



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

ELEMENT 4. THE LANGUAGE OF E2U

PRAGMATIC 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: Pragmatic aspects of E2U. My name is Sergio Hernandez Garrido from the University of Hildesheim.

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In this short video lecture, I will talk about pragmatic aspects of E2U.

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So far, we have talked about comprehensibility. But this is not enough to make content accessible. It is necessary to design accessible texts in a way that the users are able to act on the basis of these texts. To achieve this, readers will not only have to be able to find a text offer, to perceive the text, to comprehend and recall it, but also to accept it. Texts that are not acceptable to the users are usually not action-enabling.

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Acceptability is a pragmatic category.

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Easy-to-understand language, that is, Easy or Plain Language, is a tool for accessible communication. In order to be able to act on the basis of a text offer, users have to perform different steps. According to Rink (2020) and Maaß (2020), in their books written in 2020 content that is accessible should be:

- **Retrievable:** Target groups should be able to retrieve the content.
- **Perceptible:** Target groups should be able to perceive the content with the sensory channels at their disposal.
- **Comprehensible:** Target groups should be able to comprehend the content.
- **Linkable:** Target groups should be able to link the content to previous knowledge. This way it is easier to recall information.
- **Acceptable:** The content should be presented in a way that is acceptable for the target groups.
- And only if it has all these qualities, it is **action-enabling:** Target groups are then able to act on the basis of the accessible content.

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The comprehension process requires cognitive capacity from the users. All the described actions - retrieve, perceive, comprehend, recall, accept - draw on the overall cognitive capacity. If the capacity of the text users is



not enough to master all these steps, these users will not be able to act on the basis of the content given in a text. Each single step can be obstructed by communication barriers. We talked about the barriers in the lecture on the target groups. If a text is not acceptable, users might quit reading it or consume a lot of their comprehension capacity to deal with the acceptability issue. Reduced acceptability is therefore harmful to the usefulness of a text offer.

But reduced acceptability is also a burden to inclusion. Accessible communication products should facilitate inclusion; not add to the stigma of communication impairments. Therefore, it is of great importance to take the text quality of being acceptable into consideration for accessible communication products.

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Acceptability of easy-to-understand language.

Among the easy-to-understand languages, it is especially Easy Language that has an acceptability issue. For that reason, in this presentation, we focus on acceptability.

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Texts may have an acceptability issue on different levels. The problem may be on the side of the target text. In this case, the Easy Language version has features that reduce its acceptability for parts of the primary target groups and / or for the secondary target groups, that is, for the majority society or for professionals that work with the primary target groups, for example doctors or administrative staff.



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But also, the source texts, that is, the original version of a text in standard language or expert language may have an acceptability issue. These issues need to be identified and addressed for the Easy Language version.

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Reduced Acceptability of the Source Texts

The source texts may have an acceptability issue. According to Lang, for people with reading difficulties, written texts usually represent a motivation barrier. Often, they have lived through many years of frustrating experiences with written texts, for example from the legal or medical context. Those texts are often too hard for them to understand. Such texts are barriers to those readers for a number of reasons: they contain a linguistic barrier, but also an expert barrier, an expert language barrier and perhaps a cognitive barrier. We addressed the topic of communication barriers when talking about the target groups of easy-to-understand language. What is more, they might have had negative previous experience in trying to communicate with the authorities. They might have been inadequately addressed.

- Authorities might have stressed the power gap in the communication.
- They might have used language that was too hard to understand or impolite.
- They might have urged users to comply with their decisions without telling them what other choices might have had.

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This may lead to negative emotions. In this situation, the negative emotions draw on the cognitive capacities in the comprehension process and make it even harder for the users to comprehend and act on the basis of a text. E2U can be a way out: It can open a communicative channel with users in their communication with experts, for example, in the legal or medical field.

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Enhanced Acceptability of the E2U Texts.

One of the tasks of easy-to-understand texts is to make communication or even reading itself more acceptable. This is done by making the texts amicable and approachable through their layout and imagery. You will learn more about this aspect in lectures in this unit about the discourse and visual presentation of E2U.

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Plain Language lays a major focus on acceptability, sometimes even more than on comprehensibility. This is the context of efforts on “citizen-oriented language”, a subconcept in the framework of the Plain Language concept. “Citizen-oriented language” is a German Plain Language approach that makes public authorities approachable by using Plain Language that is meant to be comprehensible, but most of all client- and service-oriented. There are similar in many other languages, such as “lenguaje ciudadano” or “lenguaje claro” in the Spanish-speaking world; just to cite one example.



Such E2U texts do not stress the asymmetry in the communication process. They address citizens with great politeness. They are very careful to tell the users if they must, can or should carry out an action. They explain and give reasons instead of postulating and demanding.

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At the same time, Plain Language texts adhere to standard expectations with regard to layout and imagery. They do not use all available strategies to enhance comprehensibility. Plain Language texts are often quite close to the standard. Therefore, they are often not perceptible and comprehensible enough for persons with communication impairment.

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Reduced Acceptability may trigger stigmatisation processes

Easy Language is used in the context of communication impairment. Communication impairment is exposed to stigmatisation. Easy Language texts can trigger stigmatisation processes. This is especially true if they are not executed in an acceptable way. This is regularly the case if texts look very different from the standard.

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For example,

- if they are directed towards a grown-up audience but use images that rather address children. We will go into this in the lecture of this unit about images in E2U.



- or if they reduce grammar and lexical structures so much that the texts come into conflict with orthography or grammar rules. Such texts can really stigmatise the users and trigger a very negative response from the secondary target groups.

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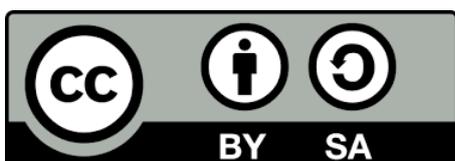
Such instruments have to be used very carefully or not at all, even if they are part of some practical Easy Language guidelines. Plain Language texts are usually much more acceptable in this respect. Users often do not even note that they are comprehensibility-enhanced. But they are not easy enough for all users, especially not for those with more pronounced forms of impairment. Maaß proposes in her book published in 2020 a language variety that balances comprehensibility and acceptability: Easy Language Plus. Easy Language Plus is very close to Easy Language, but avoids the features that are known to reduce acceptability.

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