The purpose of this paper is to examine accessibility in legal texts, in this case German tenancy contracts. Legal texts can use a citizen perspective or a court perspective (Gunnarsson 1982) and give preference to the understanding of the parties involved in the contract or to the judging by the judge in case of a litigation between the parties.

On the one hand tradition demands that LSP texts are unambiguous, exact, economical (Fluck 1996), which gives them some conventional linguistic features, usually considered to make the texts difficult, on the other hand there is a legal demand that contracts must be accessible to non-professionals who have less knowledge of genre and linguistic conventions, and this may entail that legal language is changed accordingly.

I wish to show what kinds of differences might exist between contracts between professionals and contracts between professionals and non-professionals if the text producer takes into account the lack of knowledge of the non-professional involved in the contract. My – mostly qualitative – analysis, on the basis of a model of analysis that I developed for these studies, shows that non-professional contracts are modified in linguistic categories (“lexis” and “syntax”) and in a content related category (“references and intertextuality”).

The results provide knowledge about LSP and linguistic features of legal language, more precisely of different types of contracts, i.e. language in use. They can be used for didactic purposes in teaching legal language and also by language and law professionals for acquiring knowledge on contracts in relation to non-professionals.

The paper will be presented in German.
