sheep? (the teacher pronounces sheep differently emphasizing a "long e.")
>
> (Classmate speaking) Sheep is an animal.
>
> (Teacher) Yes, indeed. You can see here that the word has a totally different meaning when I pronounce it incorrectly.

Example 1: Explanatory additions to the source text within the target text

Interpreters might be confronted with a completely different situation in the next lesson, this being mathematics. In this lesson, STTI is used by a pupil with good residual hearing in her first year of higher secondary school. The pupil does not have much experience with STTI, but it soon becomes obvious that she wishes to have a target text that is rather close to the source text, avoiding many omissions. Moreover, communicative participation in class is very important to this pupil. The interpreter, therefore, has to choose an adequate interpretation strategy, including comments from classmates that are not directly related to the content of the lesson itself, as well as paraverbal elements such as laughter or irony. Only in this way is it possible to ensure optimum participation within the communication and meet the criterion of acceptability and action-enabling potential (Maaß 2020, 44, 47), as shown in the below text example:

> (Teacher) OK, who can tell me the result of exercise 23? We want to know John's weight gain.

> (Classmate speaking) 4.5
>
> (Teacher) 4.5 apples or bananas (ironic)?
>
> (Laughter)
>
> (Classmate speaking) 4.5 percent.
>
> (Teacher) Yes, don't forget to mention such things. That is important.

Example 2: Inclusion of paraverbal elements

STTI requires interpreters to constantly question the needs of pupils and consequently apply appropriate interpreting strategies and decisions (Conrad & Stegenga 2005, 294) so that interpreters are able to overcome communication barriers for the pupils concerned and prevent moments of conversational or general frustration.

2.3 STTI in educational settings: practical insights

The actions of interpreters and their visibility, as well as active participation within the educational setting have been the subject of numerous publications in translation studies. Due to the diversity and heterogeneity of communications, it is not possible to derive universal statements and requirements for action. Added to this are the different expectations of other parties involved in the communication (Conrad & Stegenga 2005: 294). For example, interpreters are expected to remain largely invisible both in the classroom and in online settings, while at the same time performing a balancing act between interpreter, coordinator, and intercultural mediator (Davitti 2015: 177).

Among the 10 STT interpreters working at the schools in Vienna, there is consensus that they are much more than a mouthpiece with the aim of transferring texts from one medium and mode to the other. This can be seen in this quote from an interpreter who took part in the focus group, among others:

> As an interpreter, I may have to intervene in the communication situation for successful communication and inform the parties involved about the necessary conditions and requirements for the interpreting event.

Acting as an "invisible mediator" in the background, as an interpreter mentioned, is neither possible nor expedient (Platter 2019, 138–139). This can be illustrated by the two chapters below outlining STTI in secondary schools and the corresponding preparatory work.

2.3.1 Why and how to prepare for STTI school assignments

The work of STT interpreters usually starts long before the first day of school in September, as the summer holidays are used for the coordination of the actual STTI assignments and above all to establish adequate framework conditions so that STTI in the new school year can be carried out professionally. This particularly encompasses awareness-raising activities and the provision of necessary information to pupils and teachers involved. Interpreters are confronted with the challenge that neither pupils nor teachers might have experienced or used STTI before. Teachers may be skeptical and sometimes even get the impression that their teaching activities are being monitored. Users as well as classmates might have various open questions, such as how STTI works, what has to be prepared in terms of technical equipment and whether interpreters write down every word which is said.

To address these questions and create a solid basis for successful communication, it is important for interpreters to talk to teachers and pupils in advance. Moreover, information sheets on STTI distributed among teachers and pupils have proven useful. For interpreters it is important to know the different parties involved in the field of "inclusive schools". For pupils with hearing impairment, this comprises STT and SL interpreters as well as learning support teachers. Effective preparation and coordination are only possible if those parties work closely together. This cooperation also entails a constant transfer of knowledge throughout the school year to ensure high quality of provided STTI. Knowledge, in this sense, is considered a broad concept comprising the individual needs of the pupils using STTI, organizational aspects as well as teaching material, or preparation documents such as worksheets.

This aspect directly leads the interpreters of the focus group to an essential part of professional STTI: the actual preparation of interpreters for the assignment at school. Preparation goes far beyond that of the actual content of the upcoming lesson. It also refers to the organization of the technical equipment required in the classroom. As a matter of fact, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for STTI, because the requirements depend to a great extent on the target group. Whenever there are several pupils using STTI in class, interpreters might use a projector, or an interactive whiteboard directly connected to the interpreter’s laptop. This way, the whole class can see the projected text. Whenever there are single users, interpreters have to make sure that the pupils have a mobile device they can use to read the target text. For online assignments, interpreters also have to ensure that the school uses appropriate microphones because high audio quality is crucial for remote STTI.

Last but not least, preparation also comprises preparation on a content level. In practice, interpreters working at schools carry out their assignments alone taking into account that there are breaks after each lesson. Therefore, there is no colleague who can support the “active” interpreter and make corrections to the live text. This correction process, referred to as co-editing, is common practice in the majority of STTI settings in Austria which exceed a certain duration. The lack of this collaboration process makes the interpreter’s preparation for the upcoming school lesson even more important in order to be able to provide high-quality services. To properly prepare for the assignments, the interpreters might use school books, worksheets or other material used by class teachers or learning support teachers as well as existing STT-interpreted target texts that have been saved for later use. Again, the above-mentioned knowledge transfer among the parties involved becomes very important for the preparation of interpreters. This especially applies to knowledge transfer among the individual interpreters working in the educational setting who should support each other in their work and preparation to ensure consistent and professional STTI for the pupils.

2.3.2 How to interpret during school lessons

The technical preparations have been made and all parties have been informed the best possible way so that the first lesson with STTI can begin. However, even immediately before starting STTI on the spot, the interpreter has to deal with other subject-related issues, not least the question of the best possible positioning in the classroom to ensure the optimal outcome, as is highlighted in the interpreters' focus group.

The positioning firstly depends on the type of projection of the target text produced by the interpreter. If a projector or a similar device is used, the interpreters are restricted in choosing where to position themselves in the classroom, as they have to connect their working device to the projection tool. If there are no technical restrictions in terms of hardware interfaces, other factors must be taken into account: for example, lessons in secondary schools are very often not held as traditional frontal lecturers but are more interactive. Teachers ask the pupils questions and continue working on the basis of their answers, which are often not repeated by the teacher. A classic example of this is when pupils have to collaborate and fill in gaps on a worksheet. In this case, it is crucial for STTI users that they can read and follow the answers given by their classmates. When positioning themselves in the classroom, interpreters must therefore ensure that they hear and understand even the responses of classmates sitting in the back rows. For this reason, positioning themselves right next to the teacher's desk might not be the best or most suitable choice.

However, interpreters should also choose a position in the classroom from which they can make eye contact with the pupils using the target text. If they do so, they are able to immediately notice whether some passages of the target text have been misunderstood, and they become aware of technical problems that might occur during the projection (e.g., the target text is not projected on the large screen due to bad cable connection or on individual devices as WIFI is not working) in order to solve them swiftly. In their professional practice, interpreters have noted that young pupils in particular, who might have just begun using STTI and have limited experience in doing so, are often reluctant to actively draw attention to ambiguities in the target text or technical problems. In this case, it is up to the interpreters to approach the pupil immediately in order to resolve problems as quickly as possible. Last but not least, in some subjects it is crucial that the interpreter is able to see the blackboard, for example when formulae are written down – in that case, the interpreter may refer to them, noting that in the target text with a specific marker (see blackboard).

Let us now assume that the interpreter is positioned in the center of the classroom close to the STTI user. In that case, the interpreter thus becomes an interactant within the classroom and cannot “retreat into the background” simply because of where they are seated. The active role of the interpreter becomes even clearer when she has to consciously intervene at certain stages within the communication. In practice, this happens very often when, despite the best possible positioning, it is not possible to hear and understand what classmates say. The STTI users often only recognize potential gaps within the target text after a delay, when their classmates have already moved on to the next point in the conversation, and do not dare to interrupt the conversation. After consultation with the pupils, it is therefore up to the interpreters to actively intervene within the conversation and ask classmates or teachers to repeat what has been said.

Furthermore, despite detailed preparation, there is always a need to inform and sensitize teachers with regard to the STTI and how the service might be offered in the best possible way. On the one hand, this concerns the provision of preparatory or working and teaching materials for the interpreters, but also the necessity to adapt the speed of the speaker or the speed of delivery of the source text and to pause in order to give the STTI users time to receive the target text and, after reading and understanding it, to actively participate in the lesson.

Even during the actual assignment, the interpreters are therefore constantly interacting with all parties involved within the classroom; in doing so, they can ensure the best possible conditions for quality STTI tailored to the needs of the respective STTI user.

3 Conclusion

At the secondary schools presented in this chapter, STTI alongside SLI is appreciated as a beneficial support service for and by pupils, teachers, and administrative staff. STT interpreters have the possibility of adapting the interpreted target text to the respective communicative expectations and needs, taking into account the source text, the requirements of the respective subject at school, teachers, and especially pupils, both in terms of perceptibility, but also comprehensibility and linkability. STTI is, therefore, a tailor-made form of accessibility service at schools creating an added value for pupils who use this service funded within federal educational institutions. For all those involved in STTI at the different levels of decision-making there is still a need to raise awareness of how the service can be applied for and specifically implemented compared to the much better-known SLI. In addition to the actual interpreting itself, this entails a higher workload for STT interpreters, as they often have to inform about their services, plan the event in a more detailed way, and consult interactants about the characteristics of the service.

Summary in plain English

Pupils, teachers, and administrative staff appreciate speech-to-text interpreting (STTI) in secondary schools. The authors of this chapter analyzed two secondary schools in Austria where STT interpreters work in the classrooms.

The interpreters sit in the classroom and produce live texts for pupils with hearing impairments; therefore, the pupil can read what is said. The live text is understandable: it is readable, comprehensible, and tailored to the needs of the pupil. When the pupil reads the text, they can access the contents of the communication and the subject in a better way.

Sometimes, the pupil, their parents, or even the school and the directors are not aware that STT interpreters are available and that the school does not have to pay for their services. Therefore, interpreters have to let them know of their services. Even in the classroom itself, they have to do a lot of additional work, like explaining what they do, what they need, and how the live text can be used.

Notes

[1] The focus group was held in German. All translations, therefore, are by the authors unless otherwise noted.

[2] Within the context of this chapter, we use the term “hearing impairment” for impairments encountered by deaf and hard-of-hearing persons based on the definitions used in Kusters & Friedner’s (2015) inclusive approach.
[3] All translations are by their authors unless otherwise noted.
[4] Even at a later stage of education, to “improve the professional participation of people with disabilities” (BMSGPK 2022, 6), users are free to choose which interpreting service they prefer. In Austria, this considerable part of education for work-specific and further training purposes is the responsibility of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs. The Directive on Work and Training for an Accessible Working Environment also includes STTI and SLI as equivalent and freely selectable services. The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs stipulates that people with hearing impairments can apply for interpreting costs to be covered as part of individual funding (Sozialministerium 2023a). The official decrees 8/2023 (Sozialministerium 2023c) and 7/2023 (Sozialministerium 2023b) regulate STTI and SLI in great detail, including, the training courses interpreters must have completed, the duration and fees paid for interpreting jobs on-site or online.

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Simplified Language as a Dream of Every Conference Interpreter

Jaroslav Stahl

Abstract

Interpreters are forced to simplify their texts because they are under time pressure and stress, and have to decide quickly. Condensation, compression, but also compensation strategies feature a key tool for such purposes and constitute major cognitive-pragmatic processes in the simplification of formal speech structures to gain time. This is also the basis of the so-called effort theory of Daniel Gile, who identified and monitored the process of time and energy consumption until it reached and perhaps exceeded the interpreter's capacity. In order prevent such an outcome, the interpreter must use time-saving strategies which at the same time are applied to simplify complicated syntax. Special demands are put on a simultaneous relay interpreter in the booth, when their target-language interpretinghas to be especially understandable, logical, and well-structured. This chapter describes the possibilities of the interpreter to modify source texts to make them adequate speeches for the relay interpreter as well as listeners of the text in the target language. The presented examples show that the options of interpreters are quite wide, and the results indicate that there are no true simplified texts, only texts that contain simple or complex ideas, but also that complex ideas can be expressed by simpler language.

Keywords: simplified language, interpreting, simplifying strategies

Introduction and overview of theoretical approaches

Interpreting is a complex cognitive-pragmatic activity during which a whole plethora of concrete processes take place in the interpreter's consciousness. From the reception and logical-semantic grasp of the speaker's source text, through its placement in the context of the communicative situation, its memorization (which again depends on the type of interpreting – consecutive or simultaneous), and the transcoding of the semantic equivalent or semantic abstract (Stahl 2013, 70) between the working languages, to the planning of the target text and its final production. Each of these sub-activities requires time and effort, which the interpreter often does not have enough of. For this reason, the interpreter is forced to shorten and streamline the processes and seek shortcuts that will enable them to produce the target text as quickly as possible, but still with satisfactory quality. The search for these possibilities is therefore also a way of producing a text that is understandable from a semantic, but also linguistic and phonetic point of view. Gile, for example, considers this important fact to be an essential factor and part of his effort theory:

> overload due to high capacity-consuming features, such as – densely informative strings which tax both listening/analysis and production capacity; pre-composed written texts which are read out; unfamiliar accents; unusual or ungrammatical linguistic structures, which tax the listening effort, composite proper nouns; syntactic differences requiring reordering and features vulnerable to lapses of attention, e.g. short non-redundant items such as numbers or short proper names. (Gile 1995, 108)

Setton (1999, 66) also sees SI as an activity that is inhibited by several factors, including but not limited to semantics beneath the lexical-syntactic surface of the speaker's utterance structure, which inevitably has an impact on the TT (target text): A model for SI must accommodate overlapping comprehension and production, and be equipped with input and output parsing mechanisms valid for any human language, bearing in mind that more meaning is derived and transmitted than what is overtly coded in the surface form of utterances. (Setton 1999, 63). The result must be a structural-grammatical as well as semantic quality of the target text that is unambiguously comprehensible to the intended listener in a given communicative situation. Kalina (1998, 118) also writes about the strategic operations necessary to achieve the necessary TT quality: On one hand, strategies of target text production are ST-determined (relating to text surface: syntactic transformation; transcoding: compression and emergency strategies like generalization, relativization, substitution, and deletion) on the other hand TT-determined (recall strategies, the decision about the distance from the speaker, coherence-creating strategies, stylistic strategies, etc.

It's not the point here to arrive at a "simplified" target text produced by the interpreter. It's the result, that is, the actual quality of the interpreting, the quality of the target text. However, the essence of interpreting is not the simplified text as an end in itself, but the semantic-functional equivalence, i.e. the transmission of an equivalent/identical message that corresponds to the communicative intention of the speaker in the SL. According to a survey conducted by Zwischenberger and Pöchhacker (Zwischenberger & Pöchhacker 2010, 628) among about 2500 members of the AIIC, consistency of meaning compared to the original (88%) and logical coherence of the text (75%) are unquestionably the most important, with intonation and a pleasant voice as suprasegmental elements of the speech coming at the bottom of the ranking. In this case, quality is first associated with simplicity and clarity of the text (logical coherence of the text is closest to it), whereas consistency or equivalence of the text to the original is more difficult to assess in interpreting listeners and is not the aim of our research. Determining the exact level of quality of an interpreted text is also considered difficult by Behr:

> Qualität im Dolmetschen muss drei Ebenen berücksichtigen, nämlich die Äquivalenz von Ausgangs- und Zieltext, die jeweilige Perspektive, aus der beurteilt wird (Rezipient, Dolmetscher, Prüfer), sowie eine holistische Herangehensweise, die der komplexen Gesamtdynamik des Dolmetschprozesses als Ganzem Rechnung trägt und dabei die jeweilige Situation, in der eine Verdolmetschung erfolgt... (Behr 2013, 86)

> Quality in interpreting must take three levels into account, namely equivalence between the source and target text, the particular perspective taken by the assessment (recipient, interpreter, assessor), and a holistic approach that encompasses the complex overall dynamics of the interpreting process as a whole, including the particular situation in which the interpreting is performed… (own translation)

…while quality or "simplicity" of the target text (TT) respectively remains only one of the features, it is the best measurable and assessable on the surface from our point of view. Also, Djovčos et al. (2021, 17) discuss two main evaluative perspectives on interpreting performance:

> Z diachrónneho hľadiska v tejto súvislosti môžeme hovoriť o dvoch dominantných prístupoch: hodnotenie výsledného produktu tlmočenia (cieľového textu) a hodnotenie z perspektívy príjemcu., teda jeho „hmatateľného produktu".
>
> From the diachronic viewpoint, we can define two dominant approaches: The assessment of the final product of interpreting (target text) on one hand and the evaluation from the perspective of the recipient, i.e. its "tangible product" on the other. (own translation)

According to Waliczek (2002, 160), who conducted a survey among interpreters engaged in relay interpreting (interpreting a text that is interpreted by another interpreter into a third language), they rate logical cohesion of utterance (logical cohesion of the target text intended for the second interpreter) highest among quality factors, and only after that the equivalence of the text compared to the speaker's text (meaning coherence with the original message), which is not surprising in our opinion, since at any given moment the second interpreter does not know whether the information in TT1's text that he/she receives is semantically correct. However, he welcomes the logical coherence and fluency of that text. And this is also the target idea of a "simple", i.e. logically unambiguous text in the target language, the ideal for every listener and, naturally, every interpreter. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, 33) also consider cohesion (the surface linguistic structure of a text) as well as coherence (internal semantic-logical connectedness) as key criteria for any text. Without these, the listener cannot even discern any of the other properties of the text that these authors go on to define: intentionality and acceptability, informativeness, situatedness, and intertextuality. All these properties are prerequisites for making the target language text produced by the interpreter as simple and comprehensible as possible. All the above characteristics also apply to the speaker whom the interpreter is listening to and interpreting, and the title of the article suggests this aspect.

1 Simplified language and the goal of the study

As we have discussed in the previous introductory chapter, certain conditions apply to both the speaker's source text and the interpreter's target language, which we have tried to specify with the scholarly opinions of the authors cited. The preliminary aim of our consideration is to outline the possibilities of simplified language in interpreting conditions, in particular simultaneous booth interpreting. Can it be the intention of both the speaker and the interpreter to produce simplified language to better understand their communicative intention, their semantic message, or in other words, the illocution of the speaker/interpreter/emitter of the text within the speech act? Should simplified language be a necessary intention of the producer of the text? In answering these questions, we rely on the analysis of specific texts produced during simultaneous interpreting. The source of the texts used in the analysis was an unpublished dissertation.

2 Possibilities of simplified language in interpreting

In view of the scholars' attitutes presented above, the possibilities for simplifying language are as wide as the language itself offers. Among the interpreted texts which were the subject of our analysis, we focused on the lexical level, syntax, text-linguistic phenomena at the level of sentence-overlapping units up to the level of the whole text corpus. The first two corpuses were recorded in a doctoral thesis research (Stahl 2004, unpublished). Text corpus 1 is 7 min 59 s in length with a rate of utterance averaging 183.9 syllables per minute. It was a spontaneous speech by the speaker on the history and role of the European Union. The text is characterized by a slower pace, pauses and a more pronounced intonation, which facilitates the role of the interpreter. The second baseline text has a length of 4 min 29 s and an average speed of 221 syllables per minute, i.e. with a higher speaking rate, which is a typical characteristic of read texts. This corresponds to a higher information density, in other words a low redundancy rate. All of these characteristics make the work of the interpreter more difficult, who has to transcode the speaker's intention into the target language with the required semantic nuances, but into a language that by its very nature requires more text to express an equivalent unit of content – German. Additionally, we have chosen text 3, a paragraph from an official speech of the German president interpreted into Slovak, with an overall length of 6 min 31 s and 205 syllables per minute.

Anticipation of the verb in a German text is the most apparent example of a syntax reconstruction strategy in interpreting in the opposite direction, i.e. from German into Slovak, but also other languages with a different verb position. Anticipation means anticipating a part of the text that has not yet been spoken, but the interpreter has to produce it before it can be heard in German. Or, as Van Besien (1999, 250) maintains: Anticipation refers to the simultaneous interpreter's production of a constituent (a word or a group of words) in the target language before the speaker has uttered the corresponding constituent in the source language. So that need not be necessarily a verb, which is a specific case of German.

2.1 Lexis

We consider lexical shifts to be any interventions of the interpreter that take place at the level of the word, or at most the phrase. These can be implemented as pronominalization (replacing a full-meaning word with a pronoun), provided that it does not change the meaning of the utterance, or condensation, where e.g. as a result of the speaker's higher rate of speech, he or she omits some of the full-meaning words. This applies to the enumeration of several equivalent terms, where the omission does not cause communicative noise. Although synonym substitution is not in the nature of condensation, it can sometimes cause a lengthening of the target text. However, the purpose is to make the translating functionally equivalent. A typical substitution type shift can be seen in Example 1:

> ST: Európsky kontinent prekonal v minulom, *v 20. storočí* dve hrozné vojny a jedným zo zmyslov EÚ <u>bolo</u> zabrániť konfliktom na *tomto kontinente.*
>
> TT: Der europäische Kontinent machte im vorigen Jahrhundert zwei schreckliche Kriege und der Sinn der EU <u>ist</u> praktisch auch künftige Konflikte *hier* zu verhindern.

Here we see right away two examples of substitution, one with zero equivalent (condensation) and the other using pronominalization (*na tomto kontinente – hier*). The change of grammatical tense in the case of semantic equivalence plays no role at all, which is a specific feature of interpreting. Naturally, a key category such as grammatical tense and its choice depend on the communicative context, which is irrelevant in this case since it is a generally valid statement. The substitution strategy, which relieves the interpreter's operational memory, is based on the topic–rheme principle, where the topic of the following functional-semantic unit refers to the rheme of the previous unit.

2.2 Syntax

Example 2 points at another type of simplification and a certain kind of interpreting compression:

> ST: ...Ako člen vlády sa nemôžem vyhnúť úvahám, ktoré zohľadňujú celospoločenské hľadisko.
>
> TT: ...Als Regierungsmitglied darf ich hier gesellschaftsübergreifende Aspekte nicht vergessen...

This is more than condensation since the interpreter has reduced the referential clause to a simple sentence, preserving the functional-semantic equivalent. The rearrangement of the syntactic structure and the factual shortening of the idea is a basic feature of interpreter compression (Nováková 1993). Simple syntax is also very necessary in the case of relay interpreting when the TT becomes the source text 2 (ST2).

The next example, Example 3, points at a typical example of verb anticipation, which inevitably must occur to keep the word order in Slovak logical and understandable, hence forming a smooth and natural flow of text:

> ST: Ich freue mich darüber, wie schnell es Ihnen gelungen ist, eine so beeindruckende Anzahl von wichtigen Verantwortungsträgern zu <u>versammeln</u>.
>
> TT: Teším sa z toho, ako rýchlo sa vám podarilo <u>dať dokopy</u> také veľké množstvo dôležitých zodpovedných subjektov.

Example 4 indicates another simplifying transition in the Slovak text, from a complex to a simple sentence:

> ST: Unternehmen und Gewerkschaften Seite an Seite, wie es sich für gelebte Sozialpartnerschaft gehört. Partnerschaft in der Verteidigung dessen, was uns gemeinsam ausmacht und was wir nie wieder hergeben werden: die Demokratie!

> TT: Firmy a odbory bok po boku, ako v modernom sociálnom partnerstve. Partnerstvo v obrane spoločných hodnôt a toho, čoho sa nikdy nevzdáme: Demokracie!

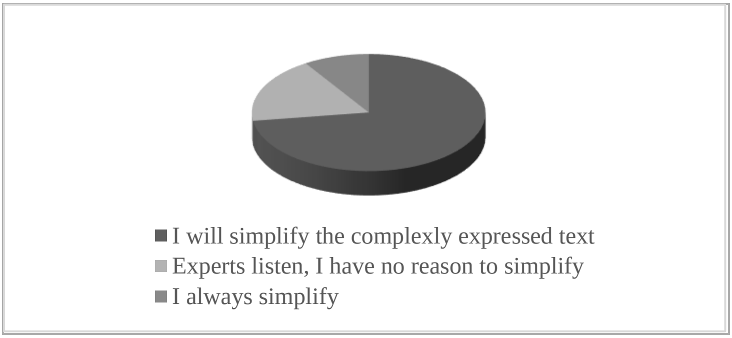
2.3 Other examples of interpreting requiring simplified language

One other case where the quality requirements and thus the relative clarity and unambiguity of the target language should be apparent is that of relay interpreting. This is interpreting at events with multiple official languages, where one language A is interpreted into the main language of the event, B, and from there again into another (third) language, C. Interpreter 1, interpreting into the main language of the event B, is the so-called pivot interpreter, with the target language B becoming the source language for interpreter 2, interpreting into language C. Interpreters can of course alternate in these roles. The main concern here is the required quality of the target text in language B, which must be comprehensible not only in terms of logical cohesion (logical coherence) and lexical-syntactic coherence, but also prosodically-phonetically, which includes neutral pronunciation (without the influence of any dialect) with adequate intonation, pacing and pausing. As AIIC (1999, 628) points out: When you are a pivot, all the principles of quality interpreting apply, of course, and a good pivot is, first and foremost, a good interpreter. However, the pivot must also make a special effort to interpret with the needs of colleagues in mind, and to be maximally clear and helpful. Relay thus places special demands on the interpreter, who must simplify the text to some extend and "sanding the edges" of the speaker's speech in language A in order to make the translated text comprehensible even to a non-native speaker of language B.

As we can see, in interpreting there is a need to simplify the language, but not by simplifying the content, but first by simplifying the form, which will allow a clearer and more logical transfer of the communicative equivalent, i.e. the speaker's intention, into other languages.

3 Survey among conference interpreters

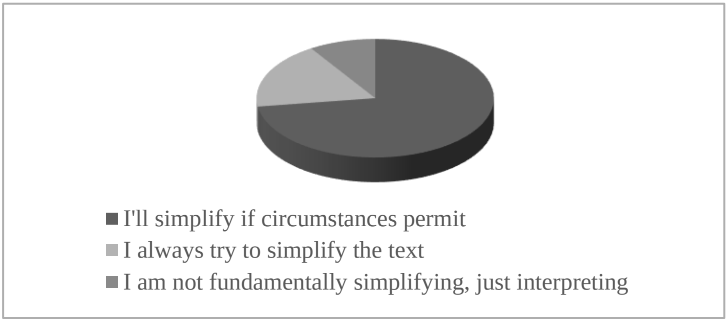
In this subchapter, we want to support the analysis of the texts and the veracity of our findings on the different linguistic levels with a survey of professional interpreters. Their daily work involves the strategies mentioned above, which we wanted to support in as objective a way as possible. The questions focus on the individual choice of strategies in the production of the ideal target text, whether in simple interpreting between two languages (consecutive – when the interpreter speaks after the speaker, or simultaneous, where the interpreter works in parallel with the speaker) or by so-called relay interpreting, where the interpreter produces a text to be further reinterpreted into a third language. In addition to the questions on the choice of strategies, we also asked for some way of defining simplified language, where the answers offered were more nuanced. In the first question, we focused on the nature of simplified language production in interpreting. Question 1: "When interpreting, a high-quality and comprehensible target text is always required. When we speak of simplified language, we always mean the formal-grammatical aspect, because even complex ideas can be expressed relatively simply. If you are interpreting a more structurally demanding speech, to what extent are you willing to simplify it for the listeners?"



Graph 1: Simplification in interpreting

In the results, we see a differentiated view of most of the interpreters interviewed (8 of 11), who try to simplify and rationalize the surface form of the text if the communicative context and the linguistic complexity or pace of the source text make it possible. However, when simplification requires considerable cognitive energy, many interpreters limit the simplification of the target text, as the burden on their working memory, the recoding of the content and the control of their own produced text overload their cognitive capacities (Gile 1995, 108). On the other hand, there are cases when there is no reason to ignore smoothing the target text just because the interpreter relies on the expertise of the listeners, as then it often results into information noise and miscommunication of the TT. Only a small portion of the interpreters interviewed (2) see no reason to simplify the text even relatively.

A specific case, demanding extra efforts of the interpreter, is so-called relay interpreting, where the target language TT1 is ST2 at the same time, intended for further reinterpreting in case of the use of less frequented working languages at various conference or congress events. All of the interpreters interviewed have worked as pivots and therefore have relevant experience. Survey question no. 2 was formulated as follows: “You work as a relay interpreter at a congress or conference event. Will you try to simplify the grammar structure of the text?”

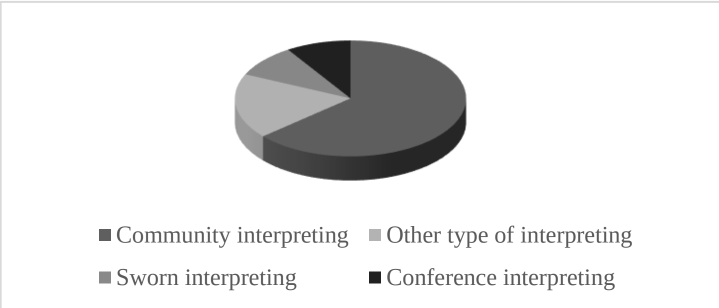


Graph 2: Simplification in relay interpreting

In the case of relay, the results are similar, indeed virtually the same, with 8 of the 11 participants simplifying the interpreted text when circumstances allowed (according to the accounts, this involved pacing, the linguistic difficulty of ST1, the topic – i.e. the communicative context, but also the color of the speaker's voice, which may not suit the hearing of some interpreters, intonation – changing the pace and pitch of the voice, but also the empathy of the speaker's voice – mentioned by 1 participant). Simplifying the text (chosen by 2 respondents) may not be a rational decision as information may be lost (1 participant who did not choose this option said that after all we are not interpreting for children). Ignoring the interpreters interpreting the pivot text is also not a good option as they may not be experts and may not always be able to handle the ST2 in its entirety – stated by 2 respondents).

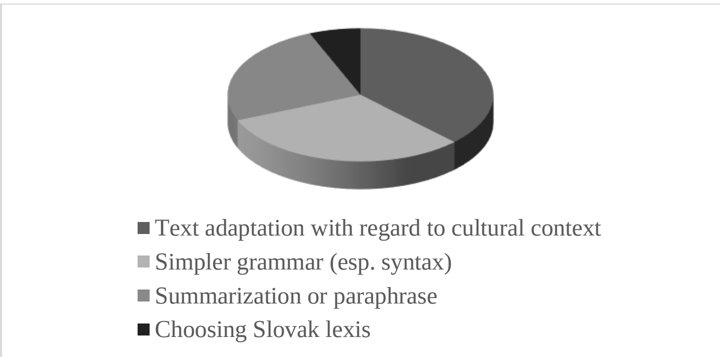
Here the observation and experience confirm that the relay interpreter text must have specific features – appropriate pacing with good quality and neutral pronunciation (3 respondents), unambiguous logical syntactic-semantic structure, acceptable to an interpreter whose ST2 is not his/her first language.

Question 3 focused on the interpreters' opinion on where simplified language should be applied most often. Of 11 respondents, the absolute majority (7) indicated community interpreting as the situation where language needs to be simplified most. At this point one could even speak of simple, not just simplified language. This is mainly due to communication with foreigners who do not have a good command of any communication language in the given situation, only their own mother tongue. In the case of sworn interpreting, although there is a need to explain legal facts and to simplify things for those in contact with the authorities, courts, etc., some technical terms are unavoidable (1 respondent). Conference interpreting is decisively not the type where simplified language should be preferred at any cost (only 1 respondent). Wording of the question: Which type of interpreting requires the most simplified and easily understandable language?



Graph 3: The biggest need for simplified language

Question 4, the last question, focused on the nature of simplified language, or what simplified language actually constitutes; i.e. through what means it is achieved: What does simplified language mean to you?



Graph 4: Means of language simplification

The answers here indicated more complex operations in deeper text levels, thus it was not so easy to choose the proper option. Adaptation of the text with respect to the cultural context means considering the cultural specifics of the receiving environment and the target language, which is most applicable to idioms, phraseology, proverbs, norms, units, and is a standard element of the application of the principle of skopos (purpose) (Reiß & Vermeer 1991, 96) in processes such as written translation. In interpreting, it refers to the elements that the interpreter manages to apply and adapt. First of all, a combination with the application of simple grammar (syntax, i.e. simplified language) should be chosen, but only if this is possible. These two options were chosen by the majority of respondents (12 times in total), but here, more than one option was possible. Summarization or paraphrase was chosen by 4 respondents, the choice of Slovak lexis by one. In the case of extremely demanding texts in terms of pace, content, or complex grammatical structure, it is permissible to use the strategy of summarization or paraphrase, but this option should not be the default one. The choice of Slovak lexis is not a sufficient option and does not simplify the text very much; it only makes it partially comprehensible, to a very small extent.

4 Conclusion

Our goal was to answer logically the question to what extent the simplified text is applicable in the process of (simultaneous) interpreting with the intention of facilitating the understanding of the listeners, but also of the second interpreter in relay who must work with his/her source text. Simplified language is not understood here as simple language for those who do not yet know the language well enough or are not able to express themselves clearly enough in it. It is a simplified language that enables the content of the utterance to be understood more clearly and logically. This is, of course, also the task of every interpreter. The question is whether simplified language can always be applied, since some complex ideas or statements about complex relationships and dependencies cannot be "flattened" into a simple text, not least for other reasons such as time (the pace of the speaker). Another interfering factor may be technical language, dialect, or other suprasegmental features of the speaker's produced text. Nevertheless, the possibilities that language provides for the interpreter are quite extensive. On the surface of the text, of course, you have syntax, where you can work with the transformation of complex subordinate clauses into a coordinative one, or a series of simple sentences. This factor relieves the operational memory of the second interpreter in the case of relay, when he or she will not have to work with several subordinating relations in the sentence structure.

However, the semantic core of the utterance will have to be processed regardless of syntactic complexity or simplicity. The first facilitator in the effort and possibilities of creating any simpler language is the speaker and his/her rhetorical skills, ability to render the text logically, if possible, without reading, as well as the other suprasegmental qualities already mentioned. The interpreter's training, experience and the level of skills acquired in the application of the different interpreting strategies are also a factor of quality. These are mainly anticipatory, transformational, or transcoding procedures (Kalina 1998, 118) as well as substitution, generalization or condensation strategies, or the method of interpreter compression (Nováková 1993, 68). Neutralization procedures or paraphrasing can only be used in emergency cases when there is a threat of loss of key semantic information (for a different view of neutralizations cf. Bohušová 2024, 31).

The above analyses represent an objective aspect of interpreting activity that can be demonstrated with concrete linguistic material. However, a key component in uncovering the possibilities of interpreter and text production also includes the exploration of the views and attitudes of individual conference interpreters. It is this subjective aspect that can help to understand the processes taking place in their minds as well as the motivators behind their decisions in a particular time and place in text. The answers obtained complement the picture obtained by the analysis of the creative approach to interpreting, on which the majority of the 11 interviewed interpreters agree, especially in the preference for simplifying the target text, if this is not prevented by other retarding factors related to the communicative context – the speaker's pace, his/her intelligibility (use of varieties of language), the more complex grammatical structure of the speech. The same is true in the case of simplification in relay interpreting. This information is crucial as the pivot interpreter must be experienced in handling difficult texts and be able to “smooth” them into a comprehensible form for the second interpreter, who listens to him/her and is often not a native speaker of the main language of the conference and has difficulty in receiving and understanding.

The final question, focusing on the means of simplifying the language, is perhaps the most difficult. Adapting the source text with respect to the cultural context seems like the most correct approach, but the implementation of this procedure is extremely difficult, albeit still possible. A combination of methods seems to be the most viable, which also allows for multiple choices. Simultaneous interpreting allows for the reconstruction (or, better said, deconstruction) of grammatical structure in terms of time; the implementation of the first choice requires the training of an interpreter. The other two methods are only emergency (but sometimes necessary) or partial methods.

The analysis shows us that simplified (let alone simple language) is only a relative and rather treacherous concept in interpreting terms. The interpreter’s role is to translate the speaker’s utterance or speech into the receiving language and its culture in its entire communicative context. This means maintaining equivalence or adequacy, but also surface textual appropriateness in the TL. This may also mean simplified language, but with an emphasis on unambiguous clarity and logicality. The interpreter can fully simplify on the surface of the language, but also in depth, replacing concepts and relations with more appropriate synonyms, better understood equivalents in the TL, while constantly checking the TT’s own acceptability in interaction with the listener (if available) or by self-check. Nothing will guarantee overall success, but it will be enhanced by experience, knowledge of both the speaker and the context of the recipient, and familiarity with both cultures in their interaction with each other. Finally, we can say that simplified language remains a dream for interpreters, but only if they mean a “simple” one.

Summary in plain English

This chapter focuses on ways that oral interpreters can simplify language. To do this, the interpreter can use various strategies to change, reconstruct, or shorten what the speaker says. The chapter analyzes these vocabulary- and word-order-based strategies by doing a survey of professional interpreters. The survey shows some of the possibilities, but also limits, of the kinds of simplifying an interpreter can do, including relay interpreting – interpreting for another interpreter who interprets into a third language. Interpreters can simplify language, but only if they do not remove or distort any key meaning information, which may happen if the interpreter is not an expert.

Abbreviations

SI – simultaneous interpreting
ST – source text
TT – target text
SL – source language
TL – target language

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Language Barriers of International Medical Students in Hungarian Hospitals

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Rawan Darwish
Bernadett Borda
Margit Skadra

Abstract

In Hungary, international medical students (IMSs) face language problems when communicating with Hungarian patients. Students are provided eight semesters of Hungarian and are expected to be able to take a patient's history in Hungarian. This requirement, however, is not fully met, considering that they may hold incomplete medical student–patient conversations.

A mixed-methods study was conducted, including questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with IMSs, to reveal the challenges and barriers concerning language use in this communication. Research data are backed up by a literature review in the field.

Recommendations are given for language teachers and university stakeholders to achieve better results and more satisfaction for international students completing their medical studies in a foreign country.

Keywords: history taking, international medical students, bedside interpreters, language barriers, language clinical field trip, teaching medical Hungarian

1 Introduction

Human communication is considered a social interaction process, with language being a key tool for it (Gee 1993, 7). Effective communication involves delivering the appropriate message to the intended recipient using the suitable channel at the correct time and location, and receiving the appropriate reply or response (Rosengren 2000, 1). Language, or more precisely, the lack of a common language, may be a barrier to conveying the message; thus, proper communication may not be achieved. Language barriers are one of the most impactful problems humans can face in several areas of life, including health care.

Communication is considered a form of art that health care professionals are taught early in their medical education (Mallah 2022). Effective communication builds the trusting relationship that is essential to providing and receiving efficient health care. While the health component is ensured by the medical knowledge of the providers, the care component should be provided through proper communication (Mallah 2022). If there is a language barrier between the doctor and patient, patient outcomes might be inappropriate. Therefore, it is essential for doctors to interact successfully with patients in order to deliver high-quality healthcare (Shoaib et al. 2016; Jahan 2019).

There is an increase in the number of academic papers addressing the impact of the language barrier on the educational experience of medical students during their clinical training, in clinical interaction. Students integrate and utilize knowledge gained in the preclinical years by engaging with patients and clinicians in real-life scenarios during the clinical phase. Both simulated practice and actual patient care can influence a student's clinical skills development (Rustandy et al. 2022, 1). Thus, the clinical years are crucial in a medical student's career for developing appropriate skills in history taking, diagnostics, and patient interactions. However, language barriers between medical students and patients may hinder the development of these skills (Mattila et al. 2010; Abass et al. 2015).

Generally, universities in the world wish to attract a greater number of international students to increase student mobility on the one hand and generate more income for the school on the other. On arriving in a foreign country, international students meet various difficulties, among which communication gaps based on the language barrier may also pose a challenge to the students (Slade & Sergent 2022). Challenges have been documented in the literature (Egege & Kutielek 2004; Ryan & Carroll 2005; Yamada et al. 2014) including acculturative stress, language and cultural barriers, different study skills, and ethnic stereotyping.

International medical students (IMSs) face some further difficulties that are related to the nature of the medical program

(Chinnah 2020). Students also need to overcome language and communication barriers (Huhn et al. 2016; Lenz et al. 2018) during interaction with hospitalized patients as part of their medical training in the clinical years (Hull et al. 2004; Torti et al. 2023). As a consequence, IMSs encounter study-related difficulties along with emotional, intercultural, and language difficulties (Hall 2004), and as they may be both culturally and linguistically diverse, they often experience challenges in communication skills that are essential for effective interactions in the ward (Chan et al. 2016).

In some countries, where financial resources are available, the language gap between the medical student and the patient is bridged by the use of professional medical interpreter services (Switzerland, Sweden, the US). In other countries, lay persons (family members or friends) are involved to assist in the conversation between the patient and the medical student in the ward. Here, the emotional bond between the patient and their family or friends can interfere with the interpreting. It is also known that non-professional interpreters may lack medical terminology, and patients might lose their right to confidentiality and information since they are forced to accept the presence of a family member as an interpreter. Sometimes peer students try to help the ones with poorer language skills. Students can also use translator apps, such as Google Translate.

In Hungary, professional interpreters are generally not available to assist IMSs during their studies. Therefore, students should acquire a higher level of Hungarian language knowledge to be able to communicate with Hungarian patients and thus practice their history-taking skills, establish the diagnosis, and discuss the therapeutic options with the patient. These all require a high level of language skills in a foreign language, in this case, Hungarian.

The Albert Szent-Györgyi Medical School, University of Szeged, Hungary (ASMS) provides the opportunity for international students to study medicine in English. Students come from various countries (for example, Iran, Israel, Japan, South Korea, and almost all European countries) and speak several languages. For the majority of them, English is not their mother tongue, which means that they might face some difficulties studying medicine in English. Problems may also arise when they communicate with doctors and fellow students. IMSs face study-related challenges as well as psychosocial, intercultural, and language barriers (Andrade 2006; Huhn et al. 2016; Nagy et al. 2021, 469). Although some students manage to improve their English level through their six-year studies, the language barrier is still faced in the clinical wards, where they meet inpatients of whom the majority speak only Hungarian. At the ASMS, students do have compulsory Hungarian language classes for eight semesters; still, some of them do not consider their Hungarian knowledge to be sufficient. This results in a language barrier between the students and the patients, where there is a lot of missing information going back and forth between both sides. This language barrier makes it hard for the students to develop their practical medical knowledge based on history-taking. Such language barriers are also an issue in other countries where international students are expected to take histories in a language that is not their first or second language.

The objective of our study conducted at ASMS was to explore the problems faced by medical graduates in communicating with their patients due to language barriers, the influence of these barriers on the undergraduate doctor–patient relationship, and the potential solutions offered by the literature and recommended by the interviewed medical students and their instructors.

2 Methods

A mixed-method study was conducted among IMSs at the ASMS, and the results were compared to the literature published in the field. An online questionnaire was sent to students in their third, fourth, and fifth year of studies at ASMS to collect data on language use at the hospital ward and possible barriers to history taking in Hungarian. Besides some demographic data (age, study year, nationality, and languages spoken), students were asked questions about how they see their Hungarian language abilities, where they can identify the language barrier(s), what recommendations they would have about it, and if the assistance of (professional) interpreters would be helpful. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they would be willing to give some further details in the form of an online interview, and if yes, they could give their email address for further communication. To understand the students’ responses to the survey as a whole and to provide additional insight into the experiences of the students, we then followed up with a qualitative research approach, specifically semi-structured online interviews of a small (n=10) selected subset of students, to explore respondents’ strategies for communicating with Hungarian-speaking patients and perceptions of how it impacted their learning.

In the 2021–2022 academic year, the questionnaires were sent to the students online totaling 210 medical students in the third, fourth, and fifth year studies at ASMS. Based on the email addresses provided by the respondent at the end of the questionnaire, 16 students were approached for an interview, and 10 interviews could be performed. The interviews were conducted on an online platform, and they were recorded. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the questions and answers to the questionnaire. A set of open-ended questions were asked to the participants regarding the issues they face due to language barriers when communicating with the patients and their influence on the medical student–patient relationship, as well as options to overcome these barriers. Each interview lasted for 10–30 minutes.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. Prior to the actual interview, volunteers were sent informed-consent forms about participation and the recording of the interview, and the online interview was arranged only after the signed consent forms had been returned. All the information collected was used only for research purposes, and confidentiality was maintained. The ethical committee of the university consented to the research to be conducted.

3 Results

Out of the 210 questionnaires sent, 87 fully filled ones were returned, and out of the 16 volunteers, 10 were interviewed, and these talks were recorded and transcribed.

3.1 Questionnaire results

Based on the answers, the age of the students was between 21 and 42 years (mean age: 26 years), most of them were in year 3 of their medical studies (n=39), and altogether 28 nationalities were mentioned, e.g., Iranian (n=9), South Korean (n=8), Japanese (n=7), Indian, Israeli, and Palestinian (n=6 each), Nigerian, Pakistani, and Seychellois (n=4 each).

The majority of the respondents spoke one more language besides their native language and English, the language of the medical program. Concerning their Hungarian language abilities, most of them indicated that it was 4 to 6 on a Likert scale of 1 to 10, where 10 was the highest level. Almost every respondent mentioned the presence of the language barrier during communication with the Hungarian patients. However, approximately one-third of them confessed that they were somehow still able to overcome this barrier with the help of a peer or by using an online translation tool.

3.2 Interview results

During the interviews, besides elaborating on the answers collected from the questionnaires, some further questions were also asked to get more insight into the nature of the language barrier and to be able to give some workable suggestions for overcoming it. The questions of the semi-structured interviews included, "How do you develop rapport with your Hungarian speaking patients?", "Where do you feel the language barriers can affect your communication with the patient?", "How would the presence of an interpreter affect the communication between you and the patient?", "How do you think the patient would feel in the presence of the interpreter?", and "Which solution would you consider the best and why?". When assessing the collected answers, the similar ideas were grouped together.

The interviewed participants claimed that the language barrier "is part of our daily life challenges. Patients do not speak English at all, and [they speak] only Hungarian". "Our Hungarian language is not bad, but based on their [the patients'] level, it is definitely more than bad. For example, we can understand the general message from the whole conversation, but never the meaning of every sentence". "Because Hungarian is not our mother tongue [it is a huge barrier]. At the university, they teach us Hungarian, but it is not enough to deal with all the terms and vocabulary used by the patients".

The language barrier was mostly present during understanding the answers of the patient in history-taking and to explain the patient the differential diagnosis and the possible therapeutic options. The language barrier was the highest in case of the patients speaking with an accent (nonstandard Hungarian), speaking very fast, answering in long and complicated sentences, or having some difficulty speaking (lack of teeth, old age, or medical condition related voice/articulation problems). "Hungarian is one of the hardest languages […]. We only understand what we were taught […], other than this, we need help". "Our work is all based on communication with the patient, and when it's absent, the consequences on both sides are big".

The majority of participants perceived that due to their inability to converse in Hungarian, they were unable to properly communicate with patients, which may have adversely affected their ability to empathize with patients. "I find that despite learning medical Hungarian, I feel like I am not able to communicate any better with the patients apart from my memorized list of questions and the answers I need to look for. I find that I am not able to partake in and hold a conversation with a patient".

One student highlighted that many non-native students have this attitude because they study and have exams in English, and because students are not planning to pursue a career in local hospitals. Some non-native medical students may not be inclined to learn Hungarian at all, "if most of the students will return to their home countries after they finish med school, and will not use the language in the future, wouldn't it be more efficient to make Hungarian as a choice and opportunity to get a new skill to manage?"

The presence of an interpreter could be helpful, but "it depends on the type of the interpreter, for example, if it's a doctor it would be the best, since he can explain and make us understand the medical diagnosis and the background behind it". "If it [the interpreter] was a nurse, it would also be good, but if it was any normal [lay] Hungarian person, it would be a bit challenging". "[A layperson] would also explain what the patient said from their point of view. Which means a lot of medical information will be missed". The patient might feel uncomfortable in the presence of the interpreter, but "honestly it depends on the type of interpreter. If it was a doctor or a nurse, the patient wouldn't mind to share [sic] any information and would be comfortable, but if it was any other person just helping with translation that would be a problem".

The students' recommendations on overcoming the language barrier included the employment of interpreters, making English-speaking patients available for practicing these skills in English, asking Hungarian students to help them during their clinical years, an increased number of Hungarian language classes, different teaching materials and course materials, and the presence of the Hungarian language teacher assisting them during ward rounds.

A participant emphasized that effective communication skills are crucial for student–patient interaction. However, the presence of the language barrier can render the interaction ineffective even if the student possesses outstanding communication skills. The respondent recommended that "more listening exercises are needed", "More vocabulary lists [would be useful] with all the vocabulary and expressions that we need to know", "more of speaking practice and organized field trips", and "I would suggest an increase in the off-book practice during class, that is, we should have classes where no books are allowed and we can only chat in Hungarian with the teacher/other students, since I think actually speaking the language more without the book is what makes it stick!".

Participants also said they had to work harder and put in more effort to make up for their lack of Hungarian. Several participants identified that the Hungarian language classes they took as part of their curriculum were not fully sufficient to prepare them well for their clinical years.

4 Discussion

Medicine is a compassionate career, one where students can initiate care throughout their clinical education. They should establish a therapeutic connection through communication and develop a relationship with the patients even if they cannot administer medical treatment to them (Rustandy et al. 2022, 8).

As William Osler (1901) suggested, "To study the phenomena of disease without books is to sail an uncharted sea, while to study books without patients is not to go to sea at all". When students move into the clinical learning phase, they start attending to real patients and not simulated ones. Students are expected to learn the skills necessary to provide care for patients, encompassing not just their physical conditions but also establishing a therapeutic rapport with them. Therefore, the clinical years are crucial for providing medical students with the essential skills and practical experience required for their adjustment to real-world clinical environments. Nevertheless, the existence of a language barrier may negatively impact the objectives of these clinical years; they may feel inadequate and hindered by their language limitations (Sheikh et al. 2022).

In our study, IMSs generally expressed that the clinical years should provide an active and engaging learning environment for them, which is in accordance with the reported findings where the authors have discussed that the students tended to develop professional confidence by performing physical examinations on real patients, and by using their previously acquired pre-clinical, theoretical knowledge, students were able to convert this knowledge to clinical practice (Al Kadri 2011). Another study explored whether the active interaction of students in the clinical ward enhanced their previous theoretical knowledge and critical thinking skills (Diemers et al. 2008). Nevertheless, because of the language barrier, the IMSs might have had a feeling that they could not fully acquire the required clinical skills and perceived the language barrier as an obstacle to a meaningful clinical experience.

Language barriers are one of the major issues of concern in communication. If such a barrier is present between the patient and the healthcare professional, the resulting nonunderstanding or misunderstanding may have a negative impact on medical care. Healthcare professionals, and among them medical students, would get frustrated when patients failed to understand them (Mustafa et al. 2023, 42). This may lead to a feeling of being inadequate and a lack of confidence on the medical student’s part. The patient, on the other hand, may feel doubt or fear, or even lose trust and experience misery as a result of a lack of understanding during healthcare encounters (Molina & Kasper 2019, 378). All in all, the frustration of the medical student may prevent the student from acquiring the appropriate skills for providing patient care.

This inadequate communication between the IMS and the patient might hinder the development of a good rapport and the delivery of adequate healthcare (Ha & Longnecker 2010). As a result of the language barrier, the participants in our study experienced a lack of empathy and trust between them and the patients. This had a negative impact on their learning outcomes and the overall quality of health care provided by them. The lack of information flow between the two parties resulted in a growing sense of frustration and impatience on both sides.

Generally, interpreters are often considered valuable in professional settings where language barriers are present. To overcome these barriers, some medical institutions, among them medical universities, offer interpreter services; yet, these services present significant difficulties in terms of availability and financial burden (Al Shamsi et al. 2020).

Several studies have argued that the use of interpreters may lead to better understanding of health problems on the part of the doctor or medical student (Kasten et al. 2020) and better interaction on the part of the patient (Karliner et al. 2007).

Nonetheless, the availability of professional interpreters to IMSs is infrequent, and some studies have proved that this solution of the language barrier could even be ineffective (Sheikh 2022, 870). Whereas students would appreciate the presence of professional interpreters in the ward, thus reducing their frustration, patients would not always feel comfortable speaking about their most intimate and sensitive problems with medical students who could not understand them directly and could communicate only through another person. Additionally, it would mean only a temporary solution for the medical students, as the history-taking skills and thus the ability to establish the diagnosis based on it would not be directly possible. Besides these, the presence of the interpreter may further obstruct the building of the medical student–patient rapport (Abbe et al. 2006, 821). Therefore, the presence of the interpreter seemed to prevent the development of trust and empathy on both sides.

Some studies suggest that medical professionals felt that interpreters were not giving a complete translation of what the patients said but tried to provide only a summary of it (Sheikh 2022, 868). Obviously, using a family member to interpret may also increase the risk that parts of the communication are not translated fully or correctly. Besides increasing the risk of medical errors (Gany et al. 2007, 322; Tuot et al. 2012, 87), it may also violate patient confidentiality (Squires 2017).

According to research results in the field, the best solution in such a scenario is utilizing the assistance of a multilingual nurse, another healthcare professional, or a peer medical student who speaks both the patient's language and the medical student's one. In this way, besides language knowledge, medical professional knowledge can also be provided (Hull 2016, 168).

If human interpretation is not available or acceptable, online translation tools are also possible solutions for overcoming the challenges posed by the language barrier (Shamsi 2020, 5). IMSs in our study tried to make use of Google Translate, DeepL Translate, or online-fordito.hu in such scenarios. Unfortunately, MediBabble, the professional medical interpretation app, is still not available in a Hungarian–English version (Table 1).

Solutions	Benefits	Drawbacks
professional interpreter	• no frustration for the student • complete history taken • better interaction on both sides • increased quality of care	• very costly • not always accessible • no confidentiality and no rapport built for the patient • no practice for the medical student
patient's family member or friend	• relaxes patients in some cases	• certain points are not translated • no confidentiality • no practice for the medical student
peer with better language knowledge	• readily available • complete history taken • better interaction on both sides	• no practice for the medical student

nurse or other healthcare professional	• complete history taken • better interaction on both sides • explanation of health issues • both professional and language aid	• no practice for the medical student • the patient talks to the healthcare professional; thus no rapport is developed with the student
online translation tools	• readily available • free or cheap	• loss of non-verbal communication • no practice for the medical student • patient dissatisfaction • no rapport can be developed

Table 1: Benefits and drawbacks of solutions for the language barrier in medical student–patient scenarios

In 2016, Chan et al. concluded that small group discussion and interaction strategies could be beneficial in supporting medical students coping with a language barrier. Brewer et al. (2024) also give a systematic review of the advantages and disadvantages of the solutions for the language barrier issue in health care, and they highlight that some universities are open to the application of nontraditional methods in teaching communication to IMSs. These methods, supplemented by the use of practice audiovisual materials, medical role plays, the involvement of simulated patients, regular presentations, and feedback, tend to result in better achievements for students in their clinical years (cf. Nestel & Tierney 2007; Koppán et al. 2017; Qureshi & Zehra 2020; Eklics et al. 2023).

A forum for IMSs to discuss the difficulties they experience during these scenarios with patients and to provide opportunities to develop and practice communication skills may also be helpful (Brewer et al. 2024, 2).

As the above-discussed solutions were not fully appropriate for the IMSs at our university, we returned to the original idea of increasing their Hungarian language skills. This way, most of the drawbacks present during student–patient communication might be eliminated.

Based on the findings of our research and reviewing the literature, in 2022, the medical Hungarian teaching staff at our department developed new course material for international students in Years 3 and 4 of their medical studies. Based on our recommendation, the medical school has implemented regular compulsory language field trips to the university clinical departments. During these trips, medical students can practice history-taking, and, generally, student–patient communication at the ward under the supervision of language teachers/student assistants in a more relaxed atmosphere, focusing on the use and development of language skills. During these scenarios, IMSs may not have the same professional burden as they do during clinical classes with the doctor, where the focus is mostly on acquiring professional/medical skills (Table 2).

Solution	Benefits	Drawbacks
medical students acquiring better language skills	• less frustration • less stress and anxiety • study outcome concerning history taking achieved • rapport and trust developed • confidentiality (better) maintained • better patient satisfaction	• time-consuming for the student and the language teacher

Table 2: Benefits and drawbacks of implementing the new language-teaching method for overcoming the language barrier

In our literature review, fewer studies were identified that discussed the challenges of the patient in the international medical student–patient scenario. Our study did not cover this aspect either. Our solution to the language barrier might not be extended to all international university situations where there is more limited time devoted to the acquisition of the language of the patient. There is only a relatively short time span (one academic year) between the implementation of the new curriculum and the publication of this study; thus, further research is needed to find out about the effectiveness of the recommended method.

As a conclusion, we still consider that the detrimental effects of the language barrier on the relationship between the IMSs and the patient can be helped by the cooperation of language teachers/health communicators and by institutional policymakers elaborating a revised curriculum. Through the new curriculum with course material tailored to the language and professional needs of the students and language field trips involving language practice with real hospitalized patients under the supervision of language teachers, the impact of language barriers on medical student–patient relationships can be lessened.

Summary in plain English

International medical students (IMSs) may have trouble with the language when speaking to local patients. At the Albert Szent-Gyorgyi Medical School in Hungary, students learn Hungarian for eight semesters and are expected to be able to take patient histories in Hungarian. But in some cases, this requirement is not fully met, so the talks between the medical student and the patient may not end properly.

This study, using both questionnaires and interviews with IMSs, was done to find out the difficulties that come up when medical students try to use the language in this way. There are a lot of studies in the international literature in the field that back up the data in this study.

The authors also give suggestions for how language teachers and university officials can help international medical students studying in another country do better when talking to patients.

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Part IV

Language Accessibility in Education

The Value of Accessibility in Language Education: Insights from the Field of TESOL

Zuzana Tomaš
Christa Niemann

Abstract

This chapter examines the value of accessibility and comprehensibility in language education and language teacher education. We address strategies for increasing textual accessibility, its benefits and consequences for language learners, as well as the growing potential of artificial intelligence in this area. Finally, we discuss the importance of engaging pre-service teachers with issues around text simplification and accessibility, outlining five TESOL teacher education practices that have proven valuable at our institution.

Keywords: simplified texts, accessibility in language education, teacher education, pre-service teachers

Introduction

In language learning scholarship, the concept of "accessibility" had initially been studied through the lens of "linguistic modifications" that occurred as speakers "negotiated meaning." The research found that speakers adjust speech by shortening sentences, repeating information, and even including comprehension checks in an effort to increase comprehensibility (e.g., Hatch 1983, Long 1981). The concept of textual accessibility began to gain traction after the formulation of Krashen's "input hypothesis" (Krashen 1985). Key to this hypothesis is the idea that language learners acquire language by engaging with comprehensible input, meaning language that is slightly above their current language level but still made comprehensible through context, extra-linguistic information, background knowledge, and previously acquired competence (Krashen 1985, 2).

Although the input hypothesis is not without problems (e.g., Spolsky 1985, Payne 2011), the overall effectiveness of concepts such as "comprehensible input" has endured in language education (Lichtman & VanPatten 2021). Through his promotion of exposure to accessible language in both listening and reading, Krashen has had a large influence on language education researchers and practitioners alike. In this chapter, we discuss the rationale for continuing to center concepts such as accessibility, adaptability, and comprehension in language education and outline ways of engaging pre-service teachers with these topics during their language teacher preparation coursework.

1 Rationale for using accessible texts in language learning

Research supports the intuition that simplified texts improve learners' literal comprehension of texts in the target language (Crossley et al. 2012, 93) and contribute to the growth of vocabulary (Albay 2017, 177). This finding is primarily due to the substitution of complex or unfamiliar words with high-frequency ones of the same meaning, which are processed faster and understood more easily (Haberlandt & Graesser 1985, 357).

Replacing complex words with high-frequency words is a technique known as *lexical simplification*, and it plays a significant role in language learners' overall comprehension of a text. In fact, English learners need familiarity with at least 95% of a text's total vocabulary or token types to achieve a basic understanding of it (Nation 2006 as cited in Dronjic 2019, 32). Research also suggests that if a learner is familiar with most of the vocabulary in a text, they can understand almost all of its meaning, even when unfamiliar grammatical structures are present (Paetzold & Specia 2017, 550). Language learners, thus, rely overwhelmingly on vocabulary to derive meaning from what they read, demonstrating the value of lexical simplification in developing reading skills in a second language.

Although accessibility of simplified texts is often best realized through lexical simplification, whereas grammar might play a smaller role in accessibility, simplified texts can also target specific grammatical structures that may be troublesome or unfamiliar to learners. This is because a carefully curated text with a simplified lexicon produces a familiar context which, in turn, makes it easier for learners to focus attention on grammar. A particularly effective strategy for highlighting specific grammatical constructions is to repeat the target grammar in focus, thus creating an "input flood" of the language we want our learners to notice (Szudarski & Carter 2014).

Graded readers and other simplified texts that utilize some of the above-mentioned strategies for increasing linguistic accessibility are sometimes criticized for being inauthentic models for language learners. However, simplified texts are not by default inauthentic. An authentic text is primarily defined as "a text originally created to fulfill a social purpose in the language community for which it was intended" (Crossley et al. 2007, 17). Accessible texts that have been linguistically modified can still be representative of an authentic language function in a particular social context. There is undoubtedly a need for texts fulfilling real social purposes that nonetheless control for complexity of vocabulary and grammar (Hill 2008, 201).

Increased comprehension of near-authentic or heavily modified texts is the primary purpose of text simplification, but there are other benefits too. For example, simplified texts reduce a language learner's cognitive load and increase decoding (reading) speed by avoiding complexities that might otherwise be distracting. This reduced load, in turn, gives the reader more bandwidth to critically engage with and interact with the reading (Crossley et al. 2012, 91). Content-area educators can especially appreciate this benefit when designing interactive, content-focused activities for language learners. Since these kinds of activities often demand higher-order thinking from students, the focus should be on content analysis rather than reading and decoding. If a complex text is presented for use in a challenging content-analysis activity, the task might unintentionally become a language task instead.

Lastly, accessible texts can reach underrepresented learner populations. The modification of texts can make materials accessible to exceptional learners, such as those with dyslexia, aphasia, and low literacy skills, who would otherwise not be able to access the material (Paetzold & Specia 2017, 549–550). Finding texts suitable and comprehensible for these learners may require the ability to fine-tune simplifications, either intuitively or via a more sophisticated algorithm. Increasingly, computer-based programs draw upon such algorithms to create individualized instructional opportunities designed to meet the needs of learners at different levels of language proficiency or reading ability (e.g., Macaruso & Rodman 2011; Verhoeven et al. 2022).

2 Consequences of text simplification

Despite clear evidence of the benefits of simplified texts, it is also important to address the unintended consequences of simplification. Namely, systematic simplification can lead to reduction or loss of meaning as specialized vocabulary is replaced with more generalized synonyms, introducing polysemy and ambiguity rather than clarity (Crossley et al. 2012, 90). Such simplification can actually result in lower comprehensibility for learners. Further, we must acknowledge that lexical substitutions can be biased toward or against a particular group of learners, as speakers of different native languages will have varying familiarity with subsets of vocabulary (Paetzold & Specia 2017, 549). This concern speaks to the importance of discerning possible fairness and bias issues when creating accessible materials, as it is unlikely that any text will be universally accessible to all.

Likewise, there are also unintended consequences related to simplifying grammar. Attempts to shorten long sentences can lead to condensed syntax, which in many cases might be more challenging for learners than a more elaborated alternative (Crossley et al. 2007, 16). Crossley et al. (2007) also found that texts shortened under a traditional readability formula often omit or shorten connective structures characteristic of authentic texts, which lowers the simplified version's overall cohesion and reduces comprehensibility. Intersentential linguistic devices like conjunctions, connectives, and logical operators (*if-then*; *because*, *so;* etc.) are critical for information processing and decoding, and without them, a reading task can become more difficult despite being simplified.

Ambiguity and cohesion are two important considerations when using a formula, algorithm, or intelligent model (see next section) to make any text more accessible. While these tools can save time, the intuitive knowledge of a teacher should not be blindly substituted without an understanding of all the potential effects.

3 Potential of AI in text simplification

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is a technology with great potential for text simplification. The use of AI and large language models to simplify texts is quickly growing alongside access to these models, and AI is already being used to simplify a variety of texts. In the past year, for instance, AI has been harnessed to simplify public knowledge in languages with lower resources than English like Dutch and to simplify medical texts and serve as a communicative bridge between healthcare professionals and patients (Corti & Yang 2023; Lorenzo Jaime et al. 2023). AI is especially appropriate for threshold-based simplification (usually based on word frequency) or lexicon-based (if there is a large list of discipline- or content-specific lexicon available), as these methods are based on identifying a readability standard and systematically applying it throughout a text.

The newest AI text simplification tools are powered by machine learning. Machine learning algorithms can predict what to simplify in a text based on large quantities of text data. Paetzold & Specia (2017) found that machine learning methods were more effective at simplifying than other methods when there was a labeled dataset (e.g., examples of texts and their optimal simplifications), although creating such a dataset is tedious. AI can also quickly measure and assess dozens of variables affecting text comprehensibility. For example, Crossley et al. (2012) used AI to analyze a corpus of intuitively simplified texts for variables like word frequency, lexical diversity, cohesion, grammatical complexity, and others. Each of these features are ones humans tend to identify intuitively while simplifying a text, but AI can do faster and systematically.

For classroom teachers, an important caveat is that the most convenient AI tools for simplification may not be specialized for that purpose. It is relatively easy to ask ChatGPT to write a text for a particular level of learner, or to provide it with an existing text you know your learners can comprehend and ask the AI to make it a little harder. The risk is that a teacher may have less control over the simplification process; it is impossible to see “under the hood” and understand the reasons for the choices that the model is making. Only the end result is visible. However, AI-powered tools that involve teachers in the simplification process are in the works (see Shardlow et al. 2022). Such tools might be able to tap into a language teacher’s pedagogical, linguistic, and content knowledge during simplification, while still approaching the task systematically and saving the teacher the time and effort of doing so by hand. Collaboration between teachers and AI will undoubtedly be an important next step in the development of AI tools for creating accessible texts.

4 Implementation of meaningful text simplification tasks in TESOL teacher education

Given the undeniable value of comprehensible input and simplified, accessible texts in language instruction, it is important for teacher preparation programs to include these topics in the curriculum. In this section, we provide examples of how preservice teachers in our TESOL program engage with issues surrounding textual accessibility.

4.1 Comprehensible input tasks

Pre-service teachers who are monolingual or have not recently taken language courses benefit from experiencing comprehensible input firsthand. A simple, yet impactful experience we regularly include in early TESOL coursework is a demonstration of instructions to an activity in a language with which our pre-service teachers are not familiar, thus creating a first-hand experience for our teachers as newcomers to an unfamiliar language. First, instructions are delivered in an authentic manner, devoid of any linguistic simplification. Following this initial, intentionally ineffective demonstration, we model the instructions to the activity again, but this time with strategies aimed at increasing comprehensibility. In a subsequent discussion, pre-service teachers eagerly analyze the differences between the two versions of instructions, often referring to this activity as “eye-opening” in terms of their understanding of the importance of increasing accessibility in language education.

To move from experiencing to enacting comprehensible input, we often follow this comparative activity by either having pre-service teachers microteach a pedagogical activity or design a grammar or pronunciation “mini-lesson” where they explain the form, meaning, and use of a particular grammatical structure or a pronunciation feature. Pre-service teachers are guided to keep accessibility front and center through the use of an assessment rubric and are encouraged to rehearse instructions with a peer prior to class presentations. In later TESOL coursework, pre-service teachers teach activities and lessons to actual English learners in local schools, community, and online, with accessibility continuing to be an important area of pedagogical focus. Exposure to peer examples increases pre-service teachers’ repertoire of strategies for making input comprehensible and makes them more critical about linguistic choices for making texts and tasks accessible.

4.2 Textual analysis tasks

TESOL coursework that centers textual analysis in meaningful ways can build pre-service teachers’ theoretical, linguistic, and pedagogical knowledge and lead them to be more intentional about the extent and nature of any linguistic modifications they can employ in their instruction. To illustrate, at our institution, pre-service teachers are tasked with identifying and explaining “language demands” in various content-area texts. For example, in analyzing an academic text that they may use in a science class, pre-service teachers are guided to notice specific scientific terms, field-specific acronyms, use of passive voice in description of experimental procedures, and the overall lexical density, cohesion, or organization of the text. Similarly, pre-service teachers can analyze simplified texts such as when they seek to differentiate texts for different levels of language proficiency or when they have to justify a choice of text for students at different entry points for literacy engagement.

As they prepare activities and lessons for language learners of different language proficiencies, pre-service teachers can turn to AI to produce simplified versions of an original text they wish to use in an activity or lesson. Written reflection or class discussions can help pre-service teachers examine differences between the AI-produced simplified texts and original, authentic texts, and even identify and critique possible AI "hallucinations." This kind of close textual analysis, combined with thoughtful reflection, can greatly foster pre-service teachers' critical thinking around AI-produced linguistic modifications.

4.3 Visual enhancements for text accessibility

"A picture is worth a thousand words" is a popular saying that seems particularly important in the context of working with language learners, whose developing linguistic knowledge can be greatly aided by visual clues such as pictures, videos, photographs, posters, or visually appealing infographics. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to adapt and/or create effective visual enhancements for instructional materials they are developing for language learners. There are many examples of effective visual enhancements for increasing linguistic accessibility that can be found online. Indeed, many teachers now enjoy opportunities to share, even monetizing their visually enhanced pedagogical materials with other educators through Teachers Pay Teachers and other platforms.

4.4 Developing e-books for newcomer learners

Although we may start with worksheets, posters, and infographics such as the example included in Figure 1 to discuss the potential value of visual enhancements in increasing text accessibility, pre-service teachers need to practice these skills at the longer discourse level too.

Among the most successful assignments we have co-developed in this area is a collaborative e-book project. In this project, pre-service teachers at our institution in the U.S. have collaborated with pre-service teachers in Slovakia on a series of online e-books for newcomers to English. Working in international teams, the pre-service teachers were challenged to produce simple stories that would be culturally and linguistically responsive and visually appealing for newcomer English learners. Throughout the development of these materials, pre-service teachers engaged deeply in negotiating linguistic accessibility, oftentimes with Slovak peers being able to better predict the likely language demands for English learners, given that they, too, were once newcomers to English.

Once pre-service teachers produced the e-books, they created contextualized versions that teachers in the respective countries could use. Most chose to modify the fictional characters' names, cafeteria food choices, or class titles to reflect the respective contexts. This contextualization added another useful layer to our discussion of accessibility. Pre-service teachers gained insights into the complexities around textual simplification; while it is true that linguistic strategies for simplifying are key in increasing accessibility, pedagogical materials that expose learners to culturally familiar characters and environments also shape the extent to which learners can comprehend texts. (For sample e-books and more information about the e-book project, see Tomaš and Slatinská, forthcoming.)

4.5 Professional opportunities around text accessibility and simplification

In addition to engaging with comprehensible input and text accessibility at theoretical and pedagogical levels throughout TESOL coursework, we also try to extend these topics to the professional development arena. For example, we encourage pre-service teachers to repurpose research papers they may have written for theoretically oriented classes as conference proposals, blogs, or newsletter articles. By doing so, they practice text simplification firsthand as they grapple with adjusting audience expectations, avoiding technical jargon, and writing in more concise and accessible ways. At times, pre-service teachers also choose to research these concepts in our capstone action research course, and even co-author professional articles and book chapters in this area.

Summary in plain English

This chapter says that we need easy-to-read texts in order to teach languages well. That is why future language teachers should learn about easy-to-read texts. They should know that easy-to-read texts are important, and they should know how to use them in teaching. To help meet this goal, this chapter shows five ways that university TESOL programs can prepare future teachers so that they know about easy-to-read texts, can write them, and can make harder texts easier to read. We, the authors of this chapter, think that understanding and using the idea of easy-to-read texts can give future teachers the skills they need to successfully teach different kinds of students in lots of different situations.

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From Complexity to Clarity: Teaching Plain English to PhD Students

Lenka Môcová

Abstract

Effective communication in academia is essential for disseminating knowledge and promoting inclusivity within scholarly communities. This chapter explores the significance of clarity in academic writing, highlighting its role in facilitating collaboration, bridging gaps between academia and broader society, and minimizing misinterpretation.

The chapter addresses specific challenges faced by Slovak PhD students in academic writing courses, among them terminological obstacles, differences in argumentative styles, and linguistic issues. Applicable strategies, practical tips, and online resources are provided for improving text clarity.

Keywords: academic writing, PhD students, clarity

Introduction

Clear communication and the use of plain English in the academic environment facilitate effective knowledge dissemination and foster accessibility. The fundamental objective of scholarly papers is not only the presentation of ideas and information but, most importantly, their actual communication (Gopen & Swan 2018).

Transparency in communication not only enhances collaboration among researchers but also serves to bridge the gap between academia and the broader community, fostering a more inclusive and informed society. Moreover, clarity of expression minimizes the risk of misinterpretation, aiding in the accurate transmission of knowledge and encouraging a culture of openness. Clear communication and plain language are not merely stylistic choices but a fundamental aspect of impactful academic discourse.

This chapter summarizes the typical obstacles faced by non-native anglophone PhD students in academic writing courses and the strategies for overcoming them. The focus here is on the applicability of the best practice available and the specific nature of teaching academic writing skills to non-native anglophone PhD students. The most typical skills developed in such courses include (Swales & Feak 2012, 12–32):

- general research skills, e.g. reviewing and evaluating literature, identifying research space, formulating arguments and hypotheses
- typical academic English phrases and expressions
- knowledge of academic writing conventions, e.g. citation and referencing styles
- organizing and structuring written outputs
- revision, proofreading, and editing skills
- ethical writing standards, conventions, and practices, e.g. how to avoid plagiarism
- especially important: clarity and precision in expressing ideas

Many of these skills can be fostered by applying the principles of the Plain English Campaign. Plain English is an initiative dedicated to promoting clarity and conciseness in public information. The underlying premise is that clear and accessible information is a fundamental right (Plain English Campaign 2024).

The application of the skills specified above can improve the students' clarity in expression, streamline their writing by striving for conciseness, introduce more logical and coherent writing organization, write more engaging and readable outputs by emphasizing the audience, using active voice, and illustrating the subject matter with examples and analogies. Importantly, applying plain English does not mean the text would lose its scholarly quality as using plain English does not mean simplifying scholarship but only its expression (Doumont 2010, n.p.).

1 Multifaceted challenges

As Day and Gastel (2006, 4) explain, scholarly communication is a "two-way process", and it is useless until "perceived and understood" by its audience. The text clarity here thus bears special significance. PhD students, when facing the task of writing a high quality yet understandable text, may face numerous challenges. One significant obstacle is the intricacy level of the presented problem, often involving specialized terminology and comprehensive theoretical frameworks. Navigating these complexities means striking a fragile balance between depth and accessibility in communicating the subject matter.

Moreover, language barriers and possibly diverse cultural backgrounds among researchers pose additional issues, making it essential for PhD students to develop communication strategies that overcome cultural-dependent boundaries. The pressure to publish in high-quality journals further intensifies the challenge, as the need for brevity and specificity can sometimes compromise the articulation of ideas. As PhD students engage in scholarly pursuits, addressing these challenges becomes integral to ensuring the successful dissemination of their complex ideas within the academic community and beyond.

1.1 Academic writing challenges of Slovak PhD students

This subchapter summarizes the typical terminological and linguistic issues faced by Slovak scholarly writers and researchers that frequently result in mistakes hindering the communication of their concepts and ideas. A notable aspect here is the apparent lack of academic writing training starting at secondary schools (Staroňová 2013, 37). The lack of such practice then often leads to problems with quoting and paraphrasing, incorrect text structure, and others.

Expressing complex ideas may pose a problem due to the fact that certain terms and concepts may not have exact equivalents, or the term's adoption may still be in progress or being discussed in the relevant academic and field community.

Slovakia is a member of the European Committee for Standardisation – CEN, with the obligation to adopt European standards into its technical standards system. There is often a problem with the translation of terms and the harmonization of these systems. For example, Balaz et al. (2017, 5–7) describe the Slovak terminological development in the field of civil engineering, where the adoption of a high number of terms from English was preceded by a lengthy discussion, and the translation of some of them remains debatable and not unified.

Moreover, students must be accustomed to academic register vocabulary with highly specific phrases and collocations that enable them to express complex ideas in a way acceptable in an academic community. A possible approach would be adopting the Academic Word List, consisting of 570 basic academic terms that would serve as a general academic vocabulary toolkit (Academic Word List).

The linguistic differences include a large pool of various phenomena caused by Slovak-English interference. Due to the similar nature of the Czech language and our empirical experience, we assume that Slovak students would exhibit identical issues as their Czech counterparts in the research of Frydrychová Klímová (2013). She studied abstracts of primary to tertiary university students and concluded that the most frequent mistakes included word order and objectivity of one’s abstract, articles, agreement in subject and predicate, tenses, existential-locative sentences with there, prepositions, spelling, appropriate register, long sentences, repetition of words, and punctuation.

These findings can be confirmed by Chamonikolasová and Stašková (2005, 53–59), who analyzed essays of Czech and Slovak university students. The most typical mistakes included the incorrect use of articles, determiners, verbal tenses, aspects and moods, subject-verb agreement, collocations, and prepositional phrases. Besides the grammar and lexical mistakes, the present cohesion and coherence mistakes included unclear or missing antecedents, missing links or information, redundant information, unclear or inconsistent statements, untruthful statements or statements contradicting common understanding, and missing parts of essays.

The third common issue would be structuring the academic texts to comply with the inherent rules of the English-speaking scientific and academic community.

In contrast to the mathematical logic, the argumentative logic in any academic writing outputs may be seen as highly culture dependent. In other words, our text complexity, flow and organization of ideas, coherence, and cohesion depend heavily on our mindset acquired by belonging to a specific culture. In as early as in 1966, Robert Kaplan introduced a theory of thought patterns unique to specific cultures. These patterns heavily influence our reasoning and argumentation, scholarly writing included, and are responsible for the text clarity vs. ambiguity.

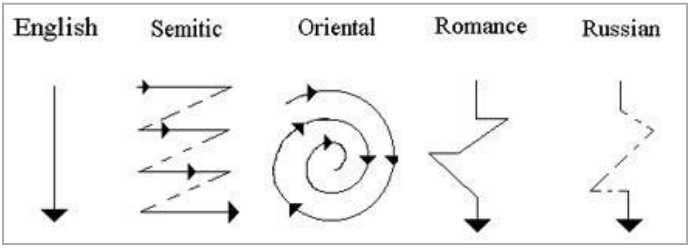

Figure 1: Robert Kaplan's reasoning styles (1966, 15)

Danišková (2014, 135–141) followed this renowned theory when she asserted that besides others there are two fundamental lines of argumentation that we should be aware of – Anglo-Saxon and Continental. In terms of academic writing, there is a visible contrast between the Anglo-Saxon linear logic or argumentation as depicted by Fig. 1 and the Russian (Slavic or Continental) reasoning style where the links between the ideas are not completely clear. The disparities can also be explained by differences in high-context vs. low-context academic cultures.

Based on this, English native writers typically prioritize clarity whereas Slovak writers would tolerate a certain level of ambiguity in their writing. To overcome this cultural barrier, PhD students should focus on:

- explicitly stating the thesis statement
- strengthening links between ideas and fostering text cohesion, e.g. by transition words and orienters
- including summarizing and paraphrasing resources in their academic training

2 Course design tips and tricks

2.1. Useful resources

There are numerous resources that can be useful in improving scientific and academic text clarity, for example:

- **The Hemingway Editor** (https://hemingwayapp.com/) is an online tool that helps users analyse and improve the readability of their writing by highlighting complex sentences and suggesting alternatives.
- **The Readable** (https://readable.com/) assesses the text and provides a readability score.
- **The Clarity Journal** (https://www.clarity-international.org/clarity-journal/) is fully dedicated to promoting plain English in the field of legal English.
- **Center for Plain Language** (https://centerforplainlanguage.org/) is an organization promoting plain English in the media and business communication.

Furthermore, students can benefit from working with an online thesaurus, e.g. www.thesaurus.com or www.wordhippo.com, as well as editing programs such as Grammarly (www.grammarly.com) or Writefull (www.writefull.com).

2.2. Practical tasks

This part will introduce some typical tasks in academic writing courses that students can employ to improve their understanding of the importance of clarity. We are aware that the variety of suitable activities is more diverse.

a. Rephrasing

One of the most typical mistakes is using excessive, verbose sentences. A particularly applicable task would include rephrasing the provided expressions, e.g. (Cansdale 2013, 3) to produce more compact and understandable sentences:

- *by the introduction of* can be replaced by *by introducing*

- *for the allocation of – for allocating*
- *of the provision of – of providing*
- *to submit an application for – to apply for,* etc.

b. Breaking up long sentences

It is significant to realize that our potential readers tend to scan texts rather than read them. The approaches to the recommended length of sentences vary. The preliminary survey of peer-reviewed literature by Moore (2011) determined a mean sentence length (MSL) of 23–30 words. He also highlights a significant aspect of shortening sentences in academic articles – compared to longer and more complex sentences, shorter sentences are more likely to provide gratification stemming from understanding the information.

Gopen and Swan (2018), however, seem to challenge these ideas, claiming that no readability formulas can be justified and the readability depends on factors other than the number of words. They highlight the significance of familiarity and novelty clues – the stress and the topic position in the sentence. Moreover, they provide an applicable and self-explanatory definition of a sentence that is too long, claiming that it is too long when "it has more viable candidates for stress position than there are stress positions available" (2018).

The most suitable approach seems to be the combination of short and longer sentences to create the text rhythm. The variety of sentences can add certain sophistication to our papers (Mamishev & Williams 2010, 170). Moreover, it provides our readers with mental space for reflecting on the idea or information presented and acquired.

c. Abridging the text with the reader in mind

Gopen and Swan (2018) suggest that we can simplify the text by applying rhetorical principles while retaining their scientific value. The main aspect they highlight here is to fulfill the reader's expectations. They suggest three fundamental rules to observe, even if not rigorously:

- to promptly follow grammatical subjects with their corresponding verbs and not separate them with long texts

- to ensure that every segment of discourse should fulfill a singular purpose
- to place the emphasized information at syntactic closure points (in the stress position)

A possible practical task might involve identifying topic and stress position clues in sample paragraphs and highlighting them, e.g.

> To increase the number of student applicants, the university recently implemented a new **program**. An important part of the **program** is to first give seminars at top-ranking high schools in the **region**. Increasing the number of **local** students is the initial step for the program's **success**. (Springer 2023, original emphasis)

Afterwards, the students can be asked to perform an identical task with their paper's draft and rewrite them to follow the rules above.

d. Toulmin's argument drill

Stephen Toulmin developed a model for analyzing any argument. He identified its three fundamental parts: the claim, the supporting data, and the warrant. The warrant explains why data supports the claim (Staroňová 2013, 113–114). The students can greatly benefit from analyzing the arguments in a sample piece of writing and then follow the model to produce their own reasoning.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the transition from complexity to clarity in academic writing, particularly for Slovak PhD students. It emphasizes the importance of clear communication in academia for effective knowledge dissemination. Key challenges faced by Slovak PhD students include terminological obstacles, linguistic differences, and issues with structuring academic texts followed in the English-speaking academic community.

To address these challenges, we can deploy effective strategies and practical tips, along with online resources. For a more accessible and inclusive academic community, we need to prioritize selected plain language principles in scholarly communication. By embracing these principles and providing necessary support and resources, we can empower PhD students to overcome linguistic and structural barriers in their academic writing, ensuring that their research is communicated clearly and effectively to a wider audience. Further discussion is needed regarding the extent to which plain English principles should be adopted in academic writing.

Summary in plain English

This chapter talks about how important it is to write clearly in academic papers so that everyone can understand them. It focuses on the difficulties that Slovak PhD students face when writing in English. These difficulties include unclear terminology, structuring their texts according to Anglo-Saxon academic standards, and linguistic issues. The chapter gives practical advice and suggests websites to help students make their writing clearer. The goal is to help PhD students overcome these challenges and make their research easy to understand for more people. The students must be encouraged to clearly structure their writing, link their ideas, and learn basic academic vocabulary. Doing this makes academic writing more inclusive and open to everyone.

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Crafting Culturally Sensitive Texts: Visual Attention and Reading Direction

Jana Javorčíková
Richard Gramanich Štromajer

Abstract

Recent research (see de Oliveira & Nisbett 2017) has proved that people from various cultures think and read differently: East Asians appear to think more "holistically", pay greater attention to context and relationship, and show more tolerance for contradiction and dialectical thinking, while Americans are more "analytic" in their thinking, tending to detach objects from their context, to avoid contradictions and to rely more heavily on formal logic. Educators in multicultural classrooms should be aware of these differences when creating "accessible", i.e. legible, readable, and intelligible texts. Based on a visual preference survey (58 university graduates, B2 CEFR level), this chapter discusses graphic, visual, structure- and content-related intercultural aspects of intelligible and culturally sensitive texts.

Keywords: accessible text, legible text, intelligible text, readable text, intercultural barriers to understanding, reading literacy, reading comprehension

Introduction

Contemporary educational environments are witnessing unprecedented digitalization and a transformation to visual culture. Rapid technological advancements pose new challenges for professionals and common text users alike in creating and handling written texts. Professions that historically had little contact with text creation now find themselves bound to it. Even healthcare professionals and industry service workers have become content creators of a wider diversity of texts than ever before, including announcements, instructions, and promotional visual documents, published either online or in print media. Moreover, these texts need to comply with various visual criteria, and few of the mentioned professions (e.g., healthcare professionals and industry service workers) have any training in effective and visually friendly text creation. EFL teachers are also, more than before, expected to create visually attractive yet informative handouts, study materials, and various text-based activities for both traditional and blended forms of learning (Pondelíková 2023, 634). Additionally, they are also content creators of a wide spectrum of online texts, ranging from simple online announcements and instructional manuals to various PC-enhanced online outputs such as PowerPoint presentations, webpages, and Moodle texts.

This transformation imposes new challenges on educators, particularly those who create digital text-based content. Besides ensuring the general legibility and readability of texts, educators must also address the needs of their multicultural audience to avoid culture-based misunderstandings, foster a friendly and inclusive school environment (Kolečáni-Lenčová 2021), and enhance the internationalization of education (Hanesová & Zelenková 2019, 7–8). Therefore, EFL teachers, as well as professionals across disciplines, should not only be aware of the accessibility rules of text, as elaborated by various European documents, employing various easy-to-read methodologies (explained in Chapter 1) but also of the socially and culturally bound aspects of reading.

1 Accessibility research – State of the art

Regarding the high number of individuals with various linguistic deficiencies, which are widely acknowledged (e.g., EU HLG Report 2012), the need for ETR (easy-to-read) methodology intensified after 2009, when Inclusion Europe issued standards for document creation. These standards provide guidelines and instructions for creating easy-to-read texts, including typographic, semantic, and various content-related recommendations, thereby improving the legibility, readability, and general intelligibility and accessibility of documents. As these terms are often mistaken for synonyms, we will explain them in the following sections 1.1 (Legibility), 1.2 (Readability), and 1.3 (Intelligibility and accessibility).

1.1 Legibility

The legibility of a document is measured by various formulas. Experts (Legge & Bigalow 2011; Cvetkova 2023; Britton 2023) take into consideration the following five key aspects related to the typographic clarity of texts:

1. **Typeface:** Among the most legible print and online fonts are those known as “sans-serif” fonts (a letter or typeface with no serifs, i.e., short lines stemming from and at an angle to the upper and lower ends of the strokes of a letter; MW 2024c), e.g., Arial and Garamond. In various reviews, Arial is usually selected as the most legible font (Britton 2023).

2. **Font size:** Size includes letter height and width. The ideal size, i.e. the size allowing for the most effective reading speed (called the “fluent range”; Legge & Bigalow 2011), depends on the task demands, viewing conditions, and the vision status of the reader. The ideal fluent range corresponds to x-heights (height of the lower-case letter x) from 1.4 mm (4 points) to 14 mm (40 points) at a reading distance of 40 cm (Legge & Bigalow 2011). Print that is too large or too small slows the reading process – even some of the best typefaces are not legible as 6-point fonts (Britton 2023). Culturally, Europeans prefer larger print to North Americans (Legge & Bigalow 2011).

3. **Style and weight:** According to Britton (2023), “style” refers to open counters (the space on the inside of the letters), a large x-height (the distance between the baseline and the top of the letters’ bodies), and generous kerning (the space between the letters). That allows the reader to focus on the content, not the way the script is delivered (Britton 2023). We find the term “style” here a bit problematic, as “style” usually denotes boldface, italics, etc. Font weight (the overall thickness of a typeface’s stroke in any given font) varies from design to design (Legge & Bigalow 2011), and it also influences the perception and effectiveness of reading.

4. **Variation:** In running, i.e. long texts without paragraphs, variation of regular print, italics, and boldface contributes to reading speed and comprehension (Britton 2023).
5. **Contrast ratio:** According to the Web Accessibility Initiative's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2024), the contrast ratio (the difference in brightness or luminance between two colors) must be at least 4.5:1 in most cases for optimal readability and accessibility, especially for color-blind readers. Whereas high contrast is good for legibility, too much contrast can decrease legibility, especially for dyslexic readers (Cvetkova 2023). Britton (2023) writes on online font legibility: "A good design means that the typeface is pleasing to look at yet doesn't call attention to itself."

However, Peterson (2017, 33) proved by experiment that the legibility, perceived professionalism, and even friendliness of a typeface are culturally bound and vary among diverse cultural groups.

1.2 Readability

Basic readability formulas relate to general readability, i.e., the ability to grasp the meaning or meanings of the text. Originally, readability formulas were compiled in the 1920s (Thorndike 1921; Lively & Pressey 1923) to measure the suitability of books for students at particular grade levels or ages and to assist educators in selecting passages suitable for both children and adults (Zamanian & Heydari 2012). These experts further warn that a well-printed but poorly thought-out text may be legible but not readable. EFL learners represent another category that benefits from easily understandable language. Štulajterová (2023, 23), for example, showed that readers struggle more with expressions that are used in a sense other than their primary meaning.

The Czech initiative ETR (2019), based on European easy-to-read guidelines, formulated the following criteria for the readability of documents:

1. **Language and style**: usage of simple words and sentences, unambiguous language, one idea per sentence, preference for active voice.
2. **Content**: important information is presented first, use of examples, logical organization and structure of the text, focus on the reader and their needs, and avoidance of unnecessary information.
3. **Visual aspects**: use of headings and subheadings, highlights, segmentation of text into paragraphs and shorter sections (adopted from ETR 2019, 14–20).[1]

Whereas legibility (mentioned in 1.1) describes the quality of being legible (when a typeface's glyphs can be identified as characters and words, also including how individual characters can be distinguished from one another – OED 2024a; Google Fonts 2024), especially of being clear enough to read, readability refers to the ease with which a text may be parsed and understood (OED 2024b). Readability and legibility are sometimes wrongly used as synonyms. Content creators ought to be aware of both legibility and readability criteria, the differences among them, as well as their role in the general intelligibility of documents.

1.3 Intelligibility and accessibility

Legibility and readability both contribute to crafting an intelligible message. Intelligibility of text means that

> [the text] is treated with respect and consideration to readers and listeners in an open, simple, and straightforward manner. The author thus ensures that the non-expert reader has an accurate understanding of the subject matter and can understand the text effectively at the most convenient time. The message must also be simplified for differently abled persons or persons with reduced ability. (Easy to Read 2019, 4)[2]

Legibility, readability, and intelligibility contribute to the holistic term called "text accessibility". It describes the general comprehensibility of a piece of writing, leading to equal access and opportunities to information for everyone (ETR 2019).

Text accessibility is a multilayered phenomenon. Thus, it is examined by a wide variety of disciplines, from typography to semiotics (the theory of signs and symbols, transmitting figurative meanings – MW 2024a), and neurolinguistics (the study of the relationships between the human nervous system and language – MW 2024b). However, there is one more often neglected aspect of text accessibility that affects the speed and effectiveness of readers and needs attention – readers' culturally bound visual preference. We will discuss this in Subchapter 1.4.

1.4 Culturally bound visual preference

Script directionality as well as placement (left, right, top, and bottom part of a document) varies across cultures. Kazandjian and Chokron (2008) note that people from different cultures differ in the direction in which they read (left-to-right or right-to-left): historically, a left-to-right reading tendency can be found in European languages, including Slovak, whereas a right-to-left reading pattern is typical in scripts such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Hebrew, which have roots in Phoenician languages (Oxford Reference, 2024). Until 1946, when they adopted Cyrillic, the Mongolians read from top to bottom and from left to right. However, there were post-2020 trends to re-establish the original Mongolian script to preserve their cultural heritage. Chinese and Japanese texts are both written vertically from right to left, though there are exceptions to this rule, and sometimes they may be written horizontally from left to right (EB 2024; Oxford Reference 2024; Thesaurus 2024).

Leaving top-to-bottom reading directions aside, Han and Northoff (2008) proved that the left-to-right and right-to-left focus of the visual field may be a barrier to effective reading in a new cultural reading environment. They note, "reading direction may bias attention towards the left visual field, whereas a right-to-left reading direction may facilitate attention towards the right visual field" (Han & Northoff, 2008). This naturally disadvantages cross-cultural readers in a culturally new environment. Thus, previously known information and competences (e.g. reading from right to left), is detrimental to the correct understanding of messages created within a left-to-right cultural pattern. Conversely, left-to-right cultures may misread, fail to remember, or skip information placed in the right part of the visual field, and vice versa; native Arabic-, Chinese-, Japanese-, and Azerbaijani-speaking students may omit important information placed on the left of the visual field. To verify culturally bound reading direction and visual attention, we conducted a test of reading focus area with Slovak university students.

2 Research corpus and research methods

Our research sample consisted of 59 students from Matej Bel University, Faculty of Arts, aged 19–25 (*M=20.58*), specializing in translation and applied linguistics. Respondents studied double majors (a combination form of study, combining English and other field of philology, e.g. French or German, or science, e.g. Physics or Mathematics), a practice common in Slovak Philological faculties. One student (Russian), whose first language was not Slovak, was excluded. The nationality and first language (L1) of the remaining 58 students were Slovak, with English being their second language (L2; B2 CEFR level). Four students had visual impairments; however, these were corrected, so they were included in the research corpus. One student was left-handed, and three students were ambidextrous (using both hands). Three students were dyslexic, and one student was diagnosed with autism.

Research methods included a visual preference experiment and subsequent interviews with selected students: participants were presented with a panel containing four identical texts, positioned as follows: 1 – horizontal, top left corner; 2 – vertical, left edge; 3 – horizontal, top right corner; and 4 – vertical, right edge. These positions represent common text directions in various cultures. Figure 1 shows the layout of texts in the experiment:

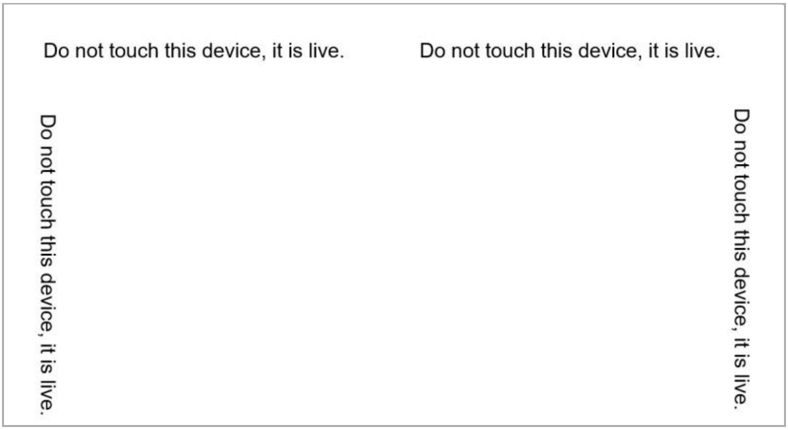

Figure 1: Visual reading focus: Experimental texts 1, 2, 3, and 4

The text consisted of a single sentence with a potentially urgent message: "Do not touch this device, it is live." The researchers selected a sentence whose proper and prompt reading could be crucial, as misreading, delayed reading, or misunderstanding might result in occupational injuries or even fatalities.

The sentences were printed in black on beige (with readable size print (24 point) and in the easy-to-read sans-serif font Arial. The font had regular weight (thickness) and recommended contrast (5:4:1) to prevent misreading caused by decorative or artistic font styles or low contrast. The distance of reading imitated a regular sign display distance (approx. 5 m).

Regarding the experimental procedure, four sentences were displayed on a PowerPoint slide projected on a screen for the time necessary for comfortable reading and comprehension (approximately 30 seconds, determined by readers). Subsequently, respondents were asked to identify their area of visual preference.

3 Data analysis

Table 1 shows the research outcomes, as proved by the experiment:

Position of preferred text	No. of respondents (out of 59)	% (rounded to two decimals)
1 – horizontal, top-left corner	42	72.42
2 – vertical, left	6	10.34
3 – horizontal, top-right corner	10	17.24
4 – vertical, right	0	0
Not sure	1	0.17

Table 1: Text position preference

The experiment showed that 72.42% of respondents gave preference to (started with) the top left section of the visual area. This aligns with the common left-to-right reading tendency found in European languages and with their L1 (Slovak).

10.34% of respondents initially read the top right section of the panel. This right-to-left reading pattern is typical in Phoenician-derived scripts such as Arabic. Two of the interviewed students who preferred the top-right text had dyslexia and one was ambidextrous, which might explain their non-standard response to text placement. However, the lower percentage suggests that placing important text in the top right area of the panel may cause difficulties or even result in skipping the information for this group of students.

Additionally, 17.24% of respondents read the horizontal top right text first, a practice uncommon in Slovak and European extensive linear texts. This relatively high number might be due to respondents being overly exposed to non-linear texts in webpages and advertising. In the following interviews, three of these students confirmed they are involved with art and visual materials as a focus of their studies, and thus, they are exposed to non-linear texts, presented in various directions. One of the students who identified their visual preference area as the horizontal top right had been diagnosed with autism.

4 Discussion

Our research found that 72.42% of readers spontaneously gave preference to text written in the top-left part of their visual field. This preference may be enhanced by so-called hemispheric lateralization

(Oxford Reference 2024). Moreover, the research of Chan and Bergen (2004) showed that left-to-right reading direction preference affects various cognitive functions and behaviour. Moreover, native speakers of languages written in LTR scripts tend to read pictures from left to right. In European art, movement tends to enter from the left, and photographic manuals often recommend this direction of action. Before-and-after formats follow this pattern and even within a single frame, figures "facing the future" face right. (Oxford Reference 2024). Research based on experimental evidence shows that Westerners tend to identify with figures on the left, seeing it as "our" side and, in Windows Messenger, people invariably initiated a virtual hug by choosing a right-facing emoticon. On the other hand, in right-to-left cultures, these directions are reversed (Oxford Reference 2024).

Chan and Bergen (2004) further experimentally proved that left-to-right preference has significant impact on visual attention and visual literacy of observers: it may influence the way and effectiveness of how they memorize items and how they linguistically process visual input. Educators creating texts should take these research results into account and adjust their visual materials to the target recipient, while also paying attention to minority readers and their special cultural needs. Figures 2 and 3 show examples of text orientation in all-Slovak and mixed classrooms:

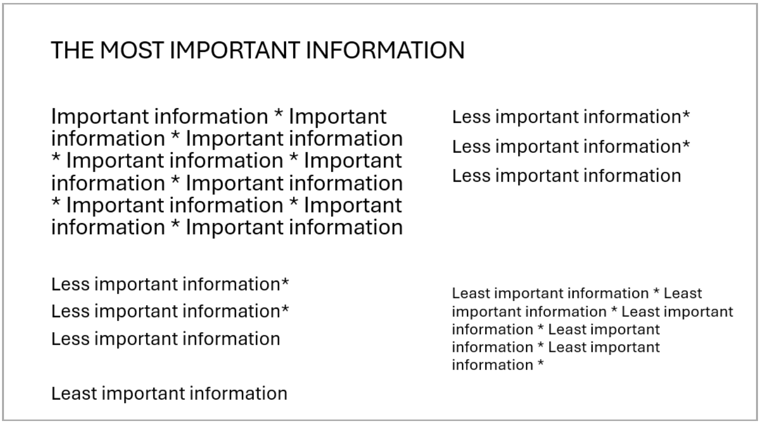

Figure 2: Visual reading focus in an all-Slovak classroom

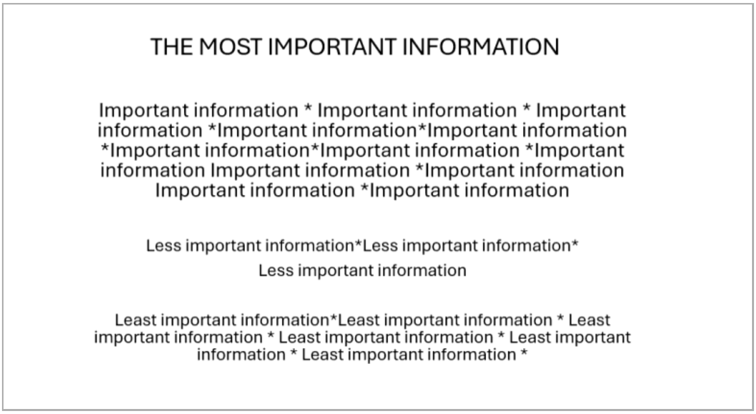

Figure 3: Visual reading focus in a mixed Slovak/international classroom

Both culturally sensitive text position and information about culturally bound differences in reading orientation might also enhance the accessibility of texts, improve student comfort, and lead to effective reading comprehension. Šipošová (2021, 107) also points out that teachers need to overcome their preconceptions about reading comprehension and adopt new strategies to enhance readers' output. The central text orientation also applies to warning signs, such as “Do not touch this device, it is live”, information on webpages, and similar visual areas. On the other hand, we agree with Han and Northoff (2008) that limitations of the presented research lie in the fact that reading direction may be also confounded with other aspects of culture: even readers who have the same reading direction but are different in other aspects of culture may show distinct neural mechanisms associated with perceptual and attentional processing. These aspects could serve as a basis of further research.

Conclusion

Erten and Razi (2009) pointed out that reading comprehension could be facilitated by EFL learners' cultural familiarity. That includes not only graphic and content-related aspects of texts but also awareness of visual cultural differences and culturally bound spatial cognition. The presented research demonstrates the top-left visual preference of Slovak readers, a fact that should be considered by educators when crafting accessible texts and visual materials and making informed decisions for multicultural audiences. And vice versa, representatives of right-to-left types of cultures need to be aware of the prevalent reading preference of their destination in order to avoid misunderstandings, misreading information, and ineffective reading.

Summary in plain English

The researchers discuss how culture affects how we read visual information. They experimented with 59 university students and proved that Slovak readers prefer to start reading from the left side. They suggest that when making texts for European students, important information should be placed on the left side. However, when making texts for students whose native languages are not written from left to right, important information should be placed on the right side of the reading area. This is important to consider, especially if teaching students from different cultural backgrounds, as their reading preferences may vary.

Notes

[1] Trans. by Jana Javorčíková and Richard Gramanich Štromajer.

[2] Trans. by Jana Javorčíková and Richard Gramanich Štromajer.

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Shaping Writing Skills in Students with Learning Disabilities

Katarína Chválová
Diana Židová

Abstract

This chapter aims to find out to what extent English language teachers adapt their modes of work to meet individual pupils' needs when developing their writing skills. The chapter is concerned with learners with learning disabilities and endeavours to identify activities and strategies that can contribute to shaping and improving writing skills in pupils with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

To address these challenges, we compiled insights from various authors to help learners with special educational needs (SEN), enhance their organizational skills, and improve their writing skills.

Consequently, teachers should foster a welcoming environment, choose interesting topics, and incorporate games to make the writing process more enjoyable.

Keywords: writing skills, SEN learners, dyslexia, dysgraphia, questionnaires, interviews, neurodiversity

Introduction

This chapter will investigate challenges learners may face during the writing instruction process, pinpoint effective teaching strategies, and examine various approaches to enhance writing as a multifaceted skill. Among its facets that learners need to master are articulating their thoughts, influencing others, managing negative emotions, recording information, creating imaginative narratives, and uncovering meaning in diverse scenarios (Graham 2018a).

While many children begin their writing journey at home, a significant number do not get the comprehensive writing education they require in school. This gap often stems from a lack of attention to the individual and unique needs of each student, which can hinder the full development of their writing skills. Consequently, this chapter focuses on enhancing writing skills among pupils with learning disabilities, particularly in lower secondary schools in Slovakia, where their numbers are increasingly growing.

Writing tasks are not as common in English lessons compared to other skills, possibly due to the complex and time-consuming nature of the writing process. Nevertheless, developing writing skills is essential as it offers diversity and exposes learners to language through multiple senses, making it more effective and accommodating to learners' various learning styles and individual needs (Byrne 1993, 6). Therefore, a multisensory approach and additional technology applications should be emphasized.

Moreover, the lower focus on written assignments significantly influences students' perceptions of writing, often causing them to regard it as unimportant. Therefore, foreign language educators must spark interest in writing and foster a positive attitude towards writing. To achieve this, teachers should present engaging and relevant topics that resonate with learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Additionally, applying a variety of teaching tools, strategies, and activities will enhance the development of writing skills. Lessons should therefore be enriched with visuals and captivating texts that align with students' interests, while also implementing techniques such as brainstorming and mind mapping to help them navigate the challenging aspects of writing. Furthermore, writing should serve as a platform to unleash learners' creative potential through interactive exercises by providing a space for self-expression, revealing their individualized learning experiences. This way writing activities can foster personal growth, confidence, and communication skills in SEN learners (Applebee & Langer, 2011).

By doing so, learners are more likely to be motivated, actively engage, and address any potential challenges they may encounter. These supportive measures are particularly crucial for students with learning disabilities, who face difficulties related to writing as well as those associated with their specific disabilities. It is imperative for teachers working with SEN students to acknowledge their circumstances and adapt the teaching approach to better suit the needs of learners with learning disabilities. These facts point to the significance of differentiated instruction for students with learning disabilities, particularly in writing lessons. By tailoring instruction and creating a supportive environment, teachers can assist learners in overcoming obstacles in writing and enhancing their skills more effectively. Effective strategies include formative assessments, cooperative learning, and incorporating cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, which can render writing more enjoyable, while also developing divergent and critical thinking. This approach allows learners to receive more constructive feedback, collaborate with their peers, build empathy, and improve their teamwork skills. Additionally, frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) should not be neglected, as they point to the importance of flexibility in both curriculum and instructional methods, ensuring that learners' diverse needs are met. With this in mind, this chapter highlights specific writing strategies such as the LESSER, POW, and TREE models, involved in organizing and producing written content. Furthermore, incorporating visual aids, games, and peer collaboration further boosts the engagement and success of students with special educational needs. Ultimately, the chapter aims to equip educators with practical tools and approaches to improve writing instruction for students with learning disabilities, thus fostering their academic growth and motivation.

1 Development of writing skills

Written expression plays a significant role in both academic and non-academic settings. For students with disabilities, acquiring the skills to write, type, and select appropriate communicative responses not only enhances their ability to achieve learning objectives but also enables them to effectively convey their preferences and establish connections with others. However, writing can be particularly challenging for students with disabilities, as most of them encounter difficulties in this area. Therefore, it is crucial to shed light on the entire writing process and stress the importance of differentiated instruction to address the possible complications.

According to Smith (1983), writing is a complex process that entails devotion to various rules. Spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, organization, formatting, and style all contribute to the clarity of ideas expressed through writing. Different genres of writing require distinct styles and conventions to effectively convey their intended message. As a result, becoming proficient as a writer requires from the students to acquire knowledge about the structural elements essential to writing. Therefore, it is obvious that writing as a versatile skill includes a wide range of categories, including books, poems, plays, songs, jokes, cards, notes, diaries, announcements, cartoons, and more. Despite their diverse forms, all types of writing serve the common purpose of communicating information and expressing ideas, thus being an integrated skill necessary for every single individual and his/her future career.

Anderson (2014) views writing as a transaction, a means of communication between the writer and the reader, with this in mind providing writers with a platform to be heard and enabling connections with others. Undoubtedly written language gives individuals the opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas in a meaningful manner. In addition to this, Mather, Wendling, and Roberts (2009, 105) identify five key components that contribute to written expression including handwriting, spelling, usage, vocabulary, and text structure. These components are crucial in the writing process, as they assist writers to effectively express their thoughts and ideas. For this reason, to write effectively, the learner needs to be acquainted with the following aspects.

Spelling, usage, vocabulary, and text structure are the most crucial components of effective writing, as discussed by Mather, Wendling, and Roberts (2009, 153). Spelling involves correctly recalling and writing words, which can be challenging for students. However, if they struggle with handwriting, it becomes difficult for them to effectively convey their thoughts through writing. These four aspects contribute to the learner's understanding and knowledge of words.

Firstly, when teaching SEN learners, teachers need to be aware of phonology, which is concerned with the sounds of language and morphology, bearing in mind the smallest units of meaning in words. Secondly, they should pay attention to orthography, as SEN learners might have difficulties with spelling and punctuation. Lastly, semantics encompasses word choice and vocabulary knowledge that a learner possesses. While spelling can be a challenging aspect of writing, for any learner it is important to produce clear and effective written communication. As was emphasized by Mather (2009, 153), usage refers to the rules of written language, such as capitalization, punctuation, and syntax, which have a significant impact on written communication. Vocabulary is important for word choice and conveying ideas. Pupils who struggle with vocabulary may have difficulty retrieving words, understanding word structure, or lacking breadth and depth of word knowledge.

Consequently, students with learning difficulties have troubles when arranging words in the correct order and following capitalization and punctuation rules. They might also struggle with using pronouns, subject-verb agreement, and maintaining consistent verb tense. As a result, students must understand narrative and expository writing to express their ideas effectively, while teachers need to know about cohesion and be familiar with different styles and genres.

Lastly, Byrne (1993, 4–6) identified three problematic areas associated with writing. Firstly, psychological challenges arise from the solitary nature of writing, where there is a lack of feedback or interaction. Secondly, linguistic issues are linked to the inability to use helpful tools, resulting in incomplete sentences and gestures to effectively express oneself. Besides that, cognitive problems are related to the complexity of the writing process. To delve deeper, Chen (2022) highlights that learners often remain unaware of their writing difficulties. For this reason, they are unable to identify and recognize their mistakes or edit their texts. This lack of ability leads to unsatisfactory outcomes and demotivation. Moses and Mohamad (2019) assert that elementary school learners commonly encounter problems with lexis, grammar, and spelling.

Correspondingly, vocabulary plays a fundamental role as it enables learners to express their thoughts. Equally, grammar issues can trigger anxiety in learners as they struggle to construct correct sentences that accurately convey their ideas. Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016) also suggest another issue arising from a lack of exposure to extensive reading. Therefore, learners who do not engage in regular reading often lack the necessary ideas and vocabulary for effective writing.

Overall, the authors state that teachers face numerous challenges when teaching writing skills. Firstly, they attempt to motivate disinterested learners through rewards, engaging topics, and praise. However, there are instances where a teacher's efforts may prove futile. Secondly, within a single group, there may be learners with varying proficiency levels, demanding implementing diverse approaches and techniques. In addition, the lack of parents' support might trigger other problems in writing. Thus mastering writing is a strenuous task that often requires guidance and support. For this reason, teachers play a crucial role in providing the necessary help. However, it is essential to emphasize not only the context but also the thought processes of learners (Fareed et al. 2016).

2 Current problems of students with learning disabilities in writing classes

Writing poses a significant challenge for students with learning disabilities, primarily those grappling with dyslexia and dysgraphia. These learners encounter difficulties in formulating a cohesive and well-structured piece of writing due to the difficult nature of the task. Consequently, it is possible to introduce differences among dyslexic and dysgraphic learners and organize them into four areas (Rouse 2019, 457).

The first one is concerned with transcription, resulting in difficulties with handwriting and spelling. Such learners often focus more time on transcription symbols, thus neglecting the content of the written outcome. The second area is related to sentence-level skills, implying that learners have problems with retrieving information from memory, hence leading to a lack of words in sentences and producing short sentences. The third area involves composition skills, where learners usually apply knowledge-telling approaches, while frequently producing a list of ideas, lacking cohesion and coherence. As a result, this situation calls for involving SEN learners in strategies focused on planning, writing and revising Lastly, teachers should not forget about motivating pupils with learning disabilities. As they are often unmotivated, they see writing as unimportant, thus not having a reason to put more effort into enhancing their skills (Rouse 2019, 463–471).

Another task for a foreign language teacher is to identify pupils with learning difficulties, who may not have been diagnosed yet.

Therefore, teachers should pay attention to the signs of learning disabilities during various activities. Initially, the challenges faced by SEN learners may not be readily apparent. Help Guide (2022) provides several examples of common difficulties that may indicate learning disabilities in lower secondary school learners, such as problems with comprehension, illegible handwriting and suboptimal pencil grip. Besides that, dyslexic and dysgraphic pupils might have difficulty expressing thoughts and opinions, memory issues and spelling problems due to difficulty recognizing similar letters and words. Their poor written outcome might be related to organizational difficulties, lack of vocabulary, and inconsistent writing pressure. While there are other indicators, these are the most frequent and noticeable ones. When a teacher suspects that a learner may have a learning disability, it is essential to inform the school authorities to either confirm or refute this suspicion (Pokrivčáková 2018, 45). To support learners with learning difficulties and meet their individual needs, differentiated instruction and student interaction should be at the centre of teacher intervention when shaping writing skills.

3 Differentiated instruction to students with learning disabilities

To make the writing lesson more effective for students with learning disabilities, teachers need to differentiate, individualise instruction and involve learners in cooperative learning activities. Moreover, there should be more focus on formative assessment to exploit instruction and provide learners with multiple ways how to master what they have learnt (Bryant, Maarouf, Burcham & Greer 2016).

According to Tomlinson (2014, 9–15), the key components of differentiated instruction are content, process, product, environment, and affect. She proposes the following guidelines:

1. Several elements and materials are used to support instructional content, including acts, concepts, generalizations, attitudes and skills.
2. Align tasks and objectives to learning goals, so that the objectives result in a continuum of skills-building tasks.

3. Instruction is concept-focused and principle-driven, while teachers must focus on the concepts, principles and skills that students should learn.
4. Clarify key concepts and generalizations by ensuring that learners receive powerful understanding, thus serving as a foundation for future learning.

The universal design learning framework is underpinned by scientific research on the brain, providing learners with diverse motivations (affective network), cognitive processes for comprehending information (recognition network), and strategies for expressing their knowledge (strategic network). The impact of these differences on learning outcomes largely depends on the educational environment. If the learning environment is flexible and can be tailored to accommodate each learner's strengths, a characteristic that may hinder learning in one context can become an advantage in another. Both the learner and the curriculum are dynamic entities, as they continuously evolve and progress together as the learner advances. As Meyer, Rose, and Gordon (2014) assert, true success is achieved when the learner and the curriculum interact in a manner that facilitates simultaneous improvement for both.

To comprehend dyslexic and dysgraphic learners, one must also understand the neurolinguistic perspective, implying how the brain works. The brain networks that facilitate learning, although described separately, are highly interconnected and work together. Similarly, a curriculum's components, such as goals, assessment, methods, and materials, are most effective when linked. A universal design of learning curriculum's flexibility comes from setting goal statements that do not prescribe a specific approach. This allows educators to use diverse teaching methods and materials that are tailored to individual student needs and strengths. For instance, if the goal is for students to understand a specific content piece, the curriculum can incorporate various options for students to interact with it, demonstrate their understanding, and stay motivated. Adjustments during instruction are important, requiring ongoing assessments to track progress and student engagement. In a universal design of learning curriculum, formative assessment is therefore more valuable than summative assessment in measuring student's performance (Tomlinson et al. 2003, 131–133).

According to Graham et al. (2012), mastering the genre approach in writing requires effective instruction, and subsequently improving its quality and writing performance. Key components of effective writing instruction include following a multi-step writing process, collaboration among learners, and providing feedback on their work. The authors also highlight several principles of writing instruction. Firstly, exemplary instruction helps with writing development, overcoming problems, and reducing difficulties for learners with disabilities. Secondly, customizing instruction based on individual needs, such as providing assistance with planning, revising, and addressing specific areas like spelling and punctuation is crucial.

Additionally, teaching strategies for planning and revising text guide learners through each stage of the writing process. Developing basic writing skills, including handwriting, spelling, and sentence writing, is important, especially for learners with disabilities. Increasing learners' knowledge about writing and its genres, making writing more motivating, and using technological tools for writing are also beneficial, especially for learners with writing and spelling difficulties.

Accordingly, teachers apply various writing strategies to assist learners in simplifying and organizing writing tasks, thus helping writers to solve the problems encountered during the writing process. This involves goal-setting, planning, and content creation. The successful production of writing relies on the effective use of these strategies. Training in writing strategies enhances learners' writing proficiency by enabling them to produce more sophisticated written work (Wenden 1991; Riazi 1997; Congjun 2005).

Nonetheless, the strategies that are predominantly used encompass a fusion of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. These strategies are based on acquiring the mastery of cognitive processes and establishing a self-directed routine. Consequently, learners can enhance their knowledge of writing, thereby enabling them to identify and self-correct errors in their written work (Graham, Harris, & MacArthur 2004).

The successful implementation of **Self-Regulated Strategy Development** (SRSD) relies on a well-structured instructional process. Firstly, the teacher's enthusiasm towards writing instruction plays a crucial role in persuading learners who may not perceive writing as valuable. Additionally, teachers should emphasize the advantages of mastering writing strategies and the act of writing itself. Therefore, teachers should create a supportive environment, where learners feel comfortable when expressing themselves in the foreign language. This can be achieved by fostering an exciting atmosphere, involving learners' interests, encouraging risk-taking and showing more effort (Santangelo, Harris, & Graham 2007, 6).

According to Westwood (2008), giving constructive feedback is crucial in avoiding demotivation and negative attitudes towards writing. During evaluation, teachers should acknowledge mistakes without singling out individual students. Developing a routine of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing work helps establish successful writing strategies. This routine allows learners to practice different types of texts and understand the meaningfulness of their writing tasks. In the SRSD model, teachers can utilize specific strategies tailored to the chosen writing genre.

To prevent demotivation and negative attitudes towards writing, constructive feedback is of utmost importance. When evaluating students' work, teachers must acknowledge mistakes without targeting individual students. By establishing a routine that involves planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, learners can use successful writing strategies. This routine allows them to practice different types of texts and comprehend the significance of their writing tasks. In the SRSD model, teachers can use specific strategies that are tailored to the selected writing genre (Harris & Graham 2013).

The LESSER strategy proves to be effective for learners who face difficulties in generating content. It involves the process of brainstorming ideas, evaluating the list of words, selecting a starting point, and expanding on those ideas with sentences.

On the other hand, the **TREE strategy** is suitable for essay planning and stands for topic sentence, reasons, explanation of reasons, and conclusion. Teachers can combine the TREE and three-step strategies by considering the goal, purpose, and audience, applying the TREE strategy for planning, and using the previous steps as a guide for writing. Combining POW and TREE strategies improves the power and quality of writing. POW consists of selecting an idea or a topic, organizing thoughts, and writing. The instructional stages are consistent for both strategies. The POW and WWW + What 2 + How 2 strategy encourage learners to produce longer and more qualitative stories, while giving students responsibility to be co-evaluators of their final outcome. Beginners may find cue cards or prompting sheets to be beneficial. Lastly, the **COPS strategy** is used to edit and improve the quality of written pieces. COPS stands for capitalization, overall appearance, punctuation, and spelling. Going through the work four times, focusing on each aspect, helps learners identify mistakes and boosts their independence, confidence, and motivation (Saddler 2006).

Selecting appropriate classroom techniques for teaching can be a daunting task for teachers. Raimes (1983) has classified these techniques into various categories, including visual aids such as pictures, which in the classroom can prove to be advantageous as they aid in vocabulary expansion and language acquisition, as well as providing real-world context. Pictures can support various activities, e.g. description, comparison, contrast, paragraph completion, and role plays. Readings are also valuable for exploring cultural aspects and can be utilized for extensive reading or close reading exercises that focus on specific details. Teachers can incorporate readings to analyse punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, and summarization. By involving all language skills in the classroom, the learning experience becomes more authentic. Techniques like brainstorming, interviews, discussions, note-taking, and storytelling can be applied to achieve this objective. Moreover, reading and writing are closely associated with critical thinking as the research study conducted by Javorčíková and Badinská shows that modern theories of reading comprehension and writing necessarily incorporate methods and techniques of critical thinking (Javorčíková & Badinská 2021, 656–658).

Teaching practical writing holds significant importance as it enables learners to comprehend the communicative purpose of writing. This involves tasks, such as filling out forms, questionnaires, writing letters, lists, instructions, and daily notes.

Controlled writing techniques, where learners follow a model or continue a passage, prove to be effective for teaching composition. Another technique, parallel writing, involves learners studying a text and then producing their version using the vocabulary, sentence structure, and organization of the model text. Organizational techniques focus on teaching learners how to construct sentences and paragraphs following English discourse (Rico 2000). Teachers commonly apply the analysing outlines and models in this context.

Providing feedback on learners' writing is crucial and encompasses writing comments, engaging in discussions about the paper, and encouraging self-editing by the learners. When selecting activities, teachers must choose ones that are engaging and relevant to the learners. The teacher should take into consideration the types of writing that will be required in the learners' future and select topics which they find appealing.

Various kinds of activities can encompass copying tasks, reinforcement exercises, sentence linking, and sequencing drills, communication assignments, comprehension tasks, and creative writing projects. Firstly, **copying tasks** are used for practicing spelling and sentence structure, and can also be adapted into meaningful activities like organizing words into categories, arranging them alphabetically, solving crosswords, and playing bingo. **Reinforcement exercises** involve composing dialogues, notes, letters, and short reports. Sentence linking and sequencing drills assist learners in comprehending the cohesive devices used in writing. **Communication exercises** emphasize the communicative purpose of writing by prompting learners to write instructions, brief messages, or seek information. **Comprehension tasks** involve responding to questions or determining the accuracy of statements related to a text. **Creative writing** projects allow learners to express their creativity through activities, such as designing questionnaires, quizzes, and mystery stories (Byrne 1993, 48–69).

Correcting students' mistakes requires teachers to be cautious, especially when giving feedback to SEN learners. It is recommended to provide a written comment, while highlighting the positives of their work. Additionally, it is beneficial for students to collaborate with their peers in correcting mistakes.

Various strategies can be applied to enhance the comprehensibility and engagement of activities, particularly for learners with special educational needs (Šimková 2015, 64). These activities must be well-structured and diverse, encompassing both written and spoken components with clear instructions.

Furthermore, incorporating numerous pictures and visual aids can help learners comprehend the topic. Besides that, transforming these activities into games can be highly advantageous as it not only fosters enjoyment, but also develops other skills beyond writing. The author also offers a range of model writing exercises specifically designed for SEN learners. Some examples include labelling diagrams with corresponding words, engaging in a "listen and draw" exercise where learners depict their own homes based on descriptions, circling items on pictures, completing gap-fill exercises to reinforce vocabulary acquisition.

Moreover, matching pictures with definitions or sentence halves and implementing a "word snake" activity seem enriching for pupils with learning disabilities as they focus on key vocabulary, arranging dialogues or short texts in the correct sequence. In addition, writing tasks may be transformed into games, such as Bingo or action cards for miming and performing as learners are not aware they are learning, and that when they truly enjoy learning and can flourish. Such exercises aim to promote active participation and enhance the learning experience for SEN learners (Šimková 2015, 69–78).

The selected references for this article offer significant insights into teaching writing to SEN learners by highlighting strategies tailored to their unique and individual needs. The recommendations for implementing differentiated instruction, formative assessments, and the use of the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) approach are grounded in research by education professionals such as Tomlinson (2014) and Graham et al. (2012), who emphasize the significance of individualized, multi-faceted approaches for effective learning outcome. Moreover, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and strategic frameworks such as POW, TREE, and COPS offer flexible, structured activities that enhance learners' cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational engagement. These strategies, validated by their successful application, ensure that SEN learners can gradually enhance writing skills through scaffolding, peer collaboration, and constructive feedback. As a result, these recommendations are not only practical and evidence-based, but also versatile enough to be incorporated across diverse learning environments, making, them crucial for fostering meaningful writing development among SEN students.

Summary in plain English

In foreign language classes, teachers often fail to see the importance of writing skills, even though writing is an important part of daily life. It helps to develop a person's thinking, fine motor skills, and communication abilities. Writing can be difficult, especially for students with special education needs (SEN), who might find it hard to write clearly, organize their thoughts, create sentences, understand what they are writing, or express themselves.

To help with these challenges, this chapter brings together ideas from different sources to help SEN students improve their organization and writing. Teachers should create a helpful environment, choose interesting topics, and use games to make writing more fun.

In general, teachers should use a variety of strategies to make writing lessons more effective and help students reach their full capacity.

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Intelligibility Limits of Slovak–French Bilingual Children

Jana Pecníková
Daniela Mališová

Abstract

This chapter examines the topic of intelligibility in bilingual families, focusing on children growing up in the families of mixed (Slovak–non-Slovak) partnerships in France. Its aim is to point out the limit(s) we identified, based on the interim results of our research.

In the theoretical part, we also present other specificities of bilingual children associated with the level of language proficiency, foreign accent, speech habits and language clarity. We also list several principles for the effective foreign-language education of a child.

Keywords: intelligibility, language, children, bilingualism, plurilingualism

Introduction

Bilingual families have become an organic part of (among others) French society, associated with an increase in the number of children who grow up in multilingual environments. Such children encounter plurilingualism from early childhood. Their parents' conversational practices play an important role in supporting the children's bilingual development. The formation of multilingual proficiency in young children and the learning of a foreign language has a positive effect on metacognitive functions (De Houwer 2021, 24).

Lipnická (2012, 36) states that children with a bilingual language background require increased attention and appropriate educational guidance. Early speech acquisition is at its most intensive in the first 10 years, which directly affects the adoption and the use of both languages.

1 Language proficiency in bilingual families

Bírová (2013, 96) defines language as a system of signs and rules used for communication and thinking. Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages and to use language competences in practice (writing, reading, speaking and listening). An exogenous variable influencing bilingualism is the environment in which one's family is situated.

A fully bilingual family (Kalayci 2012, 31) is characterized by a high level of knowledge of two languages at the level of a native speaker. In many bilingual families the parents choose to only speak their respective mother tongues (e.g. one parent speaks Slovak, the other French), which is called the OPOL method (one person – one language).

The bilingualism of children growing up in bilingual families is most often linked to the language of the father or mother, or to the language of the family home country. These can be different, i.e. the child grows up in a multilingual environment, which does not mean that (s)he automatically acquires all languages at the same level. If a bilingual family lives in a country with a language other than the parents' mother tongue, internal and external communication is in the language of the country.

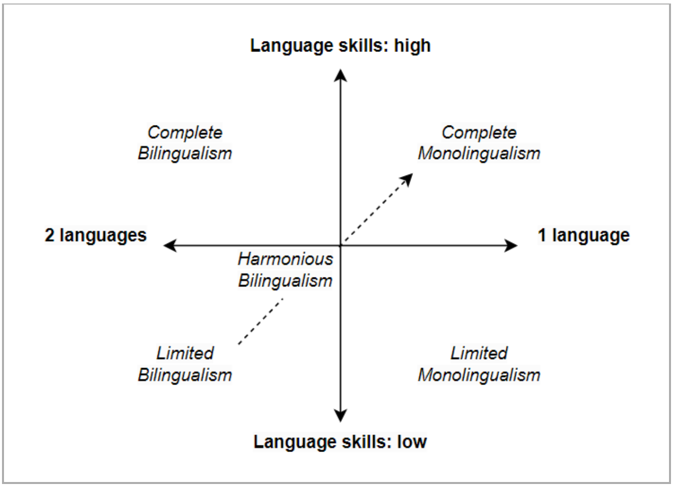


Figure 1: Language types

Portes & Hao (2002, 895) distinguish four language types (Figure 1) according to the degree of language acquisition and proficiency. They point out that there are very few children with a linguistic type of full bilingualism, i.e. children who have a high knowledge of both languages. Most often, children experience limited bilingualism, i.e. knowledge of two languages, while the level of knowledge of either language is not at a high level.

The median of these two options is harmonious bilingualism (De Houwer 2021, 64), where the child learns to speak the language of the country in which he/she lives – the language that is used in teaching at schools or institutions. However, other languages take a back seat and their proficiency declines. We thus observe a gradual diagonal shift from limited bilingualism to full monolingualism.

Kvapil et al. (2018, 12) emphasize children's need for a high level of proficiency in at least one language. Knowledge of a language is important because it relates to a person, his/her cognitive skills, success in school and the possibilities in the future. However, the degree of proficiency and pace of learning depend on the learner's source language.

A child learning a foreign language whose mother tongue belongs to a group of languages with the same background will progress faster than a child learning the same language but with a mother tongue belonging to a different group of origin.

2 Language clarity and intelligibility in bilingual families

The key to understanding a language is its knowledge, clarity, and practical application. Based on the CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020), we can identify language proficiency on a six-level scale from A1 (low level of language proficiency) to C2 (high advanced level of language proficiency). Each degree of knowledge of the language considers the degree of text comprehension (grammar and reading literacy), understanding of spoken speech and conversational speech. Based on this approach, it is relatively easy to identify an individual degree of foreign language proficiency and intelligibility independently of institutionalized or non-institutionalized education.

Multiple authors (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Tergujeff, 2021; Crowther & Isbell, 2023) identify language intelligibility as the degree of agreement between the sender's intended and verbalized content and the recipient's acceptance and understanding of the content. However, the authors distinguish between understanding and real understanding of the content. Real understanding depends on the degree of knowledge of the language. With a higher level of proficiency, the recipient can distinguish subtle nuances in verbalized speech, shades of words or hidden meanings.

These findings were confirmed by Pommée et al. (2022, 32), according to whom language intelligibility is related to the reconstruction of the meaning of a message and includes more functional speech stimuli and tasks. What is more, language intelligibility and comprehension is also influenced by speech and language abilities as well as mental or health predispositions of the individual (Kumin 1996; Mayer & Trezek 2023).

One of the related specifics of language intelligibility, according to Derwing & Munro (2020, 305), is a foreign accent or accent that affects spoken speech. For this reason, a child's second language can be strongly influenced by accent. Nguyen & Truong (2021, 98) identifies as a common problem the specifics of language sound systems, where parents pronounce a foreign language (e.g. English language) in the native language sound system (e.g. Vietnamese language), making the foreign language incomprehensible. In such an environment, children may develop an accent in the pronunciation of a foreign language, making the spoken speech difficult to understand. Therefore, to eliminate this adverse impact, it is advisable to identify problem words or contrasting sounds, as well as practicing and explaining their acoustic properties – phonetic encoding and decoding (Pommée et al. 2022, 39).

For effective education of a child in a foreign language (Kvapil et al. 2018, 53), several principles must be followed. These are the principle of communicating in language, teaching pronunciation, prioritizing speech practice over language theory, and forming speech habits. The specificity of language teaching at the A1 level is the knowledge of a relatively limited amount of vocabulary to effectively express a need or requirement in everyday communication. As mentioned above, it is also advisable to include gradual knowledge of the graphic system of a foreign language, especially if this system differs from the native language.

The intelligibility of a language depends on a thoughtful choice of language means (Tergujeff 2021, 8) that are used in teaching. Oral communication and speaking are preferred (Nguyen & Truong 2021, 86) to language exercises focused on lexis or grammar. Audiovisual materials are also an appropriate means of improving understanding.

3 Intelligibility limits in bilingual families

In this part of the chapter, we present partial results based on our research findings. Our international Slovak–French project deals with bilingualism of children who grow up in France in families where the Slovak language and other foreign language(s) are represented. Being bilingual, in this sense, presupposes the development, promotion and recognition of bilingual language competences, as well as the ability to express oneself in a bilingual environment, connected with development of one's linguistic and cultural identity.

We focus on a specific socio-cultural environment of communities composed of mixed Slovak–French or Slovak–non-Slovak families living in France.

Our research focuses on child speakers from early childhood to 18 years of age. Bilingualism, in this case, means that at least two different languages are used at home so children can actively use different languages in different communication situations, and these languages complement each other.

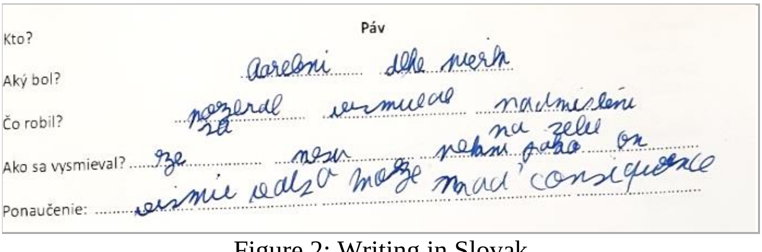
In a questionnaire survey conducted from 24 October 2023 to 24 November 2023, we obtained 60 responses from respondents, which provided us with basic data for mapping this community. This was preceded by cooperation with French colleagues from the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) Paris, when we defined our research areas, methodology and the structure of the questionnaire. We also set goals for field research, which was subsequently carried out in cooperation with the Slovak school

Margaretka in Paris. They provided us the contact with their teachers and with a sample of children who were educated in this centre in November 2023.

From the results of the questionnaire we choose the most significant (quantitatively highest) representation of responses: 81.7% of respondents were of Slovak nationality, 50% were aged 41–50 years, 65% had a university degree of 2nd degree, 35% lived in Paris at the time and the same percentage in the south of France, 31.9% of respondents had children aged 6–12 years, 61.67% of their children at home used both Slovak and French, 43.3% considered French to be their mother tongue, 10% of children attended educational institutions that support the learning of Slovak in France, 53.95% of children had problems with writing in Slovak and grammar. Respondents also stated that they would welcome available material (platform or textbook) as support for home learning of Slovak.

Our research results show that the intelligibility and use of Slovak is the most problematic in the field of writing (see Fig. 2). Children use French spelling for Slovak words. On the other hand, they have no problem understanding Slovak text when reading.

We also found that 43.33% of respondents considered French to be their mother tongue, 36.67% of respondents considered Slovak and French to be their mother tongues and 20% of respondents described Slovak as their mother tongue.


Páv

Kto?

Aký bol?

Čo robil?

Ako sa vysmieval?

Ponaučenie:

Figure 2: Writing in Slovak
Photo: Jana Pecnikova (11/2023)

For this reason, in the project with our French colleagues, we decided to prepare teaching materials that would bring children closer to the Slovak language and at the same time have an overlap with Slovak culture and literature. The output is a textbook intended for children from the Slovak–French intercultural environment.

Since we were surprised by the interest in the topic from Slovaks in France, we decided to continue in the research part of the project by conducting online interviews with a selected group of respondents who are willing to answer prepared questions in order to find out their experience in bilingualism.

The main goal is active creation of didactic support, pilot testing, subsequent reflective evaluation and finalization of didactic material. This material is a way to help improve the intelligibility of Slovak writing (and grammar) for children who understand the spoken language but have limits in its written form.

Summary in plain English

The chapter focuses on forms of bilingualism with a focus on children growing up in multilingual environments. Real understanding depends on the level of language knowledge. An important role is also played by a foreign accent or accent that affects spoken speech.

The understandability of a language also depends on the way language is used. Oral communication and speaking are easier. Language exercises focused on vocabulary or grammar are more complicated.

This idea was confirmed by our research. It showed that the limits to Slovak–French bilingual children's understanding are precisely writing and knowledge of grammar.

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Metalanguage for a Better Understanding of Grammar in Textbooks of French as a Foreign Language

François Schmitt

Abstract

In order to assess the effectiveness of metalanguage in facilitating the understanding of grammar in French as a foreign language (FFL), this chapter presents a diachronic study of its place and function in FFL textbooks from the 1990s to the present day. This study is based on a broad definition of metalanguage as language about language, going beyond terminology alone. It also considers language teaching in the classroom as necessarily explicit. The results of the study show that current FFL textbooks make greater use of metalanguage in grammar presentations than textbooks from the 1990s. Compared with older textbooks, metalanguage's role as a facilitator of grammatical understanding now consists mainly in guiding learners' grammatical conceptualisation.

Keywords: French as a foreign language, grammar, grammatical conceptualisation, metalanguage, metalinguistics, textbook, understanding

Introduction

In language teaching, metalanguage, which we define as a language about language that enables objective reflection on how language works, is often associated with grammar, which constitutes a logical component of language. In an explicit approach to grammar, metalanguage is seen as a facilitator. Communicative French as a foreign language (FFL) textbooks whose grammar sections contain rules and explanations seem to support this idea.

What is the current situation? How much do FFL textbooks rely on metalanguage in facilitating grammatical understanding? An examination of the evolution of the place of metalanguage in FFL textbooks and its integration into the pedagogical approaches envisaged for grammar could provide us with insight into its effectiveness at facilitating the learning of grammar. To do this, after reviewing the issue of metalanguage in language didactics (part 1) and presenting our corpus and our method of analysis (part 2), we propose a comparative analysis of FFL textbooks from the 1990s to the present day, focusing on their grammatical and metalanguage components (part 3).

1 An update on the issue of metalanguage in language teaching

1.1 What do we mean by metalanguage?

The *Dictionnaire pratique de didactique du FLE* (Robert 2008, 130–131) defines the term *metalanguage* in three different ways, depending on the point of view adopted. From a pragmatic point of view, metalanguage is a language for talking about language. From a lexical perspective, it designates the specialised terms of linguistic description. For the linguist, it is a language at the service of linguistic theories.

In its original sense, metalanguage refers to the area of ordinary language whose object is language. This is Jakobson's metalinguistic function of language. Through its cognitive virtues, it also constitutes a means of the scientific study of language (Besse 1980, 117). A narrow view of metalanguage tends to confuse it with specialised linguistic terminology, particularly grammatical terminology. However, while the two categories are distinct, there is often little difference between ordinary words and grammatical terms. Cuq's typology (2001, 707), which we will follow in our analysis, identifies three categories of grammatical terms: "les termes spécifiques" (specific terms), which exist only in the field of grammar (e.g. *subjunctive*); "les termes non essentiellement grammaticaux" (non-essentially grammatical terms), which are also used in other fields, but with different meanings (e.g. *article, interrogative*); and "les termes non spécifiques" (non-specific terms), whose meaning is the same in the grammatical field and in ordinary language (e.g. *read*, *repeat*, *listen*). The latter are mainly found in instructions. While, for Besse (1980, 116), terminology only represents a secondary aspect of the metalinguistic component of language instruction, it does make it possible to detach metalanguage from ordinary language and make it a tool for linguistic reflection. There is, however, a risk that the linguist will use it as a tailor-made instrument to justify the theories he is defending (Besse 1980, 119). Be that as it may, at the level of the language class, metalanguage has the merit of allowing language to leave its natural status and become a scientific object (Fintz cited in Vandendorpe 1995, 17). For the researcher, the teacher and the learner, metalanguage is based on cognitive and communicative processes which give substance to metalinguistic reflection. The metalinguistic processes used in the language classroom often stem from ordinary language, the most common being autonymy, translation and paraphrase (Besse 1980, 117). Metaphor is also a good method of metalinguistic explanation, as it enables linguistic concepts to be transformed into teachable knowledge by expressing abstract ideas by analogy with concrete ideas (Linea & Vlad 2021, 495). These ordinary metalinguistic procedures, which help non-specialists to understand how language works, therefore have obvious facilitating aims. This verbalised metalinguistic reflection results in what Besse (1980, 120) calls "le métadiscours" (metadiscourse) or discourse produced about language. According to Beacco (2014, 22), two types of grammatical metadiscourse are used in the language classroom: learners' spontaneous epilinguistic grammatical knowledge, which is distorted by school grammar and terminology, and teachers' expert knowledge, which draws on scholarly knowledge derived from research and the knowledge disseminated in grammar textbooks. To make grammatical knowledge more intelligible, teachers try to adapt their metadiscourse to the learners.

In this way, metalanguage corresponds to all the means deployed to understand how language works and to help others understand how it works. It is therefore both a means of making language explicit and a means of making reflection on how language works explicit, in other words "un outil de prise de conscience de nos opérations métacognitives" (a tool for becoming aware of our metacognitive operations) (Vandendorpe 1995, 16). We deduce from this that the use of metalanguage in the language classroom presupposes that it is useful for understanding grammar. However, this assumption is not unanimously supported by educationalists, particularly those who advocate natural language learning.

1.2 Is metalanguage useful for language learning?

In order to address the question of the effectiveness of metalanguage in language learning, we felt it essential to focus on Krashen's theory and to take up the main arguments of his critics.

The main principle of Krashen's theory (1983, 26–39; 1985, 78–81) is based on contrasting learning, which is conscious and focused on form, with acquisition, which is unconscious and focused on communication. According to Krashen, only acquisition plays a significant role in foreign language teaching. Like L1 acquisition, teaching must therefore focus on communication and not on explicit learning of grammar, because when learning a L2, it is the meaning that counts. According to this, he believes that only acquired linguistic system, i.e. unconsciously, enables the production of L2 utterances. Thus, Krashen's theory shows that acquisition occurs only when meaning is dealt with (Coste 1985, 84–85). This leads to a rejection of grammatical metalanguage, which, by focusing on form, would be detrimental to communication, which would then take second place (Germain & Séguin 1998, 127).

Krashen's hypotheses were criticised as soon as they were published, in particular by his most virulent detractor McLaughlin (1987, 22–23), who disapproved Krashen for drawing too strict a parallel between the L2 acquisition process and that of L1. In his view, adults and children have very different learning profiles because of the evolution of the LAD (Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device) as children grow older. Hilton (2014) counters Krashen with two arguments. Acquisition in an immersion situation, even in children for L1, also includes moments of explicit reflection on the language. Conversely, an exclusively implicit approach in the classroom proves impossible insofar as it can never match the child's exposure time to L1. Explicit learning then makes up for this deficit.

Sharing the criticisms of Krashen's hypotheses, we consider that the language classroom cannot be the object of exclusively implicit teaching on the model of natural acquisition. On the contrary, the language classroom is the place par excellence for explicit learning, which necessarily involves a certain amount of metalanguage. This is explained by Coste (1985, 79–80), who asserts that everything produced in the L2 classroom is done "pour la forme" (for the sake of it), i.e. with a metalinguistic objective. In other words, L2 is permanently represented, because it is produced more for its own sake than for what it signifies.

1.3 The place of metalanguage in FFL textbooks

Language textbooks, by virtue of their dual function as providers of teaching resources and explanations of language, should also give pride of place to metalanguage. This is confirmed by Cuq (2000, 11), in a study of FFL textbooks from the late 1980s and early 1990s, who notes terminological inflation. This is also the case of Slovak-designed FFL textbooks, where we have observed a high and constant use of grammatical explanations over a long period (from the 1960s to the 1990s) (Schmitt 2021, 284). These textbooks seem to draw on Slovak-designed French grammar textbooks, which are strongly influenced by contrastive linguistics, as shown by Chovancová and Ráčková (2021) in relation to verbal valency, which gives rise to specific forms of contextualisation.

Whether in the language classroom or in the textbook, metalanguage is thus intrinsic to the teaching of FFL. Therefore, in order to evaluate the a priori effectiveness of metalanguage on grammar learning, we prefer a reflection on its adaptation to methodological developments to the inconclusive quantitative approaches concerning its place in textbooks. This is the approach we will follow in the research we present in the following sections of this chapter.

2 Corpus and research method

2.1 Research objectives

Our research, which focuses on grammatical metalanguage in FFL textbooks, consists of a comparative analysis of three textbooks from the 1990s (Corpus 1) and three current textbooks (Corpus 2). The aim is to verify whether or not the evolution of grammatical metalanguage between the two periods predisposes learners to a better a priori understanding of grammar. In fact, any a posteriori verification of the results of this study in the field is ruled out by the absence of data on the grammatical performance of learners trained using textbooks from the 1990s that could be compared with learners trained using current textbooks. To counteract this bias, we will relate the results of our analyses to the cognitivist presuppositions of the communicative approach and the action-oriented approach used in the corpus textbooks.

2.2 Research procedures: a comparative analysis of the metalinguistic treatment of grammar

Our study consists of a comparative analysis of the metalinguistic treatment of grammar. To ensure the comparability of the analysis, we selected three grammatical structures treated in parallel in the six textbooks in the corpus: prepositions of place, possessive adjectives, and the near future. We then created three analytical sheets ("Metalinguistic treatment of prepositions of place", "Metalinguistic treatment of possessive adjectives", "Metalinguistic treatment of the near future"), each of which we divided into four sections ("Integration of grammatical content into the textbook's progression", "Graphic and iconographic presentation of grammatical content", "Grammatical terminology used", "Instructions for learning/teaching grammar. Explanations and comments on grammatical content"). Under the first section, "Integration of grammatical content into the progression of the textbook", we observed in which parts of the textbooks the selected grammatical content is covered and how it is integrated into the activities and other content. Under the section "Grammatical terminology used", we noted the "specific terms" and the "non-essentially grammatical terms" (according to Cuq's classification, supra-1.1) used in the textbooks. We have not included in this section "non-specific terms" (ibid. Cuq's classification), as they relate to the instructions which are the subject of the last section: "Instructions for learning/teaching grammar. Explanations and comments on grammatical content". In this section, we have analysed the instructions given to learners and teachers for carrying out grammatical conceptualisation activities and grammatical comments.

2.3 Corpus

The corpus consists of six textbooks for adults and young-adult beginners published by the main French FFL publishers (Clé international, Hatier/Didier, Hachette, La Maison des langues). We have analysed two of their components: *Le livre de l'élève* (the student's book) and *Le livre du professeur* (the teacher's book) (TB) also called *Guide pédagogique* (pedagogical guide) (PG), without considering their third component, *Le cahier d'exercices* also called *Le cahier d'activités* (the exercise or activity book), which only comes into play after the work of discovering and conceptualising grammatical structures, which is the focus of our discussion. It is mainly during this stage of the teaching and learning process that the metalanguage is mobilised in the service of understanding grammar.

In order to highlight recent developments in the role of metalanguage in the teaching of FFL, we have analysed two corpora corresponding to two different methodological trends. Corpus 1 covers the 1990s, when the communicative approach, after the innovations of the turn of the 1970s/1980s, reached maturity. Corpus 2 covers the second decade of the 21st century, which saw the publication of what we call the second generation of action-oriented textbooks, following on from the first generation initiated by the publication of the CEFR (2001). Compared with the textbooks of the 2000s, the so-called second-generation textbooks of the action-oriented approach are characterised by an even greater integration of the task, which represents the backbone of each unit built around the achievement of a final project. In the following two sub-sections, we present the six textbooks analysed, specifying their methodological orientations and their approaches to grammar on the basis of the explanations and comments provided in the introductions to the TP or PG and the student's books.

2.3.1 Corpus 1

The oldest textbook in the corpus, *Le Nouveau sans frontière 1* (1988) (NSF) is based on the complementarity between, on the one hand, the implicit introduction of content through dialogues and documents presenting a living, authentic language and, on the other hand, explicit work on the language in the "Vocabulaire et grammaire" (Vocabulary and grammar) sections presenting a didactic vision of the language from a functional-notional perspective (NSF TB 1988, 3).

Libre échange 1 (1991) (LE) approaches the teaching/learning of the language from communicative situations with a functional aim. Learners are considered to be in charge of their own learning: they formulate their own grammar rules by observing how the language works, using items in the "Découverte des règles" (Discovering the rules) section (LE TB 1991, 3–4).

Panorama 1 (1996) (PA) follows a three-stage approach: observation of the content of the trigger dialogue of the double-page "Introduction aux contenus" (Introduction to the content), metalinguistic reflection in the "Grammaire" (Grammar) pages, and application of the rules in exercises and role-playing (PA TB 1996, 6–7). As the most recent textbook in Corpus 1, PA also contains some innovations which herald the action-oriented approach, such as the project-based approach proposed in some units. PA also provides more metalinguistic instructions than the other textbooks in Corpus 1.

2.3.2 Corpus 2

As an action-oriented approach textbook, *Tendances A1* (2016) (TE) sees language learning as a series of tasks to be completed (TE TB 2016, 6–7). The rules of grammar are discovered by carrying out the activities proposed under the section "Réfléchissons" (Let's think) (TE TB 2016, 8) in accordance with the principle of cognitive effort, according to which, in order to discover the rules of grammar, the learner must make a certain intellectual effort (TE TB 2016, 9).

Cosmopolite A1 (2017) (CO) also adopts an action-oriented approach from the outset, designing each dossier in line with the final projects to be carried out. The approach to acquiring language skills is inductive, using grammatical conceptualisation in the "Focus langue" (Language focus) section, with clear guidance for the learner in the form of instructions (CO PG 2017, 4–5).

Finally, *Défi 1* (2018) (DE), whose originality lies in the fact that language is discovered from a cultural and socio-cultural perspective (DE PG 2018, 4–5). The textbook also offers an inductive approach to grammar in which learners co-construct their grammatical competence based on the trigger documents (DE LE, 2).

3 Analysis results

This third part of the chapter presents a summary of the three analysis sheets on grammatical metalanguage in the six textbooks in the corpus, through a comparative cross-section of the four sections ("Integration of grammatical content into the textbook's progression", "Graphic and iconographic presentation of grammatical content", "Grammatical terminology used", "Instructions for learning/teaching grammar. Explanations and comments on grammatical content") (supra-2.2).

3.1 Integrating grammatical content into the progression of textbooks

The grammatical content selected for analysis is covered in the same order in all six textbooks. Prepositions of place, which are essential for introducing oneself, are among the first grammatical skills to be learnt and are therefore covered as early as Units 1 or 2 (in CO, the units are called "dossiers"). Next come possessive adjectives, introduced with the theme of the family between the end of Unit 2 for NSF, which has only four units in all, and Unit 4 for the other textbooks, which have between six and twelve units. Finally, the near future is covered in the second half of the books: in Unit 3 for NSF and in Unit 7 (or dossier 7) for the other textbooks. This uniform progression of grammatical content throughout the corpus has the advantage of making it easier to compare the textbooks.

The progression of the approach designed to help learners assimilate the way grammatical structures work is also identical in all six textbooks and follows three stages. The new structure is first explained at the beginning of the units (or dossiers) in the dialogues or trigger documents. This is followed by explicit grammatical conceptualisation in the language sections (“Vocabulaire et grammaire” in NSF; “Découvrez les règles” in LE; “Grammaire” in PA; “Réfléchissons” in TE; “Focus langue” in CO; “Travailler la langue” in DE) which follow the dialogues and trigger documents. Finally, all the textbooks offer a summary of grammatical structures, either at the end of the book (“Bilan grammatical” in NSF and PA; “Précis de grammaire” in CO and DE), or at the end of the unit (“Votre grammaire” in LE; “Outils” in TE). We shall see in sub-section 3.3 that the major difference between the two corpora lies in the link between the trigger dialogue or document and the grammatical conceptualisation part. Whereas these two parts are separate in the Corpus 1 textbooks, in Corpus 2 the grammatical conceptualisation activities are integrated into the activities for understanding the trigger documents.

3.2 Use of grammatical terminology in textbooks

On the question of terminology, our analysis seems to confirm Cuq’s assertion (2000, 11), (supra-1.3), since we find greater use of grammatical terminology in recent textbooks than in textbooks from the 1990s. This terminological inflation occurs at two levels. Firstly, in all the sections devoted to grammar (conceptualisation and synthesis sections), the average number of terms used is three-quarters higher in the Corpus 2 textbooks than in Corpus 1: 7 terms for prepositions of place and possessive adjectives, 5 terms for the near future in Corpus 2, compared with 4 terms for prepositions of place and possessive adjectives and 2 terms for the near future in Corpus 1. We then observed a greater use of terminology in the grammatical conceptualisation parts of Corpus 2 compared with Corpus 1, where grammatical terms appear mainly in the synthesis parts. So grammatical conceptualisation now seems to rely more on terminology. The use of grammatical terms particularly concerns conceptualisation activities, which are also more numerous in recent textbooks, as we shall show in the next section (3.3).

3.3 Text and images of grammatical metalanguage in textbooks

The biggest differences we found between the two periods concerned the way in which grammatical metalanguage was presented in the text. However, these differences do not affect the graphic presentation, as all six textbooks make systematic use of tables, boxes and bolding of key words. The use of drawings is rarer: we only found it in PA. On the other hand, there are clear differences in the instructions for the conceptualisation activities and the metalinguistic comments, both of which are much more extensive in Corpus 2 than in Corpus 1.

The instructions and comments in the student's books in Corpus 1 are very brief. The instructions simply ask the learner to look at the examples given in the tables. These examples, completed beforehand without the learner having to add anything themselves, act as rules and take the place of grammatical comments. Most of the instructions and comments are given in the teacher's books. But here too, the metalanguage input is fairly limited. The instructions mainly concern the process to be followed to make the link between the trigger dialogue and the grammatical conceptualisation. Essentially, they consist of using the trigger dialogue as a resource of examples of the use of structures in a communicative context. For example, learners are asked to look at the examples given in the grammar section and find them in the dialogue (in PA concerning prepositions of place), or to start with the grammar before tackling the dialogue (in NSF and PA concerning possessive adjectives). In some cases, the link between grammatical conceptualisation and the trigger dialogue appears even more tenuous: for example, learners are asked to start with the exercises (in NSF concerning possessive adjectives), or to introduce the structure in classroom situations (in PA concerning possessive adjectives; in NSF and PA concerning the near future). On the other hand, very few instructions are given to guide learners' metalinguistic thinking. The only example we found was in LE concerning possessive adjectives, where learners were advised to formulate the rule in their own way and to compare possessive adjectives with tonic pronouns. As for grammatical comments, these are mainly found in teachers' books, where they consist of grammatical information for the teacher's use.

The wealth of instructions and comments accompanying grammatical reflection in the Corpus 2 textbooks is partly due to the large number of conceptualisation activities proposed. These are integrated into the comprehension tasks in the trigger documents and continue in the sections devoted to grammar. The central task systematically proposed consists in having the learners themselves complete the tables of grammar rules, whereas, as we have shown, the Corpus 1 textbooks give the rules in the tables from the outset. Although Corpus 2 provides more information than Corpus 1, the instructions in the student's books are still fairly limited. In the teaching guides, on the other hand, the steps to be followed are very detailed. These include, for all three textbooks, a marked preference for group work on grammatical conceptualisation activities. But some of the approaches envisaged are also specific to one textbook or another. CO recommends, for example, the use of colour codes for sharing the results of the class's grammatical reflection on the blackboard. Another example is TE, which offers two variants for the three structures analysed, left to the teacher's choice: a classic approach based on observation of the rules and leading on to the exercises; and an inductive approach based on the exercises and leading on to the rules. Finally, the textbooks in Corpus 2 are also richer in commentary, particularly in the grammar guide which, in addition to rules and examples, also provides explanations, whereas the grammatical summary sections in Corpus 1 consist mainly of tables without commentary.

3.4 Comparative overview of grammatical metalanguage in textbooks

The comparative analysis of the two corpora reveals a certain imbalance between the two periods in the use of grammatical metalanguage. Generally speaking, metalanguage is introduced at two levels in the six textbooks. Firstly, it relates directly to the language through tables, boxes, possibly iconographic representations, and grammatical comments. Secondly, it is introduced at the metacognitive level to support the learner's metalinguistic reflection through the instructions for grammatical conceptualisation activities. As we have shown, it is mainly at this level that the use of metalanguage is more marked in the Corpus 2 textbooks than in Corpus 1.

Corpus 1 corresponds, in fact, to a minimalist approach to grammar in which comments are reduced to a minimum, even in the summary sections, and appear in most cases in the form of tables. Grammatical conceptualisation, stimulated by the instructions in the teacher's book, is only carried out orally by verbalising the learners' metalinguistic thinking, as the rules are given straight away in the student's book. The emphasis is therefore on the learner's mental activity, to the detriment of the heuristic use of language in the activities in the Corpus 2 textbooks. This mentalist approach to grammatical conceptualisation seems to be the result of a fragmented approach to the treatment of grammar in three separate stages – presentation/exposure, conceptualisation, and application – where there is little continuity between implicit exposure to structures in trigger dialogues, grammatical conceptualisation, and application exercises.

In contrast, the textbooks in Corpus 2 give grammatical metalanguage an important place, not only in terms of terminology, but also and above all in the comments and instructions for conceptualisation activities. Recent textbooks also seem to integrate grammatical processing better into the teaching progression. There is a continuum between the exposition/presentation of structures through the tigger documents, the grammatical conceptualisation in the sections devoted to grammar and the application exercises, which fulfil a dual function of discovering and conceptualising rules on the one hand and automating them on the other. Finally, the textbooks in Corpus 2 also place greater emphasis on the collective dimension of grammatical conceptualisation activities.

Conclusion

This study leads us to conclude that grammatical metalanguage has been reinforced in current FFL textbooks in comparison with the communicative textbooks of the 1990s. This reinforcement occurs mainly through grammatical conceptualisation activities, where it contributes to a better understanding of grammar by the learner.

The increasing emphasis on metalanguage in the textbooks is closely linked to the changing function of the trigger documents. In the Corpus 1 textbooks, the function of the trigger documents is essentially to present the language content of the unit intuitively, without any metalinguistic reflection, through comprehension activities focused solely on meaning. Grammatical reflection only comes into play afterwards, and without any direct link to the trigger dialogues. This approach to grammar, based on a separation between the communicative (implicit and focused on meaning) and the metalinguistic (explicit and focused on form), seems to be inspired by the natural approach and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which gives an essential role to the learner's exposure to the language that is supposed to produce acquisition. Recent textbooks, on the other hand, by proposing activities involving reflection on language directly related to the trigger documents, avoid this separation between the communicative and the metalinguistic, which we consider to be detrimental to grammar learning, as it decontextualises reflection on language.

The differences we found between the two corpora in terms of the place and function of metalanguage do not relate solely to the pedagogical practices used to approach grammar. They are also indicative of methodological developments in FFL since the 1990s. Whereas communicative textbooks limited work on language to the verbalisation by learners of their metalinguistic reflections stimulated by the observation of language on the basis of items detached from their communicative context, current textbooks base learners' grammatical conceptualisation on activities involving the manipulation of language in context and carried out collectively. In the textbooks in Corpus 2, the metalanguage, whose essential function is to support learners as they carry out the tasks of discovery and grammatical conceptualisation, therefore meets the methodological expectations of the action-oriented approach of FFL didactics.

In this context, the terminological inflation we have observed is merely a consequence of the multiplication of comments and instructions required by the action-oriented approach to grammatical conceptualisation in recent textbooks. The function of terminology is essentially to support learners' metalinguistic guidance processes, and it plays only a secondary role in facilitating grammatical comprehension.

This analysis of the processes of grammatical discovery and conceptualisation at work in the textbooks shows us that it is not the metalanguage itself that predisposes to a better understanding of grammar, but rather its integration into an effective approach to grammar that fully involves the learner in metalinguistic reflection.

Summary in plain English

This chapter looks at how the use of metalanguage in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) textbooks has changed from the 1990s to today. The goal is to see if using metalanguage helps students understand grammar better. Metalanguage is defined as language about language and not just as the use of terminology. Metalanguage is considered essential for language learning in the classroom. The study found that today's FFL textbooks use more metalanguage than those from the 1990s. The main reason for using metalanguage is to help students think about grammar in a structured way.

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The Multiverse of Medical Latin: The Problems of Comprehension and Translation of Anatomical Terms in a Multilingual Educational Environment

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Abstract

First-year medical students enrolled in the Hungarian and English program at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Szeged, are required to study Latin-based medical terminology in both Hungarian and English for two semesters. The primary goal of this course is to provide students with the essential Latin foundation knowledge for studying health sciences, as well as to familiarise them with fundamental medical terminology in Latin and Greek. Medical students encounter approximately 60–80 new anatomical expressions during anatomy lectures and dissection practices, yet teachers seldom explain their meanings or provide their Hungarian or general-English equivalents. As a result, it is our responsibility to teach them their English or Hungarian counterparts and facilitate their comprehension of those expressions. In this chapter, we discuss the methods and difficulties of conveying the meaning of these anatomical concepts to Hungarian and international students.

Keywords: anatomy, etymology, Latin terminology, medical student, methodology

Introduction

The Department of Medical Communication and Translation Studies of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Szeged, teaches Latin medical terminology to Hungarian and international medical students, as well as pharmacy and dentistry students. Medical students study Latin terminology for two semesters, whereas students at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Dentistry take it for one semester as a mandatory course of 90 minutes each week. These courses aim to provide students with the necessary Latin foundation for studying health sciences and familiarise them with essential medical terminology in both Latin and Greek languages. As a result, we do more than just teach Latin grammar; we also help students grasp and apply anatomical and clinical terminology accurately. However, during the teaching process, we encounter a number of challenges and problems that make comprehension difficult, which we will discuss in this chapter.

1 An overview of the history of anatomical terminology

Medical language dates back to ancient Greece and has remained Greek despite Latinization attempts. Ancient Greek medical language only included physiological processes, symptoms, illness and cure names, and disease-related events. Latin translations of Arabic literature on Greek medicine preserved ancient nomenclature. Latin acquired new names and definitions, and after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, it continued to communicate and record knowledge and form the basis of scientific writing. The Church and sciences used it until the 18th century, even though it was a dead language. Hebrew and Arabic influenced Renaissance Latin, and medicine adopted terms from both. National medical languages emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, although they were mostly used for medical education, leaving Latin for scientific medicine. It was not until the 19th century that national languages became dominant and medical education in many universities became national. The same century also witnessed the formation of specialist sciences (pharmacy, physiology, pathology, toxicology, medicinal chemistry, etc.), which caused significant advancements in medical language (Magyar 2009, 74–83).

Medical terminology classification began in the late 19th century. Due to several specialties and medical technology, medical vocabulary has grown to over 50,000 items, requiring a more systematic use of medical language. The 1895 Basle Nomina Anatomica (BNA) was the first international collection of its kind. Only a few new terms were included in this collection, which aimed to systematise previous terminology. Some were dissatisfied and urged a fresh revision, which led to the Paris Nomina Anatomica (PNA) in 1955, the first universally recognised anatomical nomenclature. A revised version was attempted several times in later decades. Revisions were attempted in 1961, 1966, and 1983.

The International Federation of Associations of Anatomists (IFAA) created and authorised the Terminologia Anatomica (TA) in 1998. It standardises and adapts language for clinical and medical research (Sakai 2007; Kachlik et al. 2008). The second edition of TA was published by FIPAT in 2019. Six columns make up TA2. The top column provides the official Latin word, which FIPAT recommends for terminology lists in other languages. The second column lists Latin synonyms, whereas the third and fourth columns provide English (US and UK) counterparts (Figure 1).

	Latin term	Latin synonym	UK English	US English
2772	**Systemata visceralia**		**Visceral systems**	**Visceral systems**
2773	**Systema digestorium**	**Systema alimentarium**	**Digestive system**	**Digestive system**
2774	**Stoma**	**Ostium orale; Os**	**Mouth**	**Mouth**
2775	Labia oris		Lips	Lips
2776	Facies interna buccae	Facies mucosa buccae	Internal surface of cheek	Internal surface of cheek
2777	Papilla ductus parotidei		Papilla of parotid duct	Papilla of parotid duct
2778	Palatum		Palate	Palate
2779	Palatum durum		Hard palate	Hard palate
2780	Palatum molle	Velum palatinum	Soft palate	Soft palate
2781	Uvula palatina		Uvula of palate	Uvula of palate
2782	Raphe palati		Palatine raphe	Palatine raphe
2783	Plicae palatinae transversae	Rugae palatinae	Transverse palatine folds	Transverse palatine folds
2784	Papilla incisiva		Incisive papilla	Incisive papilla

Figure 1: Terminologica Anatomica 2nd edition. An example of part of the digestive system chapter.

2 Education of anatomy at the University of Szeged

The initial two years of medical school at Szeged University are dedicated to the study of anatomy, histology, embryology, and physiology. Medical Latin forms the basis of the studies, requiring students to establish a strong foundation in Latin terminology during the first semester. Why is it necessary for medical students to comprehend the fundamental principles of this ‘dead language’? Turmezei emphasizes that a comprehensive understanding of human anatomy is essential for the field of medicine, and the employed terminology serves as the fundamental basis for effective communication among anatomists and medical professionals (Turmezei 2012, 1015).

First-year medical students get acquainted with medical terminology during the initial week of their academic journey, specifically through the anatomy lecture and the dissecting room practice. Throughout these two courses, they are exposed to a range of 100–120 new terms. The first semester involves the acquisition of Latin terminology for body parts, bony structures, muscles, joints, blood vessels, and nerves. The terminology that students may struggle to master without prior Latin expertise includes one-word phrases such as *digitus*, *extremitas*, *humerus*, and *ulna*, as well as possessive and adjectival constructs like *cavitas glenoidalis*, *caput humeri*, and *musculus serratus anterior*. The lack of prior Latin training and the explanations provided by anatomy professors often result in students' limited comprehension of these concepts. The primary objective of the Latin medical terminology course during the initial weeks is to establish a foundation in the grammatical aspects of anatomical terminology, thereby enhancing the understanding of these phrases and expressions.

Our department began a complex renewal project around four years ago. First and foremost, we began to innovate in the grammatical field, i.e., we switched from teaching according to declensions to teaching according to cases; we do not teach the dative case because it is not used in medical Latin; and we teach only the imperative verbs from the verbal system that are used in prescriptions. Overall, we have limited ourselves to teaching only the grammatical knowledge that is absolutely necessary and employed in medical language, thereby assisting students in acquiring knowledge that is directly relevant to the practice of their profession. It is critical to teach singular and plural nominative and genitive cases in all declensions, as well as the adjectival system and noun-adjective agreement. As a result of this change, we are not adjusting the terminology to Latin language, but rather adjusting the language to medical terminology.

Latin names for anatomical structures are widespread in Hungarian medicine. This assumption, which seems outdated, is supported by the profession's traditions and the lack of a Hungarian anatomical nomenclature. Medical students learn Latin anatomical nomenclature, not Hungarian ones. Foreign students should utilise the current version of Grey’s Anatomy (Drake et al. 2023), which incorporates English terminology.

3 Previous language qualifications

The presence of classical languages in primary and secondary school education in Hungary has significantly diminished. Only a limited number of schools currently include Latin and typically offer it as an optional course. According to data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, secondary schools taught English to a total of 204,072 pupils in 2023/24, but only taught Latin to 2,900 students. At vocational technical schools, 147,365 pupils received English classes, while only 73 students received Latin language education (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2024). The data presented indicates a significant decline in the inclusion of classical language learning within secondary school curricula. Contemporary medical school students in Hungary have minimal or nonexistent prior familiarity with Latin and Greek languages.

The English program at the University of Szeged attracts students from many countries worldwide and they study all their subjects in English. The students’ English proficiency is assessed during the entrance exams, with their English level ranging from B1 to C1 or C2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). However, it is common for them to lack any linguistic grounding in Latin or Greek, which appears to be a global phenomenon (Smith et al. 2006, 333; Turmezei 2012, 1016; Stephens & Moxham 2016, 697).

4 Methods of teaching anatomical terminology for Hungarian and international students

The concepts of medicine originated in the Greek and Latin worlds, and although English is now the primary language of communication, the majority of anatomical and medical words are derived from Greek and Latin languages. The Latin or Greek name of an anatomical structure may refer to its location, function, shape, resemblance to some other organism or object, a Greek letter, or sometimes it has a mythological origin (Pampush & Petto 2010, 9). Understanding the meaning or the etymology of the anatomy structures may enhance comprehension and the learning procedure, which is also true for clinical terms. Marečková et al. also note that the vast majority of anatomical terms are of Latin and Greek origin; hence, it is doubtful if English medical terminology can be reasonably grasped without an understanding of basic Latin. The writers also emphasise the need for teaching Latin terminology at medical universities (Marečková et al. 2002, 582, 586).

Researchers have conducted several studies to evaluate medical students' comprehension and acquisition of medical terminology. The primary emphasis of these articles is on the significance of comprehending and acquiring knowledge regarding the origin of Latin and Greek terminology. According to Smith et al., possessing knowledge of the etymology of medical terminology proved beneficial for first-year medical students in their acquisition of these terms (Smith et al. 2007, 337). The attitudes of medical students towards classical Greek and Latin were evaluated by Stephens and Moxham in 2016, and their findings indicated a favourable disposition towards classical languages among first-year students (Stephens & Moxham 2016, 699). In 2011, Pampush and Petto achieved contrasting outcomes. In contrast to the study conducted by Smith et al., the researchers additionally examined the course performance and observed a limited correlation between the ability to correctly identify the Latin and Greek roots of anatomical terms and achieving positive performances in the course (Pampush & Petto 2011, 10–12). Bujalková created a questionnaire for students to share their opinions on the approach of education in which instructors focus on the etymology of medical words during medical Latin classes. The findings revealed that the majority of students were interested in this form of teaching. The author argues that including cultural and historical elements of ancient and mediaeval medicine in the teaching of medical language can enhance the effectiveness of the didactic process (Bujalková 2013, 475–477). The comparative study of Viskne and Abelite involved the participation of around 1000 students, consisting of 400 international and 600 Latvian students. The purpose of this study was to identify common issues or mistakes in the study process and to enhance students' comprehension of anatomical terminology. They discovered, for example, that pupils struggle with third-declension nouns and remembering their gender, and that the majority of students are unable to employ the correct word order in Latin or use an inappropriate ending for neutral nouns (Viskne & Abelite 2015, 133).

These studies often explain and recommend teaching and learning approaches to help simplify these procedures. For example, Smith et al. propose two methods: translation and memorisation. The first way is to master the fundamentals of Latin and Greek, and then analyse every term that students or professionals come across. The alternative way is to memorise medical terminology without trying to comprehend their origins or original meaning (Smith et al. 2007, 335). In 2008, Brahler and Walker conducted a study to examine the impact of a mnemonic (triangular) learning strategy, which involves using illogical word associations, on the ability of secondary school students to recall Greek and Latin word parts used in medical terminology. The study compared this strategy to traditional memorisation techniques. The results demonstrated that the mnemonic strategy outperformed standard memorisation methods (Brahler & Walker 2008, 223). Bujalková, on the other hand, suggests using etymological and definitional approaches (Bujalková 2013, 471). In our Latin medical terminology courses, we use both translation and etymology methods to help students grasp anatomical terms.

4.1 Translation of anatomical terms

The use of medical Latin has become sporadic in texts that were previously written entirely in Latin. The decline of Latin can best be described as a process, and today Latin is usually referred to as a "dead language". Thus, during the development of complex public health systems in the 18th century, medical books exclusively used Latin as their language. Simultaneously, vernacular languages facilitated most communication between doctors and patients, as well as between doctors and governmental agencies. This is why vernacularisation is a typical phenomenon, owing to the constant rise in doctor–patient communication as well as anglicisation, which is mostly found in scientific publications. Consequently, there is a constant re-use of Latin and Greek words, often resulting in a shift in their meaning. *Resuscitatio* is a good example of this, as it has been kept in traditional and Hungarian usage and is employed in English literature as resuscitation or reanimation, with the same meaning. However, in Latin terminology, it is possible to distinguish between *reanimo* (i.e., to resuscitate the soul) and *resuscitatio* (i.e., to move higher, to maintain), which relates to the maintenance of a condition of crisis.

Translations of different anatomical formulas occurred early in Hungarian medical language, and following the language reform, the number of terms used in Hungarian increased dramatically. These can be considered traditional Hungarian terms. In many cases, they differ from the forms used in modern Hungarian medical language. However, as previously stated, there is no accepted Hungarian anatomical terminology. Nowadays, we have some medical loanwords from Latin that have become a part of Hungarian vernacular language ('artéria' – artery, 'véna' – vein, 'vírus' – virus, 'baktérium' – bacterium, 'krónikus' – chronic, 'kúra' – cure, therapy, etc.). It is suggested to avoid translating Hungarian colloquial forms that are not part of medical terminology or that are explicitly incorrect. For example, the Hungarian equivalent of cecum is 'vakbél' (literally blind intestine), and the inflammation of it is called 'vakbélgyulladás' (literally the inflammation of the blind intestine). Nevertheless, the term 'vakbélgyulladás' is commonly employed in colloquial usage to refer to appendicitis, a condition characterised by inflammation of the appendix.

During our sessions, we primarily focus on the translation and grammatical analysis of longer and more difficult anatomical expressions, besides describing the etymology of the words. Students must first acquire the basic grammar of Latin, which includes the declension system, the nominative and genitive cases, noun genders, and the Latin adjective system. According to our experience, Hungarian students struggle to understand Latin grammar owing to language disparities. The Hungarian language is part of the Finno-Ugric language family, having roots in the Uralic language family, unlike Latin, which belongs to the Indo-European family. The differences between the two languages are: in

Hungarian, there are no declensions or genders, and adjectives do not have to agree with the noun. What is especially problematic is the word order in medical words, because in Hungarian, we use the opposite order. For example, in Hungarian possessive phrases, the possessor appears at the beginning of the phrase, while the possessed appears at the end, whereas in Latin, the opposite is true. In the case of international students, we see that they encounter similar challenges; however, for them, daily English use can be extremely beneficial, particularly in the correct use of word order and recognising the resemblances between Latin and English vocabulary (*inflammatio* – inflammation, *musculus* – muscle, *ductus* – duct etc.). On the other hand, international students' English proficiency varies, and some students are unfamiliar with basic grammatical rules and technical vocabulary; therefore, we must sometimes begin by teaching and clarifying these fundamental terms.

In the Latin curriculum, we begin by teaching basic grammatical elements such as declensions, cases, and genders, followed by how to form a singular possessive structure in Latin. To achieve this, students must master the singular nominative and genitive cases. After learning about the body parts and anatomical directions, students study the upper limb's bony structures, muscles, nerves, and vessels. These anatomical expressions include one-word, two-word (noun-noun, noun-adjective), and multi-word expressions. First, we practise translating two-word phrases in singular form, which consist of two nouns. Analysing these expressions grammatically and then translating them word for word helps improve students' comprehension. This is especially significant since Hungarian students must use the term appropriately and with the proper case ending in their anatomy exams. Students from other countries must be familiar with the English anatomical equivalents; however, we teach them the basic Latin anatomical nomenclature as well, because they begin practicing in Hungarian hospitals in the third year, where they will encounter the Latin nomenclature rather than the English one.

Table 1 shows some basic possessive structures students see during their first semester of anatomy education. We begin by teaching Hungarian pupils several translation methods. The first one is the literal translation of that given structure. We start teaching grammar with this form because it allows pupils to comprehend the use of the nominative and genitive cases. *Collum scapulae*, or the neck of the scapula (in Hungarian, ‘nyak’ means neck and ‘lapocka’ means scapula), is an excellent example of this. The literal Hungarian version of this phrase is ‘lapockának a nyaka’. The nouns’ endings indicate their role in the expression: ‘-nak’ denotes the possessive case, whereas the ‘-a’ ending in ‘nyaka’ denotes the word’s possessed role. This translation is grammatically valid, but it is not used in the Hungarian public language. The second form, ‘lapocka nyaka’, is both grammatically correct and commonly used. Nonetheless, the possessor’s suffix is missing, which may confuse students. The third choice is ‘lapockanyak,’ which combines the words ‘lapocka’ and ‘nyak’. This form can be problematic when translating from English to Latin because students are not always able to determine which word is the possessor and which is the possessed, and as a result, they translate the expression incorrectly, which is scapula colli, a non-existent anatomical structure. During the teaching of possessive structures, the question of which translation method to use for Hungarian students arises frequently. We recommend explaining all possible translations.

In the case of international students, translating appears easier. The Latin word order is identical to the English one, and the ‘of phrase’ alludes to the genitive case. We also focus on transmitting general or layman English terms to students because they are often unaware of them, which will be very crucial in the aspect of doctor–patient communication.

Latin term	**Anatomical English term**	**General English term/translation**	**Hungarian term/translation**
collum scapulae	neck of the scapula	neck of the shoulder blade	lapockának a nyaka /lapocka nyaka/ lapockanyak
corpus humeri	the body of the humerus	the body of the upper arm bone	felkarcsontnak a teste/felkarcsont teste

articulatio cubiti	elbow joint	the joint of the elbow	könyöknek az ízülete/könyök ízülete/könyökízület

Table 1: List of some possessive anatomical structures and their translations

After covering the singular possessive structure, we will move on to the adjective system and how to use noun-adjective agreement in the singular nominative. This grammar section is tough for both Hungarian and foreign students since the gender of the noun plays a vital role, and they must also identify the type of adjective used. As we stated above, knowing and utilising the correct ending is vital for Hungarian pupils, which is why we teach adjectives before plural forms. Table 2 lists some of the adjectival words that students encounter during the first semester. It is clear that the translation of adjectival phrases is similar to Latin terms; the only difference is the word order. In Hungarian and English, the adjective comes before the noun, whereas in Latin, the noun comes first. In some cases, such as with *musculus brachialis*, the Hungarian and general English translations use possessive structure rather than adjectival structure.

Latin term	**Anatomical English term**	**General English term/translation**	**Hungarian term**
tuberculum minus	lesser tubercle	smaller (small) tuber	kisebb (kis) dudor/gumó, gumócska
angulus lateralis	lateral angle	angle away from the midline of the body	oldalsó szög(let)
collum anatomicum	anatomical neck	-	anatómiai nyak
musculus brachialis	brachial muscle	muscle of the upper arm	felkarizom/felkarnak az izma

Table 2: List of some anatomical adjectival phrases and their translations

The next step in Latin grammar acquisition is to learn the plural form of nouns and noun-adjective agreement. This is required for translating and comprehending longer, more complex terms. Long muscle names, for example, can be difficult to understand. Hungarian students learn the Latin form, while international students learn the English form, which is identical to the Latin term except for the word *musculus*. Typically, translating the muscle name can aid in determining the location, function, or special characteristic of that specific component.

Latin term	**Anatomical English term**	**General English term/translation**	**Hungarian term**
musculus latissimus dorsi	latissimus dorsi (muscle)	widest muscle of the back	széles hátizom/hátnak a legszélesebb izma
musculus rectus abdominis	rectus abdominis (muscle)	straight muscle of the abdomen /belly	egyenes hasizom/hasnak az egyenes izma
musculus levator labii superioris	levator labii superioris (muscle)	elevator muscle of the upper lips	felső ajakemelő izom/a felső ajak emelő izma

Table 3: List of some complex anatomical expressions and their translation

4.2 Etymology of anatomical terms

When translating anatomical words, we mostly rely on and apply basic Latin grammar. When analyzing the etymology of these names, we focus on both the historical context and the structure of them. As previously stated, several researchers have approached the etymology of anatomical structures using various methodologies. But one thing is common: etymology is an essential component of teaching anatomical nomenclature.

For example, in her essay about teaching etymology to medical students, Dean-Jones states that etymology can help in learning medical terminology because more than 90% of technical scientific words are of Latin and Greek origin, and learning the "building blocks" will aid the learning process. However, she points out a potential problem: breaking down medical terms, dividing them into different elements, and then giving the English definition works better; on the other hand, giving the medical term based on an English definition can be more difficult because some English words have more than one Latin or Greek equivalent. Placing the pieces in the proper order might be difficult for students. As a result, occasionally memorising the English definition of a medical phrase is the best option (Dean-Jones 1998, 290, 294). Bujalková, as previously said, investigates the lexical unit from an etymological and definitional perspective, providing basic types of relationships for teaching medical terminology. The first type occurs when the etymology matches the definition. In the second category, etymology refers to definition. The third kind involves old notions taking on new meanings, while the fourth type relates to the problematic relationship between etymology and definition. According to Bujalková, this way of teaching etymology in medical terminology is highly beneficial for students (Bujalková 2013, 472–473, 475). Bujalková and Džuganová conducted a comparative study in 2015 intending to compare conventional Latin anatomical terminology to English terminology and demonstrate the strong Latin and Greek origins of English medical terms using contrastive analysis. The authors categorised and classified terms from several perspectives to assist international students and teachers in forecasting challenges when learning medical terminology (Bujalková & Džuganová 2015, 83).

When teaching the etymology of anatomical structures, we encounter various issues with Hungarian and foreign students. This is due in part to cultural and historical differences, as well as linguistic variances between Hungarian and English. In the initial terminology lecture, we always discuss why students need to study medical Latin and the historical background dating back to ancient times. It is more difficult for international students since most of them come from outside Europe. In secondary school, such students seldom study the history of ancient Greece and Rome, let alone the history of Europe. For example, the term *atlas* has a challenging etymology for overseas students to understand. Atlas, the first cervical vertebra, derives its name from Atlas in Greek mythology, who bore the weight of the sky, much like the first cervical vertebra supports the head. For Hungarian pupils, it is simple to explain because Greek mythology is taught in Hungarian secondary schools as part of the curriculum. However, students studying abroad seldom learn about Greek mythology, and the word *Atlas* is unfamiliar to them. It typically helps to show them a common picture of Atlas holding the globe, as they have undoubtedly seen a similar picture previously. Another interesting term is *thymus*, an organ of the immune system, and it was first used by Galen because it resembled a thyme bud. However, the Hungarian equivalent is not derived from the Latin phrase and has a distinct meaning, literally infant gland, which refers to the role of this organ (see Table 4). In this case, for Hungarian students, the etymology of the Latin term seems to be irrelevant.

Latin term	**Anatomical English term**	**General English term/translation**	**Hungarian term**
atlas	atlas	first cervical vertebra	fejgyám (old term, literally something that holds the head)
thymus	thymus	-	csecsemőmirigy (literally “infant gland”)
tibia	tibia	shinbone	sípcsont (literally whistle-bone)

Table 4: List of some one-word anatomical terms

We hold that emphasizing the meaning of the different prefixes in anatomical terms is also crucial. Although we teach the separate use of prepositions (*ad*, *post*, *ante*, *sub*, etc.) in the second semester before moving on to the topic of writing Latin prescriptions, in the first semester, we focus on the prefixes in anatomical structures that students encounter, because this is the first time they meet prefixes, and understanding their meaning is critical to making the learning process easier. For international students, teaching these prefixes appears to be easier because some of them are used in general English. We usually provide examples of the general use of these prefixes, such as international for ‘inter-’, submarine for ‘sub’, and so on. These prefixes do not exist in Hungarian and are used differently. Sometimes they are in the beginning of the word, like in ‘kivezető ér’ (efferent vessel), where ‘ki’ means out of, and sometimes it is after the noun, like in ‘tövis alatti árok’, where ‘alatti’ means under and serves as a postposition. The Hungarian word for endocardium is ‘szívbelhártya’, with ‘bel’ meaning inside. As a result, it is more difficult for Hungarian pupils to create Hungarian equivalents; exact translation is not always an obvious choice.

Prefixes	**Latin anatomical term**	**English anatomical term**	**Hungarian term**
ad – to	vas afferens	afferent vessel	bevezető ér
endo – inside	endocardium	endocardium	szívbelhártya
e/ex – out of	vas efferens	efferent vessel	kivezető ér
infra – under	fossa infraspinata	infraspinous fossa	tövis alatti árok
inter – between	intercostalis	intercostal	borda közötti
sub – under	arteria subscapularis	subscapular artery	lapocka alatti ütőér
supra – over	fossa supraspinata	supraspinous fossa	tövis feletti árok

Table 5: List of some prefixes used in anatomical terminology with examples

5 Conclusion

We believe that having a strong understanding of the meanings of anatomical and clinical terminologies will help students do better not only in anatomy but also in other, more difficult medical courses, and thus medical terminology should be taught as a distinct course. It is important to emphasise that the primary purpose of Latin terminology is not only teaching grammar and vocabulary; the instructors also use a variety of ways to assist students in the learning process, particularly when a teacher has both local and foreign pupils. We also believe it is critical for teachers to expand their knowledge of anatomy, as our department’s instructors are language teachers rather than physicians or anatomists, and they have never acquired anatomical nomenclature at the university. As a result, a few years ago, we launched a new program in which Latin terminology teachers attend anatomy lectures and dissection practices with the permission of the Anatomy Institute. The goal of the class visits is to learn as much anatomical vocabulary as possible while also experiencing in person what the students have to achieve during these courses.

Summary in plain English

Medical students in their first year at the University of Szeged's Faculty of Medicine who are in the Hungarian and English program have to study Latin-based medical terminology for two semesters. As well as getting students comfortable with basic medical terms in both Latin and Greek, the main goal of this course is to give them the basic Latin skills they need to study health sciences. During anatomy classes and dissection practice, medical students hear about 60 to 80 new anatomical phrases. However, teachers rarely explain what these words mean or give Hungarian or general English alternatives. So, it is our job to teach them the English or Hungarian words and phrases that go with them and make sure they understand them. In this chapter, we discuss the techniques and problems of explaining anatomical terminology to students from Hungary and other countries.

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Part V

Understandable Language in Legal Communication

Linguistic Factors in the Readability of Czech Administrative and Legal Texts

Silvie Cinková

Abstract

In our experiment with comprehension testing of Czech legal texts and their paraphrases by two lawyers committed to plain writing, we observed that readers achieved different reading comprehension scores, the main factor being the text author. This effect was particularly strong on weaker readers. In this chapter, we seek to find textual features that distinguish the writing styles. Interestingly, the authors do not differ in the classic syntactic and lexical criteria such as syntactic complexity or lexical diversity. At the same time, we observe differences in entropy and number of hapaxes. We propose that these metrics have to do with how the information is ordered and hence might even reflect the logical coherence of the text.

Keywords: readability, reading comprehension, legal writing, Czech, lexical diversity, syntactic complexity, entropy

Introduction

Democratic and transparent governments must keep citizens informed about their rights and obligations. In some countries, clear public communication is explicitly required by law (Thestrup 1969; Lov om språk (språklova) 2021; Plain Writing Act of 2010 2010; Språklag (2009:600) 2009). Governments of other countries, as well as the European Commission, actively promote plain language in administration by sub-legal guidelines (Valdovinos Chávez et al. 2007; Garsou et al. 2000; Úřad pro publikace Evropské unie 2022).

The Czech government requires clear language in law bills (*Legislativní pravidla vlády*) and has committed to implementing clear communication between the administration and the public by 2030 (Klientsky orientovaná veřejná správa 2030. Koncepce rozvoje veřejné správy na období let 2021-2030 2019). Also, language practitioners in law and pedagogy promote and teach plain, client-oriented writing in their professional communities (Bejčková 2022;

Šamánková & Kubíková 2022; Slejšková 2013; Šváb 2021; Vučka 2019), especially with respect to readers with special needs (Cinková & Latimier 2021). At the same time, recent academic research on Czech clear writing has been predominantly conducted by lawyers and pedagogists (Drápal 2020; Dvořáková 2021; Halfarová 2018; Halfarová 2020).

We are fully aware of the vast amount of cross-lingual practical tips on how to write clearly, and we recognize clear writing as a skill to be trained rather than a subject of studious perusal, and yet we were curious to quantitatively assess diverse factors known to affect clarity, specifically on Czech texts. Therefore, we ran a quantitative linguistic experiment, and this study presents its results along with a hypothesis that these results have generated for our future work.

To start, we collected six authentic administrative texts regarding common civil agendas, which were supposed to be read by (among others) legal laymen, and we had two plain-writing lawyers paraphrase each document with their personal plain-writing style while preserving all information (Subchapter 1). On each of these triples, we tested reading-comprehension in a survey with random readers of different ages and education backgrounds (Subchapter 2). Subsequently, we studied the possible associations of diverse textual features with the measured reading comprehension (Subchapter 3).

1 The LiFR-Law Corpus

All texts from this experiment, along with the comprehension test and documentation, are publicly available as the LiFR-Law Corpus (Cinková et al. 2023). The document lengths vary from 500 to 2,000 tokens (15–20 minutes to read by a linguist with no legal training).

The starting point were six authentic legal texts that address the following genres and topics: library house rules, a property lease, a court decision on a civil lawsuit for debt, a court decision on full powers (procuration) for a close person, and two findings of the Public Defender's of Rights (Ombudsman's) office (one regarding a fine and the other a negative outcome of a kindergarten application).

The authentic documents were selected to represent the common Czech legalese; that is, poorly structured, vague, bloated with irrelevant information, and obscured by jargon and opaque syntax. Two lawyers were each instructed to create a paraphrase of each text that would preserve all relevant information from the original on the one hand and be as reader-friendly as possible on the other hand, while maintaining all professional standards. In that way, we obtained six experimental document triples with varied style but controlled content.

Each of the six document triples contained the legalese original (encoded as *orig*) and the two plain-language paraphrases (encoded as *kusv* and *jasa*). Hence, each of the eighteen texts in the collection is uniquely identified by its topic (e.g. *library_rules*) and its author (e.g., *jasa*). Each triple shared one reading comprehension test consisting of seven content questions (multiple choice as well as open questions), five questions on the reader's subjective assessment of the text, and three questions on the reader's preliminary familiarity with the topic. In this study, we focus on the text traits rather than the reading competencies in relation to the demographic factors, and therefore we only consider the content questions.

2 Reading comprehension test

2.1 Design

The test was administered as an on-line survey (Arslan et al. 2020) where each reader could read all documents, each in one version (that is, at most six tests). They were motivated by a small compensation with "quality bonuses". Each text was read by at least 30 readers between 16 and 90 years of age. The readers provided their demographic details (age, sex, education, native language, reading disorders) but remained anonymous.

The experiment was thoroughly randomized concerning the order of documents, the author versions, and even the order of content questions within each test. Each of the seven content questions counted as one score point. All multiple-choice questions contained four options (with any number of them potentially correct), each true positive option counting for 0.25 points. The open questions were manually evaluated according to a (negotiable) template and allowed scores between 0 and 1 as well. Hence, from the statistical point of view, reading comprehension success is a continuous variable ranging from 0 to 7 on each text.

2.2 Results

The central question to be answered with the comprehension test was whether there would be differences between the authors, despite the content being identical and limited leeway for personal stylistic deviations from well-established administrative formats, such as house rules, contract, ombudsman's finding, legal verdict, and lawsuit.

Figure 1 presents the individual total success scores on each document version in boxplots. The y-axis indicates the success rate (between 0 and 7 points). Each boxplot represents the distribution of success of one author version of the given document. The lines inside boxes indicate the median values, and the boxes span 50% of the observations (values between the first and the third quartile). The notches on their sides indicate the 95% confidence interval of the median[1]. If the notches of two boxes within one subgraph do not overlap, their medians *might be* statistically significantly different at alpha level 0.05[2].

The expectation was that the reading comprehension success on the documents by *jasa* and *kusv* would be higher than on the documents by *orig*. Contrary to this expectation, a statistically significant difference (with alpha level at 0.05) towards the legalese original was rare. Dunn's test reveals four cases of statistically significant differences, all in favor of the author *jasa*. Readers of *jasa's* versions outperformed the readers of *kusv's* version of *omb_houseinspection* (p-value < 0.0001), those of *orig's* version of *verdict_procuration* (p-value < 0.007), and those of both other versions of *omb_vaccination* (p-value < 0.008 and p-value < 0.001 with *kusv* and *orig*, respectively)[3].

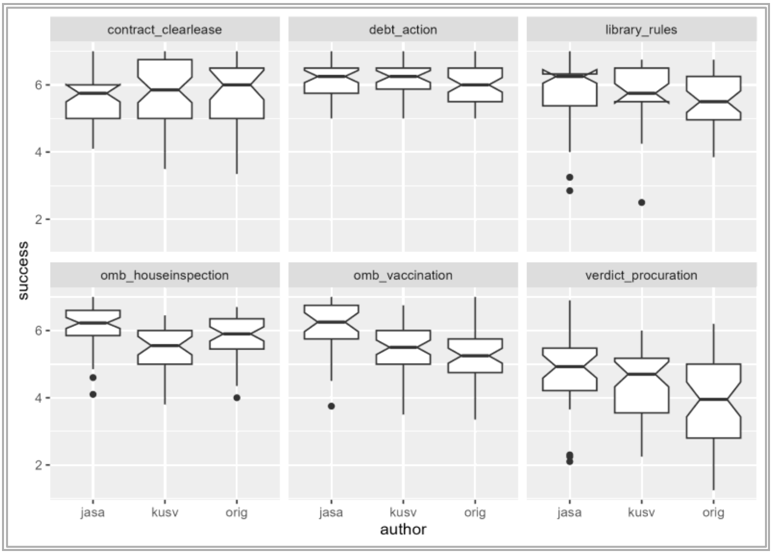

Figure 1: Reading comprehension success

Since Dunn's test does not provide effect sizes, we conducted a simple pairwise comparison of differences in bootstrapped[4] medians. The results captured in Table 1 largely comply with the results of Dunn's test. The third column contains the 95% confidence intervals, where the lower bounds give the most conservative difference assessment and the upper bounds the most radical one. The fourth column contains the medians of the bootstrapped median differences.

Positive values mean that the first author's median was higher. Intervals crossing zero indicate the difference is not statistically significant (at alpha level 0.05 and lower).

The bold values in the third column denote statistically significant differences according to the difference of bootstrapped medians. The fourth column contains the 50th percentile (median) value of the differences between the bootstrapped medians. The last column indicates the results of the multiple-comparison Dunn's test. The methods come to the same conclusions in all cases but two (*verdict_procuration* by *jasa-orig* and *library_rules* by *jasa-orig*).

Document	Author pair	Boot-strapped diff. medians CI	Boot-strapped median diff.	Dunn significant
omb_ vaccination	**jasa**-kusv	**0.3 - 1.45**	0.75	yes
omb_ vaccination	**jasa**-orig	**0.625 - 1.5**	1.15	yes
omb_ vaccination	kusv-orig	-0.25 - 0.65	0.25	yes
omb_ houseinspection	**jasa**-kusv	**0.3-1.125**	0.675	yes
omb_ houseinspection	jasa-orig	0.0 - 0.7	0.35	yes
omb_houseinspection	kusv-orig	-0.8 - 0.1	-0.35	yes
verdict_ procuration	jasa-kusv	-0.325 - 0.9	0.25	yes
verdict_ procuration	jasa-orig	-0.150 - 1.725	0.85	no
verdict_ procuration	kusv-orig	-0.2 - 1.35	0.65	yes
library_rules	jasa-kusv	-0.25 - 0.75	0.25	yes
library_rules	**jasa**-orig	**0.125 - 1**	0.65	no
library_rules	kusv-orig	-0.25 - 0.95	0.25	yes
debt_action	jasa-kusv	-0.25 - 0.5	0	yes
debt_action	jasa-orig	-0.25 - 0.75	0.25	yes
debt_action	kusv-orig	-0.25 - 0.5	0.25	yes
contract_¨ clearlease	jasa-kusv	-0.65 - 0.4	-0.125	yes

contract_¨ clearlease	jasa-orig	-0.7 - 0.6	-0.25	yes
contract_ clearlease	kusv-orig	-0.5 - 0.75	0	yes

Table 1: Confidence intervals (95%) of the difference between the bootstrapped medians of the first-named and the second-named author in the pair (the 2.5th and 75.5th percentile of the bootstrapped values).

The conservative assessments do not even reach one point of the success rate (of 7). If the median values were supposed to be telling the whole story, the results might imply that there is no point in conscious plain legal writing.

However, the shapes of the cumulative probability density distributions (Figure 2) give us one very important insight: the differences in success concentrate around weak readers! This is most evident in *omb_houseinspection* (*jasa* vs. *kusv*) and *verdict_procuration* (*jasa* vs. *orig*): above the median, the success differences are much smaller than approximately between the 15th and the 25th percentile. In *omb_vaccination*, the evident difference among the weaker readers is accompanied by a likewise noticeable difference among the stronger readers. This would mean that plain writing helps weaker readers more than the stronger readers – a conclusion that is both intuitive and consistent with international findings (Hedlund 2013; Mills & Duckworth 1996).

In all cases but *debt_action* and *library_rules*, the weaker readers did best when confronted with a version by *jasa*. This becomes particularly striking in a cross-document author comparison (Figure 3).

Some studies (cf. Wagner & Walker, 2019) claim that even strong readers benefit from plain writing by saving time. In the LiFR-Law data, *jasa*’s plain writing indeed appears to be saving time to very strong readers (though not to the very top readers): Figure 4 presents a LOESS[5] model of success normalized by document (Z-score) with 95% confidence intervals, cleared of outliers (extreme values) of each document-author version.

To justify the culling of outliers: most readers completed their tests within 10 and 20 minutes (depending on the document), as the model shows. The individual upper outlier thresholds for the document-author versions lay approximately between 20 and 40 minutes, with no lower outliers. The outliers were specific to neither author nor document. Moreover, long reaction times can even be artifacts: they certainly indicate the time for which the reader kept the given question on the screen, but with no control over whether the reader was active at all. With the outliers included, the model would have looked almost identical, only the confidence intervals would be broader.

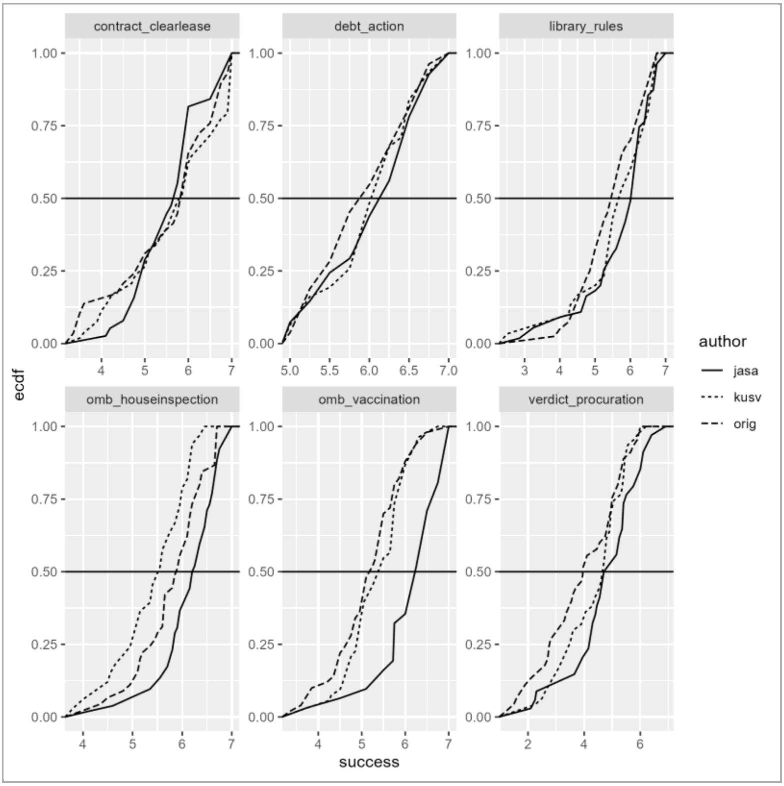

Figure 2: Cumulative probability density of reading comprehension success by document and author

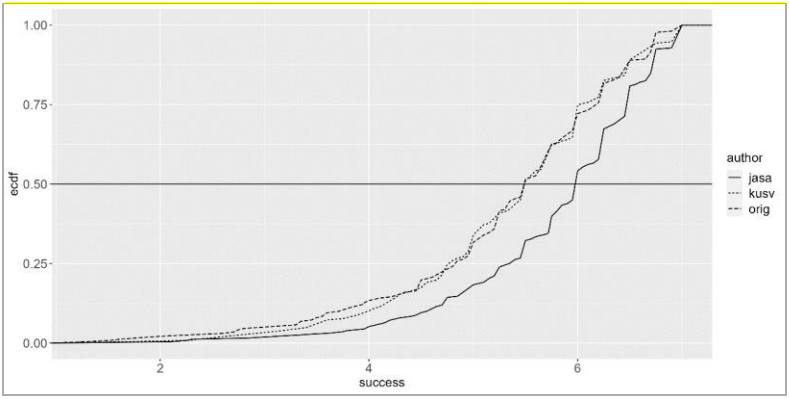

Figure 3: Cumulative probability density of reading comprehension success by author

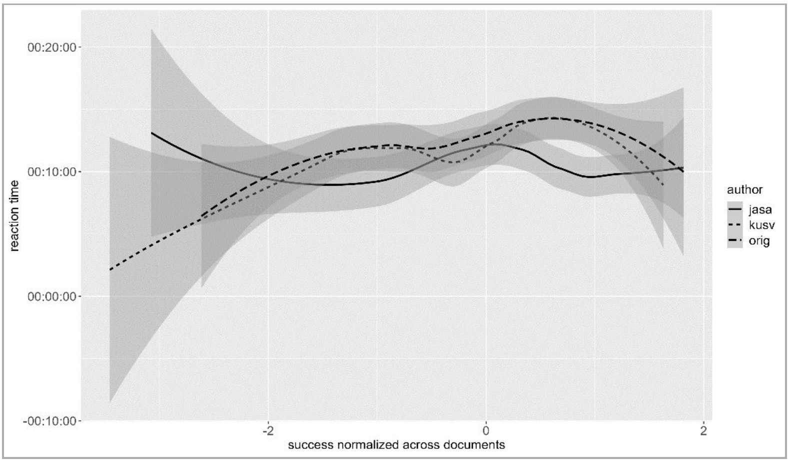

Figure 4: Relation between success and reaction time, cleared of outliers

3 Textometric traits

The results of the comprehension test single out *jasa's* writing style as more accessible to the broad audience on the one hand and time-saving for strong readers on the other hand. Both *jasa* and *kusv* are experienced plain legal writers. All the same, across all documents, *kusv's* readers, unlike *jasa's* readers, do not outperform *orig's* readers.

What is it that makes *jasa* stand out in our collection? We have examined a selection of common textometric traits to find out, mostly using the QuitaUp application (Cvrček et al. 2020) and a pipeline employing the UDPipe parser with the Czech PDT model (Straka & Straková 2022) along with the corpus manager TEITOK (Janssen 2021) with several integrated corpus query languages including PMLTQ (Pajas & Štěpánek 2009). We used PMLTQ to fully exploit the syntactic markup provided by UDPipe.

3.1 Shannon entropy

Shannon entropy (Shannon 1948) in the textometric context provides a measure of lexical diversity or predictability of the text. In QuitaUp it is implemented with the following formula:

$$H = log_2 N - \frac{1}{N} \sum_{r=1}^{V} f_r \ log_2 f_r$$

where N is the number of tokens in a text and f is the frequency of the given token. To put it simply, the algorithm goes through the text word by word and records how many times it has already spotted this word. In each step through the text, it updates this internal frequency lexicon.

For instance, when it is looking at the 11th word in a text and the word has already occurred once before, its relative frequency (and hence its probability) is 2/11 (approx. 0.19). If that word first occurred, e.g., as the second word in the text, its probability was 1/2 at that point. If the 12th word is a hitherto unseen word, its probability is 1/12, and so on. The overall entropy of a text is the average probability of a new word. In our experiment, we consider lemmas, not individual word forms.

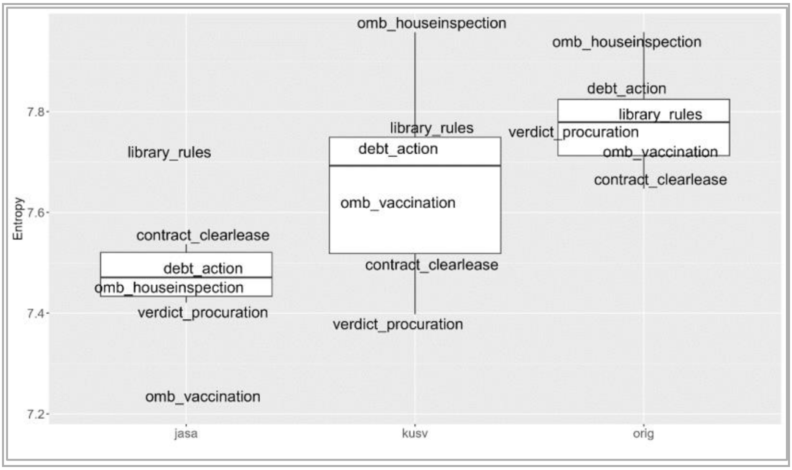

Figure 5: Entropy distribution by authors

The texts by *jasa* have in general lower entropy than *kusv's* and *orig's*. Dunn's test of multiple comparisons revealed a statistically significant difference between *jasa* and *orig* (Z-score -2.63, Bonferroni-adjusted p-value 0.013). The effect size (epsilon-squared)[6] is 0.412 on the whole group (95% confidence interval: 0.135–0.751), meaning that 41% of the differences between all three authors (or at least 13.5%) cannot be explained by mere coincidence. In the *jasa*-*orig* pair, the effect size is 0.599 (0.282–0.958), implying that almost 60% of the differences are explained by the differences betweeen *jasa's* and *orig's* writing styles (or at least 28%).

3.2 Hapaxes

Hapaxes (Figure 6) are words that occur only once. The number of hapaxes is another perspective of lexical diversity but also a perspective of thematic concentration (both will be described in the following subchapters). In our experiment, hapaxes are word lemmas[7] that occur only once in one text by the given author.

Dunn's test revealed a statistically significant difference between *jasa* and *orig* again (Z-score-2.62, Bonferroni-adjusted p-value 0.013), effect size (epsilon squared) 0.408 (0.131 - 0.767) for the entire author triple and 0.597 (0.178–0.78) for the *jasa*-*orig* pair.

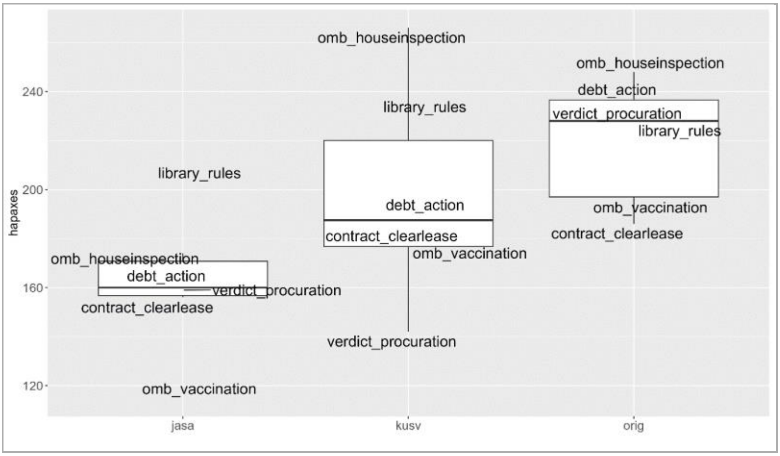

Figure 6: Distribution of hapax legomena by authors

The statistical significance nevertheless disappears when we use the relative frequency of hapaxes instead (see Discussion).

3.3 Thematic concentration

Intuitively, a text focused on one topic would seem more repetitive, that is, have lower entropy and contain fewer hapaxes than a text spread across several different topics. The Thematic Concentration (Čech 2016, 9–73) is a separate metric that uses the rank frequency distribution of words to identify so-called *thematic words*, i.e., words that are supposed to represent a topic.

The thematic weight of each word in the text is operationalized as the comparison between its frequency and its rank in the frequency list of all words in the given text. Thematic words are content words (nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs) whose rank is lower than its frequency. This property is typical of function words, while rather an anomaly in content words. Content words on par with function words must be very prominent in the text.

Although this metric is, too, dependent on the text length and conceptually associated with entropy and hapaxes, in our collection it neither correlates with entropy or hapaxes, nor is it significantly different between the authors.

3.4 Lexical diversity

Lexical diversity, aka lexical richness, comes in several flavors, but is generally based on the proportion of types (unique words) and tokens (all instances of the types, running words). The basic formula, TTR (Type-Token-Ratio) is strongly dependent on text length. Rolling TTR partially alleviates this problem: it is the mean of TTR of subsequent text windows (usually 100 tokens).

A language-dependent solution is zTTR – the TTR is normalized by comparison to TTR of similarly long texts from a reference corpus of that given language (extrapolated to a mathematical function).

In the LiFR-Law collection, none of these metrics discerns the authors with statistical significance (using the Kruskal-Wallis test)[8].

3.5 Verb distance

Verb distance is the means of the count of content words between two verbs. It is a simple way to approximate the syntactic complexity of sentences. It is not significantly different between the authors (using the Kruskal-Wallis test).

3.6 Activity/descriptivity

Activity and descriptivity are complementary proportions of verbs and adjectives. The authors are not significantly different from each other in this respect (using the Kruskal-Wallis test).

3.7 Passive constructions

Legalese is notorious for the overuse of passive constructions (e.g., *the car was stolen*). We operationalized the count of passive constructions as the count of subjects of passive clauses.

According to Dunn’s test, both plain-writing lawyers *kusv* and *jasa* use it (statistically) significantly less often than *orig*, with *jasa-orig* Z-score -2.59 and Bonferroni-adjusted p-value 0.014 and *kusv-orig* Z-score -2.29 and p-value 0.03). Author *jasa* avoids it more than *kusv*, but the difference between them is not statistically significant (Dunn’s test). The effect size within the whole group (epsilon squared) is 0.473 (within the 95% confidence interval 0.162–0.766), between *jasa*-*orig* 0.572 (0.189–0.791), and between *kusv*-*orig* 0.477 (0.091–0.8).

3.8 Sentence length distributions

Short(er) sentences are one of the key principles of plain writing, certainly known to both plain-writing lawyers *jasa* and *kusv*. Nevertheless, the data do not reveal a significant difference in sentence length between the authors (according to the Kruskal-Wallis test). In comparison on individual documents, a significant difference occurred only in *omb_vaccination*, where *jasa's* sentences were longer (sic!) than both *kusv's* (Z = 2.292, p-value = 0.03) and *orig's* (Z = 2.517, p-value = 0.018), nevertheless with a negligible effect size (epsilon squared 0.0356, 95% confidence interval 0.003–0.118).

3.9 Noun phrase length distributions

Long noun phrases are known to add to readers' cognitive load, but the authors do not differ much in this respect. Again, there is a statistically significant difference between *jasa* and *orig* (Z = -3.098, p-value = 0.003 in Dunn's test with the Bonferroni correction), as well as a non-significant one between *jasa* and *kusv*, both in the expected direction, but the effect size is negligible (epsilon squared 0.002, 95% confidence interval 0.0004 and 0.005).

3.10 Syntactic complexity

Simple sentences are easier to process than complex ones. A very common way (among many) to operationalize syntactic complexity is so-called *T-Units* (Jagaiah et al. 2020, 2582). One T-Unit consists of a main clause and all subordinate clauses of its own as well as of its directly subordinate clauses.

So, for instance, the sentence *Peter wrote two letters, which he sent right away, and John had two phone calls, when he arrived and entered the kitchen*, has two T-Units: the main clause and its subordinate clause (*sent*) about Peter, and the main clause about John, with its two coordinated subordinate clauses (*arrived*, *entered*). We compared the size (number of finite subordinate clauses) of the T-Units between authors. In this respect, there is no significant difference between them.

When we only observe the maximum syntactic depth in a sentence (how many edges it takes from a word that does not govern any other word to the sentence root; i.e., main predicate), the author with the flattest sentences is *kusv*, and the difference is statistically significant in all pairs (*jasa*-*kusv* Z = 2.35, p-value = 0.028; *jasa*-*orig* Z = -4.849, p-value = 0; *kusv*-*orig* Z = -7.793, p-value = 0) according to Dunn's test with the Bonferroni correction, but the effect size (epsilon squared) of the greatest difference (*kusv*-*orig*) is minimal: 0.008, 95% confidence interval 0.005–0.013.

The results turn out very similar when we only consider sentences that contain a finite verb.

4 Discussion

The results given by the metrics listed above are summarized in Table 2. Somewhat striking is the lack of difference in syntactic features: the authors did not differ in using long and convoluted sentences or overuse of nominalization (approximated by syntactic complexity, noun phrase length, sentence length, verb distance, and activity/descriptivity). The only expected difference that the data confirmed was *jasa*'s consistent avoidance of passive constructions, at least compared to *orig*.

Neither could the purely lexical feature lexical diversity distinguish the authors, nor could thematic concentration. Both can be explained with the strict request to preserve all information in the paraphrases. The original documents were rather concise in their own right, and a significant part of their vocabulary was multi-word named entities which could not be varied in any way (people, institutions). There may not have been enough leeway for lexical variance.

Metric	**Significance (at least between *jasa/kusv* and *orig*)**	**Effect size**
Shannon entropy	yes	considerable (*jasa* vs. *orig*)
hapaxes	yes	considerable (*jasa* vs. *orig*)
thematic concentration	no	none
lexical diversity	no	none
verb distance	no	none
activity/descriptivity	no	none
passive constructions	yes	considerable (*jasa* vs. *orig)*
sentence length	no	negligible
noun phrase length	yes	negligible
syntactic complexity	yes	negligible

Table 2: Result summary

At the same time, the authors differed in hapaxes and entropy. Both metrics are based on word frequency, just like lexical diversity, but they reach beyond by being aggregated summaries of inherently "rolling" metrics: both average snapshots that cumulatively expand one word per step.

Given that we control the content and with that largely the vocabulary, and there are no purely syntactic differences in the authors' styles, this may have to do with how orderly the authors structure the information. For instance, *jasa*'s texts make ample use of the deductive syllogism; first comes a statement about the relevant legal frame, followed by a description of the actual course of events. Both are formulated to mutually correspond to an extent that makes the conclusion obvious.

We have considered two ways to address the argumentation structure soon. Firstly, manual argumentation-mining annotation: does the author keep the law and the actual situation apart or do they mingle freely? Do we spot a conclusion, and does it refer to the law and the situation explicitly enough for a legal layman?

Secondly, modeling the cognitive load throughout the text with lexical surprisal: the lexical surprisal is an important component of the entropy formula (see Subchapter 3.1 on Shannon entropy), namely the relative frequency of a word at a given position in the text among the words spotted before. It could well be that the distribution of lexical surprisal is specific to a given author.

If this line of research turns out to be promising, we will expand the corpus with a curated selection of readable texts (by *jasa* or by authors with a similar writing style) contrasted with the usual administrative production (e.g. Harašta et al. 2018) and upscale the whole experiment.

Summary in plain English

Which language traits make the same message easier or harder to understand? To find out for Czech official communication with the public, we first collected six Czech documents written by clerks and lawyers in the typical stiff style full of complex sentences and unusual words. Then two lawyers rewrote these documents in plain legal language, preserving all the information. Finally, volunteers read these documents, and we tested how well they could understand them. The readers did particularly well on texts by one plain writer. We tried to find out how this author's style differed from the others with various statistics. We found no significant differences in vocabulary or syntax. The only difference might be the order in which the writer presented pieces of information and how well they connected them – and we may have found a statistic that measures this quality: entropy.

Notes

[1] A 95% confidence interval means that, if we had repeated the same experiment many times, with different readers, 95% of the results would have fit into this interval.

[2] The alpha level is determined by the researcher prior to the experiment. Many classic statistical tests determine the probability of the so-called null hypothesis, according to which differences between values result from random variation and could turn out very differently if the experiment was repeated. The tests often return a so-called p-value. When the p-value is lower than the alpha level, we can refute the null hypothesis and say that, with the probability of error equalling the p-value, the differences we have observed are meaningful. However, the p-value says nothing about the effect size, that is, how large the differences are. It just says the difference is not random, however small it can be. The effect size must mostly be retrieved with other tests in a second step.

[3] The p-values have been adjusted with the Bonferroni correction to account for the fact that multiple pairs are compared. This correction multiplies the pairwise p-values by the number of comparisons.

[4] Bootstrapping is a statistical method used with small data to increase the reliability of results by augmenting them in a defined way. What did we exactly do? For each pairwise comparison, we made random samples with replacement from all individual success rates of the readers of the given document by each author separately, computed their medians and eventually their difference. We replicated this computation 10,000 times. From these 10,000 differences between medians of 10,000 pairs of random samples, we extracted the 2.5th percentile (lower bound) and the 97.5th percentile (upper bound). This interval is the known 95% confidence interval that comprises the 95% of the results of the 10,000 experiment repetitions with random data variation.

[5] An algorithm that draws a curve among the points, using a sliding window along the x-axis to minimize the distance of the curve to the sum of (squared) distances to all points within that window.

[6] Implemented by Mangiafico 2023.

[7] That is, if a word occurs in two different inflection forms, e.g., a verb in two different persons, that lemma is not a hapax.

[8] This test is always to be performed before Dunn’s test. Dunn’s test is only to be performed when the Kruskal-Wallis test shows a significant

difference in the group, to specify the differences in the individual pairs within this group.

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Comparative Analysis of Legal Texts for German as a Second and Foreign Language Learners: Comparing Official Documents, Guides, and Textbooks

Petra Bačuvčíková
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Abstract

Plain language is often used to enhance accessibility and ease of understanding for a broader audience, including individuals with various language proficiency levels. The aim of this chapter is to conduct a comparative analysis of legal texts from different sources, all focusing on the topic of food allergens: a textbook of German as a foreign or second language, an online legal guide aimed at the general public, and an official legal text. This comparison observes the differences in presentation, means of simplification, and content among these sources. We focus on understanding how texts simplify complex legal information, what elements remain consistent, and what changes are introduced.

Keywords: didactics, tertiary language learning and teaching, German, legal texts, accessible language, plain language, food allergens

Introduction

Currently, plain language is predominantly a practical phenomenon. It emerged from the disability rights movement and has been supported in recent years by members of Germany's Netzwerk Leichte Sprache (Easy Language Network). The existing guidelines have largely evolved from practical applications, aiming to eliminate barriers associated with complex language, particularly in contrast to academic or formal language settings.

Plain language finds its application across various areas, where people, as recipients, need to understand what the author is trying to communicate to them. This applies especially in certain settings such as education (learners need to understand concepts or instructions), healthcare, legal documents (e.g. workers need to understand their contracts or tax documents), government communication, and corporate communication.

Dating back to the latter half of the 20th century, coinciding with the pragmatic turn in linguistics, the concept of plain language stems from the idea that language should be understandable to its specific audience, echoing the principles of inclusivity as opposed to the use of more complex or exclusive forms of language.

1 Plain language and linguistic stylistics: Bridging accessibility and understanding

The majority of academic literature refers to the pragmatic turn in linguistics in the 1970s. However, texts aimed at different audiences were also thoroughly discussed by the Prague Linguistic Circle within the framework of functional stylistics.

The concept of functional style originated from the Prague Linguistic Circle in the 1920s and 1930s, with Havránek (Havránek, 1932) distinguishing conversational, technical, scientific, and poetic styles, later expanded to include journalistic and economic styles. This framework was influenced by Bühler's functions (Bühler 1934) and Mukařovský's aesthetic function (Jakobson 1981). In 1953, the classification evolved to include practical and theoretical styles of science, alongside a journalistic style. By the 1990s, additional styles emerged, such as administrative, rhetorical, and everyday communication styles. Presently, functional styles encompass scientific (practical, theoretical, popularizing, instructional), administrative, everyday communication (epistolary, conversational), journalistic (analytical, advertising), poetic, rhetorical, sacred, and essayistic styles (Krčmová 2017).

These styles exhibit predominant linguistic features, such as vocabulary choice, which contribute to specific stylistic traits and intended effects, characterizing texts or speech as a whole. Style effects can be achieved by transferring words and syntactic constructions from their typical functional style to another, as demonstrated in linguistic stylistics. An intralingual translation from legal language to plain language can be very similar, including discursive features such as level of persuasion or directness.

Today, plain language adopts an inclusive approach, emphasizing recipient design, a term introduced by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (see e.g. 1978), referring to the orientation and sensitivity of talk towards specific co-participants in conversation.

> With 'recipient design' we intend to collect a multitude of respects in which talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants. (Sacks et al. 1978)

In linguistic stylistics, plain language is often likened to xenolects, as seen in studies such as Ferguson's "Foreigner Talk" (Ferguson 1981), which delineates four modification processes: simplification, clarification, expression, and identification processes, all leading towards standardization.

2 Plain language in German language acquisition

The relationship between plain language and foreign language acquisition is evident. Non-native speakers constitute a unique audience in language teaching, which has traditionally been segmented into levels. In Europe, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Europarat, 2020) has established a standardized framework for describing proficiency levels, ranging from A1 to C2. It is crucial to emphasize that the "Mastery" (C2) level does not necessarily imply native-speaker competence. Some scholars, such as Oomen-Welke (Oomen-Welke 2015) and Pottmann (Pottmann, 2019), now compare plain language to the B1 level. Additionally, sources like BMAS (Netzwerk Leichte Sprache 2014), Oomen-Welke (2015), and Inclusion Europe (Inclusion Europe 2017) suggest that simplified language is not exclusively designed for individuals with cognitive limitations but also for those who are learning German.

Pottmann (2019) discusses the suitability of Leichte Sprache (Simplified Language) and Einfache Sprache (Plain Language) for teaching German as a second or foreign language. He notes that both are viewed as helpful tools for a wide range of users, irrespective of their reasons for use. He also looks at extralinguistic factors such as the availability of materials, lack of alternatives, and the temporary necessity of simplified language for learners, highlighting the availability of news written in Leichte Sprache as a valuable resource for language teaching and cultural studies.

Following the idea of inclusivity, the principles of plain language include simplifications in lexicon and syntax, utilizing simple words, concrete language, short sentences, and avoiding lengthy compounds, derivations, and foreign words. However, certain simplifications, such as the general use of informal pronouns in German or other languages, which distinguish between formal and informal pronouns, are discouraged to maintain clarity and especially formality.

Challenges in implementing plain language, as highlighted by Oomen-Welke (2015), include issues with nominalization and maintaining text coherence, particularly in the context of formulating short sentences or maintaining cohesion within a text. Despite these challenges, the adoption of plain language remains crucial in fostering accessibility and comprehension across diverse linguistic contexts, including second language acquisition in German.

Following Marlia et al. (2024), who claim that "the implementation of plain language intervention effectively reduces lexical density, leading to an improved comprehension of legal language" (ibid., 18), we aim to compare three types of texts intended for different audiences.

3 Food allergens: Texts and methodology

We focus on describing and contrasting different types of texts related to food allergens in German. We exclude food packaging labels, allergen information cards, and allergen-warning statements on menus.

Firstly, we turn our attention to the legal document that serves as the foundation of all other texts included in our analysis: Regulation (EU) No. 1169/2011 (EU 2014) pertains to the provision of food information to consumers; it is available in various languages, including German. Secondly, we explore the websites of governmental bodies such as the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL 2021) and the Austrian government (Österreichs digitales Amt 2023). These websites offer official information on food allergen labelling and regulations, providing essential guidance for consumers and entrepreneurs. Additionally, we consider several official websites, including those of industry associations and initiatives such as the German Food Association (Lebensmittelverband 2024) and the Austrian initiative "Österreich isst informiert" (Österreich isst informiert 2024). Furthermore, we delve into a German language textbook designed for advanced learners (B2 level) (Klotz 2016), examining how this particular legal theme is addressed in language learning materials. Lastly, we explore a resource in plain language, focusing on materials from the German Federal Centre for Nutrition (Bundeszentrum für Ernährung) (Mounier 2019).

In our analysis, we employ several parameters to assess the suitability of the texts for various audiences and learners of German. Firstly, we examine vocabulary and terminology to ensure that the texts effectively convey complex concepts to their intended audience in a comprehensive manner. Secondly, through the parameter of syntax, we evaluate the complexity of sentence structures and evaluate how easily the information can be understood. Thirdly, we consider the level of formality in the texts, examining their style and tone. Additionally, formatting and design, which include visual elements such as headings, bullet points, images, and colors, are integral to our assessment. These elements contribute to better understanding and enhance visual appeal. By evaluating these parameters, we determine the suitability of the texts for educational purposes and establish their order of use in teaching.

4 Food allergens: Analysis

We consider two distinct sections in each analysed text: the list of the allergens itself and contextual information. Across these sections, we apply the parameters to evaluate aspects such as terminology, syntax, formality, and formatting to ensure comprehensive assessment and understanding for diverse audiences.

4.1 Vocabulary and terminology

The EU Regulation is targeted to authorities and lawyers and is rich in terminology, including Latin terms, with minimal explanation. The following is the section about tree nuts:

> Schalenfrüchte, namentlich Mandeln (Amygdalus communis L.), Haselnüsse (Corylus avellana), Walnüsse (Juglans regia), Kaschunüsse (Anacardium occidentale), Pecannüsse (Carya illinoiesis (Wangenh.) K. Koch), Paranüsse (Bertholletia excelsa), Pistazien (Pistacia vera), Macadamia- oder Queenslandnüsse (Macadamia ternifolia) sowie daraus gewonnene Erzeugnisse, außer Nüssen zur Herstellung von alkoholischen Destillaten einschließlich Ethylalkohol landwirtschaftlichen Ursprungs. (EU 2014)

The German and Austrian government web pages target the same information for businesses and citizens using only the necessary terminology such as "Allergenkennzeichgung" "Unverträglichkeitsreaktion", "Lebensmittelunternehmer" or "Verbraucherschutzgesetz", but provide explanations and examples for better understanding. The German website provides the same allergen list as the EU regulation, the Austrian one lists only the central term "Schalenfrüchte" with examples in German.

The German Food Association and the Austrian initiative "Österreich isst informiert" focus on consumer education. They offer comprehensive explanations regarding food allergies, utilizing terms such as "Lebensmittelallergie," "Lebensmittelintoleranz," and "kennzeichnungspflichtig," with clear definitions provided. In their lists, they employ the general term "Schalenfrüchte (Baumnüsse) (und daraus gewonnene Erzeugnisse)," prioritizing simplicity for their audience.

The German language textbook for foreigners (B2 level) uses just the term "Schalenfrüchte" in the list; as a commentary, the book provides an alternative text where most terminology is omitted; instead, the used terms are paraphrased with examples:

> Am 13. Dezember 2014 ist eine neue EU-Verordnung in Kraft getreten: Auf Speisekarten von Gastronomiebetrieben, Würstchenbuden, Eisdielen, Kantinen, Schulen, Feinkostläden, Bäckereien usw. sind 14 Allergene anzuzeigen, die für Allergien

> und Unverträglichkeiten verantwortlich gemacht werden. (Klotz, 2016, 156)

The text introduces the EU Regulation and then elaborates on its content. However, the term "Unverträglichkeiten" remains unexplained.

The German Federal Centre for Nutrition, targeting consumers, emphasizes plain German in its text. It explains the central term "Allergene", visually distinguishing it, and provides a clear example of its usage. Additionally, it directly references what consumers would read on product labels, such as "Enthält Schwefel". The list opts for the simpler term "Nüsse", with the official term in parentheses immediately afterward, followed by three examples: "Nüsse (Schalenfrüchte) zum Beispiel Mandeln, Haselnüsse und Walnüsse" (Mounier, 2019).

4.2 Syntax

The EU regulation exhibits relatively low readability because of its complex sentence structures and technical language characteristics of legal documents. For instance, sentences containing extensive past-participle constructions are prevalent, such as

> Unbeschadet der gemäß Artikel 44 Absatz 2 erlassenen Vorschriften müssen die in Artikel 9 Absatz 1 Buchstabe c genannten Angaben den folgenden Anforderungen entsprechen […] (EU 2014, Art. 21)

along with numerous subordinate clauses, posing comprehension challenges for non-specialists.

The German and Austrian government web pages also use passive voice, a common feature of standard written German.

> Auf der Verpackung von Lebensmitteln muss die Verwendung bestimmter Zutaten wie Erdnüssen oder Sellerie, die allergische oder andere Unverträglichkeitsreaktionen auslösen können, stets angegeben werden. (BMEL 2021)

However, the sentences usually contain only one subordinate clause and no pre-modifying past participles, making the text much easier to understand.

The German Food Association and the Austrian initiative “Österreich isst informiert” also use the passive voice and simple sentences with just attribute clauses or, eventually, an object subordinate clause with the very frequent conjunction “dass”. The Austrian page appears to be more readable, as it is recipient-oriented. Subheadings are presented in the form of questions, such as “Welche 14 kennzeichnungspflichtigen Hauptallergene gibt es?” (Österreich isst informiert 2024).

The commentary also includes active sentences and addresses the reader directly:

> Die folgende Liste umfasst die 14 Hauptallergene. Sie zeigt, welche Inhaltsstoffe kennzeichnungspflichtig sind. Außerdem finden Sie darin Beispiele, wie die Kennzeichnung im Zutatenverzeichnis aussehen kann. (Österreich isst informiert 2024)

Infinitives with “zu” or reflexive passives are used, giving the text an official tone: “ist anzuführen”, “ist hervorzuheben”, “findet sich der Hinweis.”

The German language textbook for foreigners at the B2 level (Klotz 2016) utilizes verbonominal collocations like “es besteht die Möglichkeit” and infinitive constructions with “zu”, such as “es besteht die Möglichkeit zu informieren”, along with common clauses containing frequent conjunctions like “wenn” and “dass”. The sentences are generally short and not overly complex.

The German Federal Centre for Nutrition document as a text in plain language uses subheadings in the form of questions and employs short, non-complex sentences, often accompanied by explanations.

> Die meisten Menschen sind nicht empfindlich für Allergene. Menschen mit einer Lebensmittel-Allergie müssen aber gut aufpassen, was sie essen oder trinken. Wer zum Beispiel eine Erdnuss-Allergie hat, sollte keine Erdnüsse essen. Und auch keine Lebensmittel, in denen Erdnüsse verarbeitet sind, wie Soßen oder Kekse. Darum steht auf jedem Lebensmittel, welche Allergene darin stecken. (Mounier, 2019)

The text begins with a broad approach, employing numerous paraphrases and examples, yet predominantly comprises independent main clauses.[1]

4.3 Formality and informality

All analysed texts belong to official communication and maintain a formal tone, and can be characterized as a language of distance (Koch & Oesterreicher 1985). However, the formality across the analysed documents varies, reflecting their diverse audiences and purposes. EU Regulation 1169/2011 stands out for its high formality, adhering strictly to legal standards and maintaining an impersonal tone. Governmental websites strike a balance between formality and accessibility, addressing consumers and entrepreneurs with a slightly more personal tone. The German Food Association and the Austrian initiative "Österreich isst informiert" also maintain formality but are accessible. The textbook maintains a formal tone while ensuring recipient-friendliness by framing the food allergen list within the context of a restaurant owner's story incorporating direct speech, for instance. Lastly, the German Federal Centre for Nutrition maintains a formal yet recipient-friendly tone, utilizing the "Ich-Form" to establish a sense of direct engagement with the reader. It anticipates potential questions or concerns from the audience, incorporating various prompts to guide their understanding. Additionally, the inclusion of explicit text orientation cues, such as questions and instructions for accessing audio content (in the sense of: Do you want to listen to this text? Then click here.), enhances accessibility and user engagement.

4.4 Formatting and design

Formatting and design play a crucial role in enhancing accessibility and comprehension. The EU Regulation follows the legal text standard with its use of small font size, consistent numbering of articles, and italicization of Latin terminology. It notably lacks visual elements such as images or colours, maintaining a formal presentation with black print. In contrast, the texts from the Austrian government and the German textbook utilize various font sizes and colours as outlined in the EU Regulation, with the latter also featuring a table for allergen information. Most other texts adopt a multimodal online format resembling newspaper articles, featuring headings, excerpts, photos, and textual content. Additionally, the German Federal Centre for Nutrition as a text in plain German offers an audio version of the text and employs a different layout for one term definition. Notably, it includes an authentic photo of an allergen list on a granola bar, with explicit clarification regarding the bold printing of allergens on the packaging. This significantly contributes to the overall comprehensibility of the text.

5 Conclusion

By juxtaposing these texts, the chapter illustrates potential strategies for effectively communicating legal concepts to foreign language learners. This comparative analysis serves as a foundational step in language teaching, offering insights into how different types of texts approach the same subject matter. By understanding the varying approaches and levels of complexity present in these texts, language instructors can tailor their teaching methods to better suit the needs and proficiency levels of their students. This comparative approach lays the groundwork for developing comprehensive language lessons that address both linguistic and legal comprehension skills.

Summary in plain English

Plain language aims to make information more available and understandable for a varied audience. Such an audience includes users with varying levels of language skills. In this chapter, we comparatively analyse legal texts. We try to understand how the texts make complex legal information simpler. To achieve this, we analyze texts related to food allergen information from textbooks, official legal documents, and online guides. We evaluate terminology, sentence structure, formality, and formatting. Our findings show that publicly available texts provide simpler explanations than textbooks and original legal documents. By comparing these texts, the chapter shows possible strategies for understanding complex legal ideas, especially for learners of a foreign language.

Notes

[1] Free translation: Most people are not allergic. Those who are must be careful about what they eat or drink. For example, someone with a peanut allergy should not eat peanuts. And they should not eat any products containing peanuts, like sauces or cookies. That is why every product states which allergens it contains.

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Part VI

Understandable Language in the Linguistic Landscape

Simple and Understandable (?) Language of Slovak Pre-election Large-scale Signs

Petra Jesenská

Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to examine Slovakia's political pre-election linguistic landscape (LL) comprising large-scale multimodal signs via observation, detection, data collection, description, qualitative analysis, and comparison, resulting in conclusions from the data obtained and investigated. The selected subject matter is the language used in the LL that is easy to comprehend. Pre-election Slovak billboards of three political parties are chosen as the source of research material as these kinds of multimodal signs are meant to convey easily comprehensible ideas by means of easy language and visual phenomena. The data collection took place in the city of Banská Bystrica, namely in the Fončorda neighbourhood.

Keywords: billboard, sign, linguistic landscape, plain language

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the linguistic landscape, specifically large-scale signs (i.e. billboards) of a pre-selected urban area in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, shortly before the country's parliamentary snap elections held on September 30th, 2023.

The research was informed by the principle of simple language usage, as its aim was to capture and examine typical features of pre-election visual signs installed in the chosen linguistic landscape. In the leadup to elections, many politicians tend to use thought shortcuts and simplified versions of the truth; however, extremist parties (those whose intention is to establish a fascist or communist regime in the country) and/or other parties having close links to authoritarian ideas use not only plain language but language that is offensive and harmful as well. The idea was thus to examine the way they use language and the way they communicate with their potential electorate, particularly by means of large-scale signs, as they are perfectly visible and thus highly likely to be influential on voters.

1 Methods

To obtain our research goals several strategies have been chosen, such as definition of simple language and billboard, observation, and detection of the pre-selected linguistic landscape (LL), outdoor data collection, description of collected material, its qualitative linguistic and pragmalinguistic analysis, comparison, and drawing conclusions from the data obtained. The subject matter selected for our research was language that is easy to comprehend. We chose pre-election large-scale signs (i.e. billboards) as the appropriate source of research material to collect from September 6th to September 9th, 2023, because these kinds of signs are meant to carry easily comprehensible ideas by means of easy language. The data collection took place in the Slovak city of Banská Bystrica, namely in the Fončorda neighbourhood. The author of this chapter has been involved in the research of the LL since 2019 covering this issue from various perspectives, e.g. the influence of gender (Jesenská 2022a), political topics, such as the ongoing war in a neighboring country (Jesenská 2023), teaching the LL in the English classroom (Jesenská 2022b) and many others.

Five research questions were set:

1. What are the typical features of the selected pre-election billboards in the examined area?
2. Is the language of the billboards informative or manipulative?
3. Does the simple language of the pre-election billboards work?
4. Do the linguistic devices used evoke an emotional response?
5. Where are the billboards installed?

2 Research

Charles Kay Ogden was one of the first inventors and users of an easy language when he introduced his today well-known Basic English, incl. British, American, Scientific, International, and Commercial English expressions and collocations. Linguistics focusing on easy language(s) is currently a frequently discussed topic by researchers who have already been involved in this branch of study in various languages[1].

There is a question mark in the title of this chapter following the "simple and understandable" language as it is disputable whether simple language has to *a priori* mean understandable as well. That is why the question of the simple language must be answered first. Simple language, easy language, plain language, or simple reading are notions referring the umbrella term easy-to-understand language in terms of language levels A1, A2 and B1 (cf. Lindholm & Vanhatalo 2021). In other words, simple or plain language is a simplified version of everyday language. The primary objective of using this version of language is to inform in such a way that is understandable to the most people. Simple language uses everyday colloquial lexis avoiding any technical terms and/or foreign, neological, or archaic expressions. It focuses on the core (centre) of vocabulary, i.e. neutral words and expressions.

Large-scale signs, such as billboards, prefer usage of the simplest possible language to capture as many recipients' comprehension as possible. The large-scale sign represents a multimodal carrier of visual semiotics communicating as much information as possible in the limited space. The LL very often communicates by means of images, which are representing "a continuous flow of iconic, spatially configured signs. Perception and cognitive processing of images involve rapid, simultaneous, and holistic perception with a powerful effect; therefore, images are easy to remember and directly connected with emotions" (Molnárová 2021, 209). According to Klincková (2014), the billboard represents a specific genre of communication, the aim of which is to inform, persuade and manipulate the recipient, and then its multilayer function is informational-persuasive-manipulative.

On the other hand, however, according to the aforementioned author, the large-scale sign informs, persuades and motivates, and then its function is informational-pervasive and appellative-conversational (cf. Klincková 2014, 93). Thus, according to her, the communication paradigm can modify its function depending on the intention of the clients. Linguistic manipulation works with vagueness and ambiguity in the advertising environment, and this technique is often applied in pre-election media because of the threat of criminal prosecution in the event of open support for extremist views. Another reason for using such language is to leave the message open to various interpretations to persuade as many people as possible to, for example, vote for a political party. A billboard as a large-scale medium is a complex, visually striking, easy to read, concise and topical communication (see Klincková 2014, 88–93).

Slovakia was facing snap parliamentary elections in September 2023, and that was an interesting opportunity to investigate the pre-election LL. The attention was primarily paid to the narratives of political parties who have communicated their thoughts this way considering their inclination towards extremist views. These are usually referred to as extremists (fascists and communists) as they favour authoritative regimes. Paradoxically, however, they openly distance themselves from these ideological movements. Their polling results were not high[2]; however, some had fair chances of making it into the parliament by reaching Slovakia's 5% threshold for a party to obtain seats (see Fig. 1 – Republika in particular).

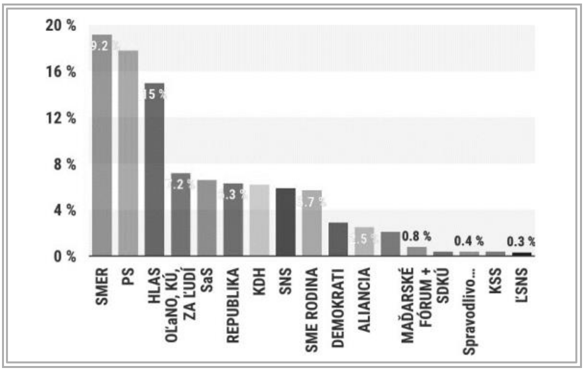

Figure 1: Pre-election poll conducted by AKO Agency
Source: Sme 2023

Figure 1 above depicts the pre-election poll conducted by AKO Agency collecting data from Aug. 7th to Aug. 14th, 2023, and published on Sept. 7th, 2023. According to their predictions, extremist parties KSS (The Communist Party of Slovakia) and ĽSNS (The People's Party Our Slovakia) were not about to get into the parliament, while Republika (The Republic) had quite a good chance to get there (6.3%). ĽSNS is led by a well-known far-right neo-Nazi politician. A wing of disaffected politicians broke away from his party and founded the Republika party.

The first multimodal sign, i.e. ĽSNS billboard (see Fig. 2), was installed near an exposed chain store (Billa) and was highly visible from the main road for both drivers and pedestrians.

Figure 2: ĽSNS_Nové Kalište_BB_Side 1
Photo: Petra Jesenská

The billboard depicts the leader of the party backgrounded by a Slovak mountain, the party's characteristic green and white logo, information (number and name of the party) mixed with an appeal to vote for them. The text of the billboard contains the following sentences: *"We speak plain language"(Hovoríme jasnou rečou)*, *"We can afford it!/We can do it! (Máme na to!)*, *"Live without the EU and NATO" (Žiť bez EÚ aj NATO)*, *"Vote number 21" (Voľte číslo 21)*, *"The Kotleba People's Party Our Slovakia" (Kotlebovci Ľudovástrana Naše Slovensko)*.[3] Their language is so simplified that it becomes ambiguous, polysemous, and even tricky. For instance, the idiomatic expression *Máme na to!* can be translated as *We can make it!/We are good and clever enough to achieve it!/We can manage!* (meaning being capable of doing something and trusting in your abilities and skills) or *We can afford it!* (meaning we are economically and politically strong enough as a country to do it). On the other hand, their language is indeed plain and clear as they openly promise to leave the EU and NATO without offering any substitution for membership in those institutions. Their discourse indicates peril from the side of the EU and NATO and themselves as defenders of Slovak values. Their sign provides information (number, leader's image and name, party's logo, party's name), a statement (*We speak plain language*), and promises and wishful thinking (*We can afford it!/We can do it! Live without the EU and NATO*). However, their sign does not mention any other perils the country would face after leaving the Euro-Atlantic structures.

Figure 3: ĽSNS_Nové Kalište_BB_Side2
Photo: Petra Jesenská

The text of the other side (Fig. 3) contains the following sentences (repeating the images of mountain, leader, etc., and some information, too): *"We speak plain language" (Hovoríme jasnou rečou), "We have the answer to the* ***gypsy*** *question" (Máme odpoveď na* ***cigánsku*** *otázku), "Vote number 21" (Voľte číslo 21)*, *"The Kotleba People's Party Our Slovakia" (Kotlebovci Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko).* The usage of *cigánska otázka (gypsy question)* is disputable and problematic not only because it is politically incorrect (*rómsky* (*Romany*) is preferred in Slovak instead as *Cigán* (*Gypsy*) bears negative connotations in Slovak), but also due to criminalizing a particular group of people because of their ethnicity. *Cigán* and *cigánsky* (Gypsy – noun, adj) is a derogatory term in Slovak, supported by conveying negative semantic connotations of the verb *cigániť*, literally meaning "to lie like a gypsy"[4]. This is followed by the Slovak proverb that "the person who lies also steals", and thus the lexical unit implies that Romany are not only liars but thieves as well. The ĽSNS party do not consider this socially or legally unacceptable nor the least. The sign does not provide pure information or statements, but openly incites hatred towards a concrete group of inhabitants. This is supported by the black font in the yellow phrase *Máme odpoveď na* ***cigánsku*** *otázku*! – *We have the answer to the* ***Gypsy*** *question!* Accentuating the adjectival expression *cigánska (Gypsy)* with black text is not a pure coincidence but a clear intention to emphasise dark complexion and to ensure their voters that Slovak Romanies are troublemakers. Plus, the phrase *Gypsy question* (*cigánska otázka*) is a reference to the Nazi-speak used in the 1940s. The whole sentence also reinforces the idea that the Romany are one of this country's most challenging problems that should be faced and dealt with. In terms of colour, green and yellow dominate.

Figure 4: Republika_Nad plážou_BB
Photo: Petra Jesenská

As mentioned above, the party Republika (Republic) was formed by several politicians who left ĽSNS. They were involved in a parliamentary election campaign for the first time this year. The text of the billboard (Fig. 4) states: "*We will stop zoning and land theft*"

(Zastavíme zonáciu), "*the Republic Party*" *(Hnutie Republika)*, and the name of the politician, along with the number of the party and the number to vote. The promise to *stop zoning and land theft* evokes that "someone" is stealing land from the people. That "someone" is a reference to their political rivals. *Zonácia* (*zoning*) is a term referring to the categorization of national parks in Slovakia. It is the division of national parks into zones that can be encroached upon (by construction, logging, etc.) and those that cannot be encroached upon. The tricolour (white – blue – red) dominates the whole sign. The sign was installed close to a main road near a highly exposed chain store (Lidl) and was visible to both drivers and pedestrians.

Figure 5: Republika_THK_BB
Photo: Petra Jesenská

The text of the billboard in Figure 5 reads: "*We'll put things in order*" *(Urobíme poriadok)*, "*the Republic Party*" *(Hnutie Republika)*, the party's number, and their leader's candidate number. The promise to *make order/put in order/clean up* suggests that now there is chaos or a mess in the country that must be solved, though it does not explain in what spheres or how exactly they plan on doing so. However, the phrase *Urobíme poriadok!* is so simplified that without any other context it is polysemous and therefore ambiguous and tricky in a very manipulative way as it can be understood differently depending on the recipient. When uttered at home, in an office or on a street it would suggest *cleaning up a flat, a house or a cellar, rearrange things (e.g. in a drawer), tidy things up, keep* *order, do cleaning*. It may also refer to the meaning *manage or fix something*, e.g. *see to something* (one translation of the billboard sentence would thus be *We'll see to it,* but what *it* refers to can be just guessed – society, chaos, people in charge, etc.) or *do something with someone, dispose of someone, deal with someone, correct someone, put things right, establish order, put matters straight*. But in a political campaign it suggests a different kind of "cleaning" (possibly even cleansing or purge in extreme cases), in the sense of reorganising the current social and political order as we know it, e.g. by replacing people in important positions in the country without unnecessary ado or without any further political discussions. It may even suggest a violent approach towards ideological opponents. It makes the readers believe that there is chaos and disorder in the whole country that must be managed. This would be conveyed by the following translations: *clean house, clean up, set things right, restore order, organize the chaos, control someone/something, settle with someone, sort things out, put all to rights, handle someone or something, call to order, make them quit it, make (them/it) stop*. The Slovak sign of the double cross is presented to emphasise national and patriotic values. Again, the symbolic tricolour of white, blue and red dominates the whole sign as they are the colours of the Slovak flag. The sign was installed close to a main road and was highly visible to both drivers and pedestrians.

Figure 6: Republika_THK_BB_2
Photo: Petra Jesenská

The text of the next billboard (Fig. 6), in close proximity to the estate car park, states: "*European salaries for Slovaks, too*" *(Európske platy aj pre Slovákov)*, "*The Republic Party*" *(Hnutie Republika)* and the name of the candidate. The tricolour is a must again. The promise of *European salaries for Slovaks* is meant in terms of Western European levels (i.e. to get the same or similar salaries as in Germany or France); however, this is a utopia in the country's economically challenging current situation. The sign was installed close to a main road near a highly exposed chain store (Lidl) and was clearly visible to both drivers and pedestrians.

Figure 7: KSS_THK_BB
Photo: Petra Jesenská

The next billboard (Fig. 7) displays the text "*Golden (lit. transl.)/Gilded (lit. transl.)/Great communists*" *(Zlatí komunisti)*, "*For (the sake of) common sense and the good old days" (Za zdravý rozum a stare dobré časy), "Communist Party of Slovakia" (Komunistická strana Slovenska), "We vote for number 6" (Volíme číslo 6* applying the first person plural, suggesting it as an indicative statement, not an imperative to vote them*)*, the party logo, webpage, and a Facebook logo. No face nor any values are presented except for the link to the past before the fall of the Iron Curtain to make recipients feel nostalgia. Besides information (party's abbreviation, their name and number, and so on), the sign openly provides clichés dating back to the times before 1989 (i.e. the communist regime by saying "*great communists*") to evoke memories of an allegedly easy life providing social securities (work, housing, allegedly free healthcare, etc.). Strongly manipulating discourse, as the sign does not refer to the communist political monster processes in the 1950s in former Czechoslovakia, abuse of power, the Iron Curtain, lack of choices, shooting refugees at the borders trying to escape the totalitarian regime, etc. The red colour dominates the whole billboard as it is the symbolic colour of communists, whose reference is in yellow (or gold) to refer to the Slovak cliché about *"golden/gilded"* or *"nice/dear/cute/sweet/great communists"*. The whole communist regime is perceived nostalgically by some people as something positive providing social certainties believed to be free (e.g. free schooling, free healthcare, etc.) or automatically guaranteed (e.g. the right/obligation to get a job[5]). Political monster processes, political prisoners, barbed wire on the borders (to prevent its own citizens from fleeing the country) are forgotten. Another cliché, *zdravý rozum* (*common sense*) and *staré dobré časy* (*the good old days/times*) are used to make potential voters remember how things used to be in the past (before November 1989), when life was "nice" and "simple" and "everything was clear" (e.g. NATO was a struggle enemy, the USSR was the country's best friend, etc.). *Zdravý rozum* (*common sense*) is believed to be used by those who give them their votes. The sign was installed close to a main road near a highly exposed chain store (Lidl) and was clearly visible to both drivers and pedestrians.

The turnout in Slovakia's snap parliamentary elections was 68.5%, of which ĽSNS won 0.84%, Republika 4.75% and KSS 0.33% of the vote. It turns out that, at least in the case of those three examined political parties[6], simple language did not work out as expected. How can this be understood and interpreted? It is possible that they were not able to reach their voters sufficiently because they were not able to convince them of the quality of their work. As Table 1 depicts, in the case of KSS the predictions were quite accurate, unlike those for ĽSNS and Republika, who were expected to get more votes, with Republika predicted to make it into the parliament (above the 5% threshold) according to pre-election polls.

Political parties and their %	**ĽSNS** People's Party Our Slovakia	**Republika** Republic	**KSS** Communist Party of Slovakia
Polls in %	0.3	6.3	0.3
Results in %	0.84	4.75	0.33

Table 1: Pre-election polling and actual results – comparison

The results of our description and analysis of the collected data are presented in the following Table 2, providing answers to research questions 1–5 (which are repeated below the table):

Questions 1–5	**ĽSNS** People's Party Our Slovakia	**Republika** Republic	**KSS** Communist Party of Slovakia	**Comparison**
Q1	simple messages delivered by simple lexis, short and easy-to-remember syntagms, allusion to Nazi speak information next to manipulation and insults: ***We speak plain language, We can afford it! Live without the EU and NATO We have the answer to the gypsy question***	simple messages delivered by simple lexis, short and easy-to-remember syntagms information vague and/or unreal promises: ***We will stop zoning and land theft. We'll clean up. (Western) European salaries for Slovaks, too***	simple messages delivered by simple lexis, short and easy-to-remember syntagms, referring to nostalgia for "gilded times" information and statements towards past time that never occurred: ***Great communists For (the sake of) common sense and the good old days***	manipulative and disputable content of discourse in all three cases in general: **The creation of false ideas about a threat (EU, NATO, the Gypsy question) and nostalgic references to the past (the great communists). Providing simple instructions and solutions (plain language, good gold days)**.

Q2	informative manipulative spreading fear and hatred	informative and manipulative	manipulative and informative	More manipulative features were observed compared to the information content.
Q3	not at all	not at all	not at all	This manner of communication did not seem to work **in the 2023 elections** as none of them got into the parliament.
Q4	definitely	definitely	definitely	The aim was to evoke an emotional response for sure **by creating perceptions of alleged threats and nostalgic references to the country's communist history. Their messages evoke positive or negative emotional response in recipients.**
Q5	in an exposed and clearly visible place	in an exposed and clearly visible place	in an exposed and clearly visible place	The signs of all three parties were installed in highly exposed and clearly visible places.

Table 2: Research questions answered

1. What are the typical features of the selected pre-election billboards in the examined area?
2. Is the language of the billboards informative or manipulative?
3. Does the simple language of the pre-election billboards work?

4. Do the linguistic devices used evoke an emotional response?
5. Where are the billboards installed?

Summary in plain English

This chapter investigates easy language in public spaces, specifically on political campaign billboards in the Fončorda neighborhood of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The research focuses on the billboards of three political parties tending to totalitarian political systems. The aim was to find out whether their easy-to-understand and easy-to-remember language worked for voters. Though this approach may have worked for some parties, it did not for these three parties as none of them got into Slovakia's parliament. Their billboards contained not only easy language, but also easy and plain solutions expressed via simple ideas in everyday language, such as well-known Slovak expressions and phrases, also known as clichés. The language has been simplified, and it is so general and has so many possible meanings that it becomes unclear and tricky, turning out to be very manipulative and confusing.

Notes

[1] For more detailed information see the project webpage:
https://www.ff.umb.sk/zbohusova/vega-1-0549-22-accessible-lingvistika-lahko-zrozumitelnych-jazykov-linguistics-of-easy-to-unterstand-languages.html

[2] The author of this chapter has already conducted research on multimodal signs installed in the LL by the three most successful political parties and the article with the results is forthcoming soon.

[3] The English translations of the Slovak billboard texts have been made ad hoc for the purpose of this chapter. All translations are intercultural glosses unless otherwise noted.

[4] However, in Slovak the phrase *cigánska kapela/hudba (gypsy band/music)* functions as a term without any negative semantic connotations. See https://slovnik.juls.savba.sk/.

[5] Unemployment, however, used to be punished in the past (i.e. before 1989).

[6] However, it is worth noting that a similar approach did work out for other parties that had attracted some of their extreme-minded voters.

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Linguistic Landscapes and Translatoriality: Pictograms as Vehicles of Accessibility

Tamara Mikolič Južnič
Agnes Pisanski Peterlin

Abstract

The linguistic landscape of officially bilingual areas is characterized by rich translatorial activity where several languages typically interact in different types of signage. Additionally, communication is also carried out through different semiotic channels, including pictograms. Pictograms are standardized images with illocutionary or informative functions, which can be considered a type of intersemiotic translation, often constituting a simplified expression of a unit of meaning. In this chapter we attempt to examine the role of pictograms in signage, focusing on the type of content they express and on the relationship between the text and the pictogram, in two officially bilingual protected areas in Slovenia and Italy.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, conservation areas, translatoriality, translation strategies, pictograms

Introduction

Linguistic landscape studies offer interesting insight into the use of different languages in public spaces, investigating the relationships between multilingualism and translation strategies (see, for instance, Reh 2004, Koskinen 2012, Mikolič Južnič & Pisanski Peterlin 2023). The fundamental function of any public sign is communicative, but to ensure that its content is properly understood, it is often necessary to employ multiple languages and multiple semiotic codes. Multilingual signage is needed to provide access to different audiences; however, in various types of linguistic landscapes accessibility of content, understanding and intelligibility may also be achieved through means beyond traditional translation. As an umbrella term Koskinen and Kinnunen (2022) introduce translatoriality, one of several terms that attempt "to cover the non-prototypical end of the translation continuum" (Koskinen & Kinnunen 2022, 11), i.e., translation in its broadest sense, which, as they point out, "presupposes that something is repeated, reworded, revoiced, or recommunicated" (ibid., 9). The use of pictograms in addition to or instead of text on public signage seems to fall under this category.

In this chapter we investigate pictograms as vehicles of accessibility in two officially bilingual protected areas in Slovenia and Italy, the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park and the Rosandra Valley Nature Reserve. Official bilingualism, combined with tourism, means that multilingual signage is expected from the outset and monolingual signs are expected only exceptionally.

We begin by analysing the linguistic landscape of the two areas in terms of the type of signage, the ways of providing accessibility, and the translation strategies employed. In examining signs containing pictograms, we address two research questions: (1) What type of content is made accessible through pictograms? and (2) What is the relationship between the text and the pictogram?

1 Linguistic landscapes and translatoriality

1.1 Linguistic landscape studies

Research into linguistic landscapes has grown relatively rapidly in recent decades, since the notion of linguistic landscape was first conceptualized by Landry and Bourhis (1997). According to the two scholars,

> "[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration". (Landry & Bourhis 1997, 25)

Taking into account the recent technological advances, it is hardly surprising that a number of researchers have expanded this definition to include various types of digital signage (see Gorter 2013; Leimgruber 2017; etc.). Moreover, the boundaries of linguistic landscape research have been extended to include a wide range of methodologies and research approaches, focusing on a variety of settings and geographical locations. Multilingualism has frequently been the focus of attention in the signage of different types of linguistic landscape, and minority languages and bilingual and multilingual communities have received substantial research attention in this context. In such contexts, content is made accessible through different forms of translatoriality on the signs, ranging from traditional translation in multilingual signage to other, more peripheral types of translatoriality, including pictograms.

While the majority of linguistic landscape studies focus on urban environments (see, for instance, Backhaus 2005; Koskinen 2012; Tufi 2016), the locations observed in this study are conservation areas, which entails signage of a somewhat different nature, in certain instances more similar to what is addressed in museum studies. In their study of a museum of indigenous culture, Kelly-Holmes & Pietikäinen (2016) identify three functions of museum signs: visitor management, narration and language as a displayed item. The latter is not relevant for conservation areas such as the ones investigated in this article, in which only visitor management and narration signs are found (see Mikolič Južnič & Pisanski Peterlin 2023).

1.2 Official bilingualism

The two protected areas whose linguistic landscape was analysed in the present study were not chosen randomly; they are both located near the border between Italy and Slovenia and they are mirror reflections of each other. The Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is located in the officially bilingual area of Slovenia with Italian as the second official language in addition to Slovene, and the Rosandra Valley Nature Reserve located in an officially bilingual part of the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region in Italy, with Slovene as the second official language.

Apart from the general recommendations of the European Commission regarding linguistic rights of minority languages (Council of Europe 1992), Italy and Slovenia have additional agreements that regulate the language policies in the areas on both sides of the border between the two countries, such as the Osimo Treaties (see Zaccaria 2020), according to which, among other provisions, public signs are to be displayed both in Slovene and in Italian.

While in Slovenia, minority rights are strictly implemented on all levels (public signs, school system, media etc.), in Italy there is more variation depending on the municipality in question (see Smejkalová 2008; Mezgec 2016); therefore our research may shed additional light on the presence of both languages in the areas. Tufi (2016), who observed signage in the wider Trieste area, has shown that there are striking differences between signs found in the city centre and in the surrounding peripheral towns, in which Slovene is found both in top-down signs (i.e. those mandated by the official administration) but also in bottom-up signs of commercial nature and in other settings.

1.3 Multilingual signage

Multilingual signage is typically the result of some form of translation, and a closer examination reveals that translation practices in linguistic landscapes are characterized by great complexity. Koskinen (2012, 90) points out a number of different aspects of translation that need to be considered ranging from authorship and target audience, directionality and the type of translation used, to power, cultural identity and assimilation. Several linguistic landscape studies dealing with translation in multilingual signs (e.g., Backhaus 2006; Koskinen 2012; Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau 2015) have used Reh's (2004) classification of multilingual presentation of information in stationary signage, encompassing four categories: duplicating, fragmentary, overlapping and complementary. Duplicating involves presenting the same content in more than one language, i.e., full translation in the traditional sense. Fragmentary multilingual presentation entails partial translation of some of the content into another language (or more than one language). Overlapping refers to the instances where some of the content is presented in all the languages, while other parts are only presented in one of the language versions. Complementary multilingual writing means that different content is presented in different languages, which means that no translation is involved.

However, translatoriality in linguistic landscape is not limited to interlingual translation (in the sense of Jakobson 1959), as the content of the sign can also be expressed through non-verbal elements. In signs containing text and pictograms, discussed in Subchapter 2.4 below, one can find what Jakobson (1959) has termed intersemiotic translation, i.e. “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson 1959, 233).

1.4 Pictograms

Backhaus (2005, 18) explains pictograms as “standardised pictorial marks containing messages of an informative or directive nature without relying on a specific language”. Galvão Spinillo (2012, 3398) highlights their universality and convenience, pointing out that they are “intended for broad audiences” and “generally designed to be effective without the use of words”. Galvão Spinillo (ibid.) further points out several important advantages of pictograms over text or words: their superior discernibility in conditions of poor visibility, their provision of better access to people with different language and literacy skills and their compactness.

It has been argued that pictograms play an important role in providing access to information to audiences with different literacy levels: Juffermans & Coppoolse (2012) studied the reception and interpretation of signage in the public space of a Gambian village, focusing on people with different levels of literacy skills; their results show that low-literate readers employ “a variety of visual interpretative strategies to read the signs in their local linguistic landscape” (Juffermans & Coppoolse 2012, 244).

However, the effectiveness of pictograms varies: as Backhaus (2005, 68) argues, non-standardized pictograms may be misunderstood or confuse the audience; furthermore, comprehensibility of pictograms may depend on cultural factors. According to Galvão Spinillo (2012, 3401) “[a]ll pictures belong to representational systems defined by a cluster of visual saliences which are influenced by readers’ pictorial experience, within historical and cultural dimensions”; in other words, for successful communication, the design of a pictogram needs to match the cognitive schemas of the audience (ibid.). Issues relating to the comprehensibility of pictograms across cultures have been examined in a range of studies, above all those focusing on pictogram use in medical and health care settings (see for instance Barros et al. 2014; Kassam et al. 2004; Shrestha et al. 2018).

Comprehensibility may be an issue even without cross-cultural differences with less standardised pictograms: in their analysis of disaster signage in the linguistic landscape of Japan, Tan & Said (2015, 146) point out that although some of the images in the signs they examined are used by governmental organisations in evacuation signage, they do not seem to be universally understood and tend to be accompanied by text in Japanese.

2 Data and methods

2.1 Data

The photographic data for this study were collected in two locations, the *Sečovlje Salina Nature Park*[1] and the *Rosandra Valley Nature Reserve*[2]. Both locations are rather large and encompass diverse sections with different functions (visitor centre, commercial establishments, etc.). To ensure comparability, only signs in two similar sections of the two locations were compared in the analysis: the Lera Areas in Sečovlje and the *Friendship Footpath* area in Val Rosandra. It must be noted that there are also some differences between the two locations. Sečovlje is primarily a tourist attraction offering a guided visit, where an entrance fee is charged. Val Rosandra is primarily a recreational area with no entrance fee.

All types of public signs at both locations were photographed in 2023 during a number of visits to both settings. Initially, all types of signs were photographed, but certain categories were subsequently excluded from the analysis: only verbal signs, pictorial signs containing pictograms, and combinations of verbal signs and pictograms were included. This means that pictorial signs containing only photographs, illustrations, maps, logos, arrows etc. were excluded. In addition, traffic signs and commercial signs were excluded as well, as were labels for objects on display, models and signs on various objects (such as an inscription on a bicycle or incisions in stones). Path markers on rocks and trees, found only in Val Rosandra, we also excluded.

In composite signs comprising several frames, each frame was counted as a separate sign, in accordance with Backhaus's (2006, 55) definition of a sign being "any piece of the written text within a spatially definable frame", to allow an accurate quantification of functions. It should be pointed out, however, that the number of pictograms is not the same as the number of signs: many signs contained more than one pictogram; in fact, there were instances when a single sign contained more than fifteen pictograms.

In total, 112 signs in Sečovlje and 96 signs in Val Rosandra were analysed.

2.2 Methods

The corpus of signs was analysed in terms of the following categories:

- Type of sign: Signs were classified as verbal only (displaying only text), pictogram (displaying only pictograms) or combined (displaying both text and pictograms).
- Languages displayed: For each sign, all the languages displayed were noted, as was the order of languages.
- Translation strategy: Reh's model outlined in Subchapter 1 was used to classify translations as duplicating, fragmentary or overlapping. No instances of multilingual writing were identified in the data.
- Pictogram-text alignment: In combined signs, the relationship between the text and the pictogram was explored in terms of whether the same amount of content or the same content was covered by both verbal and non-verbal parts of the sign.
- Type of content: The signs were classified as narrative or visitor management. Since all the pictograms were on visitor management signs, only the content of these signs was further analysed descriptively.

3 Results

Table 1 shows that the majority of signs in both locations rely only on verbal content to convey the message to the visitors. Approximately a quarter of the signs in Sečovlje rely on both text and pictograms, whereas the percentage is somewhat lower for Val Rosandra (18%). Signs containing only pictograms are used only exceptionally. Although signs with pictograms typically contained more than one pictogram, as, for instance, the sign in Figure 3, (the total number of individual pictograms was 122 in Sečovlje and 67 in Val Rosandra), such instances were counted as single signs.

	Signs with pictogram only	**Combined signs with text and pictogram**	**Signs with text only**
Sečovlje	5	29	78
Val Rosandra	3	18	75

Table 1: Types of signs in the observed areas

At both locations the majority of signs display more than one language, while monolingual signs or signs containing pictograms only are relatively infrequent (see Table 2). 10 different languages are displayed on the signs analysed; of these, six (Slovene, Italian, English, German, French, Latin) are found at both locations, while four (Spanish, Russian, Czech, Slovak) are only present in Sečovlje. Only four languages (Slovene, Italian, English, German) are displayed on more than 10 signs at each location; of these German is found relatively infrequently.

Slovene and Italian are the most frequently displayed languages. This is due to the fact that both Sečovlje and Val Rosandra are located in officially bilingual areas, which means that official signs are expected to display both languages. While the structure of the signs tends to follow a similar pattern in most signs in Sečovlje, with Slovene always displayed first, Italian second (and English, when present, third), the order of the languages defies the expectation of Italian being displayed first in several signs in Val Rosandra.

As both locations are also frequently visited by international tourists, the presence of English, as the global lingua franca of tourism, is expected. However, the results show a significant difference in the frequency with which English is displayed in the two locations: while almost 75% of the signs in Sečovlje display English, the figure for the same category is less than 25% in Val Rosandra.

	Pictogram only	**Monolingual**	**Bilingual**	**Trilingual**	**Multilingual**
Sečovlje	5	12	14	64	17
Val Rosandra	3	13	58	16	6

Table 2: Number of languages displayed on signs

	Duplicating	**Fragmentary**	**Overlapping**	**Not applicable**
Sečovlje	65	24	6	17
Val Rosandra	57	12	11	16

Table 3: Translation strategies used in signs

All multilingual signs contain translation, with duplicating (full) translation being the dominant strategy at both locations (see Table 3). Cases of abridged and overlapping translation can also be found at both locations. The category labelled “Not applicable” includes monolingual and non-verbal signs.

	No alignment: the content of the pictogram(s) differs from the content of the text	Partial alignment: the content of the pictogram(s) is more detailed or specific than the content of the text	Partial alignment: the content of the text is more detailed or specific than the content of the pictogram(s)	Full alignment: the content of the pictogram(s) is same as the content of the text
Sečovlje	12	4	10	8
Val Rosandra	13	1	5	2

Table 4: Degree of alignment between pictograms and text

When comparing the alignment of the content of the pictograms and the text in signs containing both semiotic codes, four different types of alignment were identified (see Table 4). Full alignment between the two with no difference in content is relatively rare: in Sečovlje, 8 out of 34 (23%) signs with pictograms and text exhibited full alignment (see Figure 1), while in Val Rosandra there are only 2 such signs out 19 (10%).

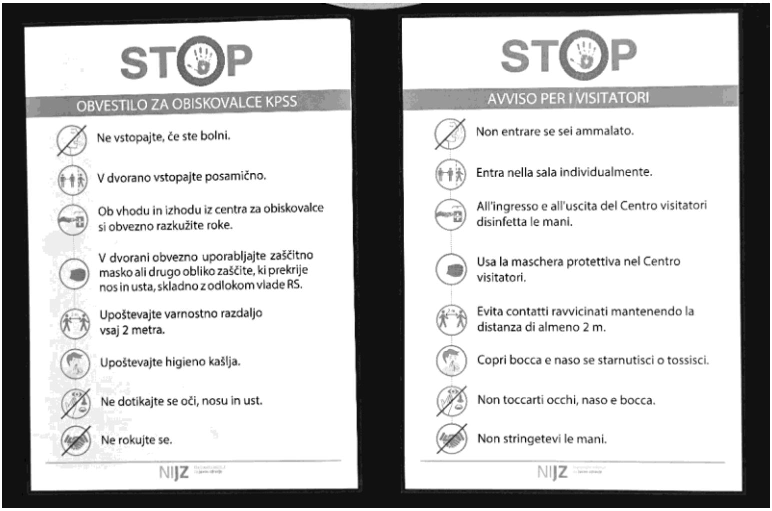

Figure 1: Two signs from Sečovlje demonstrating full alignment of text and pictograms

In most cases of signs with both pictograms and text, there is no alignment of the content (11 cases in Sečovlje (32%) and 14 in Val Rosandra (67%)). Figure 2 illustrates this type of relationship: the two pictograms on the sign complement the brief bilingual instructions, together mandating the use of surgical masks and hand sanitizer.

Figure 2: A sign from Sečovlje displaying the complementarity of pictograms and text

In other cases of no alignment, the message conveyed by the pictogram constitutes a completely independent unit of content: while the text narrates the history of a sight, the accompanying pictograms have a visitor management function (Figure 3).

Figure 3: A sign from Val Rosandra displaying no alignment of content between the pictograms and text

In many instances the alignment was partial, i.e., the pictograms express more or less detailed content compared to the text on the same sign. When more content is expressed by the pictograms than by the adjacent text, the pictograms specify certain aspects or details that are just summarized in the text. An instance of such alignment is the sign in Figure 4, which is a complex sign featuring a number of pictograms and many short textual segments. In most cases, the content of the pictograms and the textual segments are fully aligned. However, in one section of the sign containing eight pictograms in blue, partial alignment occurs: the text mandates the use of protective equipment in general, while the pictograms specify the different types of protective equipment.

Figure 4: A complex sign from Val Rosandra displaying partial alignment with more content in the pictograms

When, on the other hand, the pictograms express less content than the text, which happens more frequently in both locations, the pictogram typically summarizes what is explained in more detail in the text. Thus in Figure 5, the pictogram is a generic warning sign with an exclamation mark inside a yellow triangle, whereas the text in Italian specifies the type of danger, calling visitors' attention to the fact that vehicles may exit the construction site at that point.

Figure 5: A sign from Val Rosandra displaying partial alignment with less content in the pictogram.

4 Discussion

The aim of this chapter was to examine pictograms as vehicles of accessibility in two officially bilingual protected areas in Slovenia and Italy: Sečovlje and Val Rosandra. The analysis showed that most signs at both locations relied on verbal content to convey the message, with combined signs, containing both pictograms and text, being used somewhat more frequently in Sečovlje than Val Rosandra. Signs with only pictograms were used infrequently. In multilingual signs, interlingual translation was used consistently, with duplicating, i.e., full translation being the most commonly used translation strategy.

As pointed out in Subchapter 1.2, the two locations were selected for linguistic landscape analysis because the requirements of official bilingualism combined with multilingualism generated by tourism is expected to result in rich translatorial activity (Mikolič Južnič & Pisanski Peterlin 2023). The results show that both bilingualism and tourism did indeed impact language use, with the landscape of Sečovlje reflecting a more defined language policy, with languages in a fixed order in most signs, as most were put up by the park management. The landscape of Val Rosandra is less uniform in this respect: it is clear that the signs were put up by several different entities, including local authorities, local tourist organizations, various associations, building contractors, etc. The order of languages on the signs varies far more than in Sečovlje, with Slovene occasionally found in the initial position, which is somewhat surprising, considering that it is located in Italy.

In terms of lingua franca use, there is a pronounced difference between the two locations: whereas English is almost ubiquitous in the linguistic landscape of Sečovlje, it is used far less frequently in the linguistic landscape of Val Rosandra. This is partly due to the differences between the two locations. Sečovlje is primarily a tourist destination, offering a guided experience of the cultural and natural heritage of the saltpans to local and international visitors (international tourists constitute 70% of the visitors; see Pisanski Peterlin et al. 2023). Val Rosandra, on the other hand, functions as a recreational area where cultural and natural heritage is highlighted in some of the signs, but the visitors, who tend to be local, either Italian or Slovene, tend to use the site above all for hiking, walking, cycling, etc. Moreover, the English in some of the signs in Sečovlje is present because they were added within various projects funded in part by the European Union.

Our first research question relating to signs containing pictograms was what type of content is made accessible through pictograms. The analysis showed that at both locations, the pictograms appear in visitor management signs; namely, they are used to warn, prohibit, and instruct. This is very much in accordance with Backhaus's (2005, 18) observation about their conveying "messages of an informative or directive nature". Since such signs express meanings related to safety, sometimes intended to prevent injury or even loss of life, but also governing the behaviour of the visitors to avoid damage to the environment, equipment, wildlife etc., ensuring a safe and pleasant visit, it is essential that the information is accessible to everyone, regardless of their age, literacy, language and cultural background. On such signs, pictograms are always present in the two areas analysed. In cases of partial alignment, where the pictogram expresses less meaning than the text, the pictogram alone is sufficient to ensure the safety of the visitor.

Our second research question concerned the nature of the relationship between the text and the pictogram. If we attempt to apply Reh's (2004) classification of multilingual signage to the alignment between text and pictograms in signs combining both semiotic codes, it becomes clear that there are pronounced differences between interlingual and intersemiotic translation. Whereas there is a strong tendency to use what Reh (2004) has termed duplicating translation, in multilingual signs, (see Table 3), pictograms are rarely fully aligned with the text. Pictograms tend to either complement the verbal part of the sign, which means that there is no alignment of content and no actual "translation", or they constitute some form of fragmentary translation (Reh 2004), where they either explicitate the content of the text, providing additional details, or sum it up more briefly.

However, the reception of pictograms entails yet another type of translatoriality: visitors are expected to translate the iconic content of the pictogram into a tangible, concrete meaning. This inevitably entails some degree of cognitive effort, although the effort is clearly greater with non-standardised pictograms that may be unfamiliar and difficult to interpret. This is particularly pertinent when the text and the pictograms are only partly aligned (where the pictogram provides more information than the text), not aligned or when there is no text.

Nonetheless, even though pictograms require additional effort, an important advantage of their use is that they are intended to provide fundamental accessibility to all visitors regardless of the language, cultural and literacy background. When used successfully, they offer a valuable shortcut for communicating essential safety instructions and other visitor management details.

5 Conclusions

Pictograms always imply translatoriality. They are either instances of intersemiotic translation of the text present on the sign with a picture or, when they are not aligned with the textual content of the sign, they are intersemiotically translated in the mind of the visitor to the visitor's language of choice.

The signage of the two conservation areas analysed in this chapter displays a number of different languages occasionally combined with pictograms in an array of distinct configurations. Whereas interlingual translation is generally characterised by the duplicating translation strategy, very different tendencies are identified in intersemiotic translations. In signs containing text and pictograms, the content expressed by the two semiotic codes tends to be complementary or partially overlapping. Essential visitor management information is generally not only expressed verbally, but also with non-verbal standardized images, pictograms, to ensure access to and understanding of crucial content. The role of pictograms is even more important for visitors who do not speak the local languages, since, especially in Val Rosandra, a considerable portion of the signs do not contain English translations. In such cases, pictograms are the only way to ensure the accessibility and understanding of the message.

The scope of the present study was limited to the linguistic landscape in two specific locations, conservation areas in bilingual settings in Slovenia and Italy. For further insight into the cross-cultural communicative efficiency of the signage analysed, future research into how visitors understand and perceive the different semiotic codes and languages is needed. Nevertheless, border areas, where different cultures and languages naturally come into contact, are important sources of information on how to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers using different forms of translatoriality.

Summary in plain English

Signs in officially bilingual areas, that is, areas with two or more official languages, often display several languages. These signs are also characterized by some type of translation.

These signs also communicate using different sign systems, including pictograms. Pictograms are simplified standardized images used to tell readers what to do or inform them. They are a case of translation between two different types of sign systems, used to simplify the message. This type of translation is called intersemiotic translation.

In this chapter we look at the role of pictograms in signs. We focus on the type of information they express and on the relationship between the text and the pictogram, in two officially bilingual protected areas in Slovenia and Italy.

Notes

[1] The name of the institution is officially bilingual (Slovene–Italian), *Krajinski park Sečoveljske soline – Parco Naturale delle Saline di Sicciole*; in this chapter we will use the Slovene toponym Sečovlje.

[2] The name of the institution is officially bilingual (Italian–Slovene), *Riserva Naturale Val Rosandra – Naravni rezervat Dolina Glinščice*; in this chapter we will use the Italian toponym Val Rosandra.

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