



UNIT 2. EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE (E2U)

ELEMENT 4. THE LANGUAGE OF E2U

SYNTACTIC ASPECTS OF E2U

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 2, Easy-to-understand language, in short E2U, Element 4, The language of E2U. Video lecture: Syntactic aspects of E2U. My name is Sergio Hernández from the University of Hildesheim.

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In this short video lecture, I will talk about the syntactic aspects of easy-to-understand language. In this unit, we already had a presentation about the basic rules of easy-to-understand in Element 1. There we covered some rules on the syntactic level. In this presentation, we will go into detail.

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Before beginning with the syntactic aspects of Easy and Plain Language, let me state that these aspects may be language specific. In this

presentation, we focus on aspects that are **not** language specific and that are general principles on the syntactic level for more comprehensibility.

Too long and complex sentences are beyond the reading capacity of the primary target groups. Therefore, the basic rule on the syntactic level is that we avoid long and complex sentences.

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Avoid long sentences: For Easy Language, only independent clauses are used and compound clauses are avoided. This means that adverbial or relative compound clauses have to be transformed into independent clauses.

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For example:

- As an example for an adverbial clauses, we take a conditional clause:
 - Instead of formulating "If you are hungry, eat something.", we can use two independent clauses: "You are hungry? Then eat something".

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- For relative clauses: Instead of formulating "A laptop that costs more than 2000 Euros is too expensive for many people", we can also use two independent clauses: "There are laptops for more than 2000 Euros. These laptops are too expensive for many people".

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- For noun clauses: "There is some doubt as to whether the document is genuine". This can be reformulated in two independent clauses: "Is this document genuine? There is some doubt about this." (Maaß 2020: 112).

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The rule to avoid compound clauses applies to Easy Language. Plain Language may allow some simple forms of compound clauses depending on the target groups.

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Avoid complex sentences: Even sentences that are not long may be complex. This is the case if they shift the information to the noun phrases that are then enriched with adjectives or more noun phrases. In easy-to-understand language, we prefer the verbal style over the nominal style. The verbal style is more comprehensible than nominal style. Therefore, we shift information from the nouns to the verbs.

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For instance, instead of writing "The behaviour of the children in school was not appropriate" it can be said "The children have **not** behaved well in school".

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Coping with negation: Negation markers have to be kept to a minimum in easy-to-understand language, especially in Easy Language. Negation is a rather complex instrument as it talks about non-existent issues.

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When something is negated, it is nonetheless activated in the brains of the audience. If we read the sentence “Do not smoke”, we directly think about the act of smoking.

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Negation is therefore cognitively complex. On the other hand, each language and text needs the possibility to negate. It is not logical and not possible to totally avoid negation in a text. Therefore, if negation markers are used, it can be helpful to use negation markers that are independent words, such as “no” or “not”.

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Markers that are bound morphemes, such as “un-” in “unthinkable” or “less” as in “toothless” are harder to perceive. In German, to increase perceptibility of the negation markers, they are set in bold type.

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Active over passive: On the syntactic level, active voice is preferred over passive voice. Active voice usually indicates who is carrying out an

action which usually is important for the audience to know. For example:
“All schools were closed” instead of “The government closed all schools”.

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In conclusion, on the syntactic level following features of easy-to-understand language can be named:

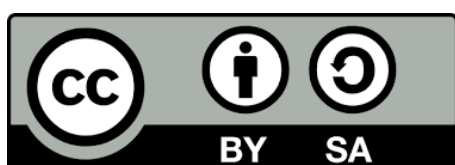
- Independent clauses are preferred over compound clauses.
- Verbal style is used instead of nominal style.
- Negation markers are kept to a minimum. Independent markers are more perceptible than morpheme-bound markers. Bold type can help to increase perceptibility of negation markers.
- Active voice is used instead of passive voice.

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This video lecture has been prepared by Sergio Hernández and Christiane Maaß from the University of Hildesheim. You can reach us at easit@uni-hildesheim.de.

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