
Methodological issues in reading research with low literate vocational students

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Teachers at vocational schools complain that many of their students struggle with texts from school books (Niederhaus 2013; Ghobeyshi et al. 2024). Inspired by research on Easy German and on text comprehension in general, we tested the readability and comprehensibility of original texts and linguistic simplifications.

In a corpus study, we analyzed the complexity of words, phrases, and sentences occurring in school books for vocational education. We identified relevant features and developed linguistic simplifications that were evaluated in metalinguistic tasks and in psycholinguistic experiments. Participants were students in pre-training classes and in vocational classes. In metalinguistic tasks, students read in parallel texts from their schoolbooks (cf. Olszycka et al. 2023) and simplified versions of these texts. They were asked to identify words and passages that might be hard to comprehend for students who had just begun to learn German. Experiments yielded lexical decisions and self-paced reading data. In experimental materials, we manipulated the complexity of words (foreign words, nominal compounds, and particle verbs), constructions (e.g., genitives, word order variants, subject ellipses, *zu*-infinitives), and formatting (line breaks and hyphenations).

In our contribution, we will focus on methodological issues: How are heterogeneous groups of participants best dealt with when they differ in, e.g., language proficiency, reading skills, and reading motivation? How does one identify levels of linguistic complexity that are appropriate and not too demanding? How can the validity of the data be granted? What if results from metalinguistic tasks and from psycholinguistic experiments do not converge? We will present selected data to illustrate these issues. Potential solutions will be discussed.

References. Ghobeyshi, A. et al. (2024). Sprachliche Vereinfachungen in Materialien für die berufliche Bildung – die Perspektive der Lehrkräfte. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht* 29, 179–208. • Niederhaus, C. (2013). „Die Schüler verstehen es nicht und wenn sie es nicht verstehen, dann nutzt auch die fachliche Richtigkeit nix.“ Zum Einsatz und zur Nutzung von Fachtexten und Fachkundebüchern in mehrsprachigen Lernergruppen der beruflichen Bildung. Die Perspektive der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer. *Info DaF* 40, 553–583. • Olszycka, C. et al. (2023). Sprachliche Hürden in der beruflichen Bildung. Eine Studie zum angeleiteten Lauten Denken. *Sprache im Beruf* 6, 162–180.