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**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication**

**TRANSLATING INTO PLAIN AND EASY-TO-READ LANGUAGE:  
THE ROLE OF LINGUISTICS**

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**Abstract**

The essay deals with questions of development of the skill of translating into Plain and Easy-to-Read Language in the education of teachers of German as a foreign language at a pedagogical university. Mastering the skill translating into Plain and Easy-to-Read Language forms an important part of the modern training of future foreign language teachers. Their expertise in translating standard and special texts into Plain and Easy-to-Read Language is particularly relevant nowadays, because the number of people with a migratory background in Europe has increased enormously in recent years. The language of official and technical texts corresponds to the C1-C2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Foreign language teachers need to master techniques for text editing to transform standard language into Plain and Easy-to-Read one, its linguistically simplified version, which corresponds approximately to the A2-B1 level. The focus of this essay is on the role of linguistics, which in the context of foreign language didactics is regarded as an important prerequisite for the promotion of this skill in German as a foreign language teaching at the university. Knowledge of grammar, especially syntax, and text linguistics is of great importance. Knowledge of stylistic synonymy as well as style levels and of lexicology, diaphasic and diastratic varieties of vocabulary, is required. In this essay various proposals for translating into Plain and Easy-to-Read Language of future teachers of German as foreign language master program at the Moscow Pedagogical State University are presented.

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## 1. Introduction

In the modern life of many countries, the terms “Plain Language” and “Easy-to-Read Language” (P/E Language) play an important role. Both concepts are increasingly becoming public awareness. Not only in administration, public authorities and companies, but also in inclusive and normal foreign language teaching P/E Language is gaining importance. The term “Easy-to-Read Language” has become part of foreign language didactics (Digitales Lexikon Fremdsprachendidaktik, n.d.). Bredel and Maass (2016) write that “Easy-to-Read Language” would have a scaffolding function in a didactic perspective. It would be a framework that allows further learning (p. 43).

Proceeding from this thesis, one can consider translating texts into P/E Language as a special teacher supportive measure, as scaffolding. But in foreign language teacher training, the process is not yet sufficiently anchored.

At the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the Moscow Pedagogical State University, future German as a foreign language teachers are taught in the main subject (English teacher as minor) and in the minor subject (English teacher in the main subject). German as a foreign language is studied in the teaching profession as part of a bachelor and master degree program. According to the curricula, the students have the subjects of pedagogy, psychology and foreign language didactics. The students are taught in linguistics: basics of linguistics, also theoretical grammar, phonology, lexicology, stylistics of German and English; at the same time they have lessons of German as a foreign language. Students who choose German as their major subject already have a good command of language: they have learned German in schools.

The following essay argues that the development of the skill of translating into P/E Language should play a special role in the training of foreign language teachers in the master's program. This skill should be taught to future teachers of German in lessons of German as a foreign language.

## 2. Problem Statement

The focus of this essay is the role of linguistic knowledge, which students must have in their first language as a prerequisite for learning and acquiring the skill of translating into P/E Language. This skill is not isolated but practiced in conjunction with the promotion of reading and writing skills in foreign language. Thus, the focus of this study is on questions of obtaining linguistic knowledge and good reading and writing skills in foreign language teaching.

Mastery of translating into P/E Language should be an important part of the modern education of future foreign language teachers throughout Europe. Their expertise in translating of standard and special texts into P/E Language is particularly relevant nowadays, as the number of people with a migratory background in Europe has increased enormously in recent years.

Foreign language teachers must be proficient in text editing techniques by which the standard language in P/E Language, i.e. their linguistically simplified version, is transformed, which corresponds approximately to the A1-A2 level.

### **3. Research Questions**

Lately, many works have appeared addressing the phenomenon of P /E Language (see Apel-Jösch, 2018; Bock, 2014, 2017, 2019; Bock et al., 2017; Bredel & Maass, 2016; Fix 2017; Fiedler-Rauer, 2019; Kellermann 2014; Linz, 2020; Pottmann, 2019; Schuppener 2020; Vollenwyder et al., 2018; Winter, 2010). The following work should contribute to the study of didactic aspects of handling with the P/E Language.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this essay is to show what linguistic knowledge master students should have in developing the language skills of translating of official and technical texts into P/E Language.

Accordingly, the main part of the paper presents linguistic areas that provide a necessary foundation for building this skill. The knowledge of text linguistics (text grammar and stylistics), including the knowledge of stylistic synonymy as well as style layers and colorations, is of great importance. The knowledge of lexicology is not to be underestimated: especially understanding of diaphasic and diastratic varieties of vocabulary.

### **5. Research Methods**

Observation and description are used as the main general scientific methods of research, which allows us to register certain features of the research object. A structural method is used to describe actually observed linguistic phenomena.

### **6. Findings**

#### **6.1. Definition of Plain and Easy-to-Read Language**

The terms “Plain Language” and “Easy-to-Read Language” are not clearly distinguished. Easy-to-Read Language texts can also be described as Plain Language texts. Easy-to-Read Language is a specially regulated, very plain language and Plain Language can be interpreted as Easy-to-Read Language. In both cases these are functional varieties of language, which is nowadays perceived as a particular social manifestation of language, which appears as an opposition of the difficult language. At present there are political demands to establish both forms of language as their own additional offer of everyday language.

##### **6.1.1. Easy-to-Read Language**

Easy-to-Read Language also means a certain kind of language usage. Texts in easy language are aimed at heterogeneous target groups: foreigners, “people who do not speak German so well” (German learners or 'migrants') (Bock, 2014, p. 19). In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, people with reading difficulties, who are his addressees, seek to participate active of society and politics. Different types of texts, especially such as party programs, leases, and Bible texts are written in Easy-to-Read Language.

Easy-to-Read Language is a written communication system, a special language that is not only related to the sphere of disability, it is part of language learning. Visual signals of Easy-to-Read Language are short main sentences, sentence ellipses, and compound words written with a hyphen.

Easy-to-Read Language has a codified standard. In 2009, a comprehensive set of rules on Easy-to-Read Language was created. Nowadays, Easy-to-Read Language texts are based on the rules of the “Netzwerk Leichte Sprache“ catalog (Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, 2013). Their disadvantage is that the suggestions contained there are intuitively developed and only recently subjected to a linguistic review (Bock, 2019).

### **6.1.2. Plain Language**

There is no codification for Plain Language, there are no fixed rules. In contrast to the Easy-to-Read Language, it is characterized by Kellermann as a more complex language style, design is not strictly defined. The sentences are of medium length, subordinate clauses and even more difficult terms are used, only unnecessary foreign words are avoided. “The visual appearance of text and image are also less strictly regulated” (Kellermann, 2014, p. 7). Significant is also larger font, but paragraphs after punctuation and sentence sections are not mandatory. Plain Language texts are aimed at people with limited language skills, and are helpful to foreign language learners. The Plain Language concept includes two components of text adaptation: the linguistic modification of a text so that it is easier to read, but without changing the content, and the simplification of texts both at the linguistic and the content level.

In this essay the nuances between Easy-to-Read Language and Plain Language are renounced and the term “Plain and Easy-to-Read Language” (P /E Language) is used.

### **6.1.3. Translating of texts in P /E Language as a language teaching skill**

The term “translating” means in the translation studies transferring the meaning of a mostly written text in a source language into a target language.

Translating of texts in P /E Language is a linguistic simplification of texts. This activity is a specific process because it is an intra-lingual transfer, i.e. linguistic signs of a language are replaced by other signs of the same language. Texts retranslated from standard German into linguistically simplified German: a particular content is rendered in a different functional language variety.

## **6.2. Plain and Easy-to-Read Language from a linguistic point of view**

For a long time, P /E Language was used independently of basic scientific research. It was not until 2016 that a conference titled “Leichte Sprache im Spiegel theoretischer und angewandter Forschung” (“Easy-to-Read Language in the mirror of theoretical and applied research”) took place in Leipzig, at which scientists from various disciplines dealing with P /E Language participated for the first time.

In 2018, the subject was presented at a GAL conference “Was ist leicht, was ist schwer zu lesen und zu verstehen? – Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven, Methoden, Desiderate” (“What is easy, what is hard to read and understand? - Interdisciplinary perspectives, methods, desiderata”) in Essen. Thereafter, the linguistic

findings of the project named LeiSA were prepared and published for practical recommendations (Bock, 2019).

The linguistic basis for translating into P/E Language is primarily knowledge of text linguistics and stylistics, because P/E Language is mainly present in the form of texts.

### **6.2.1. Text level: text linguistics / text stylistics**

In the German as a foreign language education in Russia, the functional stylistics grown out of the Prague structural school and further developed by the Soviet linguist Elise Riesel plays an important role (Riesel & Schendels, 1975). It is based on the recognition that different areas of communication are characterized by their typical linguistic expressions, which are referred to as styles. There are five communication areas or functional style types: everyday, media, science, public and literary communication. Functional styles are: style of everyday speech, style of the press and journalism, style of science, style of the authorities or administration (style of office) and style of fiction. The concept of the style feature is of importance, which is a selection of individual stylistic devices that signalize the reader a particular text value. The term serves to determine the texts of various functional styles.

In the context of the P/E Language, texts of official communication are most important. The social function of the style is to enable official communication between public authorities, public organizations and the population based on official documents, official communications, codes and regulations. Such texts require even for native speakers of simplification, one wishes a citizen-friendly language. The texts are used to transmit official information, their necessary style features are: 1. impersonality and objectivity, 2. compact brevity, 3. clarity. Because of various excesses (accumulation of difficult analytical constructions, bombast) the term “official style” is often used with pejorative coloring (bureaucratic style) (Conrad, 1985, p. 24).

The style goes back to the old German chancellery style, because of its clumsiness, it is also called “paper German language”. Official style texts are a particular challenge for translating into P/E Language at all language levels.

In the style of the press and journalism, whose texts are also in the foreground of a language community, that needs P/E Language, a distinction is made between independent genres, e.g. message, commentary, reportage, interview, etc. The texts contain current information; these are mass media that contribute to public opinion in a special way. The texts are characterized by specific stylistic features. The metaphor / metonymy plays a major role in the texts of the press and journalism as a means of expressivity and also as a means of textual progression (Malá, 2003, p. 75). Their transformation into “normal” expressions is necessary when translating the texts into P/E Language.

Text linguistics attempts to refine the classification of functional style types by distinguishing between different types of text styles within the five communication areas (everyday communication, official communication, special communication, mass media, fiction). Based on the function of texts, they are divided into: expository (explanatory), narrative and argumentative texts. Describing expository (explanatory) texts, entertaining and forming narrative texts, argumentative texts are persuasive.

When translating in P/E Language it is important to find out which text type the source text belongs to in order to determine its essential characteristics and ideas. The texts are assigned to a text type

on the basis of their characteristic features. Texts are “patterns of linguistic communication” (see Brinker, 2010, p. 120). The terms “text pattern” and “text type” are not equivalents according to FIX, the text types are bound to specific given text patterns by combining features (Fix et al., 2002, p. 26). For the determination of text types, not only text-internal, but also text-external features should be used.

In order to reconcile terms of text linguistics with those of functional stylistics, the most important types of text can be determined within the functional styles described above, which include socially relevant P/E Language texts. These are texts of the official (the administrative) language: official documents, e.g. tax returns, leases, etc.; publicist texts: especially news and election programs.

A special feature of P/E Language texts as target texts of translation in P/E Language is that they are structurally similar to each other. They are similar in style to simplicity and clarity as well as grammatical and lexical simplicity and primitiveness. Many essential characteristics of a text type are deleted when translating in P/E Language, the text type of a target text is not clearly definable. For this reason translators should indicate at the beginning of a P/E Language text which text type the text is. It is also recommended to describe the task of the text (Bock, 2019, p. 31).

An important concept of text linguistics is the term “text structure”: one differentiates the external structure (the architectonics) and the internal structure (the composition), because the text structure is intervened in the transformation of the difficult texts into P/E Language texts. The textual theme is explored by coherence (structural) and cohesion of the text (logical).

### **6.2.2. Sentence level: syntax**

One should also have syntactical knowledge when translating in P/E Language. Simple sentences and short sentence structures should be preferred in an P/E Language text. The sentences that have only the necessary parts of a sentence (subject, predicate with possible valence actants) are considered simple sentences. The subject should initiate the sentence and the predicate should follow him. As a rule, phrases encompass 3-5 words, namely the grammatically necessary and the informatively most important ones (e.g., time and place information). A sentence should contain only one thought. But in the dictionary of the workbook in Easy-to-Read Language (Bundesministerium für Finanzen, n.d.) definitions are given that do not meet these requirements, e.g. you can read: *Zölle sind Abgaben, also Geld, das man zahlen muss. Zum Beispiel, wenn man Waren in einem Land kauft, das nicht im Europäischen Binnenmarkt ist.* If the first sentence is simple, the second sentence is difficult because it contains two subordinate clauses. A coded language with a subordinate clause should be avoided.

### **6.2.3. Word level: lexicology / word formation / phraseology**

Lexicology and vocabulary also plays an important role in translation. The simply words to be used are structurally simple (simplizia), known (native) and everyday (concrete) words, e.g.: *Ein anderes Wort für Bundes-Kabinett ist Bundes-Regierung.* The words that have more than three syllables can cause difficulty in understanding meaning. A term should be expressed in one word, e.g.: *Der Solidaritäts-Zuschlag wird auch Soli genannt. Der Soli beträgt 5,5 Prozent von der Lohn-Steuer.* Difficult words, which can't be dispensed with, are made clear, e.g.: *Arbeit-Nehmer müssen Lohn-Steuer bezahlen.* They are explained at the end of an article in a dictionary.

Simple verbs are particularly strongly recommended part of speech: Verbal-style representations have a more lively appearance. In verbal style there is a tendency to use as many dynamic verbs as possible and to avoid verbal nouns and other nominalizations.

Characteristic features of the simple words are objectivity, uniqueness, accuracy, precision, completeness (no abbreviations and short words) and conceptual sharpness. Word forms in genitive case, passive voice, subjunctive mood should be avoided. Pictorial means of speech (tropes such as metaphors, hyperbolas, etc.) are completely taboo.

Another important aspect is semantization, i.e. understanding of the meaning of abstract words for P/E Language texts. e.g., the word *Steuergesetz* is defined in the DUDEN as follows: *besonders die Erhebung von Steuern betreffendes steuerrechtliches Gesetz* (Duden, n.d.). The definition is not informative for P/E Language addressees, texts in P/E Language can't use such explanations: the translators should create simple definitions: e.g., *Steuer-Gesetze. Darin steht, wer Steuern bezahlt*. Another example is: According to DUDEN, *Einkommensteuer ist von jemandes Einkommen erhobene Steuer* (Duden, n.d.). In this case, the P/E Language addressees should also look up the word *Einkommen* in the dictionary: *Einkommen ist Summe der [regelmäßigen] Einnahmen in einem bestimmten Zeitraum* (Duden, n.d.). Again, this definition is not easy. A solution would be the following example: *Die Einkommen-Steuer ist eine Geld-Summe. Man muss sie bezahlen, wenn man Geld verdient. Zum Beispiel wenn man Gehalt für die Arbeit kriegt*. The meaning of the word is explained with two simple sentences.

The foreign words that can't be avoided should be explained in German words. Thus they are presented in the dictionary of the workbook in Easy-to-Read Language as follows: e.g.: *Kommune. Kommune ist ein lateinisches Wort. Hier bedeutet es Stadt oder Gemeinde* (Bundesministerium für Finanzen, n.d.).

Word formation as a special sub-discipline of linguistics should not be underestimated when translating. It plays a role in the analysis of the structure of multi-compound words. The decomposition of such words into immediate constituents is necessary for their clarification. Compounds are written with a hyphen: e.g. *Steuer-Gesetze, Digital-Steuer*. If morphological analysis is a simple carve-out of morphemes in a word, word-formation analysis is a constituent analysis (UK analysis) of immediate constituent organization, which is mostly a binary division. Three components are not allowed: e.g. *Einkommen-Steuer-Erklärung, Kraft-Fahrzeug-Steuer*.

As far as phraseology is concerned, phraseologisms are a particular problem area in terms of P/E Language. They should not appear in P/E Language texts. A rule of the P/E Language is: Avoid phrases. This means that learners must have the basics of language skills before being taught the phraseologisms. Especially the idioms, whose meaning is transferred, can be difficult for foreign language learners with little language skills, because they can translate every word of the idiom, they do not understand what it means. If e.g. a politician is called a "harter Hund", it does not mean that he is compared to a dog. It simply means that the politician is a hardliner. Teachers should master the skill of replacing idioms at the beginner level with free phrases (such as *kompromissloser Mann* instead of *harter Hund*).

However, texts of the administrative language are distinguished by the preferential use of the verbal stretched forms, also called functional verb structures (*zur Beurteilung gelangen, in Widerspruch*

*greaten*), in which the meaning is shifted from the verb to a noun and the verb itself functions as a function verb. Function verbs are verbs that have lost their original meaning. They are assigned by Burger (2003) the collocations, they form “the most regular subgroup of noun-verb collocation” (p. 52). It is therefore recommended to transform the function verb structures into simple verbs, e.g. *Verzichtleisten* → *verzichten*.

At this point it can be summed up that the results of linguistic research, especially the disciplines text linguistics / text stylistics (text level), syntax (sentence level) and lexicology (word level), are relevant for the promotion of translating into P /E Language in foreign language teaching. This means that foreign language teaching must be based on knowledge of linguistics.

## 7. Conclusion

The concept of P /E Language should be more important not only in inclusive education but also in general foreign language teaching. The development of translation skills in P /E Language should be relevant in the training of foreign language teachers.

It must also be clear that translating into P /E Language is, from a linguistic point of view, a linguistic impoverishment, a focus on pure information transfer, the lost of connotative content through cuts. However, the conveyance of factual information without secondary meanings corresponds to the concept of P /E Language.

The topic of P /E Language could be further explored in terms of its linguistic value. And foreign language teaching offers the opportunity to observe and analyze the phenomenon of P /E Language in practice. In order to understand P /E Language texts well and to fulfill their function, linguistic knowledge alone is not enough. For written texts, graphics (visual design) are important: images, illustrations, drawings, photos and text, such as font size, line length and page layout. If you are staging a fairy tale in P /E Language, you should think of musical accompaniment, songs, costumes, play, gestures, facial expressions and so on.

Nevertheless, linguistics should be more present as an academic discipline in the German teacher training curriculum. Results of linguistic research and language theories make a significant contribution to the training of foreign language teachers.

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