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Absatract

In this study the issue of simplification of literary texts has been analysed. A comparison between passages from the original text of Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe and the simplified versions of these texts. The RANGE computer program has been used to compare the word frequency of the texts, with the findings that little has changed in the simplified texts. Analyses of the contents of the texts show that the main essence of the author's focus remain in the simplified version and that the simplified text contains enough information to be called authentic as far as content goes. What lacks in the simplified text is cohesion, which results in a text that is comprehensible to its content but needs more linking to fully work as a good simplified text for L2 readers.

Keywords: simplified texts, high/low frequency words, easy readers, readability

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The issue of simplifying original texts to suit L2 (second language) learners has been an object of discussion for teachers all over the world. There is an opinion, supported by Honeyfield (1977), that the simplified texts can be even more difficult to read for the learners than the original text, as the language in the simplified text is not presented in a natural way. The changes made in the simplified version might make the text lack in readability and might not help the readers to develop their reading skills in order to deal with unsimplified texts.

In an article written on the topic of teenage literature Lilian Rönqvist and Roger D. Sell, both members of the Academy of Finland's Literary Pragmatics Project, claim that classics are unsuitable for L2 learners, as the classics are too hard to read and the content is not interesting for teenagers. Even simplified versions of these texts are refuted as the language of these texts are considered unenjoyable and boring (Rönqvist & Sell: 126).

There are, however, those who claim that simplified texts can be authentic and, if written well, interesting for the reader. Gillian Claridge, for instance, has compared texts with the conclusion that simplified texts still can give the reader an authentic reading experience (Claridge, 2005).

This study will be carried out in a similar way as Claridge's (2005), meaning the RANGE computer program will be used to compare simplified texts to the originals. In this case the classic Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe to its simplified version by Bob Blaisdell, in order to see if the simplified text keeps or loses its authenticity and readability.

Aim and scope

The adventures of Robinson Crusoe is a classic that is read world wide and it is most likely that learners of English as L2 at some point face a simplified version of this novel. Therefore the aim of this study is to clarify whether the simplified text can keep the characteristics of an authentic text although it has been simplified.

The first part of the comparison deals with the linguistic qualities of the texts. There are many features in a text that can be changed, rewritten or left out while composing a simplified version. The linguistic features chosen to be compared in this study are word frequency, sentence structure and discourse markers. These features will together result in a conclusion about the texts' readability.

A second part of the comparison between unsimplified and simplified texts aims to show if the focus of the author is the same in both texts. The author of the simplified text might have put emphasis on a slightly different piece of information than the author of the original text. There is also a discussion on the topic of whether classics are suitable for teenagers to read or not.

1.3 Material and Method

The study treats two passages in *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, a description and a dialogue, as these are two different types of text. The first one is the introduction of Robinson Crusoe, the opening of the novel. When starting to read a novel the reader starts from the beginning and from the first pages he or she has often already decided whether the book is interesting enough to keep on reading. If the readability is bad the reader will probably have a hard time understanding what the novel is about. Therefore the introduction seemed most important to analyse to see if the changes made in the simplified text have any effect on the reader's comprehensibility. The passages are the first 165 words of the unsimplified text and the first 57 words of the simplified text, headline excluded.

The second passage chosen is a dialogue between Robinson Crusoe and a captain of a ship that arrives to the island. What is interesting in the dialogue is to see whether the simplified text has changed in such a way that it is no longer considered as communicative and 'normal' English. A dialogue might also be sensitive to changes that can lead to another interpretation of what is really being said. The original dialogue is 176 words long and the simplified version 120 words long.

To measure the level of the text, word frequency and foreign words the program RANGE has been used. It is a computer program that processes texts according to word lists to compare the number of high frequency and low frequency words, for instance. The word lists used in RANGE are the 1st and 2nd 1000 words from West's General Service List (West, 1953). These lists will be referred to as GSL Base Lists 1 and 2, and they contain the 2000 most frequent headwords for L2 learners (Nation & Heatley, 2003). The third word list will be referred to as AWL and it contains the first 1000 words from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000). The words in this list are frequent in academic writing in upper secondary school and university texts and will probably not appear at all in the simplified text of this study, as it deals with fiction.

The RANGE results of word frequency assigned to the GSL Base List were put together in graphs to clearly show the distribution of high and low frequency words throughout the text. Further, the structure of the texts and the discourse markers were compared and the content briefly analysed.

To be able to make a fair comparison between an original text and its simplified version, there has to be a clarification of what an authentic text is. Sometimes the term authentic text is used when referring to the original and unsimplified text to part it from the

simplified version, but as the aim of this study is to find authenticity even in simplified texts, the terms 'original' and 'simplified' are used. However, the issue of authenticity will now be further explained.

Janet K. Swaffar is a professor at the University of Texas, teaching German as a second language. She has published five books and several articles on L2 teaching and learning (Swaffar, 2002). In an article about reading authentic texts she explains that even a simplified text can be authentic. The definition of an authentic text is a text that is written in order to communicate meaning, whether it is written for native speakers of English, for L2 learners or children. What is important is that the goal of the text is to communicate information. In simplified texts used for teaching, communication of information is often put aside for the main purpose of teaching language as such.

Swaffar also puts emphasis on the importance of decoding message systems and not just reading word for word. Simplified texts which focus on language learning rather than communication often encourage word for word reading which keep the learners from developing their skills in decoding systems of message in unsimplified texts (Swaffar, 1985: 17).

Moreover, comparisons have been carried out, looking at the author's focus in a certain piece of information. These comparisons are made and analysed by the author of this study and conclusions are simply drawn from the interpretation of the same with the endeavour to make the analysis as generally applicable as possible.

2. Previous research

In 1977 John Honeyfield, at the time university lecturer at IKIP Negeri, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, presented a study about simplified texts and grader readers. He claimed that since simplified texts reduce information density by not using low frequency words, they are not equivalent to the normal system of distributing information in English texts. Moreover, the syntax is often restricted to such extent that the cohesion of the text is lost. The way of treating vocabulary and cohesion in simplified texts may limit the readability and make it harder for the reader to reach the level of reading that is required to read an unsimplified English text (Honeyfield, 1977).

Gillian Claridge, has taught English for L2 learners in both England and New Zealand. One of her articles published in TESOL Quarterly is a reanalysis and extended version of Honeyfield's (1977) study of simplification. By using the RANGE program (Nation & Heatly, 2003) she has analysed simplified texts with the findings that a well-written simplified text can be experienced as typical of 'normal' English and as authentic.

Dr. Scott Crossley is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at Georgia State University. His primary research focuses on corpus linguistics and second language learning with the application of computational tools in text comprehensibility. His research on second language acquisition has appeared in many journals in the field of including TESOL Quarterly and The Modern Language Journal (Georgia State University, 2010). Together with three other professors Crossley has written the article *A Linguistic Analysis of Simplified and Authentic Texts* (2007) where criteria for simplified texts are presented. For example connectives and cohesive links are presented as important devices in simplified texts and the conclusion is drawn that simplified versions rely on more common connectives than do original texts (Crossley et al. 2007:27).

The computer program RANGE used in this study has been developed by Paul Nation, professor of applied linguistics at Victoria University in Wellington New Zealand (Victoria University, 2010), who has written several books on vocabulary acquisition, for instance *Learning Vocabulary in another language* (2001) and *Teaching Vocabulary: Strategies and Techniques* (2008). Nation's research on simplified text in *Learning Vocabulary in another language* presents criteria for simplified texts according to percentage of unknown words for L2 learners (Nation, 2001:150).

3. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of the texts will first deal with the introduction passage and then the dialogue passage. Figures 1 and 2 show the distribution of high and low frequency words throughout the original versus the simplified text. Figure 1 shows that most of the words in the original text were found in the 1st GSL Base List. In the same text, 22 out of 165 words (13%) did not occur in any of the base lists. The results of the simplified text, figure 2, show a fairly similar frequency of words, as the majority of the words were found in the 1st GSL Base List and 4 out of 57 words (7%) were not in any of the GSL lists.

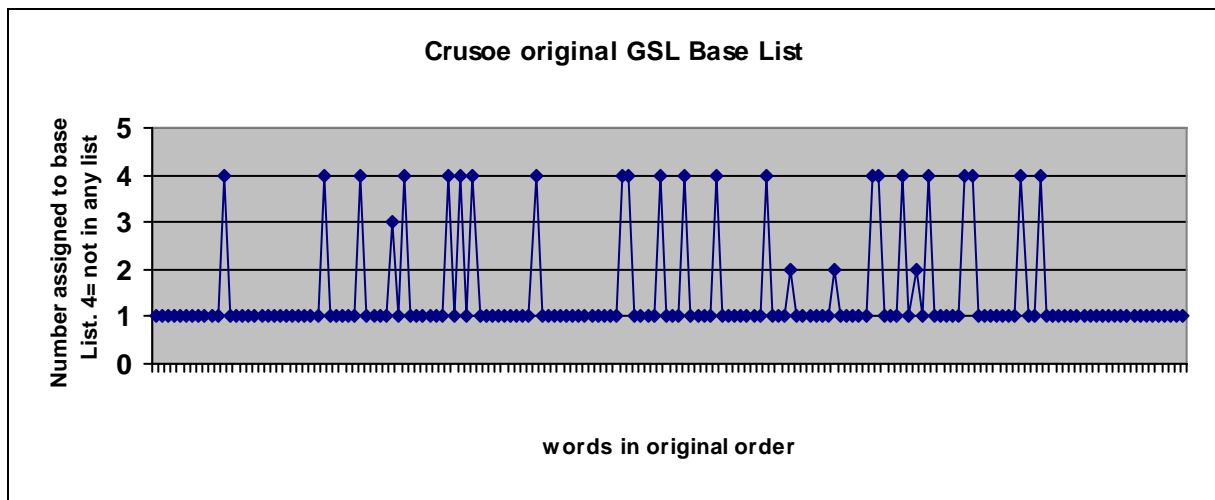


Figure1: Presentation of word frequency in the original introduction

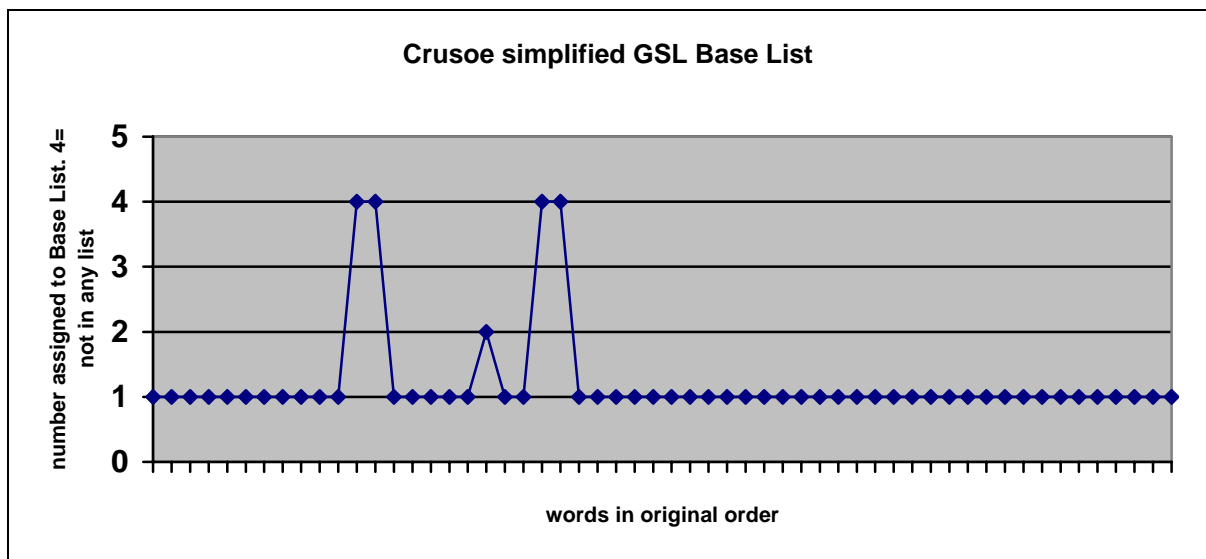


Figure2: Presentation of word frequency in the simplified introduction

A first quick look at the graph of the original text suggests that the words, according to the lists, are distributed as one would expect from a 'normal English' text. It is notable, though, that very few words from the 2nd and 3rd Base Lists are represented. Group 4, containing words not found in any lists, also include proper names that are not hard for any reader to understand and in the original text 12 of 22 words are proper names.

If the proper names are excluded from the analysis, as they do not cause any trouble for the reader, we are left with 10 words out of 165 (6%) that are particularly low frequent and either just hard for the reader to understand or known as old English, and therefore still hard to understand. As previously mentioned, the simplified text contained 4 words that were not included in the GSL Base Lists. All of these 4 words are proper nouns and can, therefore, not be counted as regular low frequency words.

After excluding the proper nouns from both texts the conclusion is that, when it comes to word frequency, the simplified text does not differ very much from the original, as the original text surprisingly does not show a mixed distribution of words either. If there is no, or little, difference in the word frequency of the texts, there is no reason for stating that the simplified text is more homogenous than the original.

Table 1 below, shows all the linguistic features compared between the texts. Moving on from word frequency, structure and discourse markers are also treated as features that make a text authentic. The cohesion of a text is important for linking ideas and making the text fluent. Crossley et al.(2007) say that an original text is more likely to contain connective items than a simplified text. The reason is that the author of the simplified text often wants to avoid too long sentences in the simplified text. However, this can lead to a choppy text without any natural linking between the clauses and the simplified text then becomes perhaps even harder to follow than the original (Crossley, 2007: 18-19).

In this case the 3 sentences in the original have been broken up into 4 sentences in the simplified version. A lot of information has been cut out in the simplified text which means that there are information that need to be linked together. However, there are still 4 sentences without any linking devices which gives the impression of a choppy text with pieces of information just piled on one another. The original text is not easy to read because of the very long and complex sentences, appositions and relative clauses for example the very first sentence of the extract (appendix 1, lines 1-2). Therefore it is understandable that the author of the simplified text has chosen to cut out some information, how Crusoe got his name for instance, to make the text less heavy, but then the text is left without any attempt to link it

together again. The lack of cohesive ties in the simplified introduction is definitely not an advantage as it does not come out as normal written English.

Another observation made is that the lack of complex sentences makes the simplified text differ from ‘normal’ English, as several simple sentences after one another makes the reading boring and non- fluent (appendix 2, lines 1-4).

Table 1: Presents the linguistic features of the original and simplified introduction

Linguistic features	RC original	RC simplified
Words	165 words 86,06% words found in 1 st 2000 words 1 word from 3 rd list 22 words outside the lists (except proper nouns)	57 words 92,98% words found in 1 st 2000 words No words from 3 rd list No words outside the lists (except proper nouns)
Structure	3 sentences	4 sentences
Connectives	though, and, and, but, and, and, and	

Measuring authenticity of a text also include the content of the text. Claridge takes the authenticity discussion to another level when she claims that a simplified text can still count as authentic even if it does not communicate the same meaning as the original text. A simplified text that communicates a slightly different meaning than the original is not a true one, but the point is that the simplified version in itself can still be readable, communicative and amusing to its reader (Claridge, 2005:10).

Table 2 shows the results of the comparison between the original and simplified texts according to the information given in the texts and what the author probably would like to communicate to his reader. As far as information goes, the texts are similar except that in the simplified version the explanation about Crusoe’s name has been cut out. The interpretation of the texts differs a little as the author’s focus in the original text lies in the fact that Crusoe came from a very well-reputed family (appendix 1, lines 1-5). In the simplified version the author simply tells where Crusoe was born and that he came from a good family while the background of his family has been left out (appendix 2, line 1).

With Claridge’s (2005) criteria of a good simplified text in mind, the results of the comparison shows that the authors’ focuses do not really correspond to each other, which leads us to the conclusion that the simplified text in relation to its original is not a good one.

However, what is important in this comparison is not only to see if the simplified version is good in comparison with the original, but also to see if the simplified text can embrace the criteria of authenticity on its own. In this case, it has to be considered whether the text communicates a meaning, and, according to Table 2, it does. The information about Crusoe and his brothers does work perfectly as an introduction just like the extended, original one.

It is also remarkable that the information left out in the simplified text does not have any influence on what happens later on in the novel. The fact that Crusoe's family had a good reputation does not have a major bearing further on and, therefore, it does not feel strange that this part has been left out. The reader can still assimilate the story despite the cut out information.

These findings lead back to Rönqvist's and Sell's (1994) claim that classics are often unsuitable as the stories are considered boring and not appealing to teenagers. If unsimplified, it is understandable that Robinson Crusoe, to a teenager, appears overwhelming with all the sentences that seem to go on for pages. There has to be a disagreement with Rönqvist and Sell, though, because the content of the simplified version gives the reader all the essential parts of the story and therefore it has to be up to the reader to decide whether the text is enjoyable or not. Even if the simplified text treated in this study does not reach the criteria of a good simplified text when it comes to cohesion, the content gives the reader what is needed to read and understand a classic.

Table 2: Presents the content of the original and simplified introduction

Content	RC original	RC simplified
Information	1 birth of RC and background of his parents 2 explanation of his name 3 two elder brothers and what happened to them	1 birth and name of RC 2 two brothers and what happened to them
Author's focus	1 to emphasise that RC came from a well-reputed family. 2 to show that RC's brother had a very high rank in the war before he died 3 to indicate that RC disappeared	1 to inform about RC's family 2 to indicate that RC disappeared

The word frequency of the dialogue passages shows a slightly different distribution of words than the previously analysed texts. The original text contains 6 words from the 2nd GSL Base List and 2 words from the AWL list. The simplified text has only 3 words from the 2nd list and none from the third.

The dialogue texts also have words that are not found in any lists. In the original dialogue 11 of 176 words are from this category and in the simplified text 6 of these words are kept. What really differs between the introduction passage and the dialogue passage is that among the words not found in any list in the dialogue, none are proper nouns. This fact points out that there are more words in the simplified dialogue that are hard for the reader to understand than in the simplified introduction.

Nation (2001) claims that a well-written simplified text for L2 learners should contain a maximum of 5%, of words unknown to the reader. This percentage corresponds to the number of words that the learner should be able to guess the meaning of, or the reader should at least be able to follow the text without loss of overall comprehension. In the simplified dialogue the words outside the word lists represent 5%, which is on the edge of too many hard-to-read words for a L2 learner, presuming that these words are not proper nouns (Nation, 2001:150).

However, one of the words that is not included in any lists is *angel* (appendix 4, line 1), which is not a frequently used word in fiction and especially not in dialogues. It is probably therefore excluded from the GSL Base Lists, even though it seems very likely that even younger L2 learners already know the meaning of *angel*. If so, the percentage of unknown words in the simplified dialogue is only 4.1%, which is within the margin that Nation recommends for a simplified text.

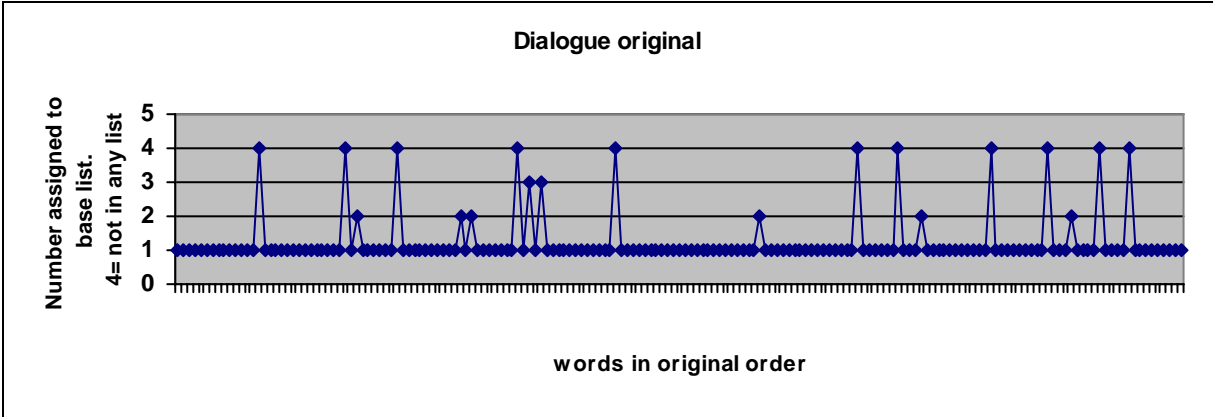


Figure 3: Presentation of word frequency in the original dialogue

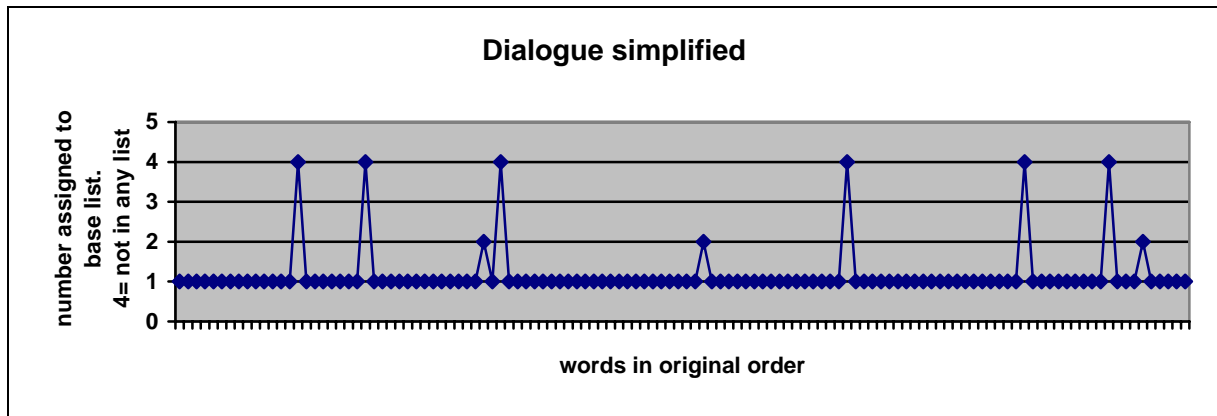


Figure 4: Presentation of word frequency in the simplified dialogue

The 6 sentences in the original text have been rewritten in 10 sentences in the simplified text. As the simplified version is 56 words shorter than the original, it seems a lot to use 10 sentences in such a short passage. Of these sentences 2 are kept exactly as they are written in the original and if they are excluded, the author of the simplified text has made 8 sentences from the original 4. Again we have the results of a text that has many and short clauses that the reader probably will find strange to read. The discourse markers that connect the clauses are also cut down from 5 to 2, which indicates a lack of cohesion, to some extent, even in the dialogue passage.

Table 3: Presents the linguistic features of the original and simplified dialogue

Linguistic features	Dialogue original	Dialogue simplified
Words	176 words. 157 in the 1 st list, 6 in the 2 nd , 2 in the 3 rd and 11 not in any list.	120 words. 111 in the 1 st list, 3 in 2 nd , none in 3 rd and 6 not in any list.
Structure	6 sentences	10 sentences
Discourse markers	and, and, but, and, and	but, instead,

As for the content of the dialogue passages, presented in table 4, there are no significant differences. The simplified text leaves out the fact that Crusoe, in the original, emphasises that the captain should not be afraid (appendix 3, line 1-4), but the fact that Crusoe offers him help makes the reader understand anyway that Crusoe has a friendly attitude towards the captain. The captain's story has also been cut a little but the main sense of the speech, that he was abandoned and left to die, is still there.

Table 4: Presents the content of the original and simplified dialogue

Contents	Dialogue original	Dialogue simplified
Information	1. RC introduces himself to the captain 2. the captain tells his story	same as original
Author's focus	1. RC tells the captain not to be afraid and offers help. 2. the captain has been abandoned by his men and he thought he was going to die	1. RC offers help. 2. same as original

In the simplified dialogue, however, there is reason to take a closer look at what words and structures have been changed. It seems that the author of the simplified text has made some decisions about changing or not changing the text that are questionable. For instance, among the words that, with the RANGE program, were not found in the GSL Base Lists or the AWL list, *mutinied* (appendix 4, line 5) and *desolate* (appendix 4, line 6) are found. These are words that are kept as in the original and the reason for this is probably to give the reader some words that are not obvious, in order to make the reader learn new words.

As there is a great gap between most of the words in the text that occur in the 1st GSL Base List and these words mentioned that are not in any lists, it might have been justified to look for synonyms from the 2nd GSL Base list and the AWL list. For instance *desolate* could easily be replaced by *deserted* or another suitable word from the GSL Base Lists. When looking closer at the word *mutinied*, it has to be clarified that the GSL Base lists and the AWL list are based on word types using one headword, in this case it would be *mutiny*, and all its possible variations like different tenses, plurals etc. This means that the past tense *mutinied* would be listed as found if the headword *mutiny* occurred in the lists. In this case the word does not occur in the lists and there has to be a reason why it is still there in the simplified version. The author of the simplified text has presumably kept the word unchanged, as it is a specific term used in the semantic field of sailing, and because a suitable synonym would be hard to find.

Further, the author of the simplified text is not consistent when it comes to word order. In the original dialogue there are two inversions, *said I* (appendix 3, line 2) and *said he* (appendix 3, line 6). These expressions should not be hard to understand even as the reader will probably automatically switch the words for a more contemporary word order. In the

simplified version only one of these has been changed into *I said* (appendix 4, line 1) and the other is left unchanged. At least the author of the simplified text ought to keep the same changed word order throughout the text or perhaps for the better, keep the original order. As a good simplified text, as far as possible, should keep the original wording there is little support for making this change at all.

4. Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this study was mainly to see if the simplified version of Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe can count as authentic reading. Comparisons have been carried out focusing on word distribution of high and low frequency words, sentence structure, cohesion and content. Two passages were compared, one was the introduction and the other a dialogue.

By using the RANGE computer program the analysis of word frequency was made with the result that the simplified texts did not differ much from the original. The word frequency in both passages did not show that the simplified versions were more homogenous than the original. The simplified introduction showed signs of being homogenous but this can not be blamed on the author of the simplified text, as the original had nearly the same distribution of words, where most of the words were to be found in the 1st GSL Base List.

The simplified texts had weaknesses when it came to text structure and cohesion. The criteria for a good simplified text is that the simplified version is written in a way that is as close to 'normal English' as possible. This is where the simplified version of Robinson Crusoe loses part of its authenticity. The short and many sentences with full stop and lack of discourse markers and connective devices made the simplified passages not very convincing as an example of 'normal English' and, in fact, for a L2 learner they are probably hard to follow.

If the meaning of the simplified version is not the same as the meaning communicated in the original, it is not a true simplified text, states Claridge (2005:10). When comparing the original passages of Robinson Crusoe to their simplified versions it is clear that there is no difference in what the authors lay focus on in their texts. The content of the simplified passages communicate the same message as the original, although some information has been left out. The information missing in the simplified passages are presumed to have little, or no influence on the text in its entirety. The reader can still understand the main themes of the story.

The story of Robinson Crusoe in itself is judged to have no influence on the readability for L2 learners. There is no reason to state, as Rönnqvist and Sell (1994) do, that a classic is not interesting for teenagers as it would be a personal judgement from the reader depending on taste. With a simplified version as the one treated in this study it is clear, as far as content goes, that the main story of a classic can still be brought to the reader in a shorter form.

The overall conclusion is that the simplified version of Robinson Crusoe to its content can fully be counted as authentic, both in itself and in relation to the original. The information left out in the simplified text has little influence on the readers interpretation of the text. As for word frequency and other linguistic features the only thing to wish for would be a more cohesive text, but as this study only treated the number of sentences and discourse markers in terms of conjunctions, this would be something to investigate further.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Extract from the original introduction of Robinson Crusoe

1. I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that
2. country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who was settled first at Hull. He got
3. a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade, lived afterward at York, from
4. whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very
5. good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer; but
6. by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay we call
7. ourselves, and write our name, Crusoe, and so my companions always called me. I
8. had two elder brothers, one of which was lieutenant-colonel to an English regiment of
9. foot in Flanders, formerly commanded by the famous Colonel Lockhart, and was
10. killed at the battle near Dunkirk against the Spaniards; what became of my second
11. brother I never knew, any more than my father and mother did know what was
12. become of me. (Defoe, 1995: 1)

Appendix 2: Extract from the simplified introduction of Robinson Crusoe

1. I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, England, of a good family. My
2. parents named me Robinson Crusoe. I had two older brothers, one of whom was killed
3. in a war. What happened to my second brother I never knew, any more than my father
4. or mother later knew what happened to me. (Defoe, 1995: 1)

Appendix 3: Extract from the original dialogue in Robinson Crusoe

1. Am I talking to God or man? Is it a real man or an angel? Be in no fear about that, sir,
2. said I. If God had sent an angel to relieve you, he would have come better clothed, and
3. armed after another manner than you see me in. Pray lay aside your fears; I am a man,
4. an Englishman, and disposed to assist you, you see. I have one servant only; we have
5. arms and ammunition; tell us freely, can we serve you? What is your case? Our case,
6. said he, sir, is too long to tell you while our murderers are so near; but in short, sir, I
7. was commander of that ship; my men have mutinied against me, they have been
8. hardly prevailed on not to murder me; and at last have set me on shore in this desolate
9. place, with these two men with me, one my mate, the other a passenger, where we
10. expected to perish, believing the place to be uninhabited, and know not yet what to
11. think of it. (Defoe, 1995: 196)

Appendix 4: Extract from the simplified dialogue in Robinson Crusoe

1. Am I talking to God, or man? Is it a real man or an angel? I am a man, I said, an
2. Englishman, who would like to help you. I have one servant only. We have guns and
3. ammunition. Tell us, can we help you? What is your story? Our story, said he, sir, is
4. too long to tell you, while our murderers are so near. But in short, sir, I was
5. commander of that ship. My men have mutinied against me, they have hardly held
6. themselves back from killing me. Instead they have set me on shore in this desolate
7. place, with these two men with me, one my mate, the other a passenger, where we
8. expect to die. (Defoe, 1995: 67)

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