WRITE CENTER

A Linguistic Analysis of Simplified and Authentic Texts

Produced from the article of the same name
by Scott Crossley and colleagues in 2007.

What is authentic and simplified texts for L2 learners?

- Authentic text: a text originally created for a specific social purpose (Grellet, 1981).
- Simplified texts are texts written to illustrate a specific language feature, or to modify the amount of new lexical input that L2 learners were introduced, or to control for propositional input (Simensen, 1987).

What aspects of authentic and simplified reading texts can be compared?

1. Authentic texts are not as reader-friendly to L2 learners

because it is created for a certain purpose or function, which often do not include considering the readability for non-native speakers.

2. Cohesion

is an aspect that supports the authentic text to be used in L2 learners. By its very nature, simplified texts change the texts' cohesion and coherence, resulting in the texts to be actually more difficult for L2 readers to comprehend and manage (Honeyfield, 1997).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to provide an exploratory study to measure the differences between authentic and simplified reading text material from the aspects of the use of linguistic features, syntax, and discourse structures. Moreover, this article introduced a novel computational method (Coh-Metrix) to investigate the differences between texts more comprehensively and objectively.

Findings

The level of ambiguity and abstractness in words are similar.

This counters the idea that simplifies texts are more ambiguous.

The authentic texts have more logical operators and conditional clauses.

The simplified texts, with the lack of such operators, may not be able to link ideas in a logical way. This can actually pose challenges for L2 readers.

The simplified texts contained more words.

This is due to the simplification process.

Simplified texts showed more similarity in meaning between sentences and within paragraphs.

Simplified texts provide greater redundancy and semantic overlap, which can help readers in understanding messages and intentions of texts.

The authentic texts may show a greater tendency to use more diverse parts of speech than the simplified texts.

This indicates one disadvantage of simplified texts in that they rely on simplified syntactic structures and do not use natural language.

The simplified texts contained a higher number of more frequent words and fewer abstract words.

This feature may facilitate beginning L2 learners' comprehension of texts.

The simplified texts may depend too heavily on certain constructions.

This will put a heavier processing burden on readers. Short and choppy syntax can result from simplification processes that can lead texts to be unnatural. (Honeyfield, 1979)

The simplified texts use fewer causal and negative temporal connectives

This lack of complex connectives is due to the simplification process.

Teaching Suggestions:

- The results for this article are very open-ended. It is for the scholars and teachers in this field to determine which form of texts should they use to better meet the needs for students based on the above-stated findings.

- The computational tool, Coh-Metrix (Graesser et al., 2004), is very helpful for researchers and teachers to conduct studies and better comprehend which form of reading texts to utilize for different levels of L2 learners.

Source: Crossley, S. A., Louwerse, M. M., McCarthy, P. M. & McNamara, D. S. (2007). A linguistic analysis of simplified and authentic texts. The Modern Language Journal, 91(1), 15–30.

Infographic created by Jiali Wang, UC Irvine