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

ELEMENT 4. THE LANGUAGE OF E2U

LEXICAL ASPECTS OF E2U

Video Lecture Transcript

Slide 1

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

Slide 2

In this short video lecture, I will talk about lexical aspects of Easy-to-understand language. How we have been doing in this Unit, we will depart from Easy Language and then move towards Plain Language.

Slide 3

General Characteristics of Easy Language Vocabulary

Unknown words are a hazard for comprehensibility. Therefore, Easy Language uses the central vocabulary of a natural language.

Slide 4

The words that may be used have the following characteristics. They are

- short

- accurate and

- frequently used.

- They occur in everyday language

Slide 5

- And can be assumed as known by the groups

- They are learnt early in life or in the process of secondary language acquisition

- And they are unlearnt late in case of language degradation processes (like dementia)

Words that do not match this list will have to be explained or exemplified in the text. Words cannot be presupposed as known if they do not occur in the everyday life of the users. This is often the case for expert texts of all kinds (for example, on legal or health issues).

Slide 6

But there are exceptions: People with disabilities often have knowledge on the discourse around disability and often know lexical items on this topic that go beyond average basic vocabulary, as this topic belongs to their everyday lives.

Slide 7

Explanations / Exemplifications of vocabulary

Vocabulary that is presumed to be unknown to the users has to be explained or exemplified. This is especially true for printed or online written texts. Easy Language in time-based media formats might have other requirements. Subtitles, for example, do not always allow for word explanations due to their restrictions of time and space. In any text format, the number of explanations given in a single text must be limited and must comply to the processing capacity of the users. This processing capacity may be limited due to their condition, for example due to a cognitive impairment.

Slide 8

Explanations can be given in or against the reading direction.

Slide 9

In reading direction means, the unknown word comes first and is followed by the explanation:

For example:

The festival was in Hannover.

Hannover is a town in Northern Germany.

Slide 10

Against reading direction means a concept is explained in the text and the term is given in the end. The reader has to find the explanation of a term in what was said before; thus, the reading direction changes.

For example:

> Perhaps your arms and legs feel stiff.

> Or your muscles are aching.

> Your doctor calls this: rigor.

Slide 11

Explanations can be singled out from the text through the layout, for example with indents (like in the case of the Hannover example). Or through text boxes. In Online-Texts, there are other possibilities like Mouse-over-boxes or drop-down lists.

Slide 12

Avoid synonyms

Easy-to-understand language avoids synonyms. The same concepts are rendered with the same words. This is also true for verbs and text connectors: always use "therefore" to express causality. Do not exchange "therefore" with "that's why" or "hence". Stylistic variation is no strategy to be followed for Easy Language. To use the same words for the same concepts reduces the processing effort for the users.

Slide 13

What to do about Metaphors?

Metaphors are linguistic images that illustrate certain concepts. In standard texts, they are often used as stylistic elements. Metaphors may not be used in Easy Language if they are not known to the users and are not intuitively clear from the text content. On the other hand, metaphors may be used if they allow the users to concretely grasp abstract content.

Slide 14

For example: "Plain Language" is a metaphor. „Plain" literally refers to a surface that is even. "Plain" as in "Plain Language" is used metaphorically and means "without heights and depths, very simple and straightforward". Nonetheless, this metaphor is easy to understand and illustrates well the concept to make complex content accessible. In this case, the metaphor makes an abstract concept, that is, the degree of complexity of a language, easy to grasp.

Slide 15

"To smell a rat" in the meaning of "to become suspicious" is also a metaphor. But in order to understand it, it has to be learnt. Its meaning cannot be derived directly from the text and it may thus cause difficulties. Such metaphors are only used if central for the text. This rules also generally apply for Plain Language, but a bigger range of vocabulary can be presupposed as known by the intended audience. With this slide we end this presentation about lexical aspects about E2U.
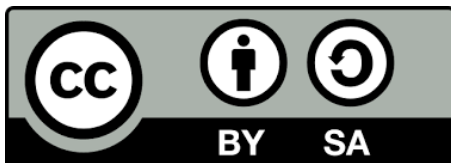
Slide 16

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.

Partners: