Goranka Rocco

Einfache Sprache in practice: an empirical view of clause connecting modalities

The study „*Einfache Sprache in der Praxis*: *ein empirischer Blick auf die Modalitäten der Satzverknüpfung*" departs from the question how general recommendations regarding the phrase structure of *Einfache Sprache* (Plain Language) are put into practice. The relevance of the issue derives from the fact that the syntactic principles of *Einfache Sprache* (Plain Language), especially in comparison to the strictly normed variety *Leichte Sprache* (Easy language/Easy-to-read) (cfr. Bredel/Maaß 2016a/b; Maaß 2020), are formulated vaguely and in part intuitively, leaving a lot of scope for variation within text production and/or intralingual translation. In order to approach the desideratum of a more comprehensive empirical investigation of *Einfache Sprache*, especially with regard to its syntactic features, but also to the general problems of complexity reduction at different levels, the study explores several aspects of connectivity. Particular attention is paid to the use of sentence connectors (especially subjunctors) and the related topological aspects, without neglecting the semantic relationships between the clauses and the effects of the text function.

The corpus is divided into two subcorpora: the news texts published on the website *nachrichtenleicht.de* providing news in *Einfache Sprache* within a period of 6 months (March-August 2020) and the *nachrichtenleicht*-dictionary articles in *Einfache Sprache*, available on the same website.

The results of this first, explorative analysis of the use of *Einfache Sprache* point in the direction of a dynamic, evolving variety which shows complexity-reducing efforts by means of strategies also proposed for and observable in *Leichte Sprache*, such as a tendency to express semantic relations of causality and concessivity by means of paratactical structures, i. e. using adverbial connectors (*deshalb*) or asyndetic structures (explanative use of a colon) on the one hand, but also a relatively high frequency of some subjunctors (*wenn, weil, damit*) and sporadic appearance of other subjunctors (*nachdem*, *solange*, *als ob*, *obwohl*) and of non-canonical positions on the other: tendencies which clearly distinguish it from the syntactic rules of *Leichte Sprache* in the sense of the Hildesheimer Regelwerk (Bredel/Maaß 2016a/b).

In summary, there is evidence of tendencies towards syntactic simplification, but sometimes also of an increase in complexity induced by attempts of simplification. Some problems seem to arise from the fundamental difficulty of implementing different principles of complexity reduction at the same time and refer, more generally, to the fundamental question of how to deal with linguistic and extra-linguistic complexity.

References

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