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Diversity in Communication

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Hi ChatGPT, Translate This Text into Easy Language: Is the New Easy Language Translator a Machine?

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We are surrounded by dysfunctional texts that are burdened with various communication barriers: They are not where we are looking for them, they are written in fonts that are too small, they are completely incomprehensible or unacceptable. Such texts make it difficult for us to act based on them and they need editing. Removing communication barriers is a form of translation. Accessible communication recognises and accommodates the diversity of communication partners. This diversity can be the result of differing interests and expertise in certain areas, differing educational opportunities, stressful life events such as flight or migration, but also disability. In recent years, accessible communication has become a major issue in Europe and around the world: Approaches include Easy Language, Plain Language, subtitling for the hearing impaired, text-to-speech interpreting, sign language interpreting, and audio description for the blind. An expert field has emerged here: It encompasses a labour market, study programmes, and scientific research. Recently, a new player has been added: artificial intelligence. Machine translation – between different languages, but also intralingually between different levels of comprehensibility – has recently improved enormously in quality. What does it entail that machine translation has become part of the field of accessible communication? Are human translators still necessary and what is their role? Who can use machine translation and for what? How is the field of accessible communication changing as a result? In this invited plenary talk of the XLIV VAKKI Symposium, held on 8-9 February 2024 at the University of Vaasa, I focus on Easy Language translation and try to find at least a preliminary answer to this question: Is the new Easy Language translator a machine?

Keywords: accessible communication, AI translation systems, Easy Language, machine translation

1 Diversity in Communication

The topic of the XLIV VAKKI Symposium, "Diversity in Communication", aligns perfectly with my core research interests:

- How is successful communication possible in the context of diversity?
- How can communication barriers be overcome – in the most diverse situations, between the most diverse communication partners, with the most diverse tools and resources?

My focus is on accessible communication (as outlined in our handbook, Maaß & Rink 2020; 2024), including translation into Easy Language (a state of the art in Maaß 2015; 2020; 2024a; 2024b, but see also Bredel & Maaß 2016a; Maaß & Schwengber 2022).

For my lecture, I am focussing on a new partner: AI tools for machine translation. People have been dreaming of having translations done by machines since the late 1940s (Hutchins 1995). For a few years now, the programmes have been so good that they can actually do translation work (Nitzke & Hansen-Schirra 2021).

The question is: how does machine translation perform in Easy Language translation? How is it currently being used, and is this development beneficial or a cause for concern? Where are we heading? I will discuss what successful communication looks like and how barriers can arise, but also how translation can remove barriers from communication. Next, I will outline the field of Easy Language translation as it is today, and position machine translation using AI tools in this context. In this way, I will try to provide an answer to the question formulated in the title: Is the new Easy Language translator a machine?

2 Communication Barriers and Accessible Communication

Over the past 10 years, we have developed a model in Hildesheim that we call the Hildesheim Staircase. This model has recently been presented in our "Handbook of Accessible Communication" (Maaß & Rink 2024). We first published this Handbook in German in 2019 (Maaß & Rink 2019; 2020) as basic literature for our Master's degree programme "Accessible Communication" (Maaß et al. 2022). The book was published by Frank & Timme in mid-February 2024 as volume 15 of our book series "Easy - Plain – Accessible". This book series publishes outstanding international works on the topic of accessible communication, including the Handbook of Easy Languages, which our Finnish colleagues Camilla Lindholm and Ulla Vanhatalo have commendably curated (Lindholm & Vanhatalo 2021).

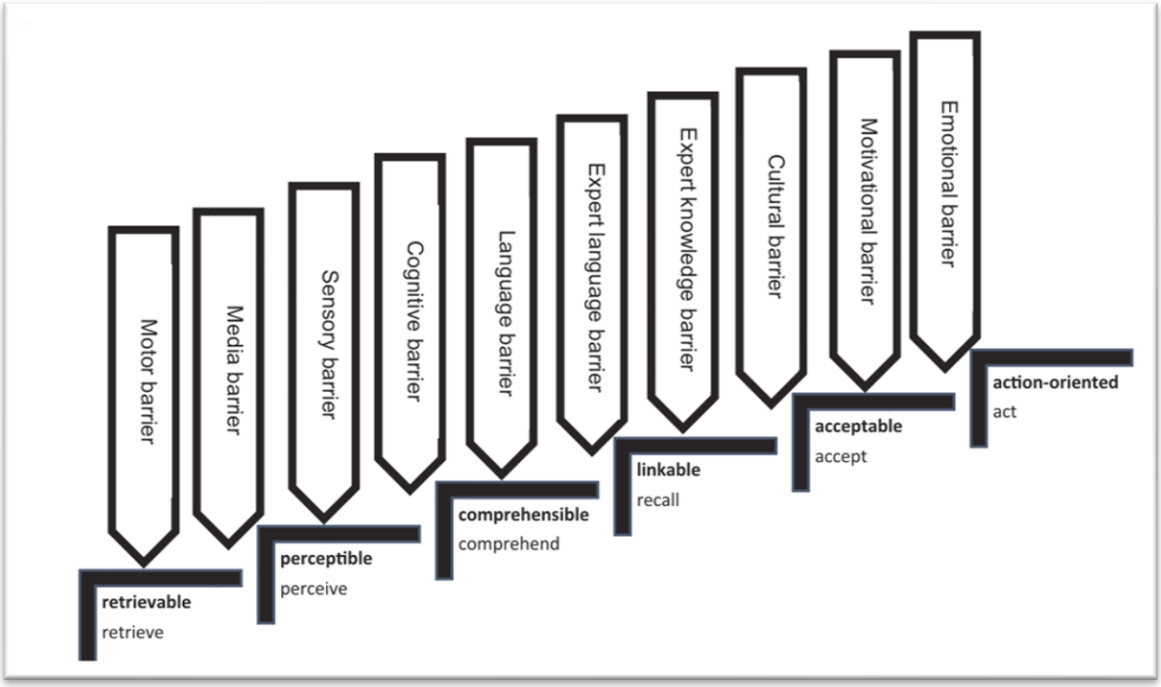

Figure 1. The "Hildesheim staircase" of Accessible Communication, Maaß (2024b); Maaß and Rink (2024)

The Hildesheim Staircase model shows what is necessary for communication to succeed. In order to be able to act on the basis of texts, these texts must be retrievable, perceptible, comprehensible, linkable and acceptable (Maaß 2020). This is the basis for users to find, perceive, understand, recall, accept and act on the information. Communication barriers can occur at any of these steps. If this happens, the staircase will not be successfully climbed (Maaß 2024b; on the single barriers see Rink 2020; 2024; Lang 2021).

The **motor barrier** means the information is not accessible because of the user's motor skills. For example, because a website cannot be navigated using tab stops or because the pages of a paper publication are so thin that a person with a motor disability cannot turn them.

The **media barrier** means that the information is stored on a platform or in a location that users do not have access to or simply do not use. For example, if the information is made available online only, even though it is aimed at older users. Or on Facebook, if you are addressing young users.

The **sensory barrier** means that the information is provided in a media form or in a code system that users cannot access. For example, visual information forms a sensory barrier for blind people and auditory information for people with hearing impairments.

The **cognitive barrier** means that the information is provided in a form that users cannot grasp cognitively.

The **language barrier** means that the information is provided in a language or language form that users do not understand or do not understand sufficiently.
The **expert language barrier** means that the information is written in expert language, even though it is aimed at non-experts.
The **expert knowledge barrier** means that the information itself is technically complex, regardless of its linguistic form.
The **cultural barrier** means that the information requires knowledge of group discourses that the users do not know or do not share.
The **motivation barrier** means the form in which the information is given demands more from the users than they are willing to invest.
The **emotional barrier** means that the information itself or the situation in which the information is received is so stressful for the users that they are unable to absorb the information.

The information is only usable for users if all steps have been successfully climbed. Communication barriers can be removed through translation. In other words, translation is the removal of communication barriers.

Translation takes place in different dimensions, the first two of which go back to Jakobson (1959). Translation can be intralingual or interlingual, intrasemiotic or intersemiotic, intracultural or intercultural, as well as intramedial or intermedial.

Table 1. Dimensions of Translation, modified on the basis of Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 183)

Language	**Code System**	**Culture**	**Medium**
Intralingual	Intrasemiotic	Intracultural	Intramedial
Interlingual	Intersemiotic	Intercultural	Intermedial

Sometimes there is simply a language barrier, often combined with a cultural barrier. Then we are in the realm of interlingual translation. However, if translation is needed because of a cognitive barrier, this is the typical case for an intralingual translation into Easy Language.

Easy Language is a variety of a natural language that is designed to be as comprehensible as possible (Maaß 2015). It is aimed at users with communication impairments. The group that is closely associated with Easy Language is people with intellectual disabilities (Maaß & Maaß LM 2024). However, Easy Language is also used by other people and groups for whom the source text is not accessible because it has communication barriers (Bredel & Maaß 2016a; Maaß 2020): because it is too complex and too technical, altogether not sufficiently action-orientated.

These can be people with other disabilities, for example pre-lingual hearing impairment, which is very often accompanied by a limitation of literacy; with aphasia or dementia-type illnesses, with certain disorders from the autistic spectrum and so on (on Easy Language target groups see Bredel & Maaß 2016a; Maaß 2020). However, this also applies to people with a different first language who do not yet have sufficient language skills to understand the source text.

Translating into Easy Language can be interlingual or intralingual. It is possible to translate from another language into Easy Language and this does happen (Maaß & Fioravanti 2025 in print). However, it is far more common for Easy-Language-translation to occur within the same language, in other words, intralingually (Maaß 2020; 2024a; 2024b).

Sometimes there is a sensory barrier. In this case, for example, we are in the area of subtitling, which can be interlingual or intralingual (Mälzer & Wünsche 2020; 2024). If sounds are reproduced in the subtitles, this represents a change of code: you hear a sound and a word appears in the subtitles, e.g. “knocking”. This is an example of intersemiotic translation. Audio description for the blind, in which the visual parts of a film are described verbally (Benecke 2024), is also intersemiotic.

I interpret culture in a broad sense as groups that have very different ways of speaking about a specific topic. These can be domain experts who are engaged in their own discourses, of which laypeople have no idea. If they are speaking among themselves and need interlingual translation, it is intracultural. If they are speaking to people who are not part of their discourse community, the translation is intercultural. This is a very common case.

Sometimes the mediality of the text changes (Maaß & Hernández Garrido 2020): for example, it is spoken – the text appears as a sound wave for auditory perception – but the dialogue partners are deaf and require sign language interpretation. Sign language is a manual system that is perceived visually (Maaß LM 2024 in print). This is a case of intermedial translation. Or a written text is converted into an oral format, as is the case for Easy Language interpreting (Schulz et al. 2020; Maaß & Maaß LM 2024). Or an oral text is converted into a written format – for example in text-to-speech interpreting.

There are also mixed forms. For example, an intercultural component is often present when the dialogue partners have only a small amount of common ground. This happens regularly in expert-layperson communication, for example. Here are a few more examples of other mixed forms:

Films can be subtitled in Easy Language: intralingual and intermedial.

Pure text is enriched with visualisations and illustrations in the target text in Easy Language: intralingual and intersemiotic.
Subtitles not only reproduce dialogue, but also sounds and music: inter-/intralingual, intersemiotic and intermedial.

Now let's take a look at Easy Language translation in Germany.

3 What is the Current Situation of Easy Language in Germany?

German is a big language. Germany has almost 85 million inhabitants. Around 2.2 million people belong to the primary target groups of Easy Language. There are also other people who use Easy Language when they do not have access to the source text. This may be the case, for example, if their knowledge of German or their literacy skills are insufficient or if the text is too technical for non-experts or contains other communication barriers.

We are talking about some 20 million people in Germany who benefit from Easy Language, at least in some contexts (Maaß et al. 2021).

In Germany, as in many other European countries, Easy Language goes back to the Pathways project of Inclusion Europe, which was implemented starting in 1997 (Bredel & Maaß 2016a; Maaß 2020). In 2006, the "Netzwerk Leichte Sprache" (= "Network Easy Language") was founded, which is currently the most influential empowerment organisation in the field of Easy Language in Germany. The first practical guidelines were published in 2009. In January 2014, I founded the Research Centre for Easy Language at the University of Hildesheim. The Research Centre for Easy Language conducts basic and applied research in the field of Easy Language and accessible communication.

In Maaß (2015), I presented the first scientific set of rules for Easy Language in Germany[1]. In 2016, I published the three volumes of Duden Easy Language together with my colleague Ursula Bredel (Bredel & Maaß 2016a-c). The Duden is regarded as the most influential institution for the German language in Germany. It publishes normative works on the lexicon, grammar and orthography of German. The publication of Duden Easy Language was therefore an important milestone for Easy Language in Germany

[1] Plain Language exists alongside Easy Language. Plain Language is more comprehensible than everyday language or expert language, but less comprehensible than Easy Language (Maaß 2020). Plain Language has no fixed rules, but is a continuum of different forms. However, the term "Plain Language" is sometimes used in Germany when texts are actually in Easy Language but have not been reviewed by target groups.

(Maaß et al. 2021). A monographic publication in English on our Easy and Plain Language approach is available in Maaß (2020), that is also available online.

The first regulation that established a right to texts in Easy Language for people with communication disabilities was published in 2011: the Barrierefreie Informationstechnik-Verordnung BITV 2.0 (= Accessible Information Technology Directive; on Easy Language legislation see Maaß 2020; Lang 2021). All public bodies must provide information in Easy Language on the Internet and in other contexts now.

Since 2020, the German Institute for Standardisation (Deutsches Institut für Normung, DIN) has been preparing a standard for Easy Language, DIN SPEC Easy Language. DIN creates standards for processes, and they are often incorporated into legislation in the next step. This standardisation is an attempt to summarise the current state of science and practice in a set of rules. The public comment phase for DIN SPEC Easy Language was in summer 2023, and we are now waiting for the final version to be published. Authorities in Germany have announced that DIN SPEC Easy Language is to become part of public tenders for translations in Easy Language.

In the form released for comment, DIN SPEC Easy Language is almost 60 pages long, and the translation of this text into Easy Language is almost 200 pages long. It does not set any fixed rules, but rather specifies corridors in which translators and text creators can select strategies depending on the situation and audience. In Germany, for example, there are different ways in which Easy Language texts are created: Many texts that are translated for public bodies are created in inclusive settings. They are not necessarily produced by trained translators, but they must be checked by a target group with intellectual disabilities. Such texts often have a childlike layout (see Figure 2).

Research has shown that this often results in texts that are not optimised for their intended function in the target situation (Bredel & Maaß 2016; Maaß 2020; Lang 2021). Texts that are visibly designed differently from the layout conventions also present a risk of stigmatising the target groups.

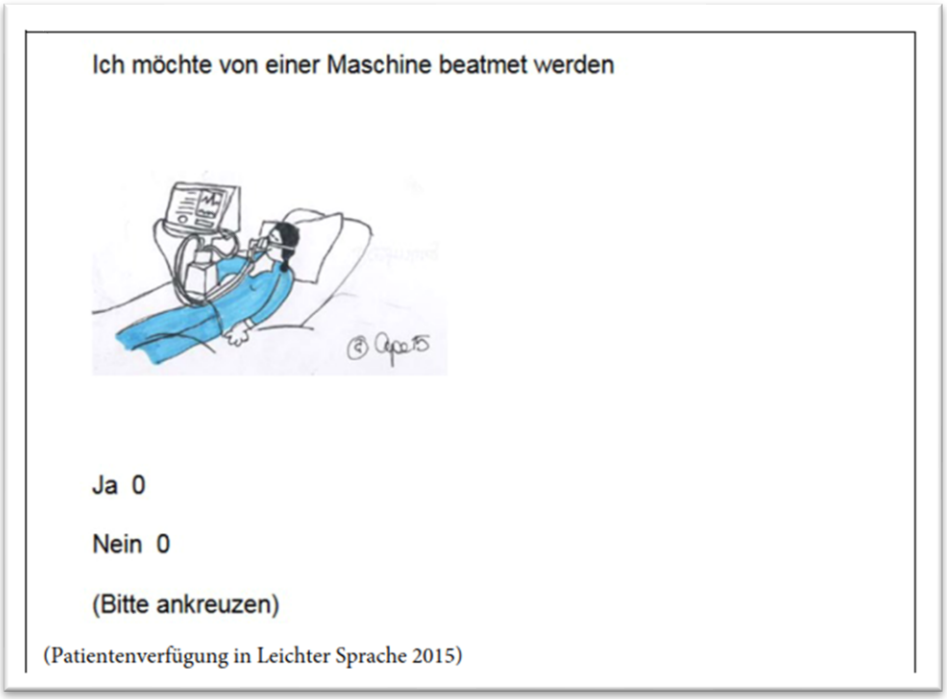

Figure 2. Patient decree in Easy Language (Saarland 2015). Translation of the text in the figure:
"I want to be ventilated by a machine
Yes ()
No ()
(Please tick)"

Texts that are created in inclusive settings can have a symbolic function (Maaß 2020): They symbolise the group of people with intellectual disabilities in the public space - for example on the homepage of a ministry. The group is therefore visible in the public space. Easy Language then creates representation.

On the other hand, many people need Easy Language texts in specific situations – for example at the doctor's – to enable them to understand and act (see the contributions in Ahrens et al. 2022, especially Leyerer et al. 2022). Representation should not take centre stage there. It is more important that the texts work well and that they enable participation. It is a task for experts to produce texts for an audience with communication disabilities in such a way that they work in the target situation. Accordingly, we also have translators on the market who produce specialised translations into Easy Language or adapt Easy Language into various media formats (Maaß & Hernández Garrido 2020) so that it works best. In Germany, for example, Easy Language has also been available for interpretation (Schulz et al. 2020; Maaß & Maaß LM 2022), that means, oral rendering in a face-to-face situation, for a number of years.

DIN SPEC 33429 takes account of this multifaceted situation. This results in its considerable number of pages. The DIN SPEC is therefore a sign of the differentiation of the areas of application of Easy Language and of the professionalisation of the stakeholders.

This is the scene where Chat GPT and other machine translation tools have entered relatively recently.

In Maaß et al. (2014), we pointed out that translators need tools for Easy Language translation, just as their colleagues in interlingual translation have tools at their disposal. This also applies to CAT tools, i.e. computer-aided translation tools, which have developed rapidly over the last 20 years (on their application to the Easy Language sector, see Hansen-Schirra et al. 2020). In interlingual translation, human translators devote an increasingly smaller portion of their time to actual translation. Instead, the focus is on pre-editing, i.e. optimising texts for translation, and post-editing, i.e. revising machine-translated texts (Nitzke & Hansen-Schirra 2021). With AI tools, even pre-editing has become less important and the focus is now clearly on post-editing (ibid.).

For some time now, machine translation tools have also been available and used for Easy Language. In my research group, we have looked at how they perform and for whom these tools are therefore well suited.

4 How do AI Tools Perform in Easy Language Translation?

Easy Language translation can be interlingual and intralingual. I will briefly discuss both forms here. Firstly a distinction must be made between chatbots such as Chat GPT, which can be given various tasks, and tools that are specifically designed for the translation of texts.

Translation tools have one box for the source text and one for the target text. With interlingual translation via DeepL, you can also select the register (formal, informal, automatic).

4.1 FCSP

Some of these tools have been customised for specific topics. This is the case, for example, with the tool for the St Pauli football club in Hamburg. It is trained for football contexts, but it also works for other text types. Here is an example:

Table 2. An example from the FCSP tool.

Source Text	**Target Text**
In Deutschlands Metropolen machen möblierte Wohnungen bereits rund ein Drittel des Angebots auf dem Mietmarkt aus. Das bedeutet: noch horrendere Mieten. Der Trend hat Folgen für den Wohnungsmarkt insgesamt.	In großen Städten in Deutschland gibt es viele Wohnungen mit Möbeln. Etwa jedes dritte Angebot ist eine möblierte Wohnung. Das heißt: Die Mieten können sehr hoch sein. Das hat Auswirkungen auf alle Wohnungen, die man mieten kann.
In Germany's metropolises, furnished flats already account for around a third of the supply on the rental market. This means even more horrendous rents. The trend has consequences for the housing market as a whole.	In big cities in Germany, there are many flats with furniture. About every third offer is a furnished flat. That means: The rents can be very high. This has an impact on all flats that one can rent.

We can see that at first glance the translation is more comprehensible than the original. But "flats with furniture" is not really accurate: flats usually have furniture, the question is who owns it: the landlord or the tenant? And the sentences don't follow on logically from one another. In addition, there is no term consistency: "furnished flats" in the source text is rendered once as "flat with furniture" and once as "furnished flat" in the target text.

The target text is only apparently easy. Manning (2023) has tested this tool. She compares the FCSP (St Pauli Football Club) tool with Chat GPT 4 and looks at comprehensibility and correctness. She analyses texts of different types. She uses the Hohenheim Comprehensibility Index (HIX) for the formal comprehensibility score. My Research Centre for Easy Language developed a benchmark for Easy Language years ago together with the HIX team: Easy Language texts must score at least 18 out of 20 points in the HIX.

The following is the result of Manning's (2023: n.p.) test:

Table 3. Comparison HIX for FCSP / GPT-4, from Manning (2023)

Topic	**Source text**	**Translation FCSP**	**Translation GPT-4**
Robert Koch Institute	2	12	20
Buyer protection	4	20	20
Climate neutral	7	19	19
Looted art	10	20	19
Olympics	14	20	20

The values are excellent here. The author did not systematically analyse the correctness of the data, but she does provide some observations: The results are on the whole

positive. However, there are errors: The tool sometimes only strings statements together without recognising the argumentative structure. There are errors in content. Hallucinations are a problem; for example, the tool added the second sentence in Manning's test (Manning 2023: n.p.):

> „Viele Menschen sind dabei gestorben. *Das ist sehr traurig*."
> "Many people have died as a result. *That is very sad*."

She also notes that some abstract words have been left in the text and that the passive voice has been used.

This does not comply with the rules of Easy Language. My sampling tests revealed further problems: for example, relative clauses were used, which present a barrier to comprehension for different target groups.

4.2 Chat GPT

At the University of Hildesheim, we have been researching the performance of various tools for Easy Language (and partly for Plain Language) for about a year. In Deilen et al. (2023) we presented the results on Chat GPT. We collected a corpus of 20 texts from three different websites of German public authorities. It was about things like applying for a certificate of good conduct, using the lost property office, etc.

We worked with two different prompt sets: a holistic and a linguistic approach. In the holistic approach, we gave Chat GPT the command to translate the text into Easy Language. We then repeated the command "Make the text even easier" twice. For the linguistic approach, we told Chat GPT to reformulate the text without unimportant information (a rule on text level), then to use an easy sentence structure (a rule on sentence level). And finally: to explain difficult words (a rule at word level).

Then we analysed the results in terms of comprehensibility, syntactic complexity and correctness and compared the two sub-corpora. We also used the HIX (see Figure 3).

The results of this analysis show that the holistic approach was more successful and the texts were significantly easier. However, most of them were not yet in the Easy Language range, but more in line with Plain Language. There was still syntactic complexity, as nominal constructions were often broken down into subordinate clauses. This is a good first step, but not yet easy enough for Easy Language.

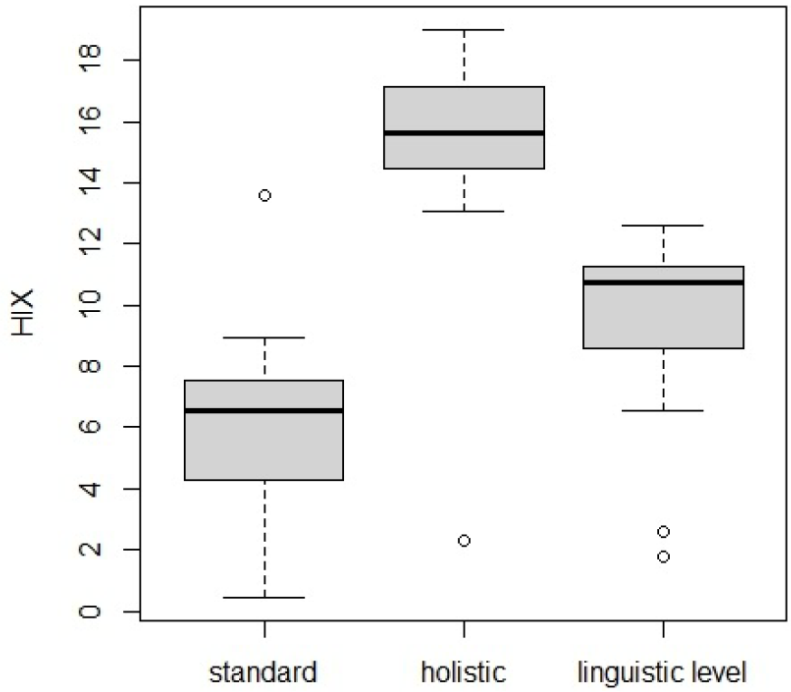

Figure 3. HIX values of the source text and the two simplified variants under analysis (Deilen et al. 2023: 6)

The problem, however, was the lack of correctness of the texts. In the holistic approach, which leads to easier results, 80% of the texts contained at least one piece of incorrect information. In the less easy texts of the linguistic approach, it was 45%. So the information may be more accessible, but it is not reliable.

4.3 SUMM AI

In Deilen et al. (2024), we examine the tool from SUMM AI (https://summ-ai.com/), which advertises with the slogan: "Easy Language with just one click. Make any complicated text accessible and comprehensible with one click using our AI-based tool" (see Figure 4).

SUMM AI is currently optimising the tool through collaborations with practice partners and researchers, including my Research Centre for Easy Language. We have focussed on the area of health communication.

Another partner in this project is *Apotheken Umschau* ("Pharmacies' Review"). *Apotheken Umschau* is the largest German-language provider of health information (Hörner 2022). The site has 64 million monthly page impressions, around 7 million copies are sold each month and the printed version alone has a reach of around 17 million readers per month. Over the past 5 years, in a project with *Apotheken Umschau*, we

have manually translated a corpus of around 250 texts with health information into Easy Language Plus.

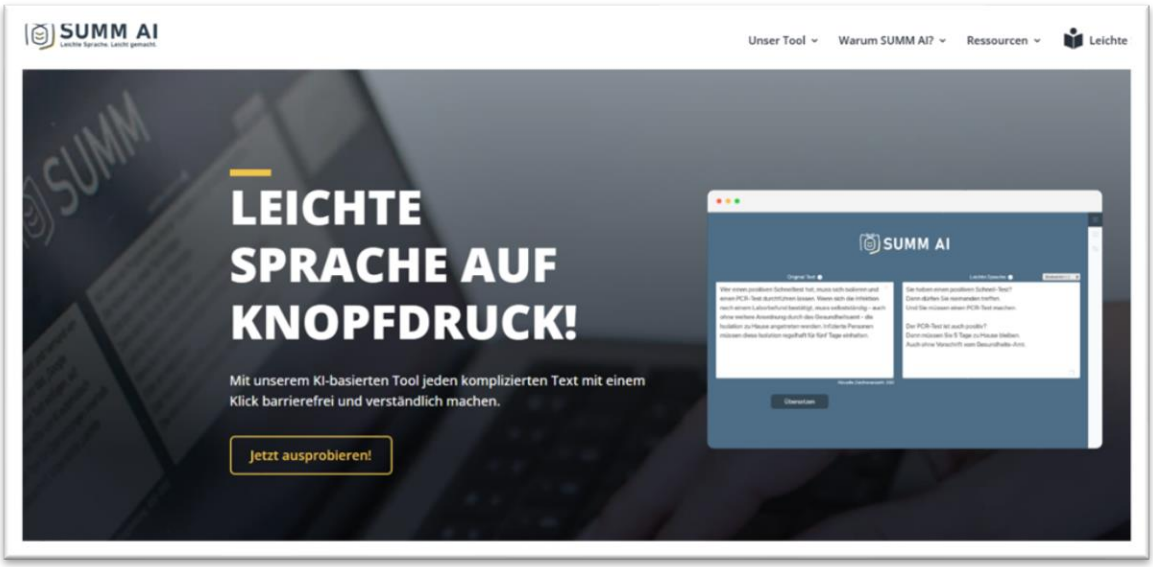

Figure 4. "Easy Language with just one click" - The SUMM AI homepage

These manually translated texts are the gold standard, which we can now compare with the results of machine translation. In collaboration with SUMM AI and *Apotheken Umschau*, we established a baseline and then used 200 texts as training data. SUMM AI optimised the machine using our texts and the results of the baseline study. We are currently analysing whether the performance of the tool has improved in this process and, if so, in which categories.

The formal comprehensibility values for the baseline are very good. However, the syntactic complexity of the machine translation is higher than that of the human Easy-Language Plus translation in the Gold Standard Sample. The real problem, however, is the lack of correctness: 29 of the 30 machine translations contained at least one error. In the project, however, various optimizations were made to the original machine, which significantly improved the quality of the output. However, these texts are not error-free either.

4.4 DeepL

I am working on a collaborative project with the Institute of Legal Informatics and Judicial Systems of the National Research Council of Italy (IGSG - CNR) to investigate the possibility of using DeepL for interlingual translation into Easy Language. As a corpus, we have taken the Easy Language translations on the website of the municipality of Bolzano in Italy (Maaß & Fioravanti 2025 in print; this is also the source of the following data).

The region is multilingual. The texts were drafted in German Easy Language by human translators according to the scientific rule set of the Research Centre for Easy Language: in our study, this is Corpus Bolzano German, consisting of 26 texts.

Then the texts were translated interlingually into Italian Easy Language, again by human translators: Corpus Bolzano Italian. Both human versions are the Gold Standard in the project for the evaluation of machine translation into Easy Language. We machine-translated from Corpus Bolzano Italian into German using DeepL, which is the Corpus DeepL German, and from Corpus Bolzano German into Italian using DeepL, which is Corpus DeepL Italian. We then compared the results in terms of comprehensibility with regard to the relevant scores, to content accuracy and to adherence to Easy Language rules.

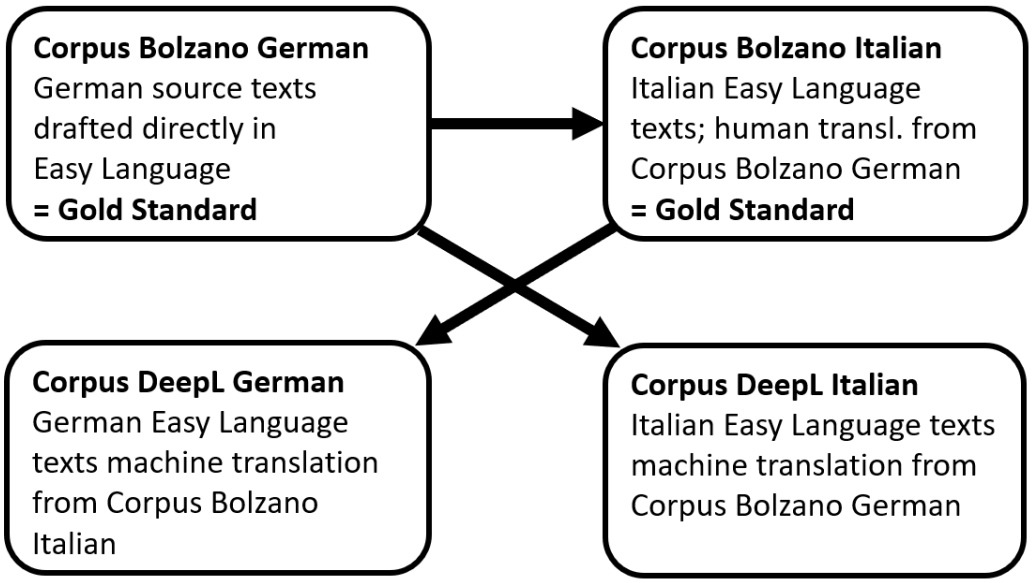

Figure 5. Corpus creation in the Bolzano project (Maaß & Fioravanti 2025 in print).

It can be seen that DeepL tends to normalise the target texts in the direction of Administrative Language. The HIX values decreased in the translation: while German 1 has an average comprehensibility of 19.1 out of 20, German 2 only has an average of 17.8 out of 20 points and is therefore no longer formally Easy Language.

Some target texts even have less than 14 or 13 out of 20 points. With regard to the rules of Easy Language, DeepL also normalises towards the text type conventions of legal-administrative texts: for example, there are significantly more technical terms and abstract nouns without explanation, passive voice and subjunctive forms.

Finally, almost all texts, namely 24 out of 26, contain at least one content-related error. Here too, the texts are not easy enough and they are not trustworthy enough for the primary target groups to use.

4.5 What Can We Conclude?

The interlingual and intralingual translation tools provide translations in Easy Language and Plain Language. They are a valuable aid for translation. However, the results are not reliable. In addition, the tools reviewed here translate dominantly on the "language" dimension. For example, they do not yet automatically create illustrations.

It could be interesting to test whether intercultural translation is also possible via prompting by telling the machine who it is translating for. However, this would be limited to chatbot-like systems such as Chat GPT; to my knowledge, however, no scientific studies have been conducted on the subject and this approach has not yet been systematically pursued.

The user interface of tools such as SUMM or DeepL, on the other hand, do not currently allow any additional prompts beyond switching languages. You enter a source text and receive a target text.

The translation is limited to language. The possibility of intermedia translation is not yet systematically implemented. However, it is quite conceivable that this will be the case in the future, for example automatic subtitling in Easy Language.

Quality remains a problem: users without communication disabilities are able to compensate for errors, at least to a certain extent. Users with communication disabilities are not: in this case, there are very high demands regarding the comprehensibility and correctness of the texts. Primary users should not be confronted with incorrect or insufficiently comprehensible Easy Language texts. That would be absurd. Such texts miss their primary goal.

5 Why Do We Translate into Easy Language and What Can AI Do for Us?

To find out what role these machines can play in the future, I would like to place them in the context of Easy Language translation: Why do we translate into Easy Language and how can Machine Translation come into play here?

1. The aim is to create or gain access to content: this is about barriers in texts.

2. The aim is to create representation for the group of people with intellectual disabilities: this is about access and participation of groups in society in a more general sense and the individual text is a symbol of this.

3. The aim is to fulfil legal requirements with limited resources.

Ideally, one could say that all three reasons should apply at the same time: Authorities or companies want to create access to information while signalling inclusion; in doing so, they are implementing legal requirements. This case could look like this:

1. An authority or company commissions a translation agency for Easy Language with academically trained translators.

2. The texts are checked by a test group with intellectual disabilities.

3. The company thus fulfils the legal accessible requirements.

That sounds simple enough. In practice, however, it is often the case that not all three occur together. Creating texts that are highly functional in target situations often does not go hand in hand with the representational, the symbolic function of Easy Language.

Firstly, this is due to mediality: it is often not intramedial but intermedial translation that is more suitable for accessing content. Access to content therefore does not necessarily mean that source texts are translated in writing into Easy Language: 70% of people with intellectual disabilities are not able to read and retain texts in a meaningful way (Günthner 1999) – this also applies to Easy Language texts. Current research shows this very clearly (Gutermuth 2020, Tross 2023). Access to content works better with an approach that takes the target situation into account.

This can lead to Easy Language materials being optimised for oral interaction, i.e. interpreting into Easy Language, producing pictograms or audiovisual material. These interfaces are not automated at the moment. The adaptation to the specific target situation makes full automation difficult. Producing these texts requires considerable effort and resources that are not available for the wide range of text practice.

Texts that focus on representation frequently have poor translation quality (Maaß 2020) because they are often not produced by trained translators. The focus is on inclusive text practice, which means that they are produced in collaboration with people with intellectual disabilities or are reviewed by this group. This inclusive text practice is their real value. These texts often deviate greatly from the conventions of the text type. Their

content is often greatly reduced, their layout appropriate for children rather than for adults and they frequently contain spelling mistakes. Such texts may contribute to the stigmatisation of the target groups.

Dysfunctional source texts are not easily converted into functioning target texts. The machine does not process all barriers and not in all possible ways. The machine only translates at the “language” level. The other dimensions of the translation are not taken into account.

6 Is the New Easy Language Translator a Machine?

I come back to the question of my presentation: Is the new Easy Language translator a machine? The answer to that is “yes and no”. The statement is correct if I emphasise it like this:

> The **new** Easy Language translator is a machine.

For the first time, we now have a situation where text simplification using AI tools is so widely and cheaply available that it can be used in Easy Language translation. The Easy Language translator, which is new to the field, is, in fact, a machine. But we still need human translators. This is because the results of machine translation are

1) not easy enough
2) not correct enough (and the easier they are, the bigger the problem)
3) too dependent on the source text (written texts are translated into written texts)

It is currently not given that people who have no or only limited access to the source text can safely use AI tools to gain access to content and act on the basis of this information.

Nevertheless, this is happening right now: the parts of the target groups that have the ability to read are already using Chat GPT in this function.

This poses a problem: With regard to the source text, there is **non-understanding**. Non-understanding is overt. It signals: There is insufficient basis to act on the information from the text. With regard to the automatically translated text, there is a risk of non-understanding if those responsible withdraw because they believe the machine will take care of things and then do not make any offers.

Even greater, however, is the danger of **misunderstanding** (Kercher 2013). Misunderstanding is covert and does not signal anything. The target groups may act on the basis of information that the machine has hallucinated.

We increasingly have a situation where AI tools are being used in translation processes instead of human translators. This occurs in two constellations:

1. Simply to comply with legal requirements without target group verification.
2. With target group verification.

In most cases, the post-editing effort is underestimated and not factored into the processes. The resulting texts are currently not easy enough and predominantly incorrect. In such constellations, no thought is given to whether the resulting texts are at all functional in the target situation, what they are supposed to achieve, whether they enable action in the intended way, in other words, whether the barriers have really been removed and action orientation has been established.

KI statt Übersetzungsbüro übersetzt die Inhalte

Leichte Sprache für Webseite der Stadt wird getestet

Paderborn - Der Internetauftritt der Stadt Paderborn soll in Zukunft inklusiver werden und auch in Leichter Sprache zur Verfügung stehen. Eigentlich sollte das ein Übersetzungsbüro übernehmen, jetzt gibt es aber eine technische Lösung: Künstliche Intelligenz. Von Alexandra Pöhler

Figure 6. Report on the automated translation of Paderborn's municipality websites. Translation of the paragraph:

AI translates the content instead of a translation agency
Easy Language for the city's website is being tested
Paderborn. The city of Paderborn's website is to become more inclusive in future and will also be available in Easy Language. This was originally supposed to be done by a translation agency, but now there is a technical solution: artificial intelligence. By Alexandra Pöhler

One example is the city of Paderborn. It initially allocated 10,000 euros for Easy Language translations in its budget. However, it then deallocated the funds, minus the costs for the subscription to an AI Easy Language translation tool (See Figure 6).

This is a situation that runs counter to professionalisation efforts, as well as scientific regulations and the standardisation efforts of DIN. We must monitor, inform and warn

so that communicative inclusion does not suffer a setback as a result of Easy Language machine translation.

In contrast, the use of AI tools as CAT tools is valuable, whether interlingual or intralingual. Until recently, no specific tools have been available for Easy Language translation (Maaß et al. 2014). The new AI tools can support translators in creating Easy Language content. The number of texts can be significantly increased with relatively little effort.

The primary target groups of Easy Language, however, are often confronted with several barriers at the same time. They are vulnerable to errors made by the machine and do not easily compensate for them. Therefore, it is negligent to expose them to unprocessed machine translations. At the moment, evaluating communication barriers is not a task that a machine can do automatically. However, the translation tools are helpful and we should integrate them into translation processes.

In the course of professionalisation, translators need skills in prompting and in post-editing, but also in the evaluation of target situations: Not all written source texts should become written target texts. We should also implement other dimensions of translation: Audio texts, audiovisual translation, interpretation.

Diversity in communication means matching the diversity of the communication partners with the diversity of the communication products.

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