



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

ELEMENT 2. LEGISLATION, STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

E2U IN GERMANY: OVERVIEW AND LEGAL SITUATION

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 2, Easy-to-understand language, in short E2U, Element 2, Legislation, standards, and guidelines. Video lecture: Easy-to-understand language in Germany: overview and legal situation. My name is Christiane Maaß from the University of Hildesheim.

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We will talk about the situation of easy-to-understand language in Germany in two video lectures. In this first video, we will give an overview about the German concept of easy-to-understand language. We will give insight into the fields where easy-to-understand language is already used and where more Easy Language material is needed. This video will end with an overview on important legal milestones.

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In the second video, we will talk about the German situation in research. We will talk about the existing practical and scientific guidelines. Then we will go into more detail with regard to the German easy-to-understand language rules. This topic will be a bit longer than the others, as it covers more aspects than the other videos and treats the situation of easy-to-understand language in Germany from different viewpoints. Therefore, we have created two videos to cover this topic.

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In Germany, easy-to-understand language is differentiated in Easy Language and Plain Language. Easy Language is strictly normed and is maximally comprehensible. Plain Language is not as strictly normed, but covers an area of different complexity stages. It can be adapted to the target groups and the respective target situation.

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Let's have a look at the different areas of application. Easy-to-understand language, especially Easy Language, is widely implemented in legal and administrative communication. This situation has evolved on the basis of the legal situation in Germany that privileges Easy Language. We will talk about the legislation in a short while.

On the basis of the legislation passed on federal level, federal agencies of all kinds, but also federal states have to offer Easy Language on their homepages and there are projects to translate legal and administrative information into Easy Language. Especially on municipal and local level,

there are many interaction texts, for example, municipal services, available in Easy Language.

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Political participation is another field where many Easy Language texts are available: polling information, programmes of political parties, explanations of the German political system, news from different news media etc.

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News are actually available in Easy as well as in Plain Language. An example for a regular Easy Language news offer are the daily news of the North German Broadcasting Association. If you are interested, you can visit their homepage and see how they provide this service.

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Offers in the field of public health are also growing. In this field, it is especially Plain and not Easy Language that is used.

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Still quite rare are multimodal services in Easy Language, but there are examples like the fairytales in Easy Language and sign language. Literature in Easy Language is very rare in Germany and there is no state funding in place to promote such offers.

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Very active are museums, that open to a broad and diverse audience and increasingly offer Easy Language.

But there are many other contexts where information in easy-to-understand language needed and wished for by the target groups, but still lacking.

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In the field of legislation, the central pillar is the Federal Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities, in German Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz or short BGG. This law was first passed in 2002 and amended in 2016 and 2018. The 2016 version contains a paragraph on Comprehensibility and Easy Language that became effective in January 2018.

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This paragraph states “[...] that official notices, general rulings, public law contracts and forms should on request be explained in Plain Language and, if it does not suffice, in Easy Language” (BGG 2016 § 11, Maaß 2020: 60).

That means, Easy as well as Plain Language are mentioned and we can see the continuum of comprehensibility, the different stages of complexity, that we mentioned before. Authorities may try with Plain Language first, but if this doesn’t work, they have to go for Easy Language.

Paragraph 11 is limited to certain text types of legal communication and to persons with cognitive and psychological disabilities. Nevertheless, this law has boosted the implementation of easy-to-understand language in Germany.

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The Federal Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities is implemented through different regulations. The most important for Easy Language is the Accessible Information Technology Regulation, in German *Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung (BITV 2.0)* in its version from 2011. It regulates the accessibility of websites, mobile apps, e-government tools and graphical interfaces. This regulation states that every federal agency has to have Easy Language offers on their homepages. In addition, the BITV 2.0 contains an appendix with 13 basic rules for the creation of Easy Language content. This makes the Accessible Information Technology Regulation an important promoter of Easy Language in Germany.

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On a rather political-administrative level, there are the National Action Plans that were drafted in 2011 and 2016 to concretely implement the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, short UN CRPD, on a national level. They contain many measures evolving around communicative accessibility in general, among which Easy Language. The National Action Plans for the implementation of the UN CRPD is not a binding document, but rather a letter of intent. Nevertheless, its implementation is being monitored and Easy Language is mentioned several times. You can find more information about the UN CRPD in the

video lecture of Unit 1 “Easy-to-understand language”, Element 2
“Legislation, standards, and guidelines”, video lecture “Legislation
(international perspective).

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Plain Language, on the other hand, is mentioned in the National Action Plan Health Literacy passed in 2018 as a means to improve health literacy of the broader population, especially the vulnerable groups that tend to have reduced health literacy and are disproportionately often faced also with communication difficulties. The main idea of the National Action Plan Health Literacy is that health literacy can only develop on the basis of accessible health information. Plain Language is seen as the tool of choice to achieve this goal.

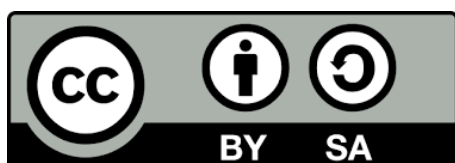
We will continue talking about the research on Easy and Plain language and the rulesets used in Germany in our next presentation.

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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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