Guidelines for alternative & descriptive texts

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1. Introduction

Alternative and descriptive texts give information on visual elements of a paper in written form, so that users of screen readers can get access to the contents of pictures and figures.

Alternative texts summarize the picture contents in a very short and concise way (e. g. "bar diagram showing the frequency of X"), while **descriptive texts** give more detailed information (e. g. a full description of the bar diagram including axes labels, maximums, minimums, etc.). All pictures/figures should be fitted with at least an alternative text; descriptive texts are necessary if an in-depth understanding of the contents is required. As academic papers most commonly contain rather complex graphics, that visualize a lot of information at once, most figures in these contexts will require descriptive texts.

Alternative texts	**Descriptive texts**
- Short & concise: main message of the image	- Longer & more detailed: contain all necessary or interesting information
- Neutral in tone, not framing anything as particularly positive or negative - Repetitions of information given in the text or the caption should be avoided - Introductions such as „The image shows …" are unnecessary - Use of formatted text and special symbols (as are used in e. g. predicate logic) should be avoided if possible - Switches in language (e. g. to the researched language) are recognized automatically by the screen reader and do not need to be labelled	

2. Alternative texts

a. Creating alternative texts

1. Format of the image
   (e. g. photograph, drawing, diagram etc.)
2. Main aspects featured in the image
   (e. g. persons, writing, statistical markings etc.)
3. Background or shape of the image (if present/relevant)
   (e. g. landscapes, speech bubbles etc.)

b. Examples[1]

Example 1

(Gebel Asyut al-gharbi in 2010; photo: Fritz Barthel; © Jochem Kahl, The Asyut Project):

Alternative text:

A color photograph shows a view across fields to a steep, rough rocky landscape. A mountain rises prominently from a chain of hills in the center, featuring large cave-like openings as well as smaller rectangular openings.

Example 2 (Lindenfelser 2024):

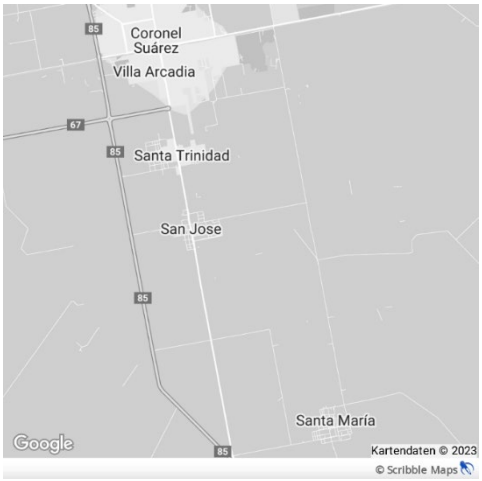


Abbildung 1: Die drei wolgadeutschen Siedlungen bei Coronel Suárez (Provinz Buenos Aires)

Alternative text:

Screenshot: Five places are marked on a black and white picture from google maps: Coronel Suárez, Villa Arcadia, Santa Trinidad, San Jose and Santa Maria.

[1] All example images are taken from editions of the journal *Linguistische Berichte* that were published before the addition of alternative and descriptive texts. The texts shown here were created by the publisher to exemplify the use of alternative and descriptive texts. As the papers' authors did not take part in creating the texts, the texts are likely to contain errors, please excuse these. Captions (where present) were taken from the published articles.

Example 3 (Lindenfelser 2024):

Abbildung 2: Zweisprachiger Willkommensgruß am Eingang der Bibliothek von San José

Alternative text:

Photograph: A sign reading “Willkommen Bienvenidos” on a red brick wall above a white door.

Example 4 (Hieroglyph as an image in the continuous text)):

und in dieser

Alternative text:

Hieroglyph: Name of the hieroglyph, as well as a pictorial description if it cannot be clearly described.
(The alternative text should then also be inserted as alternative text to the image)

3. Descriptive texts

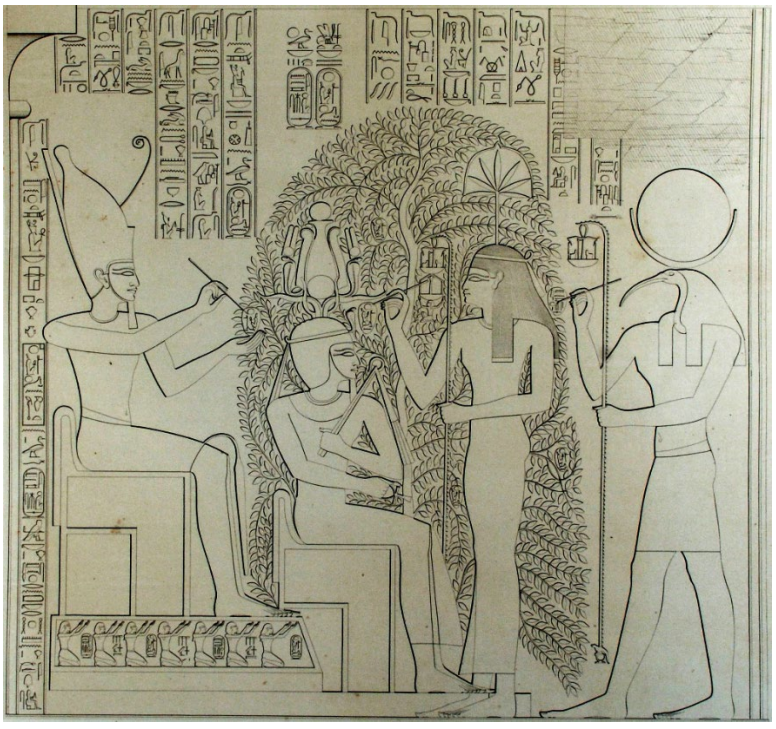
a. Creating descriptive texts

The following instructions for creating descriptive texts were adapted from Fibich, Oncken & Axnick (2019):

1. Start with the title or label of the image (e. g. “Figure 3.1”), so the beginning of the image and its descriptive text is clearly marked in the text.
2. Name the format of the image next (e. g. photograph, schematic graph, portrait, drawing, mind map or a specific type of diagram). Simply using “image” or “figure” is not precise enough.
3. Next, describe the overall structure of the image. This could mean giving an overview of the main elements of the image to give an impression of the contents.
4. Now describe the relevant details. While doing so, follow the logical order one might view the graphic in. Often this means going from the upper left corner to the lower right corner or going clockwise around the image. Should the order diverge from these two, explicitly mention the order (e. g. “The following pie chart contains the following contents in a counter-clockwise order”). Describe one element after the other, do not jump between elements.
5. Give information on any written markings on the individual elements in the image and describe how the elements are connected to each other.

b. Examples

example 1 (The deities Seshat, Thoth, and Amun-Re write the king's name on the leaves of the Ished Tree (Lepsius 1849-56: Section III, p. 169)):



Descriptive text:
Black and white drawing showing the Ished Tree with branches and leaves in the center. Directly in front of the tree is King Ramses II dressed in a long robe and wearing the Atef crown, seated on a (throne) seat with a low backrest. In his left hand he holds a flagellum, in his right hand an ankh sign. In front of him stands the goddess Seshat, wearing a knee-length robe and a tripartite, shoulder-length wig. In her left hand she holds a palm-branch stripped of leaves and notched to serve as tally, and in her right hand a reed, with which she writes the name of King Ramses II in

an oval shape, which represents an oversized leaf of the Ished tree. Behind Seshat and next to the tree stands Thoth, depicted in human form with the head of an ibis. He wears a knee-length apron, a tripartite shoulder-length wig, and a crescent moon and moon disc on his head. In his left hand, he also holds a palm-branch stripped of leaves and notched, and with his right hand, he also writes the name of Ramses II on a leaf of the Ished Tree. Behind the seated king and also next to the tree, the god Amun-Re is depicted sitting on a (throne) seat with a low backrest. He wears a loincloth with an animal tail and the double crown. With his right hand, he also writes on a leaf of the tree, which he holds with his left hand, the name of Ramses II. His throne (seat) rests on a pedestal on which seven men kneel with their hands raised forward. Inscriptions in front of them mention the name of King Ramses II and 'the gods who are in heaven.' The scene behind Amun-Re is accompanied by a vertical column of hieroglyphs. Above the Ished Tree are three further blocks of hieroglyphic columns: six vertical columns above Amun-Re and next to the tree, two columns above the tree, and seven columns above the tree and to the right of it.

Beispiel 2 (Grabkammer der Dame Idy, Außensarg mit Innensarg und Deckel, Foto: Andrea Kilian, © Jochem Kahl, The Asyut Project):

Descriptive text:

A colour photograph provides a view into a narrow burial chamber cut out of the rock, in which two colourfully decorated box coffins without lids stand nested inside each other. On the narrow side of the outer coffin, a false door is painted, surrounded on the left, right, and top by ornamental hieroglyphs. The hieroglyphs are painted in blue on an ochre background. Next to the coffins, a lid is positioned upright against the wall. It also shows traces of decoration. The coffins and lid take up almost the entire width of the chamber. Between the lid and the wall, a few clay shards lie on the floor of the chamber. A yardstick, a display board labelled "TAP, P10.1, shaft12; 7.9.24" and a north arrow lie in front of the coffins.

Example 3 (Xu 2024):

n, e, x
$e < n$ $Max(x)$ $stand\ up(e, x)$

Descriptive text:

Table-like graphic of the semantics of the sentence “Max stood up.” from example (34). In the first row, all involved entities are listed with n standing for the time of utterance, e for the time of the described event, and x for a person. In the row underneath, the semantic relations between the entities are listed: The first relation is e smaller than n, meaning that the event happened before the time of utterance. Below that is Max(x), meaning that the entity x is Max. Last is the predicate stand up (e,x), meaning that the action of standing up is executed by Max at the event time e.

Example 4 (Stutz 2024):

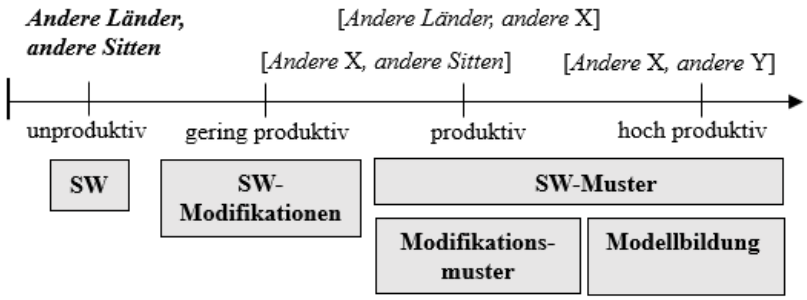


Abbildung 3: Produktivität und Schematizität der Musterbildungen von Andere Länder, andere Sitten

Descriptive text:

Figure 3 schematic: In the center of the schematic is an arrow showing the progression from unproductive to highly productive. Above the arrow, the four stages are exemplified: unproductive is represented by “Andere Länder, andere Sitten”, slightly productive by “Andere X, andere Sitten”, productive by “Andere Länder, andere X” and highly productive by “Andere X, andere Y”. The last three are set in square brackets to show their status as patterns rather than sayings. Underneath the arrow, the four stages are named: A „Sprichwort” at the unproductive stage, a “Sprichwort-Modifikation” at the slightly productive stage, a “Modifikationsmuster at the productive stage, and a “Modellbildung” at the highly productive stage. The latter two are subsumed under the category „Sprichwort-Muster”.

Example 5 (Lee-Schoenfeld, Diewald & Kelly (2024)):

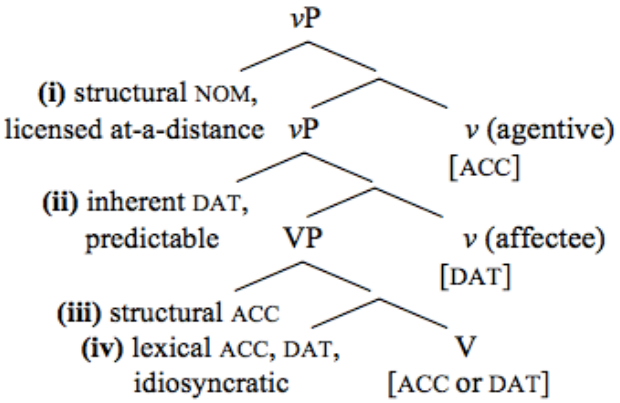


Abbildung 4: German case positions and case-licensing heads in the verbal domain

Descriptive text:

Figure 4 syntactic tree: Case-licensing in a verb phrase which explains the use of verbs with either a dative and an accusative object or two accusative objects. The tree is split into four stages from top to bottom, marked by roman numerals: In stage (1) is a vP (small v, the P is always capitalized) splitting into the case-licensing "(i) structural NOM, licensed at-a-distance" on the left, the element "v (agentive) [ACC]" on the right, and another vP (small v) in the center. In stage (2) this latter vP splits into case-licensing "(ii) inherent DAT, predictable" on the left, the element "v (affectee) [DAT]" on the right, and a VP (capital V) in the center. That VP is split in stage (3) into case-licensing "(iii) structural ACC" on the left and an unlabeled branch on the right. Stage (4) sees the split of this branch into case-licensing "(iv) lexical ACC, DAT, idiosyncratic" on the left and the element "V (capital v) [ACC or DAT]" on the right.

Example 6 (Gu 2024):

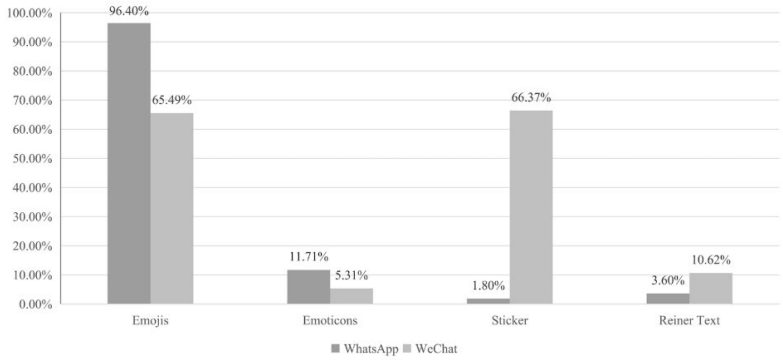


Abbildung 5: Anteil der Bildzeichen in den deutschsprachigen und chinesischen Dialogen

Descriptive text:

Figure 5 diagram: A bar diagram with a y-axis from 0–100% and an x-axis with four category labels: "Emojis", "Emoticons", "Sticker" and "reiner Text". For each of the categories, two messenger apps are compared with the WhatsApp chats representing German data and the WeChat chats representing Chinese data. On top of the bars, the percentage for each bar is given: 96.40% of WhatsApp messages contain emojis, 11.71% contain Emoticons, 1.80% stickers, and 3.60% are text only. In the WeChat chats, 65.49% of messages contain emojis, 5.31% emoticons, 66.37% stickers, and 10.62% are text only.

4. Handing in the alternative and descriptive texts

The manner of handing in the alternative and descriptive texts depends on the document format of your manuscript. If your manuscript is in .rtf or .pdf format, please put your alternative and descriptive text into an additional Word document. If you are handing in a Word manuscript (.docx), please add the texts to their images. To do so, please right-click on the image and select the button marked in figure 6.

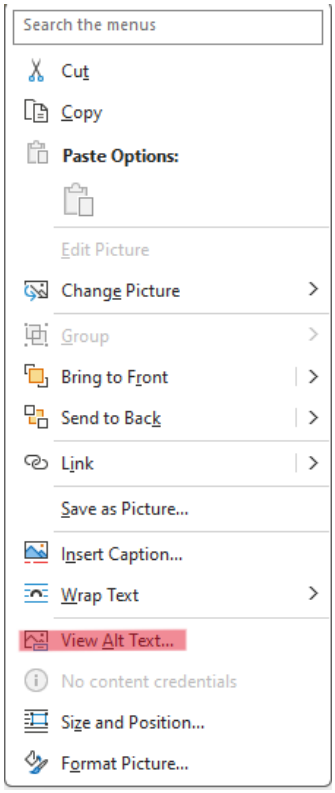


Figure 6: Button to add an alternative text in the Word image menu, reached through right-clicking on the image

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