UNIT 3C. EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND (E2U) AND AUDIOVISUAL JOURNALIMS (AVJ)

ELEMENT 2. LINGUISTIC ASPECTS

SIMPLIFYING LANGUAGE AND STYLE OF AUDIOVISUAL JOURNALISTIC TEXTS

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is Unit 3C. Easy to Understand and audiovisual journalism. Element 2. Linguistic aspects. Video lecture: Simplifying language and style of audiovisual journalistic texts.

My name is Rocío Bernabé Caro from the Internationale Hochschule SDI München, in Germany.

Please, do not stop the video at the end, because the video sample with the subtitles will be shown after the end of this video lecture.

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This video lecture discusses how to reduce the complexity of audiovisual journalistic texts while considering the conventions and style of the text type. We use a news item to illustrate the ideas that we present.

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According to scholars such as Meckel and Kamps (1998:11), "broadcasts are a part of a daily communication culture". They aim to update viewers on the latest news.

The product delivered, i.e., the news items, often comprise visual and aural elements that combine and relate to each other to convey a message. These elements can use verbal signs, such as the spoken text, and non-verbal signs, such as images and sounds. Each of these elements is a semantic carrier that makes up the multimodal message of a news item.

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News items fulfil the key function to "aid citizens in becoming informed", as described by Holbert in 2005, p. 511. It is for this reason that audiences grant news the greatest trust among all forms of media presentations.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions also raises awareness about this topic in their guidelines. Moreover, they describe the implicit consequences of a lack of access with these words: "For many people, access to easy-to-read versions of news and other informational materials represent their only way of exercising their democratic right to stay informed." And they add: "The audience for these types of publications is probably larger than that for books."

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Using a simplified language or style in news items does not mean moving away from their informative function.

Simplification principles can support viewers in perceiving and decoding the message. The simplification process would then involve the different modes and signs.

On the one hand, we have information that is conveyed aurally. Verbal, aural information can be text, mostly read aloud by the newsreader, and prosodic features, such as the particular voice used by newsreaders to catch our attention and their speaking rate. Non-verbal, aural information can be sounds, mostly background sounds, and music, such as the jingles and sounds used by broadcasters.

On the other hand, we have information that is conveyed visually. That can be verbal, like text images and video information, and visual effects and supporting pictures or graphics.

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Reducing the complexity of information can be realised by using simplification principles.

Some useful sources that can help us are, for instance, the publication *Information for All* published in 2009 by Inclusion Europe, the recommendations by Plain Language Association International, or the 19 writing recommendations elaborated within the Swedish project Begriplig Text. You can find more information about this project on the Internet at begripligtext.se.

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Linguistically, there are several dimensions of complexity that can be addressed. At a word level, for instance, it is advisable to use common words. That is words that are frequently encountered and used by a general audience. These words are often called "high-frequency words".

Journalistic texts and news items, however, often report on specialised topics and use low-frequency words. A way to reduce their complexity would be to explain the meaning in the narrative or to provide examples. The underlying idea is to make pre-supposed prior knowledge explicit.

Sample 2 of this Unit provides several examples of how to do this. The sample was produced by the Austrian public broadcaster ORF. The news items that they present are in Plain language and offer explanations for low-frequency words.

The word "Kultureinrichtungen" is an example. This word means cultural institutions or organisations. The term can be considered of low frequency because it is less frequently used. Also its range of meaning is broad, which can be an additional hurdle. The broadcaster solved this issue by providing examples of what Kulureinrichtungen are, i.e., theatres and museums.

Indeed, the examples are chosen very wisely, because the next news item in the news is about a theatre in Wien, the Volkstheater. Let's take a look at that one.

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"Volkstheater" is a specific type of theatre. Understanding the meaning requires a specific prior knowledge from a listener. In the sample, this

knowledge is not pre-supposed. Conversely, it is made explicit by defining the term.

A cultural institution in Vienna is the **Volkstheater**.

Volkstheater is an old theatre.

The explicitation is done as in written texts. That is the term to be defined, Volkstheater, is repeated in the next sentence just before explaining it.

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Another example from the same news item is the explanation of the verb "to renovate". First, the term is introduced, then repeated and defined in the next sentences.

The Volkstheater **has been renovated**

in the last few months.

When an old house is **renovated**,

everything is made new.

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Other linguistic recommendations are to avoid abstract words and expressions, to use simple sentences that express one idea, and to follow the canonical sentence order, which in many languages is: Subject-Verb-Object.

One last simplification principle that I would like to outline is the use of repetitions. The use of repetitions is recommended as a strategy to support coherence and help users to stay on track.

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Repetitions in simplification not only occur at a lexical level with repetition of words or key terms as we have seen before. Conversely, repetitions can also occur with images supporting a statement visually or, at a sentence level, by repeating the same patterns.

Let me show you an example from Sample 2, as well. In this case, the news item reports on the COVID restrictions in Austria:

> During curfew hours, **you can**
>
> only **leave your house** for specific reasons.
>
> **You can leave your house** to help someone.
>
> **You can leave your house** to take a walk.

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Cotter stated in 1993, and I quote: [p]rosody is key to defining the broadcast news register. Prosodic features are used in news production purposely to convey a sense of authority, credibility or competence. The aim is to raise listener confidence, which is the "basic mandate of the profession" as expressed by Raymond (2000:355).

Therefore, when producing news, we should also use prosodic features that facilitate understanding while remaining truthful to those in this type of discourse.

The guidelines *Information for All* published by Inclusion Europe already provides some recommendations. Allow me to list here just a few.

Several recommendations related to voicing are:

- The person speaking should have good pronunciation and articulate clearly. The accent should not be too strong.

- The voice should only be speaking about things that people can see on the screen.

- The person reading should read the text in a way that emotions can be perceived.

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With regards to speech rates, volume, and sound several recommendations are:

- That the person speaking should speak slowly.

- The person should leave pauses at sensible points. This way, people can understand the first part before more information is given to them.

- Avoid interferences or background noises.

- The sound should be good, without interferences or background noises.

- The sound should have a good volume, not too loud, and not too quiet.

- And you might use a special sound announcing that the following information is in an accessible format.

Some of these prosody features match those used in journalistic discourse. For instance, the use of a clear voice, enunciating clearly, sounding natural and conversational, using a moderate reading speed, or

adjusting tone for content. Of course, we are aware that each language has its own broadcasting style.

I encourage you to listen to Sample 2 even if you cannot speak German. Try to answer for yourself whether you can identify some of these recommendations from the sound. You can also compare the features you recognise, such as speed, pitch, pronunciation or tone, with those in your own language. Lastly, you can also do this with other aural information like sounds and music, or even the jingle played by the broadcaster.

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"Show and tell" is a strategy that we know from speeches, education, children's books, and also from TV news items. The idea behind is that visual items help listeners understanding the information that is being conveyed aurally. Indeed, we could even consider this strategy as one sort of multimodal repetition.

The example on the screen illustrates this idea. While the newsreader explains that stores will close at 19:00 o'clock at night, the video in the background shows the metal shutters of a café rolling down at night.

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Visual items can serve different functions. For instance, some items may be elements of repetition to support learning and aid retention. Similarly, others may aim to enhance a point, add an explanation, emphasize an idea, or to enhance one's credibility, for instance, with infographics.

Using visuals and aural information is a strategy that is also used in easy-to-read texts. I have compiled some recommendations from different sources in the field. These are, for instance, not to use too many pictures

or graphic elements because it can be confusing. Also, to avoid a slow and fast motion. To use images that have good contrast ratios, to use the same style of images throughout the document, or in this case the audiovisual product, and to use simple graphs or tables.

In Sample 2 we see how this was realised for the Plain Language news. We see, for instance, that all news items are accompanied by video images that illustrate the narrated news items visually.

However, one could argue that there too many images and that they sometimes move quite fast. This could be approached by reducing the number of images altogether, and extending their time on the screen.

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Lastly, Sample 2 also provides and interesting example of how to use visual, non-verbal items to communicate with the audience. In this case, the message communicated is that a news item has ended and that a new one will begin.

The producers have realised this by using a visual item (a red screen) and an acoustic signal (a short jingle). The red screen drops like a curtain while the short jingle plays. This is repeated after each item.

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To sum up, we can say that designing accessible broadcasting news that are easy to read and to understand enables persons with intellectual or reading and learning difficulties to exercise their right to be informed. And that simplified news texts serve the same function as standard journalistic ones.

Current simplification principles already provide guidance in the process, especially if the items are produced following inclusive approaches such as the For All approach presented by Gian Maria Greco and Accessible film-making by Pablo Romero Fresco.
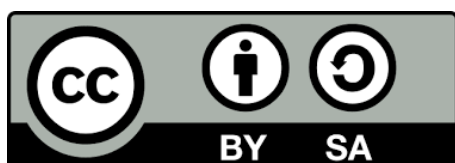
Ok, let's watch the video now.

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This video-lecture has been prepared by Rocío Bernabé Caro from the Internationale Hochschule SDI München, in Germany.

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