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Semantic-Lexical Dynamics in Linguistic Simplification: Semantic Relations in *Leichte Sprache* Texts

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This article investigates semantic relations in linguistic adaptations from Standard German to *Leichte Sprache* (LS), a simplified variety designed for cognitive accessibility. While normative and morphosyntactic aspects are well-documented, the semantic-lexical dimension remains under-researched. Consequently, this study examines synonymy, antonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, meronymy, holonymy, homonymy, and polysemy within a parallel corpus of twenty standard and LS texts. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, the research identifies usage patterns and distributional frequencies. Findings suggest a redrawing of semantic rules within simplification strategies and discuss the potential impact of these dynamics on interlingual translation involving other simplified varieties.

Keywords: *Leichte Sprache*, Easy Language, Semantics, Semantic Relations, Linguistic Simplification

1. *Introduction*

In contemporary societies, equal access to information represents a fundamental prerequisite for the active participation of citizens in social, cultural, and political life, as stated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-*Behindertenrechtskonvention* 2008), which codifies information accessibility as a core human right essential for full and equitable societal inclusion. However, the linguistic complexity characteristic of many institutional, legal, and media texts still poses substantial challenges for individuals with cognitive, linguistic, or literacy-related difficulties.

This article positions itself within the expanding research field of linguistic accessibility, in which *Leichte Sprache* [German Easy Language] has emerged as both a normative framework and a practical tool aimed at ensuring inclusion and enabling effective access to informational content.

Despite considerable scholarly attention to regulatory aspects, such as the recommendations issued by Inclusion Europe (2009) and the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2011), as well as to morphosyntactic and typographical features, the semantic dimension remains comparatively underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing the semantic relations employed during processes of translation or adaptation from Standard German to *Leichte Sprache*. These relations are central to achieving an appropriate balance between fi-

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delity to the source content and immediate comprehensibility for the target readership. In this perspective, the present analysis aims to uncover the semantic phenomena that guide the selection and substitution of lexemes. In doing so, it highlights how specific semantic choices influence meaning construction and shape textual usability. The primary aim of the study is to identify recurrent patterns in lexical transformation strategies, focusing on semantic relations (such as synonymy, antonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, holonymy, and meronymy) as well as the management of lexical ambiguity phenomena, including polysemy and homonymy, which could be systematically employed as a model to follow in order to meet the clarity and transparency requirements, which are characteristic of the *Leichte Sprache*. Indeed, Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework by outlining the linguistic and regulatory foundations of *Leichte Sprache*, including terminological definitions, and an overview of principal simplification rules. Section 3 presents a contrastive analysis of major guidelines, with specific reference to their treatment of semantic aspects and the degree of explicitness with which these are addressed. Section 4 constitutes the empirical core of the article, introducing the corpus and methodology before discussing the results of the analysis. Section 5 offers concluding reflections and perspectives for future research.

2. Leichte Sprache*: definition and main characteristics*

Defined by the regulatory framework of DIN SPEC 33429 – proceeding from the 2023 technical draft to the authoritative March 2025 version – the term *Deutsche Leichte Sprache* identifies a specific, simplified variety of Standard German. While it operates alongside *Einfache Sprache* [Plain Language] within the broader spectrum of accessible communication, *Leichte Sprache* is characterized by a much stricter set of linguistic rules and structural constraints (see f.i. Bock, Pappert 2023, 18–28). This designation reflects a concerted effort within German-speaking countries to prioritize the development of verifiable linguistic instruments, thereby ensuring equitable information access for different target groups.

Far from being a monolithic concept, *Leichte Sprache* (henceforth LS) has historically been encompassed by a mainfold set of definitions: it was typically described either as a particular form of accessible communication (cf. Girard-Groeber, Lichtenauer 2024, 22; Bock 2017, 20), or as a simplified variety of Standard German, systematically reduced in its syntactic and lexical structures to enhance perceptibility and comprehensibility, especially for individuals with cognitive disabilities or reading difficulties (cf. Maaß 2015, 11–12; Bredel, Maaß 2018, 251). Recently, however, a fundamental consensus has been reached with the regulatory framework of DIN SPEC 33429, which grants LS a special, authoritative status by formalizing its structural boundaries and establishing a standardized, verifiable set of rules. A defining feature of LS is its explicit identification of target audiences and their direct involvement in the process of text validation. Although originally created to meet the needs of individuals with cognitive disabilities or limited reading proficiency (Bock 2017, 20–28), LS is now intended for a highly heterogeneous audience that includes functional illiterates, migrants, refugees, and learners of German as a second or foreign language (DaZ/DaF) (Bock, Pappert 2023, 151–170).

Chronologically, the first document outlining LS guidelines was the translation of Inclusion Europe (2009) into various European languages. Its internationalised character results in a broad and highly generalised compendium, which functions more as a precursor to later and more linguistically grounded guidelines. A subsequent regulatory framework is the *Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung* (BITV 2.0), which prioritizes technological accessibility by specifying compliance standards for web and intranet content. While the 2011 revision explicitly recognized LS and sign language as essential instruments for information accessibility, the ordinance is jurisdictionally restricted to the federal level, necessitating distinct regulations at the state level. The rules provided by the Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, which was founded in 2006 and became an association in 2013, have been made available online since 2009. In 2013, and later in 2022, the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (BMAS) published them for the first time in the form of an information brochure in LS[1]. The most comprehensive and systematised set of guidelines is DIN SPEC 33429 (2025 [2023]) (*Deutsches Institut für Normung: Empfehlungen für Deutsche Leichte Sprache*), which was published definitively in March 2025 following earlier drafts. This document offers the most detailed and nuanced treatment of LS to date, addressing morphosyntactic, lexical, visual, and textual aspects with substantially greater precision than previous *Regelwerke*. It also includes explanations regarding the potential difficulties arising from features characteristic of the standard language.

Academic interest in LS extends far beyond its normative framing. Over the past decade, research conducted at the *Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache* at the University of Hildesheim and numerous scholarly publications – such as Bock (2019; 2022), Bock, Fix and Lange (2017), Lange (2019), Lindholm and Vanhatalo (2021), Maaß (2015; 2020; 2024), Maaß and Rink (2020), and Bredel and Maaß (2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2018) – have established this variety as an interdisciplinary research domain positioned at the intersection of applied linguistics, translation studies, and accessibility research.

Within the Italian academic landscape, research specifically focusing on the German *Leichte Sprache* has recently gained momentum, attracting increasing attention from scholars in German studies alongside the already established research on Italian Easy Language (cf. Sciumbata 2022). Despite this broad interest, research still exhibits a notable gap regarding the use and distribution of semantic relations. Prior studies have primarily focused on morphosyntactic and pragmatic features (Bellavia 2024; Di Meola 2024a; Di Meola 2024b; Mollica 2024) or have approached LS from transdisciplinary and metalinguistic perspectives (Crestani 2024a; 2024b; 2022; 2020; Puato 2024a; 2024b), without analysing how semantic relations contribute to meaning construction in simplified texts. A significant exception is provided by Porcaro (2024a; 2024b), who examines metonymy from a simplification-oriented perspective and analyses nominal compounds in terms of their structural variation and semantic loss. The present study expands this perspective by focusing specifically on semantic relations and offering a metalinguistic interpretation grounded in empirical corpus analysis.

[1] Crestani's contribution (2024, 205) offers a comparative overview of the rules established in 2013 and the rules marked as 'new' in 2022, also reporting a personal comment on the innovations adopted or modified.

From a linguistic standpoint, LS is a highly codified variety governed by rules aimed at ensuring maximum linguistic simplicity and reducing both intra- and paralinguistic complexity. Although the *Regelwerke* are characterized by a certain systematic coherence, they differ significantly in their regulatory frameworks. Collectively, the guidelines comprise approximately 120 rules, but only 17 are shared across all major compendia (cf. Puato 2024a, 20). This fragmented landscape has recently been transformed by the introduction of the DIN SPEC 33429, which establishes an authoritative consensus and serves as the primary benchmark for harmonizing these rules. While the specific linguistic prescriptions of this new standard will be analysed in detail in the subsequent sections, it is useful to first consider how Maaß (2020, 75) summarises these rules across different levels:

Tab. 1 - *Rules in common between the various compendiums (Maaß 2020, 75)*

Visual and medial design	1.	Bigger type-size
	2.	Each sentence on a new line
	3.	No word truncation at the end of the line
	4.	Text is left-aligned
Word structure	5.	Short words
	6.	Separation of compound words with hyphens
	7.	No abbreviations
	8.	No passive voice
Vocabulary	9.	Easy-to-understand words
	10.	Preferably no foreign words
	11.	Foreign words are explained where they are needed
Sentence structure	12.	Short sentences
Semantics	13.	No negation
Text	14.	No lexical variation in the text: same designation for same concept
	15.	Relevant information first
	16.	Clear structure: subheadings are used
	17.	Readers are addressed directly

At the layout level, LS uses typography to aid meaning; morphology favors linear, short, non-opaque structures over typical German density favouring hierarchical ordering, importance of information and chronological sequence of events (cf. Di Meola 2024a, 41); the lexicon prioritizes high-frequency, low-ambiguity, denotative terms; syntax demands short, linear sentences without subordination; semantics avoids or reduce negations; and the textual level enforces strict terminological coherence and hierarchical organization (key content, extensive use of headings, direct reader address).

A preliminary review on linguistic rules reveals that existing guidelines place substantial emphasis on morphosyntactic and textual aspects, while the semantic dimension receives considerably less explicit attention. The next chapter therefore seeks to shed further light on how semantic aspects are addressed in LS-guidelines.

3. *Semantics in* Leichte Sprache *Guidelines*

Proceeding in chronological sequence, this section investigates the way distinct LS-guidelines have approached semantic issues: 1. Inclusion Europe (2009), 2. BITV 2.0 (2011), 3. *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2022), 4. DIN SPEC 33429 (2025).

1. Inclusion Europe (henceforth: IE) (2009) addresses semantic aspects in a general and non-specific manner, resulting in a broad and heterogeneous treatment. The section of the document entitled *Wörter* [words] includes rules concerning the lexicon (see Rule 6) as well as pragmatic (see Rule 12) and typographic recommendations (see Rule 14):

   > 6. Verwenden Sie leicht verständliche Wörter, die allgemein bekannt sind.
   > 12. Seien Sie vorsichtig, wenn Sie Pronomen verwenden. Pronomen sind Wörter wie "ich", "du", "sie", "er" oder "es". Man verwendet sie statt einer Person oder einer Sache.
   > 14. Vermeiden Sie zu viele Satz-Zeichen.

   The only references that may be interpreted as pertaining to lexical semantics – albeit not explicitly foregrounded – are those embedded in the formulation of Rules 7, 9, and 10:

   > 7. Verwenden Sie keine schwierigen Wörter. Wenn Sie schwierige Wörter verwenden müssen: Erklären Sie die Wörter klar und eindeutig.
   > 9. Verwenden Sie im ganzen Text dasselbe Wort für dieselbe Sache.
   > 10. Verwenden Sie keine schwierigen Begriffe wie zum Beispiel Metaphern. Eine Metapher ist ein Satz, der nicht wörtlich gemeint ist. Zum Beispiel: "Es schüttet wie aus Eimern", statt: "Es regnet sehr stark".

   These rules require avoiding so-called 'difficult words' (cf. Rule 7) or, when their use cannot be avoided, providing a clear explanatory paraphrase. In addition, Rule 9 calls for the consistent use of the same lexical item to refer to the same concept, while Rule 10 excludes metaphorical expressions, that is, semantic structures whose figurative meaning does not correspond to their literal denotation.
2. BITV 2.0 (2011) likewise refers to semantic phenomena only implicitly, requiring the reader to infer relevant principles from the following:

   > 3. Begriffe sind durchgängig in gleicher Weise zu verwenden.
   > 4. Es sind kurze, gebräuchliche Begriffe und Redewendungen zu verwenden. Abstrakte Begriffe und Fremdwörter sind zu vermeiden oder mit Hilfe konkreter Beispiele zu erläutern. Zusammengesetzte Substantive sind durch Bindestrich zu trennen.

In this case, the document does not explicitly mention synonyms or lexemes but instead refers to *Begriffe* (expressions, terms, words) (cf. Rule 3), which must be used consistently throughout the text, avoiding terminological variation. Moreover, Rule 4 requires the use of simple and familiar terms, discourages abstract or foreign expressions (unless clarified through concrete examples), and prescribes the hyphenation of compound nouns to support ease of processing.

3. The guidelines of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2022) (henceforth: NLS) display a more systematic organisational structure, as is already evident from the index. The section *Wörter* includes twelve rules (W1–W12), of which only a few (W2, W4, W12) refer – albeit once more only implicitly – to semantic relations:

> W2. Benutzen Sie Wörter, die etwas genau beschreiben.
> W4. Benutzen Sie immer die gleichen Wörter für die gleichen Dinge.
> W12. Vermeiden Sie Redewendungen und bildliche Sprache.

Rule W2 promotes the use of lexical items that precisely denote their referent, favouring concrete and familiar terms. This principle is exemplified by the recommendation to replace abstract expressions such as *öffentlicher Nahverkehr* with more accessible formulations like *Bus und Bahn*. Similarly, Rule W4 calls for consistent lexical choice. For example, it recommends the continuous use of *Tablette* rather than alternating it with *Pille*. This avoids not only unnecessary lexical variation but also potential semantic ambiguity, as the term *Pille* is strongly associated in everyday usage with a highly specific meaning (the contraceptive pill). Finally, Rule W12 excludes figurative and idiomatic expressions, such as *Raben-Eltern*, on the basis that such forms may be understood literally and therefore lead to misinterpretation.

4. The final document under analysis, DIN SPEC 33429 (2025, 13–14), is the first to introduce specific subparagraphs for each linguistic phenomenon. In this framework, two dedicated sections address the treatment of synonyms and metaphors:

> **5.2.3 Synonyme**
> Unterschiedliche Bezeichnungen, die sich auf dasselbe beziehen, können das Verstehen des Textes erschweren. Daher sollten innerhalb desselben Textes in Leichter Sprache keine Synonyme verwendet werden. Das heißt, Gleiches sollte innerhalb eines Textes immer gleich benannt werden. Dies gilt nicht nur für Substantive zur Bezeichnung von Personen, Dingen, Ereignissen oder Tätigkeiten, sondern auch für Verben und Adjektive sowie Elemente der Satzverknüpfung (siehe 5.4.5).
> **5.2.4 Metaphern**
> Metaphern sind sprachliche Bilder, mit denen Inhalte veranschaulicht werden können. Sie können das Verstehen von Texten erschweren, da sie eine Übertragungsleistung oder ein Erlernen erfordern, damit der Bezug hergestellt werden kann. In Leichte-Sprache-Texten sollten Metaphern vermieden werden. Sie sollten nur in Ausnahmefällen verwendet werden, wenn sie den Nutzerinnen und Nutzern sicher bekannt sind und sich aus dem Text erschließen oder wenn sie abstrakte Inhalte konkret fassbar machen. Sind Metaphern für den Text zentral, sollten sie erläutert

> werden (siehe 5.2.2). Das Gleiche gilt für Ironie. Auch sie sollte möglichst vermieden werden.

DIN SPEC 33429 prescribes the elimination of synonyms within the same text and the almost complete avoidance of metaphors. In contrast to the previous guidelines examined in this section, these recommendations display a higher degree of theoretical awareness, as they recognise that lexical variation and semantic reinterpretation may hinder comprehension. In particular, Rule 5.2.4 highlights a central problem related to metaphor: it requires the reader to undertake an additional cognitive effort in order to translate the figurative meaning into a concrete referential interpretation.

A separate consideration must be given to the two seminal works by Maaß (2015) and Bredel and Maaß (2016a) which engage with the topic in a more comprehensive manner and from a clearly defined linguistic perspective. Maaß (2015, 161) suggests consulting synonym dictionaries and thesauri as tools in the translation from standard language to *Leichte Sprache*. Bredel and Maaß (2016a, 426–479), in addition to dedicating an explicit chapter focused on semantics, mention for the first time some of the semantic relations such as hypernymy, hyponymy and synonymy in connection to grammatical coherence (485–486). The authors refer to semantic connections in relation to the use of lexical co-referentiality either on the basis of encyclopaedic pre-knowledge, or on the basis of contextual knowledge built within the text.

The analysis of the guidelines indicates that the treatment of semantic relations tends to be largely implicit and fragmented, lacking a fully explicit and systematic framework. The main critical issues identified in the LS-*Regelwerke* can be grouped into three thematic areas:

1. Approximate treatment of semantic relations, in particular synonymy and polysemy. Guidelines like IE (Rule 9), NLS (W4), and DIN SPEC 33429 (Section 5.2.3) enforce referential rigidity, mandating the same word for the same concept. This oversimplifies semantics and creates a paradox: inclusive *Leichte Sprache* ultimately adopts the terminological rigidity characteristic of exclusive technical languages. Furthermore, BITV 2.0 (Rule 4) ignores these semantic nuances and overlooks diastratic (sociolectal) variations, failing to clarify if using a concept "in gleicher Weise" (BITV 2.0 2011, Rule 3) applies to the same or different target groups.
2. Unclear demarcation between abstract and concrete concepts. Rule 4 of BITV 2.0 recommends the use of concrete and familiar concepts, avoiding abstract terms. While this serves as a useful practical heuristic, its systematic application remains challenging because concreteness is rarely an inherent, static lexical trait; rather, it frequently depends on the specific usage and contextual environment. Similarly, in NLS (W2), the removal of abstract terms results in the loss of hyperonymic and hyponymic relations that contribute to the conceptual cohesion of the text.
3. Ambiguous management of figurative language. Most guidelines (IE Rule 10, BITV 2.0, NLS W12) strictly prohibit figurative and metaphorical expressions to aid comprehension. Conversely, DIN SPEC 33429 permits well-known or explained metaphors.

> Still, current approaches oversimplify the issue, ignoring that deeply rooted metaphors are often accessible even to speakers with limited language skills[2].

Overall, the restrictive character of the rules may reduce textual variety and naturalness by limiting the range of available semantic strategies. A notable gap in the existing guidelines is the lack of a comprehensive, empirically grounded account of semantic relations in simplified communication. Furthermore, as is common in this field, there remains a critical need for empirical reception studies that document actual comprehension difficulties and assess how these formulations are genuinely processed by the target audience. While addressing user comprehension through cognitive testing falls outside the scope of this specific study, the following section addresses the former gap by presenting the results of a text-based empirical analysis.

4. *The Case Study: Semantic Relations in* Leichte Sprache *Texts*

The main objective of this study is to investigate whether – and how – lexical substitutions in the simplification process follow identifiable semantic patterns, particularly those corresponding to classical semantic relations such as synonymy, hyponymy, hypernymy, meronymy, holonymy, and antonymy, as well as cases of homonymy and polysemy. The study is not purely descriptive but also theoretical: it aims to determine whether simplification in LS texts involves systematic modification of content and whether such modifications can be formalized through stable, recurring categories. Accordingly, the central research question is tailored to this theoretical aim: 'To what extent are classical semantic relations systematically applied as functional simplification strategies in LS texts?' A related, more specific question is: 'Can we identify recurring trends in these lexical transformations that allow us to formalize them into stable, predictable categories?'

To answer these questions, the research focuses on a corpus consisting of ten pairs of texts written respectively in standard German (*Standardsprache*) from [1A] to [10A], and in their simplified version in LS from [1B] to [10B]. The selected texts cover a variety of communication genres and contexts of use, including institutional domain, journalistic articles, presidential speeches and information materials, published by official and reliable sources such as government websites, regional media and portals dedicated to language accessibility. While the corpus's thematic heterogeneity and small size inevitably limit the strict comparability of the simplification strategies, this diversity provides essential qualitative insights into real-world practices that lay the groundwork for future larger-scale studies. The selection was strictly guided by the availability of this dual version, as well as the authority and recency of the sources[3]. The corpus was analysed manually to capture nuanced semantic shifts that automated tools might overlook.

[2] For a more specific overview about metaphorical expressions in the texts in *Leichte Sprache*, cf. Bellavia (2024).

[3] The hyperlinks of the source and target texts can be consulted in the 'Appendix' section of this contribution.

After excluding non-verbal elements, a two-phase analysis was conducted: a quantitative mapping of semantic strategy frequencies, followed by a qualitative examination of specific lexical substitutions (e.g., synonymy, hypernymy etc.) to assess structural semantic shifts.

Extracted terms were systematically documented in analysis tables (e.g., *Schulung*, *Workshop*). Multi-word expressions were reduced to neutral dictionary forms; for example, "Sandra Hubbe hat den Workshop geleitet" became "einen Workshop leiten" and "Sandra Hubbe hat die Schulung gehalten" became "eine Schulung halten". Next sections detail the quantitative results and qualitative reflections on semantic simplification.

The study quantitatively analyzed 232 items (116 pairs of correspondences). A 'correspondence' denotes here any comparable semantic unit, ranging from single words to multi-word phrases. Because text lengths naturally vary, absolute relation counts per text are not used as evaluative criteria. The data is summarized in the following table, which displays the total semantic relations per text pair in the final column and cumulative occurrences per relation type in the final row. The results are based on the 116 total matches, corresponding to the 232 items:

Tab. 2 - *Quantitative assessment of semantic relations*

	Synonymy	*Hypernymy*	*Hyponymy*	*Antonymy*	*Meronymy*	*Holonymy*	*Polysemy*	*Tot. per pair*
1A-1B	2	2						4
2A-2B	7 (-2)	4 (+2)		2				13
3A-3B	6	3	1			1		11
4A-4B	21 (-2)	2 (+2)	1		2	1	1	28
5A-5B	14	2	2	3	1			22
6A-6B	9	5			1			15
7A-7B	3	2						5
8A-8B	5 (-2)	1 (+2)	1		1			8
9A-9B	4	1	1					6
10A-10B	1	1	1			1		4
Tot. Sem. Rel.	72 (-6)	23 (+6)	7	5	5	3	1	116

As shown in the table, the distribution of semantic relations is both articulated and heterogeneous. The most frequent category is synonymy, with 72 instances, accounting for approximately 62.07% of the total 116 correspondences. Hypernymy is the next most frequent relation, observed in 23 instances (≈19.83%). In the corpus, hypernymy often appears as an alternative to synonymy, reflecting the subtle distinction between the two, as illustrated in the following example:

(1) Hamburgerinnen und Hamburger [2A]
die Menschen in Hamburg [2B]

In this specific instance, the relationship can be classified as hypernymy, since the 'people in Hamburg' constitutes the macro-category encompassing 'the citizens of Hamburg', as well as other groups such as tourists, travellers, and foreigners. Alternatively, it could be considered as partial synonymy, in that 'people in Hamburg' shares most of the denotative meaning (people related to the city) but differs in referential extension. In light of the cognitive simplification of LS, for the six instances in which synonymy and hypernymy appear to overlap, we opted to categorize them under the former, while retaining the possibility of reclassifying them under the latter – hence the data entries "*-6*" / "*+6*" reported in the table. Less frequent, yet still noteworthy, are cases of hyponymy, observed in seven correspondences (≈6.03%), in which an inverse process occurs. The remaining semantic relations are distributed more marginally: five instances of meronymy (≈4.31%), five instances of antonymy (≈4.31%), three instances of holonymy (≈2.58%), and a single instance of polysemy (≈0.86%).

We now turn to the qualitative analysis, beginning with the phenomenon of synonymy. In this process, the primary criterion is not perfect semantic equivalence, but enhanced transparency, concreteness, and frequency of use of the selected term. Frequently, the term employed in LS exhibits a more central or prototypical semantic profile. Within the use of synonymy as a semantic strategy in LS texts, however, several distinctive characteristics deserve attention. High semantic equivalence is, in fact, limited to a relatively small number of cases, such as:

(2) Unternehmen [9A]
Firma [9B]

(3) Brand [7A]
Feuer [7B]

In both cases proposed, the type of direct relation allows substitution without any semantic variation either on the referential or on the pragmatic level. Such substitution is possible because the terms share the same referent within the specific context. However, there are no cases of absolute total synonymy, as most lexical substitutions involve variations in register, connotation, or scope of use. Accordingly, direct synonymy constitutes a marginal category in comparison to other, more frequent forms of synonymic relation, which will be examined subsequently.

By contrast, partial synonyms (with medium/low semantic equivalence) are more common. As illustrated by the examples discussed in this study, a frequent trend is to employ non-direct synonymic formulations, in particular:

– Synonymy via morphosyntactic modification occurs when two expressions, although differing in grammatical form or syntactic structure, maintain a substantially equivalent meaning.

(4) junge Mitarbeiter [6A]
die Jüngeren [6B]

In the example (4), the synonymic relation is produced through the transformation of the noun phrase (adjectival modifier + head noun) into a nominalized form of the adjective. The expression *die Jüngeren*, although shorter, is more abstract and less specific than *junge Mitarbeiter*, as it omits crucial information on the referent [the workers]. A further issue concerns the creation of a comparative form which, in principle, requires an explicit counterpart ([the youngest] compared to whom?). In this respect, morpho-syntactic simplification does not necessarily entail semantic transparency for the reader.

– Contextual synonymy or 'functional synonymy' describes a phenomenon wherein lexical substitution relies entirely on pragmatic constraints. While the terms involved lack paradigmatic equivalence in isolation, they achieve functional identity within a discrete context of use. This classification constitutes a non-canonical synonymy, as the substitute used in LS derives its validity from the communicative goal of simplification rather than from primary semantic use. Thus, the selected term often diverges from the direct synonym found in lexicographical resources or corresponds to it only in a marginal sense.

(5) würdigen [4A]
respektieren [4B]

In Example (5), the verb *respektieren* [to respect] does not constitute a direct synonym of *würdigen* [to appreciate, reward, thank] in a strict lexicographic sense; rather, within the framework of LS, it operates as a functional simplification to enhance cognitive accessibility. The replacement mitigates the semantic density of *würdigen*, which implies nuances of recognition or gratitude, in favour of a more concrete and familiar lexeme such as *respektieren*, which in this context takes on the value of 'showing respect' or 'appreciating'.

– Structural synonymy (or synonymic paraphrase) manifests when semantic content is preserved yet reformulated through syntactic reconstruction, typically resulting in a more expansive and cognitively accessible surface structure. Such paraphrastic reformulation in LS frequently necessitates a stylistic transposition from nominal to verbal constructions (denominalization):

(6) Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit [6A]
Diese Menschen wollen dazu gehören. / Und sie wollen sich sicher fühlen. [6B]

(7) Arbeitsort und Arbeitszeit [6A]
wo und wann sie arbeiten wollen [6B]

In this instance (6), the coordinated nominal phrase *Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit* undergoes syntactic explication, transforming into two independent finite clauses with explicit subject-verb predication. A parallel process is observed in Example (7), where nominal compounds are reformulated through expansive synonymic paraphrasing. Here, the morphological heads (*-Ort*, *-Zeit*) are transposed into interrogative adverbs (*wo*, *wann*), introducing indirect interrogative subordinate clauses – a structure that stands in tension with the prescriptive prohibition of hypotaxis in LS-*Regelwerke*. Re-

formulating abstract nouns into verbs to simplify text is questionable. Nouns carry core meaning and evoke clear mental images, which aids language acquisition (Heine 2017, 408; Koeppel 2013, 125). Conversely, verbs can increase ambiguity. Additionally, verbal structures often create longer sentences and syntactic discontinuity (like verbal brackets), ultimately increasing cognitive load rather than simplifying the parsing process.

– Metaphorical synonymy: It involves the reformulation of metaphorical expressions into more concrete units, while maintaining a certain degree of abstraction. Within this type of relation, the core denotative meaning is preserved, while there is a partial reduction in connotative or figurative nuances.

(8) in Deckung gehen [4A]
sich verstecken [4B]

The source metaphor *in Deckung gehen* [lit. to take cover or to seek shelter] evokes a complex imagery schema associated with defensive positioning, typically situated within a context of danger, urgency, vigilance, and strategic reaction. In the reformulation [4B], this construction is displaced by the more direct and concrete form *sich verstecken* [to hide oneself], which retains the denotative meaning of 'to protect oneself', but significantly attenuates the figurative connotations of the original. This semantic attrition risks reducing the text's semantic density, thereby impoverishing the narrative dimension. Consequently, it would be advantageous to empirically investigate which reformulation genuinely enhances accessibility for the target groups.

Similarly, the identification of 'regular' hypernymy and hyponymy is restricted to a marginal subset of instances within the corpus:

(9) Fassade [2A]
Wände [2B]

(10) Initiativen [3A]
neue Ideen [3B]

Example (9) illustrates a case of hypernymy, wherein the term *Fassade* [front side, facade] functions as a hypernym in contrast to *Wände* [side, wall]. A wall/side is in fact a vertical construction element that separates internal spaces or delimits the building, while a front side/facade is the external side of the building, the visible 'face' that can be considered as a specific type of side/wall. Example (10) represents a case of hyponymy, in which *neue Ideen* [new ideas] constitutes a specific instance of the broader concept expressed by *Initiativen* [initiatives], which could also be read in a synonymic key.

Likewise, for hypernymy and hyponymy there are peculiarities:

– Hypernymy via morphosyntactic modification: it is the most frequent type within the corpus. This phenomenon occurs when one meaning is included in the other, but the relation of superordination or subordination occurs through a modification of the morphosyntactic material. In the context of hypernymy, reductive mechanisms man-

ifest, specifically through the elision of nominal modifiers within compound nouns (Examples 11 and 13) or the segmental truncation of phrasal units (Example 12). Conversely, hyponymic reformulations are characterized by additive processes involving nominal modifiers, thereby engendering the formation of new compound structures (Example 14):

(11) Klimaanpassungsstrategie [2A]
Strategie [2B]

(12) Menschen in seelischer Not [4A]
Menschen in Not [4B]

(13) Giftiger Ölkäfer [10A]
Giftiger Käfer [10B]

(14) Heime [4A]
Pflegeheime [4B]

Specifically, Example (11) demonstrates the reduction of the nominal compound *Klimaanpassungsstrategie* to the simple *Strategie*. This process entails the deletion of the constituent modifiers [*Klima-*] and [*Anpassung(s)-*] thereby retaining the broad semantic reference while eliminating lexical specificity. In Example (12), the phrase *Menschen in seelischer Not* undergoes segmental reduction via the elision of the adjectival modifier *seelischer*, resulting in a construction where the syntactic complexity decreases. A parallel mechanism is observed in Example (13), where the noun phrase is preserved, yet the morphological composition of the head is simplified, inducing a hypernymic generalization (e.g., *giftiger Ölkäfer*). Conversely, Example (14) illustrates a hyponymic shift characterized by an inverse mechanism: the superordinate term *Heime* is semantically narrowed through the adjunction of the nominal modifier *Pflege-*, yielding the determinative compound *Pflegeheime*.

Current LS guidelines lack specific directives on handling hypernymic and hyponymic relations. It remains debated whether specifying concepts for clarity or generalizing them to reduce cognitive load is more effective. Ultimately, the chosen strategy should be carefully calibrated to the target audience's linguistic competence and the text's communicative goals.

– Contextual hypernymy/hyponymy. The semantic relationship of superordination and subordination is established solely within the specific context of the simplification. Consequently, his hierarchical inclusion is driven by the communicative context in the text rather than by systematic taxonomic relationship valid at a global lexical level:

(15) Teilnehmender unserer Studie [5A]
Mitarbeiter [5B]

(16) Flüssigkeit [10A]
Gift [10B]

In Example (15), the term *Mitarbeiter* is not defined lexicographically as a hypernym or synonym for *Teilnehmender unserer Studie*, as the two concepts occupy distinct semantic fields: the former broadly denotes a collaborator or employee, while the latter specifically refers to a research participant. Example (16) shows the opposite: canonically, *Gift* is not a hyponym of *Flüssigkeit*. However, in this specific text, *Flüssigkeit* is concretized as *Gift*. This substitution is heavily licensed by the surrounding co-text. Because the text already establishes the beetle as poisonous, the use of *Gift* effectively narrows the semantic scope of the generic liquid to its specific harmful function.

Regarding meronymy, LS strategies typically prioritize a constituent part of the whole, often due to informational relevance or because the selected element possesses greater perceptual salience for the reader. Conversely, holonymy is employed where an inclusive term is required to facilitate intralingual adaptation. As with the previously discussed categories, these meronymic and holonymic shifts adhere to specific, albeit non-systematic, mechanisms:

– Meronymy / holonymy via morphosyntactic modification encompasses structural reformulations wherein complex lexical units undergo de-composition or re-composition:

(17) Schülerteams [8A]
Schüler und Schülerinnen [8B]

(18) Beingelenken [10A]
Beinen [10B]

Two distinct processes are evident. In Example (18), the compound *Schülerteams* is reformulated into an explicit, coordinated meronymic structure (*Schüler und Schülerinnen*), thereby enhancing referential transparency. Here, the collective concept of 'student teams' is resolved into its constituents (students). Conversely, Example (19) shows a holonomic generalization: the compound *Beingelenken* [leg joints] is simplified by elevating the nominal modifier *Bein-* [leg] to the position of the isolated lexical head *Beinen*.

– Meronymy/contextual holonymy. The part-whole relationship is not established through inherent lexical hierarchy; rather, it is contingent upon the specific communicative context of use:

(19) Team [5A]
Mitarbeiter [5B]

The substitution of the collective term *Team* with *Mitarbeiter* concretizes the referent, shifting from an abstract entity to a more tangible designation. In this instance, the meronymic relation is not intrinsic to the lexicon, but is pragmatically established in the context of simplification: While *Mitarbeiter* denotes the constituent members of the *Team* in this specific context, the equivalence is non-systemic, as a team may theoretically comprise individuals other than employees.

– Meronymy/metaphorical holonymy. This phenomenon manifests when the part-whole relationship coincides with the concretization of a metaphorical expression:

(20) in den zweiten Winter gehen [4A]
fast schon 2 Jahre dauern [4B]

The metaphorical expression in the first instance [entering the second winter] conveys a figurative temporal concept, which is reformulated via an explicit temporal construction [lasting almost 2 years]. Consequently, the core meaning is preserved through a holonymic strategy: as the specific season (winter) functions as a constituent part of the broader temporal unit (two years).
Regarding antonymic forms, five instances were identified within the corpus. Analogously, in these cases, antonymy functions not in a strict lexical sense, but rather structurally. It manifests through expansive explicit formulations wherein the oppositional meaning remains implicit, relying on pragmatic presuppositions derived from the communicative context:

(21) die Hitze reduzieren [2A]
die Luft kühler machen [2B]

(22) schlicht unterfordern [5A]
zu einfach sein [5B]

In the first instance, the opposition is semantic-conceptual: the expression [to reduce the heat] is paraphrased as [to make the air cooler], which is thus translated into an opposite perceptual effect. It would be useful to empirically test whether the antonymic reformulation is associated with a real greater comprehensibility of the message.
In Example (22) the substitution of [to simply under-stimulate] with [to be too easy] represents a structural change: the meaning of 'understimulating' is rendered through a periphrastic formulation that makes the evaluative content explicit in more direct terms. Here too, the antonymic relation is indirect and is based on a process of pragmatic explication.
Finally, the single instance of polysemy identified (Example 23) demonstrates that semantic simplification does not invariably require lexical substitution, as it can rely on standard pragmatic inference:

(23) Opfer des Krieges [4A]
Opfer des Krieges [4B]

Although the term *Opfer* is structurally polysemous, capable of denoting both [victim] and [sacrifice], this ambiguity remains purely theoretical. Driven by standard pragmatic principles of inference, the strong semantic frame of *Krieg* [war] automatically activates the [victim] reading. Consequently, the reader is not consciously faced with a disambiguation task. This illustrates that polysemy is fully permissible in LS when the

surrounding co-text naturally and immediately restricts the meaning, making explicit reformulation unnecessary.

To sum up, corpus analysis reveals that LS reformulation balances simplification with meaning preservation, despite of some semantic loss, adapting to specific contexts rather than following a regular model. While synonymy and hypernymy are the dominant strategies, others emerge based on pragmatic or domain constraints. This distribution provides a preliminary empirical foundation for future research on LS semantic trends.

5. *Conclusion*

The conducted analysis demonstrates that semantic relations in LS texts manifest as a set of flexible strategies oriented towards communicative clarity and the reduction of cognitive load.

Within the parallel corpus of twenty texts (ten Standard German and their corresponding LS versions), the quantitative analysis identified 116 semantic correspondences. Synonymy constitutes the predominant category, accounting for 72 occurrences, hypernymy follows with 23 occurrences, while hyponymy (7), antonymy (5), meronymy (5), holonymy (3), and polysemy (1) represent significantly smaller subsets. In global terms, these data indicate that LS exhibits a predilection for processes of synonymic and hypernymic reformulation.

Qualitatively, the analysis suggests some preliminary trends regarding the structure and application of these relations. Regarding synonymy, the simplification observed within the corpus can be categorized into: synonymy via morphosyntactic modification, contextual synonymy, structural synonymy, metaphorical synonymy. Analogous patterns were observed regarding hypernymy-hyponymy and meronymy-holonymy relations, which rely on morphosyntactic modification, context-dependent simplification, and metaphorical simplification. Regarding antonymy, the analysis revealed that simplification occurs indirectly; rather than using opposing lexical pairs, the text operates on cognitive frames where meaning remains implicit within the pragmatic presuppositions of the discourse. In the only instance of polysemy, the term remained unchanged, with disambiguation functions delegated to the logical-textual context.

Methodologically, applying this analytical model cross-linguistically (e.g., to Italian *Lingua Facile*) could reveal universal simplification principles and help standardize accessibility parameters. Furthermore, while AI tools and LLMs for generating accessible texts already exist, their control over semantic content remains an open question. Understanding how these models process semantic relations is crucial for evaluating and optimizing existing tools to ensure genuine cognitive coherence.

In conclusion, this study has offered a pivotal contribution to contemporary linguistic research, by investigating how simplification processes affect the semantic relations that guarantee text coherence, thus re-establishing a theoretical foundation for LS semantics, grounded in empirical qualitative and quantitative evidence. Ultimately, simplification emerges as a highly pragmatic process of semantic mediation, constantly negotiating between referential precision and communicative accessibility. By identifying these lexical transformations, this study aims to contribute to the fields of lexical semantics and applied

translation studies, offering a structured, text-based foundation for understanding how semantic equivalence is practically managed in simplified communication.

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Appendix

Corpus – Hyperlinks (last accessed April 20, 2025)

1A: https://www.bequa-ggmbh.de/ (news of February 20, 2025)
1B: https://www.bequa-ggmbh.de/leichte-sprache/index.html (news of February 20, 2025)
2A: https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/senat/presseservice-des-senats/landespressekonferenz/klimaanpassung-in-hamburg-1027086
2B: https://www.hamburg.de/barrierefrei/leichte-sprache/neuigkeiten/2025-02-27-so-will-sich-hamburg-an-das-klima-anpassen-1028096
3A: https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/behoerden/behoerde-fuer-inneres-und-sport/presseservice/pressemeldungen/hamburger-sportgala-2025-1020014
3B: https://www.hamburg.de/barrierefrei/leichte-sprache/neuigkeiten/2025-02-12-ls-hamburger-sport-gala-2025-1020282
4A: https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2023/12/231225-Weihnachtsansprache.html
4B: https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2023/12/231225-Weihnachtsansprache-Leichte-Sprache.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4
5A: https://www.certo-portal.de/artikel/muss-arbeit-spass-machen
5B: https://www.certo-portal.de/leichte-sprache/artikel/muss-arbeit-spass-machen-1
6A: https://www.certo-portal.de/artikel/hat-die-gen-z-keine-lust-zu-arbeiten
6B: https://www.certo-portal.de/leichte-sprache/artikel/wollen-junge-menschen-nicht-mehr-arbeiten
7A: https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Brand-auf-der-Peenebruecke-Kleintransporter-in-Flammen,peenebruecke140.html
7B: https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/barrierefreie_angebote/leichte_sprache/Mehr-Nachrichten-vom-20032025,nils4284.html
8A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/ost-thueringen/jena/plastikfreier-kaugummi-schuelerinnen-wettbewerb-jugend-gruendet-100.html (not accessible anymore, April 20, 2026)
8B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-schuelerinnen-wettbewerb-jugend-kaugummis-plastik-100.html
9A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/leipzig/leipzig-leipzig-land/kohle-ausstieg-mitteldeutsches-revier-poedelwitz-kaufen-inklusives-hofprojekt-100.html
9B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-sachsen-poedelwitz-inklusives-hofprojekt-100.html
10A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/ost-thueringen/saale-holzland/kahla-oelkaefer-giftig-spielplatz-100.html (not accessible anymore, April 20, 2026)
10B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-thueringen-kahla-spielplatz-gesperrt-oelkaefer-100.html