



Simplified technical English: from the description of a new technolect to a critique of New New-speak

Christopher Gledhill

► **To cite this version:**

Christopher Gledhill. Simplified technical English: from the description of a new technolect to a critique of New New-speak. 32ème Colloque du GERAS, UFR Sciences SVT et Faculté de Médecine – Université de Bourgogne, Mar 2011, Dijon, France. hal-01220668

HAL Id: hal-01220668

<https://hal-univ-paris.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01220668>

Submitted on 24 Sep 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Simplified Technical English: An exploration of phraseology in a new Controlled Language

1. Research questions

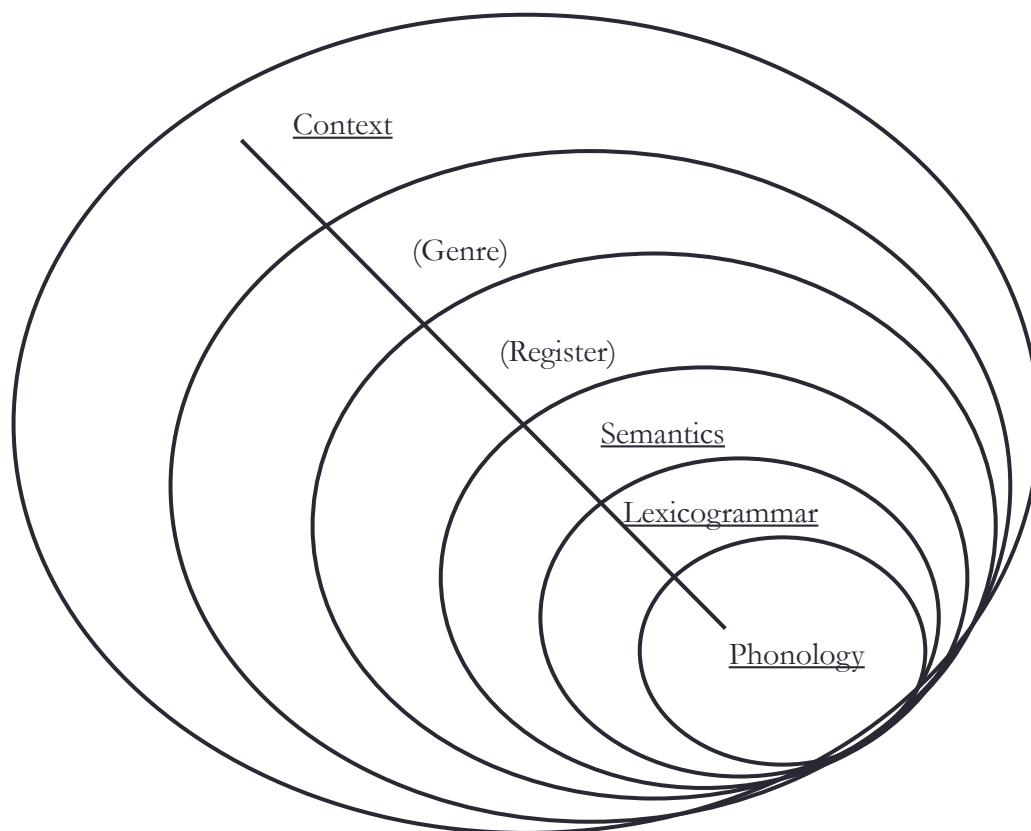
- What is STE: a Controlled Language (CL) or some other 'Language for Specific Purposes' (LSP)?
- To what extent can the designers of CLs consciously 'control' language?
- Is it possible to set up 'clear style' as a commodity, or to copyright a variety of English?

2. Terminology used for varieties of speech

- Language vs Discourse (theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics)
- Dialect vs Variety (Genderlect, Idiolect, Sociolect, Technolect...)(sociolinguistics)
- Control Language vs. Sublanguage (computational linguistics, machine translation)
- LGP vs LSP (applied linguistics, terminology)
- Planned vs. Controlled Language (CL) (applied linguistics, language planning)

3. Systemic Functional Model of Language

- **Genre / Register** 'functional variation of language'
- **Lexicogrammar** 'resource for realizing meaning'



(adapted from Martin 1992: 496)

Table 1. A Systemic Functional Typology of Text Types

Point of view of Field (Activity, Message, Theme)	Point of view of Mode (Format, Structure, Organisation)			
	Spoken (monologue / dialogue)		Written (monologue / dialogue)	
Reporting	Statement	Interview	Obituary	Tax return
Recreating	Radio commentary	Drama	Comic strip	Short story
Sharing	Reminiscence	Conversation	Blog	Chat
Doing	Ceremony	Transaction	Shopping list	Business letter
Recommending	Prayer	Consultation	Advertisement	Agony-aunt letter
Enabling	Harangue	Demonstration	Regulation	Editorial
Exploring	Speech	Panel discussion	Open letter	Letter to editor
Expounding	Plenary lecture	Oral exam	Written exam /	Report

4. Origins of Controlled Languages

1930	Basic English	C.K. Ogden's 'International Auxiliary Language' based on English
1958	Plain English	Term used in the UK and associated with Ernest A. Gower's guide to using plain English in administrative texts.
1959	Special English	Modified version of Basic English used by Voice of America radio.
1963	Plain English	Term used in the US for David Mellinkoff's campaign to improve the quality of legal texts.
1965	English Prime	A proposal by David Bourland which excludes the verb <i>to be</i> . Associated with General Semantics and the technique of 'constrained writing'.
1970s	Simplified English	Collective term used to describe a variety of industry-based controlled languages, such as <i>Caterpillar Fundamental English</i> , <i>GM Controlled Automotive Service Language</i> , <i>IBM Easy English</i> , <i>XEROX Multilingual Customized English</i> ...
1982	Caterpillar Technical English	Expanded version of <i>Caterpillar Fundamental English</i> . First CL to be designed specifically for (semi-automatic) Machine Translation.
1986	AECMA Simplified English	First controlled language to be adopted by a consortium of manufacturers (<i>Association européenne de constructeurs de matériel aéronautique</i>).
1995	Air Traffic communication (ATC) or 'Airspeak'	International convention on Air Traffic Control communication (ICAO 1995). English phonetic alphabet and phraseology must be used upon request for communication between an aircraft and a control tower.
1998	Specialised English	Variant of Special English used by a UK-based evangelical broadcasting station.
2001	Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP)	A set of key phrases in the English language for use at sea and developed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The SMCP were adopted by the 22nd Assembly of the IMO in November 2001.
2003	Simple English	Term used for the Simple English Wikipedia website (said to be based on Basic English and Special English).
2005	Simplified Technical English (STE)	New term for AECMA Simplified English, now defined as international standard for technical documentation (but with various sub-varieties: <i>Boeing STE</i> , <i>EADS STE</i> , <i>Rolls Royce STE</i>).

5 Design features of Planned languages

- 1880s-1950s International Auxiliary Languages (*Volapük, Esperanto, Latino sine flexione, Novial*)
- 1930s C.K. Ogden BASIC English (*British American Scientific International Commercial*)

Original: E.A. Poe's <i>The Gold Bug</i>	BASIC: <i>The Gold Insect</i> , devised by A.P. Rossiter (1932)
As I received it a loud growl was heard, succeeded by scratching at the door. Jupiter opened it, and a large Newfoundland, belonging to Legrand, rushed in, leaped upon my shoulders, and loaded me with caresses; for I had shown him much attention during previous visits.	As I was taking it, the deep-throated voice of a dog came to our ears, and then the sound of nails on the door. Jupiter went to it, and a great Newfoundland dog of Legrand's came loudly in , got its feet up on my arms, and kept putting its nose against me in a loving way: for I had given it much attention at other times.

1. fundamental **lexis** (cf. Esperanto's *fundamenta vortaro* (947 'monosemic' roots, including 42 affixes)
2. finite rules of **grammar** (cf. Esperanto's *16 reguloj*)

In our joint work we came to the theory and practice of definition. In comparing definitions - definitions of everything, from a sense quality to a force and from a rabbit to a concept - we were struck by the fact that whatever you are defining, certain words keep coming back into your definitions. Define them, and with them you could define anything. That suggests that there might be some limited set of words in terms of which the meanings of all other words might be stated. If so, then a very limited language limited in its vocabulary but comprehensive in its scope - would be possible.

(Richards 1943: 23)

...Basic is less concerned to alter the way we speak than to encourage a different attitude to what we say. ... [for NS and NNS] it offers an educational instrument by which contexts and connections can be analyzed in the interests of a fuller appreciation of the resources of the language as a whole.

(Ogden 1937)

6 Design features of Controlled languages

- Increasing technical complexity of modern aircraft,
- Increasing volume of technical documentation (20,000 pp 1950b > 500,000 pp 1990s)
- English is L2 for aircraft manufacturers and their customers do not have English as their first language.

Design features of SE, STE as a **Controlled Languages**:

1. approved / unapproved **vocabulary** (plus Technical Names and Manufacturing Processes)
2. finite rules of **register** (focus on reformulation, target readers, re-usable text, role of Technical Writer)

5.3 The structural rules of Basic English and Simplified Technical English¹

Rank of analysis	Basic English (1930)	STE (1995/2005)
Text		Use connecting words to join separate sentences. Restrict sentence length to no more than 20 words (procedural sentences) or 25 words (descriptive sentences). Restrict paragraphs to no more than 6 sentences.
Clause	Use all Nouns, Adjectives, and Particles as in Standard English, avoiding obscure idioms, far-fetched metaphors, and intricate word order. Make questions with the opposite word order, and with "DO".	Write more than one instruction per sentence only when two actions have to be done at the same time. (example: <i>Hold the switch to "TEST" and make sure the light comes on.</i>) Write short sentences that are logically connected by connecting words. Such connecting words are: "Thus, also, so but, and, then, now." Put conditions first in warnings and cautions.
Verb Group	Operators and pronouns conjugate as in normal English.	Use the past participle only as an adjective: either with a noun or after the verbs "to be, to become." <i>Procedures</i> : use only the active voice. <i>Description</i> and <i>Operation</i> : use the active voice as much as possible.
Noun Group	Make combined words (compounds) from two nouns (for example <i>milkman</i>) or a noun and a directive (<i>sundown</i>). Nouns must not be used as verbs.	If it is possible, you must put an article (the, a, an) or a demonstrative adjective (this, that, these those) before a noun. Break up noun clusters that have more than three nouns. Use hyphens to show the relationship between the words... ²
Lexis / Vocabulary	Use the BASIC vocabulary [850 items]. Proper names, Mathematical and Metric systems, and International terms may be incorporated at discretion.	Use approved vocabulary [1500 items] from the AECMA approved vocabulary or company-specific Technical Names and Manufacturing Processes. Each word in the dictionary has only one definition. Use approved vocabulary in the same sense as stated in the dictionary.
Lexeme / Morpheme	The usual variants from the sixteen Operators (Verb-forms) and the seven Pronouns in the vocabulary are available; also Plurals, Comparatives, Adjectives used as Nouns, Adverbs (in -ly) formed from Adjectives, and the prefix un-. Noun forms can generate four derivatives: two nouns (-er and -ing suffixes) and two adjectives (-ing and -ed suffixes), where these are in use in Standard English. Make opposite adjectives with UN-. A certain number of these formations, e.g., <i>unregular</i> , <i>unprobable</i> , are departures from Standard English. All, however, can readily be avoided by the use of <i>not</i> .	Use approved words only as the part of speech given. (example: <i>close</i> is a verb, not an adverb, write: <i>Do not go near the landing gear if...</i> not: <i>Do not go close to the landing gear if...</i>). Use simple verb tenses (past, present and future). Do not use forms of the verb not shown in the "Approved Words" such as "-ing" participles or gerunds (unless part of a technical name).

¹ The wording of these rules is taken directly, albeit in abbreviated form, from Ogden (1930) and ASD (1995/2005).

² Unfortunately the guidelines then give an example which breaks the three noun maximum' rule: "(example: *The main-gear inboard-door retraction-winch handle.*)"

7. Examples of Simplified Technical English (AECMA 1995, Stewart 1998, Disborg 2007)

Controlled Reformulation	TE	STE
RULE: 2.1 Do not make noun clusters of more than three nouns.	g) Connect suction hose self sealing coupling (13) to union (12) ...	k) Connect the self-sealing coupling on the suction hose (13) to the port pump union (12) ...
	The firewall is the world's first key-upgradeable integrated security appliance.	The firewall is the first security device [[that can use upgrades by a license key.]]
RULE: 2.3 When appropriate, use an article (the, a, an) or a demonstrative adjective (this, these) before a noun.	b) Depressurize associated hydraulic system.	b) Release the pressure from the related hydraulic system.
	1. Any leaking oil can be collected by placing the cleaning cloth under the overspeed governor (3).	A. Put the cleaning cloth below the overspeed governor (3) to collect the oil leakage.
RULE: 3.2 Use the approved forms of the verb to make only:- The infinitive, - The imperative, - The simple present tense, - The simple past tense, - The future tense.	1. Any leaking oil can be collected by placing the cleaning cloth under the overspeed governor (3).	A. Put the cleaning cloth below the overspeed governor (3) to collect the oil leakage.
	For information on installing the firewall X, see the firewall QuickStart Guide or the "Getting Started" chapter in the User Guide.	For more data on the installation of the firewall X, refer to the firewall QuickStart Guide or the "Getting Started" chapter in the User Guide.
RULE: 3.6 Use the active voice. Use only the active voice in procedural writing, and as much as possible in descriptive writing.	CAUTION: If the pump is removed because of operation without fluid (dry running), or because of malfunctioning and if internal damage is suspected , visually check the associated case drain filter element.	CAUTION: Do a visual check of the related case-drain filter element, if you remove the pump : - because of operation without fluid (dry running) -or because of malfunction if you think that there is internal damage.
RULE: 3.7 If there is an approved verb to describe an action, use the verb (not a noun or other part of speech).	d) Energize the aircraft electrical network.	d) Supply power to the electrical network of the aircraft.
	d) Display a warning notice on panel 427VU prohibiting operation of the system associated with the pump to be removed.	On panel 427VU, put a warning notice in position to tell persons not to pressurize the related hydraulic system.

	12. CAUTION: Support the pump during installation and removal operations.	CAUTION: Make sure a person holds the pump during removal and installation.
Uncontrolled Simplification	Its Intelligent Layered Security architecture delivers multiple layers of protection that work together to detect and block threats from attacking your network.	The device has different layers of protection that find and prevent damage to your network.
	At the bottom end of the cylinder there is a recoil stop tube and a gland.	At the bottom of the cylinder is the recoil stop tube and the gland.
	h) Push fire handle (fire valve opens) and safety with lockwire.	j) Push the fire handle to open the fire valve and safety it with lockwire.
	3. Note the position of bracket (6), it must be installed in the same position.	C. Record the position of the bracket (6), you must subsequently install it in the same position.
	CAUTION: To prevent inducing loads into the mound pad carbon seal, care should be taken to properly align and support the hydraulic pumps during installation.	CAUTION: When you install the hydraulic pump, make sure that its position on the studs is correct. An incorrect position of the pump can cause an unwanted load on the carbon seal of the mount pad.
	Because of the close areas in which a lift truck operates and its other operating characteristics (like rear wheel steering and tail swing), every operator must receive additional training, even if they have a license to drive an automobile.	A lift truck and a car operate differently. You must get special training, also if you have a driving license.

8. Research on STE

- Controlled languages (Fuchs & Schwitter 1996, Goyvaerts 1996, Hijsen 1998, Kamprath et al. 1998, Lux 1998, Gavieirro-Villate & Spaggiari 1999, Schubert 2001, Seidlhofer 2002? Grzega 2006)
- Reading (Van der Eijch et al 1996, Stewart 1998, Fonseca 2006, Disborg 2007, Scheuermann et al. 2009)
- Translation (Spyridakis et al. 1977, Hartley & Paris 1997a, O'Brien 1999, Allen 2000, Nyberg & Huijsen 2003, Muegge 2006/2007)
- Linguistic aspects (Hartley & Paris 1997b, Bernth 1998, O'Brien 2003, Allerton 2002, Crossley et al. 2007)

9. STE and new New Speak

Even the best product is only as good as its documentation and technical data, which allow the customer to use it safely and effectively. Simplified Technical English (STE) can help you meet documentation compliance requirements, and can also increase the efficiency and productivity of your employees. Formerly known as AECMA Simplified English, STE is an international standard (ASD-STE100) that helps to make technical documentation easy to understand and easier to translate for global customers. Simplified Technical English standardizes vocabulary, grammar and style, while letting users control their specific terminology.

(ASD, 2005)

Le mot *amerlangue* est apparu en 2017, pour désigner l'anglais international, largement inspiré de la langue américaine, qui s'est si abondamment répandu depuis le XXe siècle dans tous les échanges – scientifiques, commerciaux, financiers etc. – que la société Noolang en a déposé le brevet, sous le nom d'*anglique* (pour *anglais langue unique*). Les manifestations qui ont eu lieu dans de nombreux pays en réaction à cette tentative de récupération marchande (Noolang exigeait la mention d'un copyright pour tous les textes rédigés en anglique) a [sic] contraint les principales fédérations mondiales, Amérique et Europe en tête, à racheter le brevet et à rendre le copyright libre de droits [...] (p47)
[...] Curieusement, les pays qui ont le plus de mal à intégrer l'amerlangue sont les pays traditionnellement anglophones, car une partie de la population ne prend pas le temps d'apprendre le véritable anglais et se contente de l'amerlangue. Les spécialistes craignent à terme une disparition de la langue anglaise... Le paradoxe est que des langues comme le français, le russe ou l'espagnol, dont les locuteurs ont des années durant agité le spectre de l'anglicisation, se portent aujourd'hui à merveille [...]
(p50)

Isabelle JARRY. 2003. *George Orwell. Cent ans d'anticipation*. Paris: Editions Stock.

10. (Simplified) References

- AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe [ASD]. 2005. *ASD-STE100 - Simplified Technical English - International Specification for the Preparation of Maintenance Documentation in a Controlled Language*. [<http://simplifiedenglish.net/asd-ste100-simplified-technical-english/> Accessed 21 Feb 2011].
- Allerton, David. 2002. C.K. Ogden's Basic English: a Critical Assessment. In David Allerton, Paul Skandera & Cornelia Tschichold (eds.) *Perspectives on English as a World Language*. Schwabe Verlag: Basel, pp. 149-159.
- Farrington, Gordon. 1996. AECMA Simplified English: An Overview of the International Aircraft Maintenance Language. *Proceedings of the First International Workshop on Controlled Language Applications (CLAW96)*. Leuven, Belgium: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Centre for Computational Linguistics, March 26-27, 1996, pp. 1-23.
- Halliday, Michael A. K. & Jim R. Martin 1993. *Writing Science: Literacy and Discursive Power*. London: Falmer Press.
- Hartley, Anthony & Cécile Paris. 1997a. Une Analyse Fonctionnelle de Textes Procéduraux: Apport de la Génération Automatique à la Définition des Langues Rationalisées. In E. Pascual, J-L. Nespoulos & J. Virbel (eds.) *Actes : Le texte procédural; langage, action et cognition*, mai 1997 Pôle Universitaire Européen de Toulouse & Prescott, pp. 211-222.
- Martin, Jim. R. 1992. *English Text: System and Structure*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ogden, Charles Kay. 1930. *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar*. London: Treber.
- Seidlhofer, Barbara. 2002. The shape of things to come? Some Basic questions about English as a lingua franca. In K. Knapp & C. Meierkord (eds.) *Lingua franca communication*, Frankfurt / Main: Peter Lang, pp. 269-302.