

EASY – PLAIN – ACCESSIBLE

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# Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe

Camilla Lindholm and Ulla Vanhatalo (eds.)

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Silvia Hansen-Schirra / Christiane Maaß (eds.)  
Easy – Plain – Accessible  
Vol. 8

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# Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe

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## Preface

This is a book about both the past and the present of Easy Language in Europe. It takes its reader on a tour of Europe, opening windows and peeking into different societies, and reveals how Easy Language and accessible communication are realized in a wide variety of ways.

This book is targeted at university students, experts or anyone with a desire to gain in-depth knowledge about Easy Language practice and research in European countries. It constitutes the first national overview of Easy Language in many countries, and raises awareness of Easy Language and accessible communication in policymaking at the local level. Written in an academic yet interesting and understandable style, this handbook aims to find a wide audience all over Europe<sup>1</sup>.

The chapters of this book were written during the dark times of COVID-19 in Europe. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on the European economy and its institutions, cultural activities, and inhabitants. It has created the feeling of an uncontrollable threat among the inhabitants of Europe, including the contributors to this volume. However, we have come to think that this might be a beneficial experience for those of us who work with groups of vulnerable people. Walking in fog, feeling insecure, needing more information – hasn't this been the everyday reality of many people needing Easy Language for a long time even before coronavirus?

This book wanted to be written. The project idea was received with great enthusiasm when presented at the EASIT conference in Hildesheim in February 2020. The participants wanted to read this book. They wanted to write this book. Despite the corona pandemic closing the borders between countries in Europe, fortunately we have been able to stay in touch using digital devices. Involving more than fifty authors from 21 countries, this handbook has been

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1 An Easy Language version of this handbook is under consideration, to make this information also accessible to the end users of Easy Language.

a laborious yet enjoyable project. We wish to thank all the authors for their commitment, patience and co-operativeness. Special thanks also go to our excellent research assistant Iina Kärkkäinen, our careful language editor Alice Lehtinen, and our generous financier the Kone Foundation.

Helsinki, June 2021, Camilla Lindholm and Ulla Vanhatalo

## Introduction

The purpose of the present *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe* is to shed light on Easy Language both as a language form with specific features and as a phenomenon used to fulfil certain functions in society. Until recently, the field of Easy Language has consisted of national initiatives but has lacked literature providing a more general overview of the concept. Until very recent years, the field has had no established research tradition. This volume is the first attempt to provide an overview of Easy Language in Europe. The various contributors provide detailed descriptions of Easy Language in their own European countries. The book starts with an introduction to Easy Language, briefly discussing some of its general conditions, then highlighting some important aspects specifically related to research and terminology.

### 1 The Easy Language concept

The expression *Easy Language* is more of an umbrella term for different language varieties than the name for one uniform concept. It refers to modified forms of standard languages, which aim to facilitate reading and language comprehension, resulting in, for example, *Easy Slovenian*, *Easy Spanish*, *Easy French*, or *Easy Latvian*. Easy Languages have been adapted in terms of content, vocabulary and structure to make them more readable and comprehensible. They are aimed at people who find it difficult to understand standard language. Although the term *Easy Language* usually refers to various kinds of texts, spoken interactions can also be based on its principles. The term *easy to read and understand*<sup>1</sup> is used by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with

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1 This handbook favours the term Easy Language, see more in the section on terminology.

Disabilities (CRPD) in conjunction with inclusion and accessibility, and has equivalents in many European countries and languages (e.g., *Leichte Sprache* Germ., *selkokieli* Finn., *lättläst* Swe., *Leitura Fácil* Pt.). Guidelines for international Easy Language (or *easy-to-read*) practices are provided by Inclusion Europe (IE 2009) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 1997, 2010). Easy Language is a form of accommodated speech or text: people being able (and willing) to adapt their speech to the reception capacity of the recipient. At the time of writing, that is, 2021, a commonly agreed, official definition of Easy Language has yet to be established.

## 2 Easy Language in European society

Modern societies are completely based on linguistic constructions. Everything is built by language: legislation, values, norms, business, religion, education, science, politics, etc. Unlike in the early twilight of European history, the current view is that all people, despite their limitations, have an equal right to information, inclusion, and social participation. According to the latest PIAAC results, between 4.9% and 27.7% of adults across the countries involved in the study have only the lowest levels of literacy proficiency (OECD Skills Outlook 2013: 23). Based on these results, we can reason that a great number of people need Easy Language in their everyday lives, for example, when interacting with authorities.

Easy Language removes obstacles in the same way as a wheelchair ramp built next to stairs. In many countries, Easy Language has been a very practical, down-to-earth project: when certain people have not been able to understand certain information, others have modified and simplified it. This kind of humane activity in the interaction between people arises from the basis of general ethical standards and values. The goal of Easy Language is to enable participation and to prevent exclusion (Maaß & Rink 2019).

Easy Language is closely tied to *accessible communication* (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, CRPD, 2006; The EU Accessibility Directive 2016/2102; Perego 2020). The ratification of the CRPD has been of great importance for the development of Easy Language in many countries.

When communication is accessible, it is easy to find and perceive, and it is related to the previous knowledge of the recipients, which may have various special communication needs linked to, for example, sensory impairment, low education, illness or migration (Maafß 2019). Easy Language is one tool among others, such as braille, sign language or audiodescription: it lowers the barriers to and makes communication accessible.

The first signs of actual explicit usage of Easy Language vary. In Sweden, for example, the first documented signs of *lättläst* date back to the 1960s. Many Easy Language activities were launched exceptionally early. Finland and Norway followed slightly later, and the Nordic countries soon co-operated in the development of *easy-to-read* newspapers. The Nordic countries shared relatively flexible perceptions of the principles and purpose of Easy Language, and the concept itself was practised by organizations and activists.

The CRPD (2006) has had a great influence on Easy Language-related measures in many countries. The concept of *Leichte Sprache*, which began in Germany in the early 2010s, was more systematic and structured than Easy Language in the Nordic countries. The concept of *Leitura Fácil* was presented to Portuguese stakeholders in 2009, and in 2010, the easy-to-read version of the CRPD had an impact on the political and decision-making level, acting as a trigger to the need for accessible information. The Easy Italian version of the CRPD traces back to 2011. One of the most important milestones for Easy Language was the first Easy Read standard, addressing the creation, adaptation and validation of Easy Read documents, launched in Spain in April 2018 (UNE 2018).

The Act on the Provision of Digital Services (2019) has forced all the Member States of the EU to examine the accessibility of online services run by public providers. Although the text of the Act does not explicitly mention accessibility of language, let alone Easy Language, linguistic accessibility is included in the spirit of the law: digital accessibility is important, but it does not really help if difficult language remains a barrier.

Although various forms of international co-operation related to Easy Language have been in place for decades (e.g., the Easy-to-Read network, founded in Barcelona 2006 and the Inclusion Europe Pathways projects), European-wide co-operation has only really intensified in recent years. This co-operation has

been accelerated by the growth of Easy Language research in particular. Open research events in recent years (e.g., EASIT<sup>2</sup> events, conferences organized by Hildesheim and Mainz researchers, Klaara conferences) have rapidly brought together not only researchers from different countries but also other actors. A recent example of international co-operation is the International Easy Language Day, which was celebrated for the first time on May 28th 2020. This handbook is also one result of vigorous European co-operation.

### 3 Who needs Easy Language?

The practices in European countries may differ in terms of whom Easy Language is aimed towards, i.e., who is considered the target audience of Easy Language. As a rule, people with clear cognitive impairments (e.g., developmental disabilities, memory disorders) are believed to benefit from Easy Language. In many countries, people with various learning disabilities, neurocognitive disorders (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum disorders) or functional illiteracy are also included. Opinions as to whether second language speakers benefit from Easy Language vary slightly. In some countries, immigrants are considered a major target group of Easy Language, while in other countries, immigrants are expected, by default, to learn the common standard language with no 'Easy Language step'. Children with normal language learning abilities are excluded from Easy Language target groups as a rule, but Easy Language material may be recommended on some occasions, such as in custody proceeding documents, medical records and treatment instructions. In some countries such as Austria, situational variation (fatigue, illness, accidents) is considered to create a need for Easy Language among adults with normal language skills.

In some cases, Easy Language has also supplanted the standard language as a language format for the general public. When the Satakunta Hospital District in Finland introduced Easy Language patient instructions, no one wanted to use the standard language patient instructions anymore. One answer to the

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2 Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training (EASIT) is an EU-funded research project, led by Anna Matamala.

question of who the Easy Language target groups are is: everyone. Each individual should have the right to choose whether they want information in Easy Language or in standard language. It is important to ensure that Easy Language is a publicly available, neutral and non-stigmatized option for all public communication in society. In the spirit of the CRPD, the target groups of Easy Language have, and should have, an important role in developing Easy Language.

#### 4 Easy Language research needs international collaboration

Easy Language is an example of a real-life phenomenon that has not yet been tamed by research methods. As in many places, it has been born on the grass-roots level, the idea of making complex language simpler has resulted in countless variations. Applied to both written texts and oral speech, for people with various backgrounds and often by practitioners other than linguists, outcomes labelled Easy Language or something similar may consist of a great variety of linguistic elements. In most countries, systematic research on Easy Language is only in its early stages, trying to determine what is already being done, and how it could possibly be done better.

Even though many countries provide guidelines for easy writing and Plain Language, until the mid-2010s, only a few studies provided support for these guidelines (Wengelin 2015). The few studies in the field compare reading comprehension of texts in standard language and texts in Easy Language, particularly on websites (Karreman et al. 2007; Fajardo et al. 2014; Schmutz et al. 2019). Wengelin (2015) notes that many of the research results that form the basis for writing guidelines are outdated. Thus, there is an apparent lack of research on Easy Language and Plain Language that takes a linguistic point of departure. A similar situation can be seen in related fields: in their overview of accessible information for individuals with intellectual disabilities, Chinn & Homeyard (2016) noted that the articles they reviewed demonstrated a limited awareness of each other. Even studies that dealt with related issues contained no references to each other, which made it difficult for the researchers to comprehend how later work was based on earlier work.

Very recent years have witnessed an increasing body of research, particularly in the German-speaking area of Central Europe (cf. Bredel & Maaß 2016; Bock; Fix & Lange 2017; Maaß & Rink 2019; Bock 2019; Parpan-Blaser et al. 2018; Parpan-Blaser et al. 2019). The most prominent cases in the field of Easy Language research in the late 2010s include the research and educational programmes at the *Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache* (led by Christiane Maaß, University of Hildesheim, Germany), the *Simply complex – Easy Language* project (led by Silvia Hansen-Schirra, Arne Nagels and Walter Bisang, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany), the *Leichte Sprache im Arbeitsleben – LeiSA* project (led by Bettina Bock, University of Leipzig, Germany), and *Einfach leicht verständlich* (led by Anne Parpan-Blaser and Gabriela Antener, University of Applied Sciences and Arts North-western Switzerland). Of special importance is the EU-funded *EASIT* project (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training), which involves five countries (Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden) and is led by Anna Matamala (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalonia). The first international Klaara conference on research on Easy Language was held in Helsinki in the autumn of 2019, and the second conference was scheduled for August 2020, in Olten, Switzerland, but has been postponed to 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Encouraging news constantly comes from different countries regarding new courses, PhD grants, special issues in journals, research projects, and events related to Easy Language at universities and universities of applied sciences.

International collaboration is needed, especially in research. As pointed out by, for example, Nietzio et al. (2014: 347–348), Easy Language guidelines include both language-independent rules, such as ‘avoid all abbreviations’ and ‘always start a new sentence on a new line’, and language-specific rules, which must be specifically modified for each language. For example, in Finnish or Hungarian, morphological features need to be stressed to a greater extent than in many other European languages, because they are agglutinative languages, using inflectional suffixes to indicate grammatical functions. However, even though specific languages may differ as research objects, we need common methods and theoretical views: as the research tradition is only just taking shape, discussion is desperately needed in this area, and researchers must engage in close collaboration to move research in this field forward. In order

to establish a new research tradition, we also need tools such as publication channels, conference series, joint EU research projects and PhD training. We hope that recent activities such as the Easy-Plain-Accessible book series (edited by Christiane Maaß and Silvia Hansen-Schirra, Frank & Timme) and the Klaara conference series (changing hosting organizations) will continue and help the field emerge.

Research related to Easy Language is needed not only in linguistics but in many other disciplines. Easy Language is clearly a multidisciplinary research subject, and is interesting for researchers of, for example, health sciences, sociology, language technology, economics, and service design. Easy Language relates to many acute research themes such as language and well-being, health information and health literacy. How are Easy Language texts used by authorities? What kinds of aspects are related to the actual use of Easy Language texts in everyday literacy? Could so-called *reading representatives*, who help people read easy-to-read materials provide opportunities for everyone to be able enjoy literature and live as independent a life as possible? How much do problems caused by difficult language cost society each year? What kinds of attitudes are associated with Easy Language? Does Easy Language stigmatize target groups? Could machine translation help simplify texts?

## 5 Terminological issues

The grassroots activities and practical usage have naturally led to a great variety of terminology in both local languages and translations into English and other languages, as discussed by, for example, Christiane Maaß (2020: 50–56) and Elisa Perego (2020: 3–32). Given that Easy Language is also a multidisciplinary subject, it is inevitable that terminological variation occurs in research in national and international contexts. Even the phenomenon itself has had several terminological candidates: *Easy Language*, *easy-to-read language*, *easy-to-understand language*, *easy read*, *easy-read*, *clear language*, *simplified language* or *simple language*. Although each potential term may have great reasoning behind it, the most important issue is that actors in different countries and various fields can find each other and are aware of what has been

done. The faster the terminology is harmonized or at least explicated, the faster the research-based knowledge can spread across disciplinary and linguistic boundaries and improve Easy Language practices. Positive signs are in the air, as Easy Language-related terminology is to be included in The Dictionary of Accessible Communication (Hansen-Schirra et al. forthcoming).

Because the notion of *Easy Language* is related to and often mistaken for another frequently used concept – *Plain Language* – we must provide a brief overview of how these phenomena differ. The notion of *Plain Language* refers to communication that is designed to ensure the audience understands the message as quickly and as easily as possible (Cutts 1995). The modern Plain Language movement started in the 1970s and presented guidelines for making public documents easier to understand (Mazur 2000: 205). The Plain Language movement is closely attached to public writing, particularly to facilitating the understanding of legal writing. Today, Plain Language is a global activity, involving organizations, officials, conferences and practitioners in tens of countries (PLAIN 2021). Whereas *Plain Language* is related to institutional documents, and aims to simplify legal language for non-professionals, the notion of *Easy Language* refers to making various texts or speech accessible to people who have difficulties reading and understanding standard language. As a language form, *Easy Language* is usually more simplified than *Plain Language*. To date, very few research-based comparisons have been made of the Plain Language and Easy Language forms (see Gutermuth 2020), but in general, the easy version includes additional writing guidelines, such as the rule that a new sentence should always start on a new line (Nietzio et al. 2014: 347).

	<b>Standard language</b>	<b>Plain Language</b>	<b>Easy Language</b>
Purpose	Provides a unified means for communication and an institutionalized norm which can be used in e.g., official documents or mass media; a prestige variety of language	Aims for wording, structure, and design so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information	Aims for maximal comprehension of texts and equality of interaction
Target audience	Everyone, sometimes 'from experts to experts'	Everyone	People with various linguistic limitations (e.g., neuro-biological reasons, immigrant background, low literacy)
Level of complexity	Naturally complex, sometimes very complex	Seeks simple words, structures, and constructions, avoids jargon	Deliberately and often heavily simplified at all levels: content, grammar, lexicon
Usage area	Public communication, jargons, written text and oral speech	Legal or administrative texts, official documents	All purposes: informative texts, fiction and non-fiction literature, news texts, also oral communication
Legal status	Primary position as an official language, often prescribed by law	In many countries, laws mandate that public agencies use Plain Language to increase access to services	No legal status in most countries, Germany an exception

	Standard language	Plain Language	Easy Language
Linguistic status	It is questionable whether standard language can be spoken/written as a native tongue	Not spoken/written as a native tongue	Not spoken/written as a native tongue
Producers	Whole population	Mainly authorities, companies, organizations	The more skilled party in any asymmetric communication situation

Table 1: Comparison of approximate characteristics of codified standard language (Crystal 2011), Plain Language (PLAIN 2021) and Easy Language. Plain Language targets as large an audience as possible through clarity and avoiding overly technical language. Easy Language shares these aspects but takes its point of departure from the individual and aims to meet the various special needs of individual users. As Easy Language practices and the definitions of the concepts may vary from one country to another, this comparison should be taken as indicative only.

Terminology is often tied to methodological or theoretical approaches, or even philosophical or ideological background factors, and terms may vary from one field of research to another. This is a common issue in many fields, and has to be taken seriously, especially with multidisciplinary topics such as Easy Language. In addition to the key term *Easy Language* itself, a few other important terms also need to be agreed upon. In some cases, the definition is more or less commonly agreed on, but the term itself is unstable: What should we call the process of making standard language Easy Language – *modifying*, (*intralanguage*) *translating*, or *adapting*? Do we set *recommendations*, *instructions*, *guidelines*, *rules* or *standards* for Easy Language? Who is Easy Language for – *target groups*, *target audiences*, *user groups*, *end users*, *recipients*, or *beneficiaries*? Naming the specific groups of people is even more challenging: is Easy Language for *people with cognitive disabilities*, *special linguistic needs*, *cognitive impairments*, or *language disorders*? Is it targeted towards *people with immigrant backgrounds* or *second language learners*? Sometimes it is the translation between two or more languages that highlights the terminological issue: some languages may have traditional terminology that does not translate well into other languages. Some terminological questions grow far beyond the scope of Easy Language

yet play an essential role in how we handle and present it (e.g., *autism spectrum disorders vs autism spectrum condition*).

In this phase, we are creating the base for large-scale research on Easy Language. This is also the time for identifying terminological questions and directing the terminological discussion, even though experience has shown that reaching a consensus might be challenging. Actors in the field have extensive experience of certain terms, and researchers usually want to decide for themselves what terms to use. Accepting diversity is, on the other hand, a reasonable strategy, because it is not always possible to know in advance what term would be the best to use<sup>3</sup>.

## 6 The vision and organization of this volume

This handbook describes the principles and practices of Easy Language in Europe in 2020 and before. Each chapter follows essentially the same structure. The chapters take their point of departure from the history of Easy Language in the particular country. The historical background is followed by an overview of the current situation of Easy Language, dealing with topics such as terminological definitions, legal status, and stakeholders. Target groups, guidelines, and practical outcomes are discussed under their own headings. Education and research are presented together, and each chapter contains a final section in which the authors reflect on the future perspectives related to Easy Language in their country. The Appendices of each chapter present sample texts illustrating the Easy Language guidelines of the different countries. Some topics, such as terminology or target groups, are discussed on a general level here in the introduction and country-wise in the chapters.

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3 In Finland, researchers from various fields develop terminology in collaboration with the Helsinki Term Bank for the Arts and Sciences (HTB 2021). HTB is a multidisciplinary project that aims to gather a permanent terminological database for various fields of research, using an open collaborative website. The project is affiliated with the Finnish Language Resource Consortium FIN-CLARIN, and through this affiliation, has a connection with the European infrastructure ESFRI. Although HTB is mainly intended for the Finnish research community, it welcomes researchers from all countries and language areas, providing a platform for permanent terminology work. Finnish linguists have already started working with Easy Language terminology in HTB, and the field is open to terms and terminological ponderings from other languages.

The chapters of the book vary in length and, to some extent, in content emphasis. The authors of the book chapters have highlighted different themes. For example, although the connections between Easy Language and Plain Language emerge strongly in some countries, the limited presentation of Plain Language in some other chapters does not necessarily mean that the phenomenon itself does not have a strong position in that country. Although the structure of the chapters is roughly the same, the different voices of the authors can be heard in the texts, characterizing and enriching the regional originalities and histories of each country. The chapters of this book present some opposing views and practices, hopefully leading to new research settings. The reader may also notice some imbalance in how research on Easy Language is presented and discussed – this is not necessarily a matter of imbalanced articles, but of the different stages of research in the different countries. As editors, we have strived to offer the most consistent reading experience possible, while respecting and valuing the expertise and views of the authors.

This handbook also enables comparison among different countries. As the editors of this book, we hope that this comparison will encourage rather than discourage. Although Easy Languages have taken many great steps in countries all over Europe, no country can declare that the process is complete. In some countries, Easy Language really is in its initial stages. However, all countries presented in this volume have experiences to share with others. This *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe* is the first attempt to study the position of easy and accessible language in Europe, and despite the best efforts to reach actors and researchers in all the European countries, unfortunately, this first volume does not present them all. Hopefully, when it is time for the second volume, *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe 2030*, this will be possible.

## 7 Future perspectives: Easy Language all over the world

Texts change the world. This handbook paints a picture of today's Europe from a particular perspective. Seeing leads to thoughts and actions. This handbook is intended to be a text that will cause changes not only in Europe but everywhere. Easy Language can bring the luxury of understanding to everyone but is

essential for those for whom standard language is not an option. The majority of the work being done on Easy Languages in Europe will be applicable to and beneficial for a great number of countries with even larger populations and special linguistic needs. Hopefully, awareness of the actions of different countries will lead to multifaceted co-operation. It is quite certain that we in Europe can learn a great deal from what has been done for accessible communication in the world's multilingual communities.

In this book, we try to give a neutral description of what has happened so far, but our perspective may change in the future. Most importantly, things are moving. We can't always go fast; we can't always go directly forward. Societies and situations are different, and a variety of forces and coincidences affect the course of Easy Language. We need patience and perseverance, but also creativity and courage. 'I don't have goals, I have a direction', said Professor Anna Matamala, head of the EASIT project, in autumn 2019. This is a good motto for us all. Our concrete Easy Language goals may change as situations, funding and opportunities change. But our direction remains clear: little by little, we are building a world in which language is easy and communication is accessible.

## Bionotes

**Camilla Lindholm** is a professor in Nordic languages at Tampere University. Her main research areas are interaction in institutional settings and asymmetric interaction involving participants with communication impairments. She takes a special interest in applying her research findings in dialogue with society. Among her recent research projects are 'Easy (Finland) Swedish' (2021–2023), funded by The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. Contact: camilla.lindholm@tuni.fi

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## Easy Language in Austria<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction

With a population of nearly nine million inhabitants, Austria is one of the smaller German-speaking countries. The status of Austrian German has long been debated. Currently, the consensus seems to be that Austrian German, as it is spoken and written in Austria, is a national standard variety of the German language. Austrian German differs from German and Swiss German not only in its vocabulary and pronunciation, but also in its grammatical features. The *Duden*, the main German dictionary, identifies 0.4% of all German words as Austrian German.

In addition to German, three other languages are permitted as official languages in some Austrian regions: Hungarian, Slovenian and Croatian. Others that have the status of ‘recognized minority languages’ are: Romani, Slovak, Czech and Austrian Sign Language. Of the people living in Austria, 16.7% are considered foreigners, i.e., they do not have Austrian citizenship, and 23.7% have an immigrant background (Statista 2021).

As the term *Behinderung* (disability) lacks a generally applicable definition, the figures can be obtained for the proportion of people with disabilities are approximations. Depending on the definition, these mostly range between 10% and 15%. Part of this group are people who earlier terminology described as *geistig behindert* (mentally retarded). The representatives of this group perceive this term as discriminatory and choose to be addressed as *Menschen mit Lernschwierigkeiten* (people with learning difficulties) (e.g., Erlinger 2004). These

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1 In accordance with the title of this book, this article also uses the term Easy Language. However, it is important to note that the term Easy Language is not used in Austria. Even the German translation of *Leichte Sprache* only partially fits this term.

people and their service organizations were among the driving forces behind the establishment of Easy Language.

Since Easy Language is no longer seen as a disability issue only, but as a mainstream topic. Focus on the illiteracy figures of the entire population is growing in German-speaking countries. The PIAAC Study (Statistik Austria 2013) in the framework of OECD research showed that the situation is nearly the same in Austria and Germany and that both countries are near the OECD average. From a practical point of view, one main outcome of the study can be summarized like this: Information from public authorities is usually provided at a language level that almost half of the population does not have the appropriate skills to access.

In 2018, the LevelOne study of the University of Hamburg (Grotlüschen et al. 2019) showed a similar, even more worrying finding. On a societal level, these scientific results reveal a massive problem. Every other person living in Austria and Germany is unable to understand common information from authorities, companies and quality media without help from others. This affects not only the recipients but also the senders of the information, and indirectly affects social cohesion.

## 2 Historical perspectives

Looking back at the roots of comprehensible information in our country we can find an early approach to the issue during the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (18th century) under the regency of Maria Theresia. She is said to have had a *buta ember* (Hungarian for ‘simple man’) in the juridical system as a proof-reader of legal regulations. Laws, so the legend (of which there is no sufficient scientific proof) tells, needed the simple man’s approval of understanding in order to become valid. Even if this is not completely true, it is a good description of the functional intention of Easy Language in the 21st century.

The history of Easy Language in the German-speaking world is one of the most impressive examples of empowerment movements bringing about social change. For it was mentally retarded people – at that time the old term was still often used – who initiated this development, the effects of which are already

immense. In the case of Austria, this can be dated exactly: in a joint EU project, the self-advocates of People First London challenged the project co-ordinator by saying that they would only sign the partner contract if it was translated into a form that they could understand. In 2000, this project gave rise to an organization called *atempo*, based in Graz/Austria. In the same year, *atempo* started producing information specifically for the target group of people with learning disabilities under the brand name *capito*<sup>2</sup>. This work was based on guidelines for easy-to-read information compiled by Inclusion Europe in 1998 in a 20-page brochure (Inclusion Europe 2021a). Following the Swedish model *lättläst* (easy to read), *capito* calls its products *Leicht Lesen* (easy to read) texts.

In 2008, again under the leadership of Inclusion Europe, representatives from nine countries came together for the Pathways 1 project (Inclusion Europe 2021b) which aimed to turn the 1998 guidelines into a common European set of rules. The *Büro für Leichte Sprache* (Office for Easy Language) (Straßmann 2014), founded by Lebenshilfe Bremen in 2004, represented the North German region, and *atempo/capito* the South German and Austrian region. Both were founders of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Network Easy Language) in 2006, which has become one of the most important lobbying organizations in Germany in addition to the *Mensch zuerst* (People First) organization in Kassel and the nationwide *Lebenshilfe* association.

The context of Easy Language in Austria was specific in that the lobbying for the topic and the provision of the service, i.e., the business of language simplification itself, were relatively clearly separate activities. Whereas interest groups such as various self-representation and *Lebenshilfe* groups mainly concentrated on fighting for the cause and representing their interests and demands, independent of the business, the *capito* network began to develop barrier-free information design as a professional service with quality standards (*capito* 2021a) for customers in the market.

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 2 *capito* is Italian, meaning 'I've understood!'. In Austrian German this word is used as an exclamation of understanding.

### 3 Current situation

In 2020, the *Deutsches Institut für Normung* (German Institute for Standardization, DIN) introduced a work group to clarify the terms and criteria for German Easy Language. Representatives of Austria (from the *capito* partner network) are also involved in this ongoing process.

#### 3.1 Definitions

‘We are separated by a *common language*’. It is not certain who actually said this. Some attribute it to George Bernhard Shaw, others to Oscar Wilde, and in German-speaking countries it is believed to have been said by Karl Kraus. Whomever the quote comes from, one insight is certain: the use of the same terms can sometimes feign a match where actually there is none.

As a Germanicism, *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language) is also used in Austria, but it stands alongside other terms such as *Leicht Lesen* (easy to read language), *leicht verständliche Sprache* (easy to understand language) or occasionally also *Klarsprache* (Clear Language). As an Anglicism, Easy Language has so far only been used as the product label of the easily understandable news of the national press agency and is therefore only relevant with regard to marketing. The common term *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language) is in everyday use, mainly in the target group of people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Somehow it is a paradox, because being a metaphor, strictly speaking it does not follow the common rules for Easy Language itself.

In summary, there is great confusion regarding these terms in the German-speaking world and little clarity as to how they should be clearly distinguished. Therefore, since 2014, *capito* has used the same categorization as that of the A1, A2 and B1 language levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This approach was chosen so as not to label textual design as a special or specific language for people with disabilities and thus cause new segregation of this target group in the field of language. In addition, all attempts to label language levels within *Leichter Sprache* (Easy Language) – such as *einfache Sprache* (Simple Language), *Klarsprache* (Clear Language), *bürgerfreundliche Sprache* (Citizenfriendly Language) – have faced

two problems: they fail to provide a precise classification for everyday use, and they do not satisfy scientific differentiation.

Easy Language, according to Bettina Bock (2015: 68), is ‘*zweifelsohne durch eine dominante Funktion charakterisiert*’ (undoubtedly characterized by a dominant function), which is to convey the information content of complex texts. It is thus defined by its special quality and task of conveying content. To be successful, this communication of information must be addressee oriented.

Information barriers arise on four different levels: perception, recognition, previous experience, and previous knowledge (Fröhlich 2017). Based on these findings, *atempo* began to develop the *capito Stufenmodell* (*capito* step-by-step model) in 2012. This is a graduated system, based on the mainstream system of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This model should also help tackle the problem of the confusing proliferation of terms in, at least the German-speaking, world of Easy Language. In daily practice, hardly anyone can clearly define what actually distinguishes *einfache Sprache* (Simple Language) from *leichte Sprache* (Easy Language), or both of these from *Klarsprache* (Clear Language). However, all these terms are united by the fact that they somehow indicate the exclusion of people from the world of common language. For how the step-by-step approach impacts on the criteria, delivery and quality assurance of Easy Language, see Section 5.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Austria ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) quite early, in 2008, and thus formally implemented it in the Austrian legislation. The practical effect of the CRPD does not arise primarily because it is a legal document; it arises through the national action plans related to it and through the associated monitoring process. These create a certain pressure on the authorities and institutions close to the authorities.

An obligation to provide easily understandable information can be deducted from the *E-Government Gesetz* (E-GovG) of 2004 (revised 2016) and the *Bundes-Behinderten-Gleichstellungs-Gesetz* (BGStG, Federal Equality Law) of 2006, neither of which formulate any distinct regulations, but provide the ‘best

possible comprehensibility of websites' or a kind of service that enables 'equal participation' for everybody.

In legal practice, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Justice and some Regional Governments established a procedure to publish an Easy Language version of laws that directly affect the lives of people with disabilities and people related to them (Justiz 2021).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

As described in Section 2, Easy Language was initially mainly pushed forward by self-advocacy associations and service organizations in the field of disability. It might be a speciality of German-speaking countries (mainly Austria and Germany) that at quite an early stage, in addition to benefiting lobbying activities, the provision of Easy Language texts was also seen as an opportunity for (social) businesses. This is probably why the current situation in Austria (and Germany), despite many similarities, differs from that in other countries in several respects. In contrast to some actors in the field of disability, who have worked on Easy Language as a side-line activity and mostly depended on selective funding from public authorities for individual projects, the aim of social business actors was to build up a market for their services and products in order to consistently and sustainably refine their methodology, increase their reach and, on a small scale, also conduct or commission research. In Austria, this role fell to *capito* and its network partners alone for many years, until more recent competitors also established themselves on the market (see also previous section).

Other social organizations in Austria (and later in Germany and Switzerland) learned the *capito* method and joined *atempo* to form a **social franchise network**. Through this long-term and co-ordinated network, the necessary personnel and financial stability were established to advance methodological development and to develop a cross-organizational quality standard and bring it to external certification. The TÜV (short for *Technischer Überwachungs-Verein*, Technical Inspection Association) carries out an annual external review and certification of the *capito* Quality Standard. In the first years of its existence, only Austrian organizations were members of *atempo*'s social franchise network.

*capito* Berlin was the first German organization to join in 2011. More than 80 organizations from Austria, Germany and Switzerland are now connected through the *capito* network as social franchises or quality partners, and about 25 of these act as external service providers for barrier-free information. The other 55 use *capito*'s expertise for their own organizations and their own target groups.

Other providers of Easy Language services work outside the *capito* network, partly according to the *capito* method, partly according to the rules of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Netzwerk 2021) or the *Duden* (Bredel and Maaß 2016). Examples are *Domus Verlag*, *Loycos*, *LeichtLesen.at*, as well as communication agencies that include barrier-free information in their service portfolios, such as the *Gugler* agency or *Wortwelt.at*. In addition to their usual business, they focus on citizen-friendly communication – a sort of ‘light’ version of Easy Language – for public administrations. Other actors, service providers in the disability field, such as *Lebenshilfe Graz* and *Jugend am Werk Wien*, are also involved in Easy Language projects, especially in the area of easily understandable daily news.

### 3.4 General attitude and funding

Looking back on the development of Easy Language over the last 20 years, two driving factors can be identified. One of them is the slow but steady effect of legislation, which is reflected in the steadily increasing number of official documents in Easy Language. The other push effect can be identified as the acknowledgement that the usage of a comprehensible style of communication makes economic sense, which is shown, for example, by the number and type of orders that the *capito* network receives. Companies could thus look at the costs created by their employees not being properly informed or instructed from an internal perspective and the loss of potential customers in their marketing and sales departments: in the long run it is not justifiable to reach less than half of the audience because communication is too complicated. For authorities, costs are relevant driving factors, but the dramatic consequences of badly informed citizens also affect societal cohesion.

Except for the initial project funding in the early 2000s, no systematic public funding has been given to either the development or the production of Easy

Language information, nor to the publication of literature on easy to read and understandable language levels. The initial funding for the development of Easy Language in Austria was tied to the need to find additional paying customers. The Austrian providers of barrier-free information were therefore greatly challenged from the very beginning, having to deal with customer wishes and criticism and to produce in a market-oriented way.

It took about ten years to develop a market for Easy Language services. The first interested customers came from organizations for people with disabilities. On the one hand they were not particularly solvent, but on the other hand they tended to have interests other than *purchasing* Easy Language products. They turned out to be quite interested in learning how to *create* quality Easy Language products *themselves*.

Authorities at the national and regional level were the first to feel the pressure of legislation. Not surprisingly, the representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs were the early movers, followed by the Ministry of Justice and the legal departments of the regional state governments. Today, several authorities order information products in Easy Language, a good example is information on COVID pandemic measures. But in the big picture, Austria is still far from nationwide, legally compliant provision of these products. Some authorities are also content to liberate their communication from the style of pure official language and call it '*bürgerfreundliche Sprache*' (citizen-friendly language). However, they do so without truly general information practices that also include people with poor language skills. Like the public authorities, public-related organizations and institutions have started to feel pressure to make their information more understandable. These include social insurance companies, employee representatives and health services, but also political parties in terms of their election information.

Over the last ten years, the biggest contribution to the market growth was in the for-profit industries. They have learned that misunderstandings between customers and their staff lead to costs – costs which could be avoided. Another promising trend in recent years – with the potential to become a real game changer – has been in the news sector (see Section 6).

## 4 Target groups

Although Easy Language started its development in the disability field, the concept has become mainstream (see Section 3). This is why *capito*, for example, prefers to use the term target group-oriented or addressee-oriented language and tries to realize it in a multi-dimensional concept (see Section 5).

While Easy Language is often – and not surprisingly, due to its origins – seen mainly as a necessity for people with learning difficulties, its demand in real life is far greater and not limited to target groups such as people with disabilities or immigrant backgrounds. According to Bock and Lange (2015: 69), *‘Vermittelnde Texte sind vielmehr ein alltäglich notwendiges Phänomen in modernen Gesellschaften: Beispielsweise benötigt jeder Nichtjurist Vermittlung und Vereinfachung, wenn er gesetzliche Regelungen, die ihn ganz alltäglich betreffen, genau verstehen will.’* (Mediating texts are rather an everyday phenomenon in modern societies: For example, every non-lawyer needs mediation and simplification if they want to understand the legal regulations that affect them in everyday life.)

In their book (2015: 39–61), Johann Schädler and Martin Reichstein point out that restricting Easy Language to the target group of people with learning difficulties and disabilities raises specific problems and dangers. For many authors of Easy Language texts, distinguishing it from children’s language is still one of the main challenges. In addition, Easy Language itself can potentially discriminate if the deficient language level is fixed as the norm for the target group. This danger should not be underestimated if the tendency is to present Easy Language as the natural language system of people with intellectual disabilities (Schädler and Reichstein 2015: 54). The authors suggest that more attention should be paid to the universal design and accessibility approach.

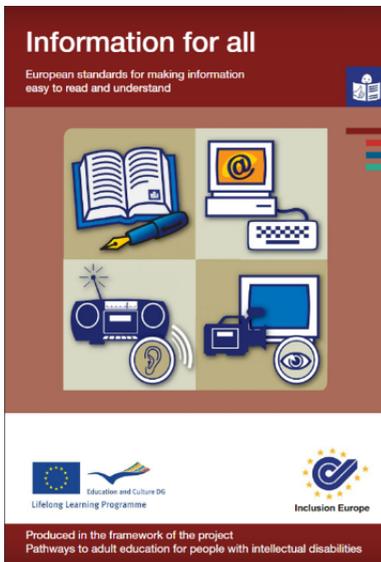
Some professional providers of Easy Language encountered the danger of this restriction at a very early stage and learned to adjust their services to multiple target groups and their specific needs and desires (see next section).

It is a well-known fact that problems initially considered a niche topic often turn out to be a mainstream topic over time. Work for and with the target group of people with learning difficulties has sharpened this perception and helped develop more general principles of Easy Language. Practical experience

has shown that the problem is not limited to a small audience. The need for information at less complex language levels and with reduced vocabulary is clearly not restricted to the target group of disabled people. Due to its strong heterogeneity, it is difficult to make a distinction according to the criterion of 'cognitive abilities' even within this target group (Bock and Lange 2015: 68). In the field of comprehensible text provision, individual abilities and restriction levels must therefore be taken into account.

## 5 Guidelines

As described above in Section 2 about the history of Easy Language, in the beginning, most actors in the German-speaking countries based their work on the initial guidelines of Inclusion Europe (1998) and the *European standard for making information easy to read and understand* resulting from the Pathways 1 project (Inclusion Europe 2021b) (2009).



Picture 1: Outcome of Pathways 1 project.

## 5.1 The *capito* model

The special customer requirements of the expanded target groups, especially those outside the disability sector, meant that more design freedom was required in matters of layout and design. In addition, there was a desire to ensure that informative material still conveyed the impression of the original material, even though it was in an easily understandable format. Easy Language election brochures should be recognisable as election brochures, Easy Language info folders as info folders and Easy Language literature as literature. When developing its method from a niche to a mainstream solution, *capito* extended the original set of rules in the *capito* criteria catalogue and formed it into its own quality standard, which is described below.

As perception is a pre-condition for comprehension, the *capito* criteria start with accessibility items. Barriers on the perception level affect our senses and whether we can see, hear, touch, or smell information. Eight percent of men cannot distinguish red from green, 3.9% of the population is visually impaired, and 2.5% has poor hearing. Barriers on this level include bold font; graphic and layout elements such as font, font size and font style; contrasts; audio information such as poor room acoustics or lighting conditions; but also media that are difficult to handle.

Barriers at the perception level arise, for example, when one can perceive information but does not have sufficient command of the language in which the information is written. Cognitive impairments and learning difficulties can also lead to the inability to grasp information. Even factors such as strong emotions, high speed or other stress can affect the ability to take in information. The ability to grasp information therefore depends not only on how a text is written, but also on the environment, time and speed at which the information must be grasped. The same person may be able to grasp information of varying complexity and detail in different situations and at different times.

The two levels of 'previous experience' and 'previous knowledge' are of particular importance for understanding information; connected to these are vocabulary on the linguistic level, but also the experienced and learned knowledge of the addressees, which can only be assumed. Many people with learning disabilities in Austria have intensive previous experience of life in institutions or special services, and many of them have little experience of normal

everyday life in our society. As a result, almost all information on processes, rights, duties and offers in our society must start from scratch, so to speak, if people with learning disabilities in institutions are to be informed. However, if the target group consists of young people with learning difficulties who are enthusiastic about football, for example, basic information would bore them more than inform them.

It is therefore not only a question of whether the language is easy or difficult to understand, but whether it meets information needs, i.e., whether it is based on the target group's previous knowledge and experience. If it does not, it may be wonderfully easy to understand, but totally inappropriate for the target group.

In addition, in 2011, on the basis of research findings, the *capito* network in Austria and Germany began to differentiate the set of rules and regulations used up to that point into a criteria catalogue. This criteria catalogue enables identifying and thus avoiding the different information barriers of different target groups, and addressing the target groups' diversity, situations and information needs more effectively.

The criteria of the *capito* catalogue is the further development of the initial set of rules for Easy Language, and the *capito* network is constantly working to incorporate into it new findings from science, research and practice. The criteria catalogue is updated annually and currently contains around 100 criteria on the methodological approach itself, the media used, its layout, comprehensibility (language), images/graphics, and the writing of texts at various language levels. It refers to specific information barriers among people with visual and hearing impairments, blind and deaf people, people with learning difficulties, people with physical disabilities, people with a non-German first language, and people with little school education. An example of criteria from the catalogue is published in the *capito* quality standard (*capito* 2021b).

## 5.2 The *capito* step-by-step solution

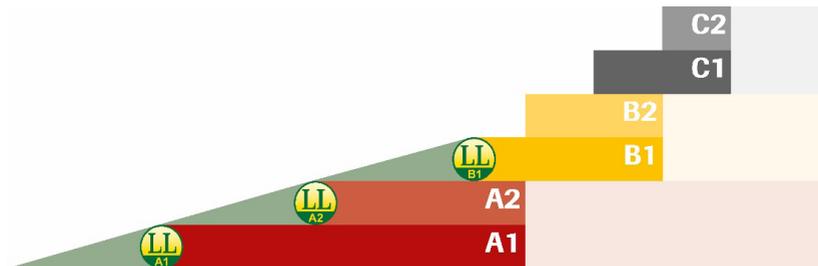
As mentioned above (Schädler and Reichstein 2015), creating new language categories should be avoided, as this could ultimately lead to consolidating the labelling of disabled people and the establishment of special routes instead of

inclusive information solutions. Easy Language should not be separated as a special language from general communication and information activities.

On the basis of its research findings and experience from many hours of test group sessions, the *capito* network developed a model of smooth transition from absolutely simple core information to the level of everyday colloquial language: the *capito Stufenmodell* (the *capito* step-by-step solution) for comprehensible information.

This model, as already mentioned, is based on the assumption that understanding depends not only on a person's language skills, but essentially on previous experience, prior knowledge and contextual conditions. It also assumes that during a successful reading process, a person expands their knowledge of the subject matter, because this is the main point of the reading process. This knowledge acquired during reading can in turn provide the knowledge necessary for the next section of information.

Based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which was originally developed to describe levels of competence in foreign language acquisition and is therefore familiar to many people, the individual levels are LL A1 (*Leicht Lesen* – Easy to read, Level A1), LL A2 (*Leicht Lesen* – Easy to read, Level A2) and LL B1 (*Leicht Lesen* – Easy to read, Level B1).



Picture 2: *capito* step-by-step model, based on the scale (A1 to C2) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

Information prepared according to the *capito* step-by-step model is first briefly written in an absolutely simple way in LL A1 (on the lowest complexity level of Easy Language, with only short sentences, using a very basic vocabulary, etc.) and contains only the core message.

An example of such a core message from an information campaign on heart health for young women taking the pill would be: ‘Are you taking the contraceptive pill? Then you should not smoke. You could die from it.’<sup>3</sup> The whole example can be seen in Appendix 1. The original information – on level C2 – reads as follows: ‘The combination of oral contraceptives (the pill) and smoking can dramatically increase the risk of leg vein thrombosis, stroke and heart attack in young women.’

For many people, this core information in LL A1 is enough to understand what is at stake and what action is expected of them. If they also want to know why women should not smoke when they take the pill, they can read on to the next level, LL A2, which may be something like this: ‘When women take birth control pills, they should not smoke. It can give them a heart attack or a stroke. Or the veins in their legs could become blocked. This can even happen when women are young.’

If people want to go into more detail, to know what a stroke is for example, the information could look like this at level LL B1: ‘If too little blood reaches the brain, a stroke will occur. The most common signs are sudden changes in vision, speech problems, one-sided weakness, a drooping corner of the mouth and balance problems.’

The step-by-step approach to the topic from very simple to increasingly complex information creates a sense of achievement, even for inexperienced readers. Thus the *capito* step-by-step solution for people with a low literacy level or poor knowledge of the subject works in the same way as a ramp works for wheelchair users. One can start at the baseline, read a few lines, understand an issues, deepen one’s knowledge, ideally expand one’s own vocabulary, and continue to a higher level.

In practice, the same information product can contain information at different levels. In the case of textual information, this might be limited to a mix of two levels, for example, summaries on level A1 within a more complex document. Digital delivery of information allows the provision of the information at all three levels (LL A1, A2, B1), and the original text on a higher level,

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3 These are literal translations of German examples by the authors, and have not been checked against special conditions of English Easy Language.

in one document. This offers the option of switching between different levels and individually choosing the appropriate level. Such information products are equally suitable for people with and without learning disabilities, as they do not bore some while overwhelming others. Thus, new ways of processing information often also create new forms of transmission and channels of media (see Section 8).

### 5.3 Quality assurance

When the first *capito* partnerships were established in Austria and Germany, the need arose for a structured, comprehensible quality control system that could be used across organizations and that was mandatory for all partners. In 2008, the *capito* partners developed the *capito* quality standard, which has been TÜV-certified since 2012. Quality control within the *capito* network is not only carried out internally by each provider, but also through regular random sampling by a quality assurance committee appointed by the *capito* network. This committee selects between 10 and 15 products from the *capito* partners each year and subjects them to a detailed quality control process based on the quality standard. This often results in valuable insights into the general development and training needs of the *capito* partners, which are then discussed and processed within the network.

Only tested products with a product certificate may be marked with a *capito* quality seal. This is to give customers the necessary assurance that the product received and paid for meets the promised quality standard and that it has been checked.

### 5.4 Role of people with learning difficulties

In the German-speaking world, two tendencies have developed with regard to the necessity of having texts in Easy Language checked for comprehensibility. The majority of providers in Austria, Germany and Switzerland carry out mandatory text checks for quality control. In most cases, these text checks are conducted by people with learning difficulties. In terms of the *capito* concept, this makes sense, if the people with learning disabilities (at least partly) repre-

sent the target group of the information product. Only then are the dimensions of ‘previous experience’ and ‘previous knowledge’ included for the comprehensibility of information. If a text is addressed to other target groups, then the members of the test group must also precisely represent these target groups.

As the concept of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language Network) in Germany mainly focuses on the target group of people with learning difficulties, the rules of the network demand test reading by people from this target group. Some members of the network even promote the work of test people in test groups as a real occupation for people with learning difficulties. *capito* follows a different approach in this respect. Although test reading of information by members of the target group is also part of the *capito* quality standard, the problem is that professional full-time readers may become experienced readers over time and would thus no longer be representative of untrained and inexperienced readers. Instead, a changing test group line-up is preferred. Test reading for *capito* is paid contract work.

## 5.5 Other guidelines

Providers of Easy Language in Austria working outside the *capito* network mostly rely on the regulations formulated by the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language Network) or integrated parts of it in their work as communication agencies. Their guidelines are neither official Austrian guidelines (the *capito* criteria are developed and used by the network partners in all German-speaking countries – Austria, Germany and Switzerland – and are therefore not specifically ‘Austrian’) nor an overarching Austrian quality standard.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Due to the prevailing lack of representative survey research on the European situation, no evidence-based data exist on the penetration of Easy Language into the information landscape in different countries. It is possible that the outcomes in Austria (and Germany) differ from those in other countries due to the comparatively higher number of Easy Language providers being entrepreneurs.

## 6.1 Media

The public provision of comprehensible daily news was greatly limited for a long period of time due to a lack of proper media channels, and digitalization now offers new options. As the market for a news service dedicated to the limited target group of people with learning difficulties and disabilities was far from viable, the only possible solution was public funding, which the governments in German-speaking countries were not willing to provide. Poorly capitalized attempts to find solutions had the disadvantage of not being able to be professional or have a regular media style on a daily basis. Outdated news turned out to an unsatisfactory solution, even if it was in Easy Language.

A joint pilot project of the APA, the Austrian Press Agency, initiated by and started together with *capito* in 2017/2018 and co-founded by the Ministry of Social Affairs of that time has delivered promising results. APA, as the professional news provider, selects and designs the TopEasyNews, and *capito* contributes its know-how and adjusts the news to language levels A2 and B1 (APA 2021) and provides quality control. The news is disseminated via various digital channels: the internet and also solutions by direct mail and the dedicated *capito* Easy-to-read app (see Section 8). Together with its partner *Österreichischer Rundfunk* (ORF), this news service currently has a reach of more than half a million people per month – and a strong upward trend.

The success of this project has convinced other newspapers and organizations (*Lebenshilfe, Jugend am Werk*) to join the production of comprehensible news, and a roll-out of the APA project in Germany is currently under preparation.

## 6.2 Literature

Although a demand definitely exists for literature on an easy-to-understand language level, up to now, in Austria there has neither been a market for it, nor noteworthy public funding. Selective initiatives, such as the publication of ‘*Die Erbschaft*’ (The inheritance) a crime novel written by Uwe Lubrich at language level A2 (2020) have therefore failed to establish a local tradition. What is special about this initiative, however, is that the author developed the plot of the crime story together with people with learning difficulties, members of the

intended target group of readers. The intention was to resolve the well-known problem that the only accessible literature for people with learning difficulties has been books for children, solely because of their simple language and text structure. The plots of children's books, however, are not at all in line with these readers' interests.

### 6.3 Informative texts

An online search has indicated that the number of informative texts in Easy Language produced in Austria by authorities, enterprises or health and social organizations might be rather high in comparison to that in other countries.<sup>4</sup> This may be because here, the topic left the niche of the disability field quite early on the one hand, and because of the social business approach of the producers on the other hand. Thus, the production of information in Easy Language is clearly not limited to customers from the public sector or the social field, in which Easy Language has achieved a status of almost the norm, when it comes to publications whose content is specifically aimed at people with learning difficulties and disabilities.

For some years, the for-profit industry has been the most relevant customer of Easy Language services. In contrast to governments, the driving factor of their interest in comprehensible information is not so much based on the aim to fulfil legal requirements, but to save costs.

For a long time, Easy Language was seen almost exclusively in the context of printed information, except occasionally in speeches to a distinct audience. Even if it was published on the internet, it was handled in the same way as normal texts, without making use of new digital opportunities. This is probably because Easy Language was considered a disability issue only, combined with the long-outdated view that people with learning difficulties and disabilities are not able to use the internet. Fortunately, this attitude is changing today, although the often-observed general reluctance of staff in the disability sector to use information technology and technology is not very conducive.

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4 Basis of this non-scientific finding: The number of documents in Easy Language found under various synonyms in Austria were significantly higher than those in other countries in relation to the sizes of their population.

Silke Borgstedt and Heide Möller-Slawinski, for example, in the *Aktion Mensch* organization's latest trend study of the digital participation of people with disabilities, state that the experts who were surveyed agreed that the use of digital tools offers enormous opportunities and could replace the common previous approach, which always emphasized the dangers. 'Across all impairment categories, devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktop PCs are used' (Borgstedt and Möller-Slawinski 2020: 48). Of the four central opportunities offered by digital trends for people with disabilities, 'unlimited access to education and information' is particularly emphasized (ibid 71). Digital media channels therefore offer promising alternatives for the delivery of Easy Language information to all target groups, especially because they allow an individualized approach.

Because target groups are very much diverse in respect to, for example, their language skills or addressees having different time budgets for reading information, there is no one and only ideal shape of information. The very best solution is the one that gives the recipient an individual choice of how they want to consume information in a particular situation.

Although printed text does not allow such a solution for practical and cost reasons, digital tools can achieve this. *capito* recently developed one such practical solution in Austria with its mobile application<sup>5</sup>. After downloading the app for free to their smartphones, users can select the language level at which they want the information; A1 (summary of the core information), A2 or B1 or in the original version. The read aloud function and the option to include sign language videos make this tool a totally barrier-free media channel. Information can be sent to a smartphone via push messages or a QR-code on the original (print) document. The app itself does not produce any information nor translate it; it merely acts as a transmission channel for prefabricated information. For further development through digitalization see Section 8.

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 5 For more information: <https://www.capito.eu/capito-app/>

## 7 Education and research

As in the production of Easy Language services, the *capito* network also has a leading position in the field of training. The chain of changes in the communications landscape towards greater comprehensibility begins with workshops, which introduce the topic. These workshops are of different durations and are mainly attended by the staff of public authorities, enterprises and organizations from the social field. Since 2020, the growth in the number of participants has increased massively due to new online formats. The workshops primarily aim to increase awareness of the topic, and are particularly useful for companies and public administrations, often leading to the participation of employees in professional training courses.

Over the last five years, more than 500 participants have completed these professional training courses in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The courses have consisted of 110 online learning units and an accompanying practical phase. In recent months, an online learning course has been launched, which has led to a significant increase in the number of participants. Organizations, enterprises or authorities with staff who complete this course are allowed to join the network as ‘quality partners’. Currently about 55 members participate on this basis. Austria has no academic Easy Language education.

In contrast to Germany, the topic has had and continues to have less resonance in university research in Austria. One of the few exceptions is the research of Rudolf Muhr from the University of Graz, which has primarily dealt with questions of plain language in administration and jurisprudence (2012). Impulses for research come more from the practical side and from the *capito* network. For example, in 2018, *capito* initiated a study to clarify the best types of script for untrained readers. The result of this broad study proves false one of the most widely held doctrines in Easy Language regulation, namely the claim that Arial is the most suitable type of font for Easy Language. In her article, Sabina Sieghart (Sieghart 2020b), Design Researcher from the University of Applied Sciences in Salzburg, reports how Albert-Jan Pool, chairman of the *Schriften* committee at the DIN German Institute for Standardization, explains the origin of this long-lasting misconception.

In the early stages of Easy Language, Arial was one of only three fonts in Microsoft's operating system package that could be displayed by the low screen resolution at that time. Thus, it found its way into the guidelines of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language Network) and was passed on by everyone else and never scientifically questioned.

The core findings of the Sieghart Study (2020a) – in a nutshell – showed firstly that the size of the font itself is not as important for readability as indicated by former regulations. Even two thirds of the test people who found a font too small actually read it better and more fluently than a larger one. These results indicate that the truth is complex: medium length of characters, letter spacing, typeface, and white space play a major role in readability. A second finding also established that Arial is no longer the best font; 80% of the test people read other fonts more quickly and more easily. Of the group of standard fonts, for example Calibri, Cambria or Georgia performed well. Of the group of fonts subject to purchase, Thesis (Thesis The Sans, The Mix and The Serif) showed good results. Finally, the research showed that the ban on serif fonts is no longer tenable. Serifs support line formation during reading and are therefore quite legible. The former problem of the inadequate screen display of serifs no longer exists.

Robert Hitthaler, expert in accessible media design, summarizes the results of the study as follows: *'Es gibt nun keine absoluten Regeln mehr, sondern vielmehr Tendenzen.'* (There are no longer absolute rules, but tendencies) (Hitthaler 2019: 5). The positive aspect of rejecting these old, simple rules could – according to Hitthaler – be a step towards a higher quality of design of publications aimed at people with learning difficulties and poor reading skills.

## 8 Future perspectives

As described above, digitalization offers new media channels and service options for Easy Language. However, the greatest change will be determined by the possible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the process of language simplification itself. The significant reduction in production costs that can be achieved in this way will enable many more customers to commission the pro-

cessing of much larger volumes of text in a way that suits their target audience and thus to maximize societal impact. As in the field of language translation, high quality language simplification will need testing group work by addressees, as well as post editing by qualified staff. On the other hand, the usage of AI will greatly support the process of transformation from higher complex to lower complex language levels. AI will deliver the first draft of a text in Easy Language, which will then be revised and finalized by professional staff and quality checked by testing groups. In contrast to automated translation from one language to another, one of the main problems in the development of AI for automated language simplification is the lack of sufficiently large text stocks to train the software. Networks such as *capito* are in the privileged position of having the relatively largest and, due to the common quality standard, qualitatively most homogeneous text corpora at their disposal. Together with the computer linguists of two Universities, *capito* has developed a comprehensive set of algorithms to check textual information against the Easy Language criteria. In 2021, the first version of an Analysis Tool that automatically checks written information will be available online. The already developed algorithms will enable testing against much larger numbers of criteria than the existing tools.

In 2019, a research project co-founded by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency began training AI for language simplification itself. Even though this is still an ongoing project, the first results clearly indicate that the idea of developing AI for language simplification is promising. Once developed for the German language, the transfer to other languages should be possible in a short time.

Because there are currently – at least in German-speaking countries – no indications that the costs for the development of AI would be financed entirely by government funding, *capito* as a social business has developed a research and development (R&D) partnership model with companies and social organizations for this purpose.

It is expected that AI language simplification will reduce the cost of producing comprehensible texts to a fraction of the current amount. This will boost the demand for information in Easy Language and thus, although it will initially lead to a loss of jobs for the providers, it will eventually increase the demand for manpower, especially in testing group work. Compared with the

development of automated language translation, the development of AI language simplification will inevitably encounter many obstacles and problems will need to be solved. But the possibility of a quantum leap in the production of Easy Language justifies all efforts to realize the *capito* vision of ‘a world in which everyone can understand everything’.

## Authors

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Appendix 1. An illustration of *capito* guidelines for Easy German in Austria

<p>Original Information</p>	<p><b>LL A1:</b> Leicht Lesen A1</p>  <p>Easy to read Level A1 (according to European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR). The LL signs indicate easy-to-read texts and are an official seal of quality.</p>	<p><b>LL A2:</b> Leicht Lesen A2</p>  <p>Easy to read Level A2 (according to CEFR)</p>	<p><b>LL B1:</b> Leicht Lesen B1</p>  <p>Easy to read Level B1 (according to CEFR)</p>
<p>Gerade die Kombination von oralen Kontrazeptiva und Rauchen kann das Risiko bei jungen Frauen für Beinvenenthrombosen, Schlaganfall und Herzinfarkt drastisch steigern.</p>	<p>Nehmen Sie die Anti-Baby-Pille? Dann sollen Sie nicht rauchen. Sie können dadurch krank werden und sogar sterben.</p>	<p>Wenn Frauen die Anti-Baby-Pille nehmen, dann sollen sie nicht rauchen. Sie können davon einen Herzinfarkt bekommen, oder einen Schlaganfall. Oder die Adern in ihren Beinen verstopfen. Das kann auch passieren, wenn die Frauen noch jung sind.</p>	<p>Rauchen und die Anti-Baby-Pille vertragen sich gar nicht gut. Beides zusammen kann zu Verengungen in den Beinarterien, Schlaganfall oder Herzinfarkt führen.</p>
<p>[The combination of oral contraceptives and smoking in particular can dramatically increase the risk of leg vein thrombosis, stroke and heart attack in young women.] Source: Public health insurance leaflet on the risk of smoking.</p>	<p>[Are you taking the Anti-Baby-Pill? Then you should not smoke. It can make you sick and even die.]  Remark: Anti-Baby-Pill is the common term in German.</p>	<p>[When women take the Anti-Baby-Pill, they should not smoke. It can give them a heart attack, or a stroke. Or block the veins in their legs. this can also happen when the women are still young.]  Remark: Anti-Baby-Pill is the common term in German.</p>	<p>[Smoking and the Anti-Baby-Pill do not mix well at all. Both together can lead to narrowing in the arteries of the legs, stroke or heart attack.]  Remark: Anti-Baby-Pill is the common term in German.</p>

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## Easy Language in Belgium

### 1 Introduction

Belgium is a country with 11.5 million inhabitants. Some organizational peculiarities are relevant to the country's linguistic landscape. It is organized into three linguistic communities: the Flemish community, for whom Dutch is the official language, consists of roughly 60% of the Belgian population; the Francophone (French-speaking) community, also known as the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* (FWB), has 40%, and the small German-speaking community, has less than 1% of the population.

These communities are responsible for all policies related to culture, which also cover linguistic policies. In addition to these communities, the country is also divided into three territorial regions: Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia. Flanders is considered monolingually Dutch speaking, Brussels is officially bilingual French and Dutch speaking, and Wallonia is mainly monolingually French speaking, but also includes the small German-speaking community. According to Ginsburgh and Weber (2007), reporting on data from 2000, about 59% of people from Flanders also know French, and about 19% of people from Wallonia also know Dutch. In Brussels, 96% know French and 59% know Dutch. English is also well known in Flanders (52%) and Brussels (42%), but less so in Wallonia (17%). To make things even more complicated, the three regions and communities are regrouped under a federal state umbrella, which also has certain powers.

In our contribution, we mainly focus on the Plain and Easy Language initiatives in the Flemish and Francophone communities, as these communities each have their own initiatives, policies and organizations that deal with Plain and/or Easy Language. The main difference between these two concepts lies

in their target audience. Plain Language is the standard for communication between the government or public institutions and the general public, whereas Easy Language targets people with low literacy or impairments. We also look at the Plain Language efforts of some Belgian Federal entities, such as the Justice department. Over the different sections of this chapter, we treat Plain Language and Easy Language as parallel concepts. Although we have tried to give an extensive, detailed overview of the comprehensibility initiatives in Belgium, covering the many different aspects of language, we do not claim that it is exhaustive.

Until the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS 1996), in which Flanders participated, it was generally assumed that low literacy was a marginal problem in Belgium, and that only 1% of adults had to deal with it. Low literacy was equated with illiteracy. The 14% with low literacy found by the IALS study marked a revolution in the thinking about literacy. It became clear that even literate people may not be sufficiently functionally literate to perform their daily and professional activities without problems, especially in a society in which work activities were increasingly dependent on efficient language use (Boutet 2005). The results of the IALS study made it clear that low literacy was a bigger social problem than previously assumed, and could have consequences in various policy areas, such as social affairs, culture, employment, poverty, and equal opportunities (Schiepers et al. 2017a). Consequently, both linguistic communities have addressed this issue.

In the Flemish community, in 2012, about 15% of the people had low literacy (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2012).<sup>1</sup> In terms of gender, this was 14% of men and 16% of women. At 26%, low literacy is a much larger problem among people aged over 55, but 9% of people aged between 16 and 24 also have low literacy. Among people with an immigrant background, the low literacy figures are 41% among first generation immigrants, and 18% among second generation immigrants, compared to 12% among people without an immigrant background. Among people for whom Dutch is not their native language, 35% suffer from low literacy in Dutch. If we look at literacy in terms of work, we see that low

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1 This infographic shows the most important figures concerning low literacy from the PIAAC 2012 research programme: Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. The OECD have the full results of the study (2016).

literacy affects 12% of people who work, 16% of people who are looking for work, and 23% of people who do not work and are not actively looking for work (Onderwijs Vlaanderen 2012).

For the French-speaking, we only have indicators, as neither Wallonia nor Brussels took part in, for example, the surveys of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2016) and the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (IALS 1996). The statistics are expected to be rather similar to those in Flanders, or in France. According to Moosen (2015), 10%–15% of the population is functionally illiterate. In other words, around 300 000 people in Wallonia could have low literacy. The *Lire et Écrire* (Read and Write) association is a prominent actor in adult literacy education. It informs public authorities of the persistence of illiteracy in Belgium. The statistics on the attendance of its courses every year that it compiles each year shed some light on the situation in Wallonia. In 2019, over 4000 participants started literacy classes (Lire et Écrire 2019). Among these, 61% were women and 33% were Belgian.<sup>2</sup> The number one foreign country represented was Morocco (18% of participants), where French is an official language. We should also mention that 20% of the participants had attended school in Belgium, but more than half of those with low literacy (55%) had not succeeded in obtaining a diploma. Thirty percent of them had never attended school at all. Regarding employment, most of those with low literacy did not have a job (20% were unemployed, 34% received state benefits).

Faced with this challenge, various Belgian actors, either institutions or non-profit organizations, launched different initiatives, support programmes and even research programmes to combat reading comprehension or language production difficulties.

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 2 All percentages are averages of Wallonia and Brussels. However, the number of foreigners in the two regions differs: 73% in Brussels, 60% in Wallonia.

## 2 Historical perspectives

Concerns about the accessibility of documents are not new. The concept of *readability*, i.e. the degree of ease with which a written text can be read and understood by a given reader, emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in the US. Research on the subject did not reach Western Europe until the second half of the same century, with the book *Lisibilité* (Readability) (Conquet 1956) and emerged in Belgium through the work of Gilbert de Landsheere (1963) and his PhD student, Georges Henry (1975). For more details on the history of the techniques for measuring text readability, see Section 7.

### 2.1 Plain Language

Belgian administrations have been increasingly aware of the impact of reading comprehension difficulties among citizens who have to carry out administrative or legal tasks. Therefore, several initiatives have been launched since the late 1980s to support Plain Language and facilitate the general public's access to information. People with special needs (illiterate people or people with disabilities) were, however, frequently overlooked by these policies and their needs were addressed by other organizations, through the paradigm of Easy Language.

The concern of administrations to communicate with their citizens in a more accessible language was addressed by the development of Plain English. The Plain English movement emerged in the US in the 1970s under Richard Nixon, who decreed that from then on, the average man in the street should be able to read the United States Federal Register.

In Belgium, the first efforts with respect to Plain Language can be traced to 1987, when a study on the readability of administrative texts was subsidized by the French Language Service. Unfortunately, this led to no subsequent action (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 1994).

1992 saw the creation of the Readability Advisory Board of the Federal Ministry of the Civil Service (*Adviesbureau leesbaarheid van het Federaal Ministerie van Ambtenarenzaken / Bureau de conseil en lisibilité du ministère de la Fonction publique*), whose missions were to provide clear writing advice, not

only to administrations, but also to legal actors. Unfortunately, this board was rather quickly abolished as part of the Copernicus Reform to modernize the federal civil service.

In Flanders in 1992, the president of the Flemish Parliament put Plain Language, called *Klare Taal* (Clear Language), in legislation and government communication on the agenda of the Flemish Parliament. The Parliament and the Government both created language services that give linguistic advice to all public services, and compulsorily revise all new legislation projects (bills and government decrees).

The Plain Language movement has strong roots in issues related to the clarity and accessibility of legal language. When it emerged in Belgium, the complicated nature of legal language had already been pointed out by researchers (Hendrickx and Deschamps 2016, Hendrickx et al. 2015) and members of Belgian administrations, such as the Council of State (Hendrickx 2003). The Belgian approach to Plain Legal Language differs from, for example, the French approach, in its multidisciplinary style, combining the linguistic tradition and the legal perspective (Cornu 2000). According to Fernbach (2003: 37), in France, this multidisciplinary aspect was missing until recently. The Belgian (federal) Senate had a reading committee that consisted of lawyers as well as linguists, which reviewed proposals and drafts. However, due to the reform of the Senate, this committee was abolished.

According to the *Justitiebarometer* (Justice barometer) (High Council of Justice 2014), 61% of citizens do not find legal language clear enough to understand. In another study (High Council of Justice 2018), this number was even higher: 86% of citizens found it unclear. Those who had already come into contact with the court ‘as a plaintiff, defendant or witness’ agreed significantly less with the statement that legal language is sufficiently clear. A striking finding was that 69% of lawyers also found legal language insufficiently clear. In fact, as much as 67% of magistrates considered it so. There were no significant differences between the French and Dutch speakers.

In 2014, the annual *Clarity International* conference was held in Antwerp and in the European Union in Brussels, providing a unique opportunity for delegates to learn about clear communication and Plain Language in a multilingual environment. *Clarity International* is a worldwide network of professionals

who are committed to promoting plain legal language. In 2016, the University of Leuven held a conference on plain legal language, with speakers from many different legal branches, and a closing session by the Minister of Justice. In 2018, *Project flavour* was launched by the High Council of Justice to promote plain legal language in the judicial world (High Council of Justice 2018). This report contains an overview of the Plain Legal Language initiatives.

In 2019, a definition of Plain Language was presented in a report by the European Network of High Councils for Justice. That same year, the European Commission Structural Reform Support Service approved a project on Plain Legal Language, submitted by the High Council of Justice, which included a workshop and conference. Though many plain legal language initiatives have been launched, much remains to be done in view of the numerous complexities often found in legal language (e.g., archaic terminology and overly complex syntactic structures).

## 2.2 Easy Language

Easy Language in Belgium was born in Flanders in 1985, which corresponds to the first publication of the *Wablieft* (Excuse me, what did you say?) newspaper<sup>3</sup> (Wablieft 2014), initially a single black and white paper leaflet that appeared every three weeks. In 1989 *Wablieft* became a *real* newspaper, printed in tabloid format. *Wablieft* clearly addressed a need, as it already had 2300 subscribers in 1990, and 5000 by 1995. Thus, it was made a weekly publication.

In 1997, the organization widened its scope and became well known for awarding the *Wablieft-Prijs* to a project, person or organization that uses Easy Language to make information accessible to everyone. This prize is announced on national (Flemish) radio and in tv journals. In 2006, *Wablieft* launched a service providing advice on texts and offering to rewrite texts in Easy Language versions. 2009 saw the first publication of easy-to-read books, and in 2011, *Wablieft* became digital with an online version, which currently has around 7000 subscribers.

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3 Wablieft, <http://www.wablieft.be/nl>.

In 2009, Belgium adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD) (with a section on understanding documents), in which all levels of authority commit themselves to promoting integration-enhancing regulations and measures in all areas concerning people with disabilities. People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which cause various barriers that may hinder their full, effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. People with disabilities are no longer expected to adapt to their environment, now it is up to policymakers to address the barriers to their participation in economic, social and cultural life (United Nations 1996). This implies that Easy Language has had some sort of (indirect) legal status since 2009.

### 3 Current situation

The distinction between Plain Language and Easy Language seems somewhat artificial in the case of Belgium, as they seem to largely pursue the same goal. The guidelines we found for both look very similar at first sight, but Easy Language could be perceived as an *oversimplification* for a general audience. The main difference between Plain and Easy Language lies in their target audience.

#### 3.1 Definitions

**Plain Language** is supposedly the standard for communication between the Government (both federal and regional) or public institutions and the general public. It is defined according to the definition of the International Plain Language Federation (2021):

‘A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.’

**Easy Language** targets two rather distinct groups: people with low literacy and people with impairments. The *Wabliefert* website offers a description rather than a definition of Easy Language:

‘No difficult words, jargon or figurative speech, but articles that everyone can understand.’ (Wablieft 2021)<sup>4</sup>

In Belgium, no formal definitions of Easy Language seem to differ from definitions of Plain Language.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

As we said, Plain Language has an official status in the Belgian law, whereas Easy Language currently does not. Easy Language only has an ‘indirect’ legal status, as it is mentioned in the UN’s CRPD (United Nations 2006), which Belgium adopted in 2009.

In Belgium, Plain Language appears in the federal Charter of the User of Public Services (*Handvest van de gebruiker van de openbare diensten*):

‘Letters, circulars and forms should be understandable and precise. Public services will endeavour to adapt their communications to their interlocutors and will avoid any technical jargon that is not essential for precision.’ (*Handvest van de gebruiker van de openbare diensten* 1993: chapter II § 2)<sup>5</sup>

This charter is implemented in both languages. An example of the use of Plain Language is the *legislative drafting manual* of the Council of State (Raad van State 2017). Another example is in the Code on Economic Law, which has been copied from a European consumer guideline.

‘If all or some of the terms of a contract between a business and a consumer are in writing, they must be drafted in a clear and understandable manner.’ (Federale Overheidsdienst Economie, KMO, Middenstand en Energie 2013: Art. VI.37.1 § 1)<sup>6</sup>

In Flanders, Plain Language (*Heldere Taal*) is mentioned in the Decree on Open Government:

‘Each [...] mentioned instance has the duty to inform the population or the involved target groups in a systematic, correct, balanced, timely, and compre-

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4 Translated from Dutch by the authors.

5 Translated from Dutch by the authors.

6 Translated from Dutch by the authors.

hensible manner of its policy, government, services, and rights.’ (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap 2004: 76)<sup>7</sup>

It is also mentioned in Chapter 2, Article 3 of the Decree on Flemish government communication:

‘The Flemish government communicates clearly in understandable language. The Flemish government communicates in the Dutch standard language. The communication of the Flemish government must be comprehensible to the recipient.’ (Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap 2016)<sup>8</sup>

The federal manual on how to apply the UN’s CRPD appeared in 2013 (Federale Overheidsdienst Sociale Zekerheid 2013), and led to the launching of the Federal *Handstreaming* plan in 2016. This plan urges everyone to mobilize the resources necessary for the inclusion of people with disabilities, by removing the obstacles faced by this target group that prevent them from living on an equal footing with their fellow citizens in social, cultural and professional terms. This includes

‘[I]mproving the accessibility of the means of communication with the general public, which should be available in a form that is accessible to all through technologies adapted to different types of disability. This principle should also be applied to electronically disseminated information or the use of electronic forms. For example, websites can be screened for their accessibility (Anysurfer). Documents must also be made available in simple language. Recordings in sign language on websites can also provide information for people with hearing impairments.’ (Federale Overheidsdienst Sociale Zekerheid 2013: 8)<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In order to help people understand legal texts, the *Droits Quotidiens* (Daily Rights) organization was founded in 1995 for French, and was later followed, although only in 2016, by its Flemish sister organization *Helder Recht* (Clear Law). The *Juristenkrant*, a current affairs magazine in Dutch that deals with

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7 Translated from Dutch by the authors.

8 Translated by the authors.

9 Translated by the authors.

the broad outlines of the development of law, has had a column that focuses on plain legal language since 2002. These were compiled into a book in 2008 (Hendrickx 2008). Many other initiatives have improved the comprehension of the law, such as changes in the style of verdicts, explanatory leaflets added to verdicts, paying attention to language usage in legal documents. The Franco-phone community, also known as the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, through its digital administration service (eWBS – *Wallonia Brussels Simplification*), offers awareness-raising activities. Writers can also ask to have a text, a group of documents or an entire process analysed and revised. This is done by the already mentioned organization *Droits Quotidiens*.

The **Inclusion Europe** organization, located in Brussels, plays an important role in defending the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. In 1998 it drew up a set of easy-to-read guidelines. In 2002, it created the Easy-to-Read Logo (Inclusion Europe 2002) which can be used by website developers to make accessible websites easily recognizable. In 2010, it developed an easy-to-read version of the new European Union Disability Strategy 2010–2020, a key document for the European Union’s work in the field of disability. Later, in 2014 and 2015, it received the Zero Project award for ‘promoting Europe-wide quality standards for accessible information for persons with intellectual disabilities’ and for its guidelines for accessible elections. The Zero Project is an Austrian-based initiative that focuses on the rights of people with disabilities globally. It provides a platform for sharing the most innovative and effective solutions to problems faced by people with disabilities.

An important party in Flanders is *Wablief*. Apart from their newspaper, they offer a whole range of services related to Easy Language, such as screening texts, rewriting texts and assistance in setting up an Easy Language plan of action for organizations.<sup>10</sup> Another Flemish player is WAI-NOT,<sup>11</sup> founded in 2001: a safe website and environment for people with cognitive disabilities and their teachers and parents. This initiative grew out of a practical need from a medical pedagogical centre. WAI-NOT actively works on social inclusion, specifically for people with intellectual disabilities, and targets children and young

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10 Wablief tekstadvies, <https://www.duidelijketaal.be/>.

11 WAI-NOT, <http://www.wai-not.be>.

people as well as adults, their supervisors, parents and teachers. By teaching their target group skills related to computers, the internet and other media, WAI-NOT contributes to digital inclusion. WAI-NOT also includes news in very Easy Language. It is supported by the Flemish government.

On the Francophone side, the **Inter-Actions** organization worked on Easy Language in the digital sphere via the *Visa pour le net* (Visa for the web) project. They promoted a simple structure for websites, with information that was easy to find and understand. Unfortunately, in 2019, just as they had begun to build a good network after 12 years of efforts, they lost the funding for this project.

Since 2015, the **Asbl Inclusion**<sup>12</sup> organization has helped people with intellectual disabilities and their families. They are involved in, for example, the spread of FALC in Wallonia. FALC is an acronym that stands for *Facile à lire et à comprendre* (Easy to read and understand), which is the French equivalent of Easy Language. They have written a brochure in FALC (Inclusion asbl, n.d. a). On demand, they also do translations into FALC. These translations are proofread by people with intellectual disabilities trained in Easy Language. They have also announced a new service, [www.falc.be](http://www.falc.be), that will promote Easy Language. Their Flemish counterpart *Inclusie Vlaanderen* (Inclusion Flanders) was renamed in 2018 as *Stan – Trefpunt Verstandelijke Handicap* (Stan – Meeting point Mental Disability).

## 4 Target groups

The target group for Plain Language documents is the general public. Easy Language targets two rather distinct groups: people with low literacy and people with a mental disability.

People with low literacy are targeted by the strategic plan *Laaggeletterdheid* (Low literacy) (Vlaamse overheid 2017) of the Flemish government. Research has shown that the number of low literate people does not decrease even when the average level of literacy increases. This increase is accompanied by a sig-

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 12 This year marks the merging of several associations that work with people with mental disabilities in Wallonia (Association Francophone d'Aide aux Handicapés Mentaux (AFrAHM) / APEM-T21 (parents of children with trisomy 21)).

nificant decrease in the performance of the lowest achievers in secondary education groups or higher. There is a constant influx of new low-literate people, who are the focus of Easy Language, literacy training and other education measures. The share of adults with low socio-economic status and the share of first-generation immigrants in the group of the lowest performers has increased. The plan states:

‘[W]e strive for an inclusive society, in which everyone has access to the information necessary for participation. This is why it is important to keep emphasizing the importance of clear communication. By this, we mean both written information that must be readable to everyone, and digital information that must be accessible, understandable and manageable for everyone. In order to achieve this, we, as a society, must fulfil our responsibility towards people with literacy needs.’ (Vlaamse overheid 2017: 22)<sup>13</sup>

The second group likely to benefit from Easy Language are people with disabilities, who are the focus of the federal *Handistreaming* plan (Federale Overheidsdienst Sociale Zekerheid 2013). This plan includes a section on communications between the federal government and citizens with disabilities, in order to strengthen the accessibility of communications aimed at the general public. Websites are advised to adhere to the guidelines of the Anysurfer quality label,<sup>14</sup> which shows that the website is accessible to anyone, i.e. that it follows the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (World Wide Web Consortium 2018).

In Flanders, the government has measures in place to enhance their communications with target groups that have cognitive, hearing or reading impairments.

The Francophone community follows the European Directive of 2016 (European Parliament and the Council of the European Union 2016), which provides a legal context for digital accessibility for Member States of the European Union. The objectives of many of the Walloon municipalities are to boost the municipal advisory councils and invest in the inclusion of people with disabilities and the elderly. Work on the accessibility of public utility websites

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13 Translated by the authors.

14 Anysurfer, <https://www.anysurfer.be/en>.

meets this political and civic objective and creates a link between the people concerned.

## 5 Guidelines

Over the years, various stakeholders have published many guidelines to facilitate both Plain and Easy Language. We discuss these in closer detail below.

In 2000, the head of the Readability Advisory Board of the Federal Ministry of the Civil Service, Michel Leys, published the Plain Language writing guide in both Dutch and French: *Goed geschreven, goed begrepen* (Well written, well understood) (Leys and Theys 2000) and *Écrire pour être lu* (Write to be read) (Leys 2000). This guide has enjoyed great success, the distribution of its first edition being 10 000 copies. In addition, thanks to being freely available on the internet, it has gained popularity throughout the French-speaking world, and was chosen by the European authorities from ‘Fight the Fog’ at the Directorate-General for Translation (Brussels) as the counterpart to the English plain language guide (Fernbach 2003: 37).

On the Flemish side, the Plain Language guides (Penninckx 1991, Penninckx et al. 1991) of the language services created by the Flemish Parliament and the government enjoyed great success and were distributed widely for several years. For a detailed overview, see Hendrickx (2003). The Flemish government has published a brochure with 20 guidelines for Plain Language (Caluwé 2017). These guidelines are organized into four sections and can be summarized as: ‘Take your target group into account from the start’, ‘Pay close attention to the structure of your message’, ‘Formulate your message as clearly as possible’ and ‘Test your message carefully before you distribute or publish it’. Another, more elaborated set of guidelines for Dutch are those of *Taaltelefoon* (Language Telephone) (Caluwé et al. 2012), which is a language advice service established by the Flemish Government in 1998. *Taaltelefoon* and the related *Taaladvies.net*<sup>15</sup> (Language Advice.net) are help desks that provide advice to users (writers of texts) on normative (spelling and syntax) as well as stylistic aspects of Dutch.

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 15 *Taaladvies*, <http://taaladvies.net>, is a service offered by the Dutch Language Union.

The *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* (FWB) wrote its first Plain Language guidelines in 2000, the already mentioned *Écrire pour être lu* (Write to be read) (Leys 2000). This work inspired the French version of the European Union's Plain Language guidelines (Fernbach 2003) and the other guides in FWB mentioned in Section 2. Even though it is the oldest guide in FWB, *Écrire pour être lu* remains the most widely used so far. The advice given in the guidelines is classified into five categories: 'Hook your reader' (the text should focus on the reader and their needs), 'Choose your words carefully' (pay attention to the selection of words, keep it simple), 'Make simple sentences' (e.g. short sentences, as few clauses as possible), 'Highlight the text structure' (e.g. add sections, give examples), and 'Make reading easier by layout' (e.g. use graphs or groupings, bold font). This was followed, in 2006, by the publication of Plain Language guidelines from the Walloon Region: *10 règles d'or pour des textes plus lisibles* (10 golden rules for more readable texts) (Easi-Wal 2006). In 2016, an initiative called *Ensemble simplifions* (Simplify together) was launched, which was linked to the user experience and simplification of online procedures, followed in 2017 by the publication of the Plain Language guidelines of eWBS (e-Wallonie-Bruxelles Simplification), mainly for digital communications: *Guide des bonnes pratiques pour des documents administratifs clairs* (Good practice guide for clear administrative documents) (eWBS 2017), and in 2018 by a thematic year in Wallonia: *Si simple, si digital* (So simple, so digital) focusing on the user experience and readability of administrative documents. A Plain Legal Language guide, which combines linguistic and legal expertise is a two-volume book *Dire le droit et être compris: Comment rendre le langage judiciaire plus accessible?* (Speaking the law and being understood: How to make judicial language more accessible?) by the *Association Syndicale des Magistrats*. This guide, first published in 2003 and revised in 2010 (Vandermeersch et al. 2010) and 2017, has brought together linguists, criminologists, and magistrates. It suggests how to write legal documents that can be understood by their main addressee, the litigant. Wherever possible, the main lines are: favour everyday life language; help the reader orient him/herself in the judicial act; and maintain legal rigour.

Recent research by Nord (2018) has revealed that, although several Plain Language guides are available to assist writers of administrative texts in their

work, the writers do not always follow the guidelines provided in these guides, mainly because they are too vague and too numerous. With the aim of relieving writers from the need to keep all these guidelines in mind, a web platform called AMesure<sup>16</sup> has been developed for French (François et al. 2020) to automatically identify clear writing issues in administrative texts and provide simple writing advice that is contextually relevant. This tool mostly relies on the advice found in the FWB guidelines.

*Wablieft* provides a two-page leaflet with 20 tips for writing Easy Language: such as use clear layout, address the reader, put important information first, remove details, one topic per paragraph, subtitles in each paragraph, use short sentences (avg. 15 words), use everyday language, use the active voice and present tense and use short words (Wablieft n.d.).

In line with the *Handistreaming* plan, Brussels offers a small Easy Language guide in French, called *Handistreaming, comment adapter votre communication à tous?* (Handistreaming, how to adapt your communication to everyone?) (Equal.Brussels and CAWaB 2019) and in Dutch, *Handistreaming, communicatie die iedereen aanspreekt!* (Handistreaming, communication that appeals to everyone!). They offer advice on different disabilities (hearing, visual, physical, mental) and on easy language for different media. Beside these guidelines, Wallonia follows the recommendations for Easy Language by the European Union and UNAPEI, the first French federation of organizations that represents and defends the interests of people with mental disabilities and their families. An example of the advice given is: use simple words, adapt the content to the target audience, prioritize essential ideas, simplify syntax, clarify layout, and use pictograms. For an illustration of the Dutch and French guidelines, see Appendix 1.

## 6 Practical outcomes

As mentioned in the previous section, different governmental levels have introduced various guidelines to facilitate and promote Plain and Easy Language.

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 16 AMesure, <https://cental.uclouvain.be/amesure/>.

Besides this, other initiatives – especially Easy Language initiatives – have also emerged, which we discuss next.

## 6.1 Media and literature

For Dutch news in Easy Language, the *Wablieft* weekly newspaper is freely available on their website. An even easier newspaper is the *Wablieft Start*, which is targeted towards beginner readers of Dutch. A possibly even simpler version of this news is also presented on the already mentioned WAI-NOT website (see Section 3).

For French, various sources of Easy Language books are available, but these are generally published by French publishers (*Lire en français facile* (To Read in easy French) by Hachette and *Lecture en français facile* (Reading in Easy French) by Clé International). In Wallonia, at the instigation of the already mentioned organization *Lire et Écrire*, an original collection of books in simplified French, *La Traversée*,<sup>17</sup> are now published by *Éditions Weirich*. The concept of this collection is that well-known Belgian writers write novels for everyone, with a special focus on adult beginner readers. To ensure the accessibility of these novels, they are submitted to and assessed by a reading committee composed of former illiterate people. Since 2012, 26 books have been published by 26 different authors. The books range from love stories to detective novels or realistic fiction, sometimes with a tragic background (such as war or disease). As adult beginner readers are often limited to reading children's books, the goal of this collection is to offer a variety of books with topics that might be more appealing to them.

## 6.2 Informative texts

During the recent COVID-19 crisis, the government has tried (not always successfully) to give information that is as clear as possible to everyone. The official website<sup>18</sup> contains various posters and fact sheets in Easy Language in

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17 *La Traversée*, <http://www.collectionlatraversee.be/>.

18 Coronavirus COVID-19, <https://www.info-coronavirus.be/en/translation/>.

Dutch and French, but it is not easy to use. A link to *Wablieft* is also on the website to offer more information on the virus. For French, there is no such link, but *Asbl Inclusion* provides a great deal of valuable information in Easy Language (Inclusion asbl, n.d. b) and reaches more than 5000 families of people with mental disabilities.

### 6.3 Other projects

The *Week van de Geletterdheid* (Week of Literacy) is an annual campaign that draws the attention of the general media to low literacy issues, and tries to convince people with literacy issues to take part in adult education initiatives. The [klaretaalrendeert.be](http://klaretaalrendeert.be)<sup>19</sup> website (Plain language pays off) provides guidelines for easy language in adult education. Its successor, [www.diversiteitspraktijk.be](http://www.diversiteitspraktijk.be) (Diversity Practice), has an entire section on *accessible* communication, including guidelines for COVID-19 communications for low literate people, and how to communicate with language learners. The [www.nedbox.be](http://www.nedbox.be) website provides exercises at different levels of difficulty (starting from, e.g., *Wablieft* articles) and in different domains for language learners of Dutch (Schiepers 2016). These exercises are based on scientific research on second language learning and online teaching (Schiepers et al. 2017b).

The international literacy day, on September 8th, is also a perfect occasion for highlighting literacy problems among adults. The *Lire et Écrire* association, together with the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, carries out an awareness campaign every year on a different topic (digital illiteracy for 2020, the percentage of the Belgian population who is illiterate in 2019, etc.).

## 7 Education and research

Regarding education, in Section 5, we presented various guidelines that all comprise pedagogical material. In this section, we highlight some specific training initiatives for both Plain Language and Easy Language. The largest

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 19 Unfortunately, this website is no longer updated.

part of this section, however, is devoted to research related to several aspects of Plain and Easy Language, such as research on literacy and readability, Easy Language corpora, augmented communication, and automated text simplification.

## 7.1 Education

Since 1997, all newly appointed magistrates have received compulsory **Plain Legal Language training** for ‘editing verdicts’ with a focus on accessible language. The already mentioned Project Flavour (High Council of Justice 2018) gives an overview of plain legal language initiatives, including two and a half days of training in *Editing of judgments: formal and substantive requirements*, of which one day is dedicated to Plain Language. This training is compulsory for candidate magistrates. The report also lists the initiatives of the different Belgian universities concerning *legal proficiency*, which often include sessions on comprehensibility.

The *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles* offers its own writers **Plain Administrative Language training** through its digital administration service eWBS – *Wallonie Bruxelles Simplification*. This training is in line with the eWBS guidelines for Plain Language, with a focus on digital communication.

*Wablieft* provides **Easy Language coaching** for writers and training sessions for organizations. *Asbl Inclusion* provides FALC (*Facile à lire et à comprendre*, Easy to read and to understand) classes for the parents of disabled children and for professionals (psychologists, administrations, etc.). Some of the courses are specially designed for people with intellectual disabilities, to teach them to say when a text is difficult.

## 7.2 Literacy research

Schiepers et al. (2017a) provides a review of the Flemish policy on literacy and a synthesis of the research on literacy in Flanders. Initially, the concept of *literacy* focused on being able to read and write, leading to a dichotomy between *alphabets* and *analphabets*. In the 1990s, the definition of literacy shifted towards a much broader and more positive, gradual concept of functional literacy.

Research on digital inclusion (Galvan 2019, Brotcorne and Mariën 2020) shows that internet use is heavily influenced by low literacy: email and social media, which both require writing, are much less used than applications such as WhatsApp or Skype, which allow sending oral messages and do not require writing. When they receive a textual message (sms, email), some users use text-to-speech software in order to avoid having to read, and turn it into an oral message.

### 7.3 Readability research

As we discussed earlier, the field of readability was first developed in the US, before being adopted by some researchers for both Dutch and French.<sup>20</sup> Belgium was actually a pioneer in this field, as Gilbert de Landsheere (1963), Professor at ULiège, was the first to efficiently promote readability in the French-speaking world. He adapted the famous Flesch (1948) formula to French simply by adapting the way in which syllables are counted and sentences are defined. He was also one of the main advocates of the cloze test for assessing reading comprehension. Taylor (1953) created the cloze test as an easier tool for assessing reading comprehension. It consists of suppressing words in a text – for instance, one word in every five words – that the reader has to guess from the context.

However, the first dedicated readability formula for French was designed by de Landsheere's student: Georges Henry (1975). He administered cloze tests to 180 schoolchildren from the 5th to the 12th grade and developed a set of readability formulae which can measure more complex phenomena such as the proportion of dialogue pronouns and the proportion of concrete words, etc. He was one of the few readability researchers to consider that one formula does not fit all readers' levels nor all contexts, and thus proposed as many as nine formulae. Both researchers, however, mainly studied readability for educational purposes and not for illiterate people or people with disabilities.

For the Dutch language, the early work on readability was mainly done in the Netherlands. A number of Dutch formulae that were developed in the

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 20 For a synthesis encompassing all the work in this field, see Klare (1984), Chall and Dale (1995), François (2011), Benjamin (2012) or Collins-Thompson (2014).

second half of the 20th century are still in use today: the *Flesch-Douma* (Douma 1960), *Flesch-Brouwer* (Brouwer 1963) and the CLIB and CILT formulae (Staphorsius 1994). A typical feature of all these formulae is that they assign a particular score to a text based on shallow text characteristics, such as the average word and sentence length, which are multiplied by a certain weight.

The CLIB and CILT formulae (Staphorsius 1994) were developed in the context of primary school education and have been used in both the Netherlands and Flanders to indicate reading levels of texts. These levels are applied to texts and to reading ability and are used to match beginner readers to appropriate-level texts. The CLIB formula was the first Dutch formula with a solid empirical basis. It is the result of extensive research that collected the cloze scores of 4320 children aged 7 to 12 into a corpus of 240 texts. The tests were distributed equally to children of different reading proficiency levels and each child took two different cloze tests. This resulted in 8640 cloze tests, the formula of which were calibrated and validated. The CLIB formula contains four predictors: average word length in letters, the percentage of highly frequent Dutch words, a type-token ratio, and the percentage of sentences per word.

Around the turn of the century, this simplistic approach to readability generated great criticism, mostly aimed at the lack of causal relevance of predictors such as word or sentence length for readability (Bruce et al. 1981, Kraf and Pander Maat 2009, Kleijn 2018), the disregard of the reader's prior knowledge or language skills (Redish and Selzer 1985), or the failure of readability formulae to take more complex linguistic phenomena into account (Zakaluk and Samuels 1988). Thanks to advances in the field of natural language processing (NLP) and computer science, recent readability research approaches have addressed the need to incorporate more complex text characteristics and machine learning techniques to more reliably predict readability.

For Dutch, this new paradigm has been investigated by several researchers (Pander Maat et al. 2014, De Clercq and Hoste 2016). In Flanders, the first machine learning-based readability prediction system for Dutch was developed at Ghent University (De Clercq and Hoste 2016). It scores an individual text (regression) or compares two or more texts (classification) and targets a wide variety of Dutch text material meant for adult readers. Various text character-

istics have been implemented in the system, ranging from easy-to-compute superficial text characteristics to features requiring deep linguistic processing.

For French, readability studies had lost a great deal of popularity in the French-speaking world and were hardly investigated when François (2011) dedicated his PhD thesis to the development of the first readability formula for French as a foreign language in line with this new computational paradigm. François and Mitsakaki (2012) compared classic formulae with NLP-enabled formulae and concluded that both types of models captured slightly different information and that when combined, their performance improved. More recently, Tack et al. (2016) focused on predicting the readability of words for learners of a foreign language using a personalized model and demonstrated that this model could better predict the words unknown by a given reader than a model based on a frequency list, as is common in second language education.

An entirely different, non-computational approach to the study of the readability and understandability of legal texts can be found in a number of master's theses, and in Hendrickx (2003), Nivelle (2008) and Deschamps (2009).

#### 7.4 Easy to read corpora and linguistic properties

To study the properties of easy-to-read Dutch, Vandeghinste et al. (2019) collected and automatically annotated the archive of the *Wablieft* online newspaper and made the corpus available to researchers through the Dutch Language Institute.<sup>21</sup> They are also working on making the WAI-NOT news corpus, i.e. the collection of all news items that have appeared on the WAI-NOT website, available for research. This corpus contains even shorter and easier to read sentences than the *Wablieft* corpus.

Vandeghinste and Bulté (2019) compared the linguistic properties of *Wablieft* Dutch with regular newspaper Dutch. Research on distinguishing easy language from language directed towards children is still ongoing, and to this end the linguistic properties of *Wablieft* Dutch and WAI-NOT Dutch are being compared with the properties of the language used in the Flemish youth

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 21 Instituut voor de Nederlandse taal, <http://hdl.handle.net/10032/tm-a2-q6>.

journal *Karrewiet* (targeting children under 12) and in the Dutch (from the Netherlands) *Basilex* corpus (Tellings et al. 2014).

## 7.5 Augmented communication

Another way to alleviate low literacy is to use pictograms. Since 2012, the WAI-NOT email and chat services have contained a Text2Picto translation module,<sup>22</sup> which is based on research on computational linguistics (Vandeghinste et al. 2015) and enables augmenting (or translating) the senders' Dutch textual messages with pictograms. This means that the receiver of the message is not actually required to read. Users can also input messages through pictograms instead of text, which are then translated into words (Sevens et al. 2015a). The organization of the pictogram entry method is based on research by Sevens et al. (2017) and has improved through user feedback from people with intellectual disabilities (Sevens et al. 2018a). In the European Able to Include project,<sup>23</sup> the system was extended so that it can also translate English and Spanish messages (Sevens et al. 2015b).

Norré et al. (2020) have also investigated whether pictograms can be used as an efficient means of communication between doctors and patients through a survey with 67 respondents. The results of this experiment showed that pictogram-based messages were correctly understood in 75%–86% of cases.

Another approach is the work of Van Praet et al. (2020), which groups various communication support tools, such as translation into five foreign languages, pictograms, icons, video remote interpreting, and an audio version of text content in communication between caretakers of a preventive health organization situated in Flanders, Belgium and mothers with limited Dutch proficiency. In a more standard NLP vein, Norré and De Wilde (2018) have modified a word prediction system and had it evaluated by people with severe communicative disabilities. They found that such a system indeed makes the writing process quicker for this specific audience, but also creates a high cognitive load that should be taken into account in future developments. Pictogram

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22 A demonstration of this system can be found online at <http://picto.ccl.kuleuven.be/> (Dutch/Spanish/English).

23 Able to Include, <http://www.able-to-include.com>.

prediction was also a part of the pictographic user interface of Sevens et al. (2017).

## 7.6 Automated text simplification (ATS)

After automatically assessing the readability of a text, the next step is to be able to automatically rewrite the text in a form that is easier to decode and comprehend. A few studies have investigated the effect of text simplification on reading. Margarido et al. (2008) conducted several experiments on text simplification for poor readers, more specifically, functionally illiterate readers in Brazil. They showed that each simplification approach had different effects, depending on the level of literacy. However, they found that all improved text understanding at some level. Rello et al. (2013) found that lexical simplification (i.e., replacing complex words with simpler synonyms) improved both reading speed and comprehension among dyslexic readers. More recently, Javourey-Drevet et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale experiment on 164 children in the 2nd grade and revealed that both reading fluency and comprehension of simplified texts were significantly better than that of normal texts. Justified by these encouraging results, automatic text simplification has undergone numerous developments since the early 2000s.<sup>24</sup>

As regards work on automatic text simplification conducted in Belgium, the French side has been mostly studies at the Université Catholique de Louvain, in collaboration with French universities. In addition to the *AMesure* project described in Section 5, this team has also proposed one of the first syntactic simplification systems for French (Brouwers et al. 2012). This approach is based on the application of linguistic patterns to a syntactically parsed version of the text, followed by a step in which replacement rules are applied in order to create simpler syntactic structures. Several studies have also investigated the issue of lexical simplification, which mostly aims to rank words on the basis of their reading difficulty (Gala et al. 2014, François et al. 2016). This line of research has led to the development of a graded disambiguated resource of synonyms,

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 24 More details about the field of ATS can be found in the syntheses by Siddharthan (2014), Paetzold (2016), Saggió (2017), or, for French, by Gala et al. (2018).

ReSyF (Billami et al. 2018), which can be used to carry out lexical substitution within automatic text simplification (Hmida et al. 2018).

Similar to the French situation, automatic text simplification in Dutch is still in its infancy, focusing on knowledge-based methods for lexical simplification (Bulté et al. 2018) and rule-based syntactic simplification (Sevens et al. 2018b). Older approaches (Vandeghinste and Pan 2004, Tjong Kim Sang et al. 2004) have focused on simplification for subtitling, also known as *sentence compression*. Based on parallel datasets consisting of original transcripts and their *compressed/simplified* equivalents (Vandeghinste and Tjong Kim Sang 2004), the systems were able to learn how to simplify, in a similar way to that in which machine translation systems learn from translated data.

## 8 Future perspectives

With respect to the future of plain and easy language in Belgium, there seems to be a difference between the perspectives of Plain Language, aimed at the general public, and Easy Language, aimed at low literate people and people with disabilities.

Plain Language seems to be structurally funded through incorporating civil servants in the administrations of the different governments. These civil servants work on raising awareness, and organize training sessions with the overall objective of having government-issued documents in plain language that are understandable for the majority of the population.

While some politicians are starting to acknowledge the importance of Easy Language, for example for social workers,<sup>25</sup> the biggest challenges remaining are policy awareness and funding. Due to this lack of structural funding, it is hard to outline a long-term vision for Easy Language. Funding is often project based, and therefore by definition limited to a time window of a few years. Even when funding has been secured, budgets can still be cut, or projects can

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25 Information collected through a personal communication in 2020 with Laëtitia Jacoby of *InterActions*.

lose funding, which is what happened to the ‘*Visa pour le net*’, an interesting initiative that fostered the simplification of websites.

With respect to the raised awareness of accessibility, only a limited budget is available to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. Clearly visible accessibility measures, such as the accessibility of buildings for wheelchairs, often have priority over less visible measures, such as providing government documents in an Easy Language variant.

Though politicians favour Plain Language, they often fail to understand that it is insufficient for certain audiences. It is hard to put yourself in the shoes of someone you do not know, or realise what their needs are. Easy Language should, however, be more widely disseminated at all levels of administration, and not only in services dedicated directly to people with disabilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, government communication has had to be converted into Easy Language by organizations such as *Wablieft*, which put a great strain on their normal activities.

With the digital shift of administrations, computer-mediated communication needs to be as easy as possible, as face-to-face conversations often disappear or are reduced to a minimum. This is where scientific research in Natural Language Processing and the resulting software applications can step in. Through the development of authoring interfaces that indicate when the author is using words and grammatical constructions that are not suitable for the targeted audience, authors may become aware of certain aspects of their writing style and adapt them accordingly. However, in order to do so properly, scientific research is needed to validate existing Plain Language and Easy Language guidelines, in particular by more clearly identifying the effect of each of the guidelines on specific user groups. Another interesting line of research is that of comparing the properties of Easy Language to those of language aimed at the general public or aimed at an *intellectual* audience.

As producing several versions of the same document to meet the specific needs of different audiences is very time-consuming, automated text simplification can also help in the conversion of documents aimed towards certain target groups. However, most techniques from state-of-the-art artificial intelligence require large data sets for training. For example, training for a text simplification system such as a machine translation engine would require large amounts

of human-simplified text. While such resources might be available for English, they are not available for Dutch or French. Therefore, new techniques must be investigated that enable *unsupervised* text simplification (e.g., Surya et al. 2019). Currently, this research area is too premature for practical applications.

To end on a positive note: just as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an improved awareness of communication in sign language, it has also resulted in an improved awareness of the importance of communication that is understood by all sections of the population. We hope that this raised awareness will result in structural programmes, not only in Plain Language governmental communication, but also in the adaptation of communication aimed towards specific groups of the population.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Dutch and Easy French in Belgium. These example texts are not simplifications of regular texts; they have been written straight into their easy form.

<p><b>Easy Dutch, Duidelijke Taal</b></p>
<p><b>Rode Kruis verkoopt weer stickers</b></p> <p>De verkoop van stickers voor het Rode Kruis is weer gestart. De traditie is al ouder dan 50 jaar. De verkoop duurt dit jaar nog tot 7 mei. In 2015 staat Wickie De Viking op de stickers. Wickie is geliefd bij vele kinderen. Het Rode Kruis hoopt daarom veel stickers te verkopen. Vrijwilligers van het Rode Kruis verkopen de stickers vaak op kruispunten. Vorig jaar ontstond even ophef. Is dat niet te gevaarlijk? Toch kan je opnieuw stickers kopen aan een kruispunt.</p> <p>Source: Wablieft, 30 april 2015</p>
<p><b>[Red Cross is selling stickers again</b></p> <p>The sale of stickers for the Red Cross has started again. The tradition dates back more than 50 years. This year, the sale will last until May 7. In 2015, Wickie The Viking is on the stickers. Many children love Wickie. The Red Cross hopes to sell many stickers. Volunteers from the Red Cross often sell the stickers at intersections. Last year there was some problems. Isn't that too dangerous? But now you can buy stickers again at an intersection.]</p>

Easy French, FALC (Facile à Lire et à Comprendre)

**Le vote est un droit**

Avant de voter, lisez et regardez des programmes électoraux. C'est important de bien comprendre les idées de chacun avant de faire votre choix. Votre choix peut changer les choses dans votre commune. Faites votre choix librement.

**Le vote est un devoir**

Tous les Belges qui ont plus de 18 ans doivent voter. Les personnes avec un handicap intellectuel doivent aussi voter. Vous êtes obligé de voter. Si vous n'allez pas voter vous risquez d'avoir une amende.

**Inclusion ASBL**

Source: This excerpt is taken from a brochure on municipal elections, written by *Inclusion asbl*.

<https://www.inclusion-asbl.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Livret-elections-communales-2018-Jai-le-droit-de-voter...-mais-comment-je-fais-min.pdf>

**[Voting is a right**

Before voting, read and watch party platforms. It's important to understand everyone's ideas before you make your choice. Your choice can make a difference in your municipality. Make your choice freely.

**Voting is a duty**

All Belgians who are over 18 years old must vote. People with an intellectual disability must also vote. You have to vote. If you don't vote you might get a fine.]

## Easy Language in Croatia

### 1 Introduction

Croatia is a country in south-east Europe on the coast of the Adriatic Sea. Its capital is Zagreb. Croatian is the official language in Croatia, and it became the 24th official language of the European Union upon the country's accession in 2013. It is a South Slavic language, used primarily in Croatia, by Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and by Croatian minorities in some neighbouring countries (e.g., Austria, Serbia, and Hungary).

Croatian, like most other Slavic languages, has a rich inflection system. Case, number and gender markings are used for nouns and adjectives, while person, number and tense markings are used for verbs. Noun inflection has three genders (masculine, feminine and neutral), two numbers (singular and plural) and seven cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, locative, and instrumental). Verb forms are expressed by means of six categories: person (first, second and third), number (singular and plural), tense (simple-present, aorist, imperfect, compound-perfect, pluperfect, future I and future II), aspect (perfective vs imperfective), mode (infinitive, imperative and two conditionals) and voice (active vs passive). The verb system can be further divided into seven verbal classes based on infinitive and present forms (Barić et al. 1995).

Most Croatian words are polysyllabic, and 87% have open syllables, which means they end with a vowel. However, the Croatian morphological system is more demanding, sometimes even opaque. With seven cases, two numbers, three genders and aspect in the verbal system, nouns and verbs can have different orthographic forms (e.g., *dijete* (child) – *djeca* (children) or *peče* (bakes; 3rd ps. sg.) – *peku* (bake; 3rd ps. pl.)).

As with most Slavic languages, the basic word order is subject-verb-object (SVO) even though, due to the rich morphological system, word order is actually relatively free.

The orthographic system of the Croatian language is the so-called ‘Gaj’s Latin alphabet’, considered to be a variant of an alphabetic writing system (Moguš 1995). It has 30 phonemes represented by 30 upper and lowercase letters. Standard Croatian has five monophthongal vowels and one diphthong (ie), but other diphthongs are reportedly used in non-standard dialects of Croatian (Škarić 1991, Jelaska 2004). Three digraphs in Croatian represent single consonant sounds (*nj*, *lj*, and *dž*). An additional digraph ‘je’ and one trigraph ‘ije’ (which is especially problematic for young spellers) are both considered not to be a part of the alphabet (see Jelaska 2004, Jelaska and Gulešić-Machata 2005).

Croatian is a language with transparent orthography which means there is great consistency in sound-letter associations in the orthography (Gontijo et al. 2003). Despite a few exceptions in one-to-one relationships between phonemes and graphemes that should be acquired mostly during formal education, transparent orthography makes the decoding process in Croatian easier than in languages with non-transparent orthography.

In Croatia, primary education starts when children are six or seven years old (most often at the age of seven). It consists of eight grades and is the only compulsory part of formal education. During preschool, there is no general assessment of communication and language abilities or early literacy and mathematical skills. Secondary education is not compulsory and is provided by gymnasiums and vocational schools. Croatia has recorded a substantial growth in people who attained academic degrees, from 7.5% in 2001 to 16.7% today (Croatian Bureau of Statistics 2019). Unfortunately, neither Plain Language nor Easy Language (for some categories of students) is included in the design of educational content, official documents, or media announcements.

The analysis of the latest research of the International Student Assessment Program (PISA), conducted in 2018, shows below-average results for the last 12 years in all three exam areas of reading, mathematics and science. There is no data on adult literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills assessed under the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

because Croatia only joined the programme recently, in 2018 (Razvoj sustava osiguravanja kvalitete u obrazovanju odraslih 2021).

Croatia has around 660 000 children and adolescents under the age of 18 and 8% of these have some form of disability (Croatian Institute of Public Health 2020). Depending on the child's capabilities, they have three education programme options: regular, regular individualized, and special. According to the annual report of the Ministry of Science and Education (2020), around 23 000 students with disabilities attended elementary school in the academic year 2019/2020. Of these, around 20 000 were educated in accordance with the regular individualized programme, and around 3 000 in accordance with the special programme. In the same academic year, 5255 students with disabilities attended inclusive secondary education – 4223 students were taught in accordance with the regular programme and 1032 in accordance with the special programme in vocational schools. Speech, language and communication disorders, and specific learning disorders are the most specified causes that require an appropriate type of education. For these types of disorders, the prescribed mode of education is the individualized education programme (Croatian Institute for Public Health 2019).

## 2 Historical perspectives

The concept of Easy Language is relatively new in Croatia. Although Croatia is the co-signatory of numerous documents that guarantee the right to education for children with disabilities and different rights for adults with disabilities, Easy Language was only mentioned for the first time in 2004 in the translation of the first version of the Guidelines for easy-to-read materials (IFLA 1997, Hrvatsko knjižničarsko društvo 2004, 2005). Since then, the term Easy Language (translated as *građa lagana za čitanje*) has been presented and described in many conferences (Lenček 2005, 2007) and in several professional materials and brochures (Lenček 2008).

Easy Language-related activities have formed parts of several professional projects carried out at the Faculty of Special Education and Rehabilitation, University of Zagreb (*Specifične teškoće učenja – i mi smo posebni* (Specific learning

difficulties – we are special too) and *Specifične teškoće učenja – idemo dalje* (Specific learning difficulties – let's move on)). Both projects were financed by the Ministry of Family Affairs, War Veterans and Intergenerational solidarity in 2007–2008. Easy Language-related activities were also part of projects funded by the Government of the Republic of Croatia. One such project is the *Utvrdjivanje problema čitanja i pisanja kod osoba s izrečenim odgojnim mjerama u Republici Hrvatskoj* (Determining the problem of reading and writing among persons with imposed educational measures in the Republic of Croatia), financed by the Office for Human Rights of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2004–2007.

In 2009, in the short article published in the bulletin of the Croatian Dyslexia Association (No. 24), speech and language pathologists presented their first experiences of easy-to-read materials from the 16th European Conference on Reading (Braga, Portugal). 'It should be speech and language pathologists who determine the adaptations based on their knowledge of the difficulties and peculiarities in language' (Gabriel 2013: 65)<sup>1</sup>, of course, in collaboration with librarians and Croatian language teachers. This decision raised an important question for speech and language pathologists (SLP): how to conduct language adaptation so that it is accessible for all students with disabilities (including grade- or age-appropriate concepts and language), but also keep the text stimulating and motivating for the child's further development and learning?

Knowing which language skills are developed in each chronological year or class is essential for starting language adaptation of a text. At this time, psycholinguistic data (Kovačević 1996) on the specifics of the Croatian language used by children (Kuvač and Cvikić 2005) and data on the use of language in the field of educational linguistics (Kovačević and Kuvač 2004, Aladrović Slovaček 2019, Peti-Stantić 2019) were relatively scarce. Consequently, speech and language pathologists decided to start from another perspective – by analysing linguistic and graphic elements in primers<sup>2</sup>, with the intention of determining what is difficult for all students but especially for students with language disorders such as dyslexia (Lenček and Gligora 2010). Since the primer is the first formal book

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1 Translated by the authors.

2 The term *primer* stands for the first formal book that children use during the first two grades for learning to read and write.

to which a child is exposed, it must be very carefully designed and take into consideration a number of linguistic and graphic peculiarities. Therefore, the purpose of the collected data was to ensure more effective work on the individualization of educational content for students with dyslexia and to develop new materials and textbooks that are adequate for the same population. In the last ten years, numerous studies have analysed primers (for more information, see the section on Education and Research).

In 2011, the Croatian Library Association (*Hrvatsko knjižničarsko društvo, HKD*), in collaboration with speech and language pathologists, published the second authorized translation of Guidelines for easy-to-read materials (IFLA 2010). Since then, different types of adaptations have been made in accordance with the principles of the Guidelines. Whereas the first edition of the Guidelines (IFLA 1997) focused only on dyslexia, the second revised edition (IFLA 2010) had a broader scope and focused on all people with disabilities who demonstrate significant reading difficulties.

### 3 Current situation

Before defining the term Easy Language, it is important to distinguish it from the term Plain Language. Unfortunately, neither Plain Language nor Easy Language has an official status in Croatian law, and consequently the public's awareness of these two terms is still very low. Therefore, there is no clearly agreed difference between these two terms, but the term Easy Language has been used more in the last 15 years due exclusively to children with developmental disorders. Plain Language (*jasan jezik*) is intended for the general population, and aims to present all written information in a form that is readable to the ordinary reader. The definition of the Plain Language proposed by the International Plain Language Federation (2021) is informally accepted in Croatia: *A communication is in Plain Language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.*

### 3.1 Definitions

The term Easy Language (*jednostavan jezik*) is connected to and based on the term ‘easy-to read materials’. The term ‘easy-to-read’ (*građa lagana za čitanje*) first appeared in Croatian in 2004/2005. A newer term *lako čitljivi tekstovi* was proposed in 2018 and has been in use since then (Lenček and Kuvač Kraljević 2018). The term *građa lagana za čitanje* was used for the first time in the authorized translation of the IFLA manual *Smjernice za knjižnične službe i usluge za osobe s disleksijom* (Guidelines for Library Services to Persons with Dyslexia, 2001) published in Croatia in 2004 by the Croatian Library Association (*Hrvatsko knjižičarsko društvo*).

The extended definition of Easy Language proposed by IFLA in its second edition of the Guidelines has been accepted in Croatia: *Easy Language is a linguistic adaptation of a text that makes both reading and comprehension easier.*

Easy Language is currently exclusively related to written text in printed and online materials. There is almost no Easy Language in the media that rely on spoken language. Unfortunately, there is a lack of awareness of the importance of understanding the content presented through speech, which is nonetheless essential for an individual’s social, political, and economic life.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Croatia is the co-signatory of documents that guarantee the education of children with disabilities in mainstream schools such as the Salamanca declaration (UNESCO 1994); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), ratified by Croatia in 2007; the European social charter (Council of Europe 1996); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN 2006); and many more. Moreover, the fundamental right of every child to education is stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (1990).

The determinants of inclusive education are incorporated into all legal, strategic and curricular documents relating to the Croatian education system: the State Pedagogical Standard 2008 (Ministry of Science, Education and Sport 2008); the National Framework Curriculum for Preschool Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education (Ministry of Science, Education and sport 2011); the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology (Croatian

Parliament 2014); and the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (Croatian Parliament, 2008). The Primary and Secondary School Education Act, as the fundamental document of the Croatian education system, establishes a method of teaching children with disabilities in accordance with their abilities and tendencies. Inclusive policy is defined by the Regulations on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette 2015).

Another important document is the Marrakesh Treaty (2013), according to which easier access should be provided to published works for the visually impaired and all people who cannot read the standard press. On September 9th 2014, the Libraries of the City of Zagreb organized the 11th roundtable focusing on facilitating access to published works for the blind, the visually impaired, and people who for whatever other reason cannot read standard printing. In line with the Marrakesh Treaty, the Copyright and Related Rights Act (Official Gazette 2017) was amended to ensure easier access to adapted texts for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia. All these changes were presented in the *National campaign for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia: I want to read too!* (2016–2021). One of the objectives of the campaign was to raise the Croatian public's awareness of the problems of people with different kinds of reading difficulties and dyslexia and the insufficient supply of easy-to-read materials. The campaign promoted unhindered and equal access to literary works for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia, as well as people who cannot read standard (black) print.

The European Union ratified the Marrakesh Treaty on 1st October 2018, which entered into force on 1 January 2019. This allows people who cannot read the standard press, and the organizations that take care of their needs in the 28 EU Member States, to participate in the cross-border exchange of material in a customized format with third countries that are also signatories of the Marrakesh Treaty. According to the data available from 2019, more than 40 countries signed the Marrakesh Treaty. Under EU law, Croatia is required to implement the EU directive and regulation related to the Treaty.

On 23rd September 2019, the Law on Accessibility of Websites and Software Solutions for Mobile Devices of Public Sector Bodies (Official Gazette 2019) entered into force. Its aim is to ensure equal inclusion and an active role in

society for all people, regardless of the type and degree of their disability and/or reduced ability to use the digital content of public sector bodies.

This Law incorporates the content of Directive 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council (Direktiva EU 2016) into Croatian legislation, which defines the circle of responsible bodies (public sector bodies) and their obligations in terms of meeting accessibility requirements and deadlines for adaptation. The Law on Accessibility, according to the provisions of the Directive, prescribes the use of world standards when designing websites, webpage layouts and ways of navigating through content, searches and structure. This Law also highlights the need to use Plain Language, but its use has not yet taken root in Croatia.

The application of standards ensures that the layout and functions of the website are adapted to people with disabilities and/or lower abilities. This is achieved through the basic principles of observability – users must be able to see the data displayed (it cannot be invisible to their senses), operability – users must be able to manage the interface (the interface cannot require interaction that the user cannot perform), intelligibility – users must be able to understand the information as well as the operation of the user interface (content or operation must not be beyond their comprehension) and stability – users must be able to access the content regardless of the type of technology (i.e. regardless of technology development, content should remain equally accessible). The Information Commissioner is responsible for the supervision of the implementation of this Law.

In Croatia, the harmonization of the Croatian legislation in the field of copyright and related rights with the EU Directive is underway. Of all the legal, strategic and curricular documents that Croatia possesses, none mention Easy Language as an obligatory part of the inclusion policy. The term can be found in implemented documents such as the Guidelines for improving the support system for students with disabilities in higher education in the Republic of Croatia (Kiš Glavaš, 2016), developed by the National group to advance the social dimension of higher education. This group was established in 2015 as an advisory body of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education, the Rector's Conference, and the Council of Polytechnics and Colleges. Despite these facts, there is constant awareness of

the importance of language adaptations for groups of people with disabilities, especially within the education system.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Easy Language is becoming more widely accepted as a necessary part of inclusive education and a valid tool for facilitating reading. Three associations play the most important role in the popularization of easy-to-read texts. The **Croatian Library Association** (*Hrvatsko knjižičarsko društvo, HKD*) has an important function in promoting Easy Language in society. The **Croatian Dyslexia Association** (*Hrvatska udruga za disleksiju, HUD*), which has members who are speech and language pathologists who work on texts and strongly advocate the need for easy-to-read texts. Both associations have focused on acquainting the Croatian public with specially designed materials that can significantly facilitate reading for people with reading difficulties. In addition, the **Croatian Logopedic Association** (*Hrvatsko logopedsko društvo*), a professional organization of speech and language pathologists, supports the speech and language pathologist profession in the production of easy-to-read materials.

**Librarians and Croatian language teachers** play an important role in text adaptation. The main responsibility of the latter is to harmonize the Easy Language text, taking into consideration the specificity of the curriculum, whereas the role of librarians is to select texts according to the age and interests of children.

In recent years, the Republic of Croatia has also increasingly shown interest in how to make the language of politics more accessible and readable to the community. This is also visible in the establishment of **The Commission of the Government of the Republic of Croatia for Persons with Disabilities** (within the Ministry of Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy in 2017 (Official Gazette 2019)). The task of this Commission is to provide the Government of the Republic of Croatia with proposals, opinions and expert explanations regarding the position, protection and rehabilitation of people with disabilities and their families, as well as to carry out activities that aim for their well-being.

Since 2017, an increasing number of **private publishing houses** have been trying to publish primers and textbooks based on Easy Language, especially those intended for the educational purposes of students in inclusive schools.

### 3.4 General attitude

Despite public advocacy, Easy Language is not always well received by different professionals related to the field of language and education. Many misconceptions persist about the quality and purposes of Easy Language texts and complete adaptations of written texts. For example, some teachers think that language adaptation destroys the literary value of the original text. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of the importance of Easy Language for literacy and learning among children with disabilities.

No funding is available in Croatia on the national, local or any other level of government for text and literature prepared in accordance with Easy Language. Currently, only a few publishing houses publish easy-to-read textbooks and required readings, and most of these fund their own products.

## 4 Target groups

The beginnings of Easy Language in Croatia are related to the publication of easy-to-read texts for people with dyslexia. In 2010, the publication of the second edition of the Guidelines for easy-to-read materials promoted acceptance that Easy Language was a valuable tool for people with cognitive disabilities, neuropsychiatric disorders, aphasia, dementia, deaf and deafblind people and other people with reading difficulties (e.g., immigrants, non-native speakers, poor readers) (IFLA 2010). Unfortunately, the awareness of reading difficulties, especially those related to comprehension, in the above-mentioned groups is still not such as to suggest the application of Easy Language principles in spoken language.

## 5 Guidelines

The first edition of the IFLA guidelines (IFLA 1997) was initially translated and published by the Croatian Library Association in 2005 and promoted by speech and language pathologists who were motivated to develop a valid text modification tool in order to produce readable texts for children with dyslexia. Both sets of guidelines proposed by the IFLA (IFLA 1997, IFLA 2010) were used as a starting point for developing a more comprehensive list of factors that make texts easier to read and more understandable.

The IFLA's guidelines for language adaptations include writing concrete text and avoiding abstract language. Actions should follow logical continuity, be direct and simple without a long introduction and not involve too many characters. Symbolic language (metaphors), difficult words, 'trigger' words (e.g., *indeed, therefore, hence*), and abbreviations should be avoided, as well as several actions in the same sentence. Words should be arranged in a single phrase on one line, if possible. Complicated relationships should be explained in a concrete and logical manner, and events should take place in a logical chronological framework. For an illustration of the Croatian guidelines, see Appendix 1.

The adaptation process can be illustrated by a few sentences from a text written by Ivana Brlić Mažuranić: *Ribar Palunko i njegova žena* (Fisherman Palunko and his wife) which is required reading in the fourth grade of elementary school:

*Još se više na ovo razjario Palunko, gdje se tako varao za dvije duge godine, te gnjevan zapovjedi ženi, da sutra prije zore pođe sa djetetom morskim žalom na desnu stranu, a Palunko će poći na lijevu - i da se ne vraćaju, dok ne nađu puta do Morskog Kralja.*

[Palunko became even angrier, because he had been deceived for two long years, and angrily ordered the woman to go to the right with the child by the sea tomorrow before dawn, and Palunko would go to the left – and that they should not return until they find their way to the Sea King.]

The adaptation first step is keyword reading – the text is first read, and keywords are extracted. The new text is synthesized from the keywords only and is then ready for a new reading. Any difficult words among these extracted keywords should be replaced (in this text that would be the word *razjario* because it is unfamiliar for children due to its low frequency). The second step is language simplification – this is carried out in two phases: defining the problematic parts of the text – these can be lexeme units, phrases, or clauses, and analysing text length and syntactic structure. The analysis of the previous example revealed that the sentence was too long and syntactically too complex. It consisted of almost 50 words and contained a few embedded clauses, one of which had a metaphorical meaning. All these present obstacles for children with language disorders.

The substitutions for the problematic parts should be provided on the basis of the findings of the linguistic analyses, and some words should be replaced by adequate synonyms. Embedded clauses can be omitted, but only if they do not affect the meaning; more complex sentences should be simplified, and the length of the sentence reduced.

The final result looked like this<sup>3</sup>:

Na to se **Palunko** još više **razljutio**.

Ljut **zapovjedi** ženi da sutra prije zore pođe s **djetetom** pješčanom obalom.

Ona neka ide desnom stranom.

On će poći na lijevu.

Nitko se **ne smije vratiti** dok ne nađu put do Morskog Kralja.

[Palunko got even angrier at this.

In anger, he orders the woman to go with the child along the sandy shore before dawn.

She should go to the right.

He will go to the left.

No one should return until they find the way to the Sea King.]

.....  
3 Keywords are in bold.

In addition to language, the graphic performance of the text is also very important, not only to make the text readable and ensure the hierarchy of information, but also to attract readers and hold their attention, which is especially important for children with reading difficulties and young readers. Graphic solutions refer to text formatting and text organization.

<b>Graphic text formatting</b>	wide margins higher spacing (at least 1.5) text alignment only to the left, not to the right indented first lines of paragraphs sentences separated by double spaces new sentences starting at the beginning of a new line whenever possible font size of at least 12 (recommended 14) font <i>Sans Serif, Arial</i> or similar (font without redundant lines) same font used throughout the text, i.e., no combinations of different fonts no glossy paper (i.e., matte paper) no italicized or underlined text black letters on cream-coloured paper
<b>Graphic text organization</b>	text divided into smaller units short paragraphs separated by a blank line titles and subtitles highlighted picture/photographs inserted as additional support for the text clear order of text despite the 'inserted' photographs (it should be clear at a glance what should be read and in what order) text organized line by line or in numerical order important information bolded

Table 1: List of graphic adaptations.

When language and graphical adaptations are implemented, the final IFLA recommendation is to test the material with actual target groups before it goes to press.

In addition to the language recommendations provided by the IFLA, other guidelines for language adaptations have been developed for speech and language pathologists to implement in the process of making text easier to read

(Kuvač Kraljević and Peretić 2015, Lenček 2010). The first informative texts about the easy-to-read system were written in 2008 in accordance with IFLA recommendations: *Dyslexia/What is easy-to-read/Characteristics of easy-to-read materials* (Lenček 2008), and *Dyslexia in adulthood: increasingly known, much less understood* (Lenček 2009).

It is important to emphasize here that after the publication of the translated IFLA Guidelines in 2011, all activities continued to mainly focus on adaptation for people with dyslexia and people with reading difficulties exclusively through written text. This is evident, for example, in the organization of the State Matura examinations<sup>4</sup> in Croatia. From the beginning of their implementation (2011), graphic and minor linguistic adaptations have been made to materials (for compulsory subjects – Croatian language, English language and mathematics). Applicants with dyslexia, dysgraphia, but also those with developmental language disorders, ADHD/ADD disorder, dyspraxia, and other difficulties listed in the Instructions for the Adaptation of Examination Technology at State Matura Examinations (National Center for External Evaluation of Education 2010) have rights to these adaptations. Some of the adaptations from the document include broader margins, right margins without alignment, higher spacing (1.5), *sans serif* font, bold keywords, highlighted titles, and text divided into smaller units. Certain adaptations, primarily those focusing on graphics rather than on language, have also been specifically developed for students with visual, hearing and motor disabilities.

## 6 Practical outcomes

All the Easy Language texts published so far have mostly been presented in written form. In addition, most of these texts have been made for educational purposes (textbooks and required reading) or promotional materials. No media texts such as news follow Easy Language principles for adults with disabilities.

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4 The State Matura examinations in Croatia is a secondary school leaving examination. The exams are managed and organized by the National Center for External Evaluation of Education. Students who have completed their secondary education at a gymnasium, vocational or art high school are required to sit the state Matura exams.

It is therefore important that other types of texts, such as information leaflets, current news materials and contents that influence individuals' decisions, gain more representation in the future.

## 6.1 Literature

Some primers and textbooks (from 2015) intended for students with special education needs have been produced in accordance with the principles of Easy Language. All adaptations are directed towards pupils studying according to the provisions of Article 4 of the Regulations on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette 2015).

Noticing the importance of producing and printing these types of materials, the Foundation *Čujem, vjerujem, vidim* (I hear, believe and see), a specialized publisher of books based on easy-to-read principles in Croatian, published 10 books in 2015–2020 (both written and audio format). All these books were exclusively from the list of required reading for primary school. The same foundation defines easy-to-read material as *...the term that encompasses linguistic and graphic adaptation of a text intended for people with disorders that cause difficulty in reading and comprehending text. A speech and language pathologist, professor of Croatian language and literature, proofreader, illustrator and editor are all involved in the process of adapting standard text.*<sup>5</sup> These required readings are mostly used by students with dyslexia. There is also a book on the market with adapted language created by students from the Department of Cultural Studies, University of Osijek and illustrated by elementary school students (Brlić Mažuranić 2013).

## 6.2 Informative texts

Recently, Easy Language has also become a tool for promoting health policy. A promotional leaflet was published online with the support of the Aphasia United organization. Best practice recommendations for people with aphasia

.....  
5 Translated by the authors.

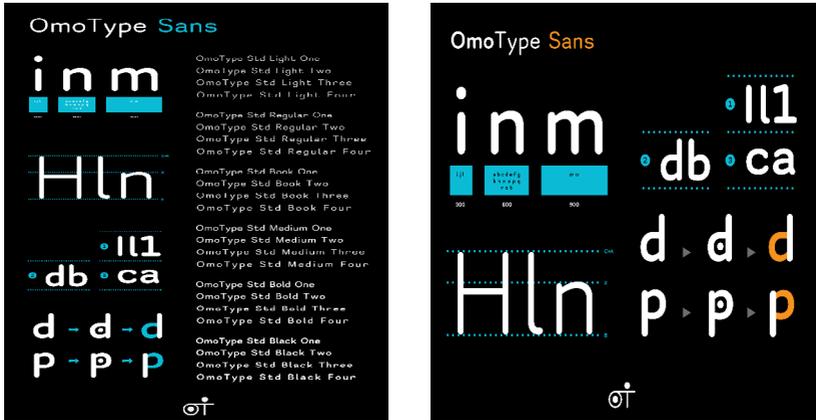
have been created in line with the linguistic and graphic guidelines of Easy Language and are publicly available (Aphasia United 2021).

During the COVID-19 lockdown (in spring 2020), the Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, published a series of short videos on the topic *How to learn better, faster and easier* for lower grade elementary school students, upper elementary school students and high school students (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb 2021). The division into three education levels was inspired not only by the cognitive differences among students or their different educational interests, but also by language. These materials incorporated the guidelines for Easy Language and specially designed fonts – OmoType.

Tenders for the development of websites for state administration bodies are currently underway. The focus is strong on visual solutions for the website, search capabilities, and the layout, but language adaptation of the content provided on the websites is lacking. This reflects the lack of research and expert data on language adaptations.

### 6.3 Other projects

The special contribution of easy-to-read materials is visible in newly created fonts suitable for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia. Typographers Marko Hrastovac and Petar Reić created the OmoType font family after five years of researching how children with dyslexia read and the influence of fonts on their reading (Peretić and Reić 2020). It consists of 240 different styles that leave plenty of room for adjustments to the individual user's needs. A special novelty in such font creation is the possibility of adjusting the height of the extenders and descenders (upper and lower extensions) of the letters. It is believed that their lengthening facilitates the detection of the letter sign and thus the reading (OmoType 2021). OmoType is a Croatian innovative contribution to the easy-to-read system. The full potential of OmoType is achieved with the Omoguru Reader, a mobile phone application (Omoguru Reader 2021).



Picture 1: Some letters in OmoType font (used with permission from Petar Reić)

The National campaign for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia: *I want to read too!*, had a great impact on the promotion of the easy-to-read system. This campaign started in 2016. Its aim was to inform and educate the public and raise their sensibility towards the problems and needs of people with reading difficulties and dyslexia. Furthermore, the campaign also strived to amend the Copyright and Related Rights Act (Official Gazette 167/03, Article 86) in order to provide easier access to text adapted to easy-to-read principles for people with reading difficulties and dyslexia. The Croatian Library Association proposed that Article 86 should be amended to include, in addition to people with disabilities, people with reading difficulties and dyslexia.

Since 2019, CARNET (Croatian Academic and Research Network) and **Algebra** (private University College) have been working on a project aimed at the inclusive adaptation of digital educational content/digital textbooks. Speech and language pathologists are also involved in this project. Inclusive adaptation implies suggestions related to multimedia and interactive elements so that their adaptations can be more accessible to students with special educational needs. The most important part of this revision related to Easy Language lies in the linguistic simplification of the texts approved by the authors of the textbooks. This is also a way to additionally promote inclusive education and the value of Easy Language for the education system.

A TEMPUS project, *Education for Equal opportunities at Croatian Universities – EduQuality*<sup>6</sup>, in the University of Zagreb, resulted in manuals, the purpose of which was to equalize access to higher education for students with disabilities in the Republic of Croatia. The cover page of the manuals, entitled *Students with disabilities*, states: ‘throughout the performance (content and content structure, graphic design, printing and equipment), this series of manuals was adapted for use by people with disabilities. The titles of the manuals have been transcribed into Croatian braille, and braille tacts of standard Marburg Medium dimensions’<sup>7</sup>. One passage in these manuals is intended for students with dyslexia and highlights the importance of language adaptations (Lenček 2012).

## 7 Education and research

No licensed education programme in Croatia provides the knowledge necessary for adapting texts and literature according to Easy Language principles. So far, several speech and language pathologists have tackled this, mostly adapting textbooks, required readings, texts for the State Matura examinations, and other similar content. However, the small number of these experts, as well as the small number of adapted texts, clearly indicate that this is a complex and demanding job that requires knowledge not only of the specificities of language, but also of the specificities of the functioning of the particular population for which the adapted text is intended.

Students of speech and language therapy acquire basic knowledge of how to make easy-to-read material in their undergraduate and graduate education. The topics related to easy-to-read material are an integral part of the theoretical knowledge of several subjects (e.g., dyslexia, developmental language disorder, alternative and augmentative communication, specific learning disorders, and clinical practicum in speech and language pathology) and are a part of learning outcomes for these subjects. To achieve these outcomes, practical papers (ad-

6 Education for Equal opportunities at Croatian Universities – EduQuality (No: 158757-TEMPUS1-2009-1-HR-TEMPUS-JPGR).

7 Translated by the authors.

aptations of texts) must be prepared. Through practical work and later through clinical and professional work, students of speech and language pathology can improve their competencies in this field.

The way in which speech and language pathologists began work on the implementation of Easy Language is interesting. The story starts with an analysis of the linguistic and graphic elements in primers. The ultimate intention was to determine what is difficult for all students and especially for students with language disorders such as dyslexia. Numerous studies have been conducted, but their findings have been uniform – all primers demonstrate a lack of clear criteria for their linguistic and graphic design (Lenček and Gligora 2010). The lexical analyses of primers showed a great number of low frequent words that usually appear only once in primers (Kovačević and Kuvač 2004, Miličić et al. 2017). It is well known that familiar words that are repeated in different contexts ensure successful reading and lexical development. Unfortunately, Croatian primers do not contain the appropriate ratio between familiar and unfamiliar words, which should be in favour of familiar words. Moreover, a lexical analysis of primers conducted by Cvikić (2002) showed that four analysed primers shared only 30% of the lexical content. This means that first graders may be exposed to different lexical items, depending on which primer they use. Another analysis of data on people with dyslexia showed the peculiarities of the Croatian language in terms of demanding syntactic and semantic forms and the need to adapt these forms so that people with dyslexia could understand them (Lenček and Anđel 2012). All the results of scientific research aim to create a scientific basis for Easy Language in Croatian.

The development of various databases (such as the Croatian lexical database – database of psycholinguistics properties of words, Kuvač Kraljević and Olujić 2018; Croatian child language frequency dictionary, Kuvač Kraljević et al., forthcoming) and the use of information and communication technology play a significant role in improving the implementation of Easy Language.

## 8 Future perspectives

The measures carried out so far represent a good basis for the future. Further development of Easy Language should focus on two key issues: First, research should focus on the principles of language adaptation. However, there are numerous doubts as to the appropriate adaptation of, for example, complex sentences. Croatian speech and language pathologists should have clear linguistic instructions on how to adapt each sentence's structure, taking into consideration the student's age and the severity of their language, reading and writing disorders. In order to obtain these clear instructions, comprehensive research should analyse a great number of children with disorders or adults with language problems who are exposed to differently linguistically adapted texts in controlled conditions. The principles of Easy Language must be empirically based, just like speech and language therapies. Research should focus on the specifics of the population of the elderly, people with intellectual disabilities, and those with aphasia and other disorders in order to improve knowledge of Easy Language and of the criteria for creating materials in Easy Language format.

Second, research should raise public awareness of the easy-to-read concept. Many negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes related to Easy Language are often due to a low level of knowledge regarding the difficulties that children and adults with disabilities face when reading. This means that it is important to work on changing public opinion on Easy Language and to make the public begin to understand its importance for the those with disabilities. Encouragement to produce more of Easy Language materials is crucial at all levels of government as well as in the education and health sectors.

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Croatian.

Standard Croatian	Easy Croatian
<p>U poglavlju 9. Programa mjera obnove zgrada oštećenih potresom na području Grada Zagreba, Krapinsko-zagorske županije i Zagrebačke županije detaljnije je raspisana procedura podnošenja zahtjeva za oslobađanje osiguranja odnosno uplate sredstava za konstrukcijsku obnovu zgrada i gradnju zamjenske kuće kao i sami rokovi za podnošenje zahtjeva. Zakonom o obnovi, uvođenjem socijalnog kriterija, predviđeno je oslobađanje od uplate sredstava za konstrukcijsku obnovu zgrada i gradnju zamjenske obiteljske kuće te je omogućeno podnošenje zahtjeva za navedeno oslobađanje putem obrazaca.</p>	<p>Kako vi možete predati zahtjev za</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) oslobađanje osiguranja i/ili</li> <li>b) oslobađanje uplate sredstava za konstrukcijsku obnovu zgrada i/ili</li> <li>c) gradnju zamjenske kuće</li> </ul> <p>Sve podatke i rokove možete pronaći u 9. poglavlju dokumenta pod nazivom <i>Program mjera obnove zgrada oštećenih potresom na području Grada Zagreba, Krapinsko-zagorske županije i Zagrebačke županije.</i></p> <p>Prema donesenom Zakonu o obnovi, možete biti oslobođeni od uplate za konstrukcijsku obnovu zgrada i gradnju zamjenske obiteljske kuće ako ispunjavate uvjet socijalnog kriterija. Da biste bili oslobođeni od ovih uplata podnesite zahtjev za navedeno oslobađanje i ispunite sljedeće obrasce.</p>

<p>[Chapter 9 of the Program of Measures for the Reconstruction of Earthquake-Damaged Buildings in the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje County and Zagreb County describes in more detail the procedure for submitting applications for insurance exemption or payment for construction reconstruction of buildings and construction of a replacement house. The Law on Reconstruction, by introducing a social criterion, provides for exemption from the payment of funds for the construction renovation of buildings and the construction of a replacement family house, and it is possible to submit requests for this exemption through forms.]</p>	<p>[How can you apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) not to pay insurance</li><li>b) not to pay to fix buildings</li><li>c) to build a new house</li></ul> <p>All information is in Chapter 9 of the 'Program of measures for the reconstruction of buildings damaged by the earthquake in the City of Zagreb, Krapina-Zagorje County and Zagreb County'.</p> <p>According to the law, you do not have to pay for fixing buildings and building a new family house if you meet the criteria. Complete these forms and you will not have to pay.]</p>
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## Easy Language in Czechia

### 1 Introduction

Czechia, with a population of ten million, bordering on Germany, Poland, Austria, and Slovakia, is a middle-sized, land-locked country surrounded by mountain ranges. The Czech population is ethnically and linguistically homogeneous – 95% are Czech (Czech Statistical Office 2019). The Government runs a Council of Nationalities, in which major minorities have representatives. Currently Czechia has fourteen recognized national minorities: Belarusian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Roma, Ruthenian, Russian, Greek, Slovak, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. Czech citizens from these minorities have the right to education and communication with authorities in their own language.

Czech is a West-Slavic language with a free word order, rich inflection, and productive word formation (Naughton 2005). It comes in two varieties: the standard written Czech (*spisovná čeština*) and common Czech (*obecná čeština*). Only the former is considered the official language. It is centrally codified by the Institute of the Czech Language of the Czech Academy of Sciences and officially associated with the highest social prestige. Common Czech is considered low standard. It is very similar to the written standard in pronunciation and vocabulary, but differs in many inflection patterns.

In writing, Czech speakers do not use common Czech inflection, except in private, emotional communications. On the other hand, most Czech speakers would not speak standard written Czech by default, although they are encouraged to do so throughout their education (colloquial Czech). The colloquial standard has been promoted by some Czech linguistic authorities since the 1930s, even under the communist government from 1948. However, colloquial Czech has not really succeeded, except in some Eastern regions. For

many Czechs, the actual mother tongue is common Czech, and the colloquial standard equals a linguistic black tie: being underdressed is awkward, but one is as easily overdressed, and only a few wear the black tie with grace. This diglossia is inconvenient for foreign speakers and speakers from low-education environments.

Foreign speakers who are only taught the written (and colloquial) standard, are regularly lost in everyday language. Children who have not been regularly read to in their pre-school years score lower in tests of verbal competence (Ernestova et al. 2016). One reason for this is that competence tests generally present material in standard written colloquial Czech. For instance, in a series of phoneme-manipulation experiments (Zezulková 2015) examining young school children with mild cognitive disabilities, Roma children, and a control group, the Roma children, who typically grow up with a mixture of common Czech and Roma dialects and do not attend pre-school care, lagged behind the control group as much as the children with cognitive disabilities. This sad case illustrates particularly well the additional load that the dichotomy between the written standard and common Czech poses to foreign speakers. It also, at least partly, explains why in the PISA literacy/reading proficiency studies (OECD 2018), Czechia is among the countries whose educational status is most affected by family background. Indeed, lacking exposure to standard written colloquial Czech in early childhood excludes people from advanced education and thus harms social mobility.

Czechia has also taken part in other international literacy/reading proficiency studies: in the IEA's PIRLS<sup>1</sup> for 4th grade pupils (Martin et al. 2017) in 2001 and 2011, and in the OECD's 2009 PIAAC for adults (Straková et al. 2013). In the PIRLS, Czech children scored slightly above the EU average. The overall performance of Czech teenagers in PISA is at the EU average, but specifically their reading performance has remained under the average since 1995. In the PIAAC, the adults scored slightly above the OECD average. Among both adults and children, Czechia had fewer underperforming respondents than average. This was particularly obvious in the PIAAC study. It may be due to the quality

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1 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

of the education system, but also perhaps to the fact that Czechia does not face mass immigration and its established ethnic minorities are extremely well assimilated (Ernestova et al. 2016: 6). Virtually all the Czech respondents were native Czech speakers.

Communicative routines reflect the degree of democracy and inclusivity within a community. Can everyone participate in the public discourse, at least in topics that immediately affect them? Are clerks patronizing or do they treat their clients as equals? Is education accessible to everyone? This chapter illustrates how the Czech community has been struggling and how its societal peripeteias relate to the use of the Czech language.

## 2 Historical Perspectives

The written standard Czech in legal and administrative documents, permeated by unavoidable domain-specific terms, can certainly be a hindrance for people who are not regularly exposed to it. However, even educated speakers struggle with the Czech administrative style – not only due to its linguistic characteristics but also due to its typical incoherence, ambiguity, and obscurity.

Poor prose is actually an integral part of the Czech clerical tradition, itself the offspring of the notorious Austro-Hungarian bureaucracy. Austrian laws were all written in German, although only a minority spoke the language properly. Law studies and licence exams were exclusively pursued in German. The system relied on multinational German-educated clerks to mediate the administrative content to their compatriots in their respective mother tongues: Czech, Croatian, Slovene, Polish, Serbian, Romanian, and Italian. The Hungarian group (including Romanian, Slovak, and Ukrainian speakers) had their laws in Hungarian (Peška 1939: 34, 36). Non-speakers of German (or Hungarian) were thus raised to be guided – and patronized – by clerks, whose behaviour they could hardly control, in a system that remained alien to them. It is surely not by chance that the literary genius of Franz Kafka arose in Prague.

The Empire's 1918 collapse brought about, among other national states, Czechoslovakia, a republic in which Czechs and Slovaks merged into one nation in the pragmatic pursuit to outnumber Germans and claim their non-Ger-

man self-determination. Czech, which is about as similar to Slovak as Danish is to the Norwegian *bokmål*, became the official language. The Czech(oslovak) national mythology considers this period the Golden Age, shaped by secular humanism, social (though not economic) equality, and a booming industry.

Indeed, the next two decades saw ambitious, and in many respects successful, efforts to build a modern state. Nevertheless, this state was far from democratic in the current sense. On the contrary, the lawmakers were generally convinced that law should not be comprehensible to common citizens, as it was meant to be presented to them by professional middlemen. By using an exclusive code with meaning shifts in common words, neologisms, and loan words to create a kind of implicit terminology, lawmakers deliberately protected laymen from the danger of interpreting laws by themselves (Peška 1939: 34).

The Czech(oslovak) independence was disrupted by the German occupation of 1938–1945. After a Soviet-orchestrated communist coup in 1948, Czechoslovakia's emerging legal culture drowned in the debilitating jargon of the communist administration. Václav Havel (1936–2011), a Czech dissident playwright and later president, parodied this in his absurd piece *The Memorandum* (1965) about *ptydepe* – an artificial administrative language designed to obscure meaning. *Ptydepe* was untranslatable into any natural language, because natural languages were ‘not ambiguous enough’. ‘Communists spoke differently’, a quantitative linguistic comparison of current political speeches with those from the communist era supports Havel's artistic overstatement with data (Kubát et al. 2020).

Since the collapse of the communist regime in 1989, Czech administration routines have been constantly evolving from a mixture of Austro-Hungarian, the 1920s, Nazi-German, and Soviet legal concepts, fusing with the EU law on the fly. Due to constant fervent reforms, the Czech law and administration have grown so opaque that practitioners regularly resort to *ptydepe*-like obscurity to protect themselves from contradicting any guideline. Unlike the original, the current *ptydepe* argues for the unease and frustration of individual clerks rather than for cementing a centralized power.

The deeply rooted administrative culture in the Czech Republic has certainly been a barrier to the emergence of comprehensible texts, but recent initiatives and new developments are now paving the way for change. Clerical

professionals seem to be reaching their pain threshold, and plain-language efforts are mushrooming. Young lawyers and clerks are becoming increasingly interested in plain legal language, particularly inspired by their experience with the legal systems of English-speaking countries and the international law, which their predecessors lacked (Pastyřík et al. 2016, Vučka 2019). Linguistic clarity is promoted as part of the Procedural Justice Principle (Drápal 2020: 25–35, based on Tyler 1988: 103–135).

The accessibility of administrative texts comes as a natural expansion of well-established NGO-launched transparency efforts (Reconstruction of the State 2021, Anticorruption Endowment 2021). The specific promotion of Easy Language texts has been historically initiated by NGOs and more specifically, by organizations of people with intellectual disabilities in the 2000s. In 2009, the first project run by Inclusion Czech Republic and Fokus, an organization of people with psycho-social disabilities and the Czech Alzheimer Society, focused on the accessibility of public administration and created the first Easy Language practical texts to facilitate the application process for different allowances and other administrative procedures (Inclusion Czech Republic 2021c). In the same year, the first alternative version of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Czech (from here on the CRPD) was in Easy Language (Latimier et al. 2009), again published by Inclusion Czech Republic.

The interest of the State and local authorities came later, most probably under the influence of European accessibility legislation, and maybe to a certain extent the CRPD (2009).

### 3 Current Situation

The situation in Czechia shows that the accessibility of information and Easy Language have become policy issues for different stakeholders who are slowly pushing for potential system changes.

### 3.1 Definitions

As the Easy Language and Plain Language concepts are quite new in Czechia, the country currently has no definitions for them. The only legal text referring directly to Easy Language is the CRPD (2009). However, it only uses the term<sup>2</sup> easy to read and understand forms of communication (*snadno čitelné a srozumitelné formy*). Several expressions can be used in Czech to qualify Easy Language: *snadné čtení* (easy read), *snadno-srozumitelný jazyk* (easy-to-understand language), *srozumitelné informace* (easy information) or even *ETR*, the abbreviation of easy-to-read (pronounced with Czech spelling). No definitive term has been adopted yet: Inclusion Czech Republic has decided to use the term *snadné čtení*, as a component of its long-term strategy for accessibility (Inclusion Czech Republic 2020). The Ministry of Interior proposes a definition of Plain Language texts (*srozumitelné texty* – ‘understandable texts’) and Easy Language texts (*zjednodušené texty* – ‘easy texts’), but only on a project website, and none of these terms have been adopted or broadly used (Ministry of Interior 2020).

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

The CRPD has been the driving force of changes in terms of accessibility. It has been part of the Czech legal system since its ratification and subsequent publication in the Collection of Laws in February 2010. Article 9 of the CRPD is now the reference framework to ensure the accessibility of public administration and public services, including the accessibility of information in alternative formats, such as Easy Language. The principles of accessibility have been newly incorporated into the architecture of the public administration and the Principles for the Creation of Digitally Friendly Legislation. The obligation to provide information accessible to people with disabilities in general can be found in two pieces of legislation. Act No. 99/2019 Coll. on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications and the amendment to Act No. 365/2000 Coll., on public administration information systems have been recently adopted or amended

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2 If not otherwise stated, all English quotations used in this text have been translated by the authors.

through the transposition of the European Web Accessibility Directive. The Act obliges public administration and other institutions to have ‘comprehensible’ (*srozumitelné*) webpages for people with disabilities. The obligation is rather narrow in scope, as it does not apply if it creates an unreasonable burden for the concrete institution (§7) (*Zákon o Přístupnosti Internetových Stránek a Mobilních Aplikací 2021*). The extent to which webpages have to be understandable is also undefined. So, if users with disabilities are not expected to claim certain benefits, the obligation may not apply. This poses the question of how many intellectually disabled people generally need this page at all? Very few people with intellectual disabilities actually work as independent workers – does this justify the lack of comprehensible information on how to apply for the status of independent worker?

Eventually, due to a push by the disability community, the Government has adopted the struggle for transparency by joining the Open Government Partnership (Open Government Partnership 2021) which targets Plain Language. Consequently, the Government commits to actions related to open justice, whistleblower protection, open data, education and citizen participation, and has begun to recognize the importance of linguistic clarity. It also promotes Plain Language by annually awarding particularly client-friendly offices. As a result, offices have begun to demand Plain Language training for their employees (Slejškova 2013).

Moreover, social services providers are obliged, based on Paragraph 88 of the Act on Social Services, to provide information ‘in a way that is comprehensible for all people’ on the type, place and goals of their services; on the capacity and way of providing social services; on the obligations arising from contracts with providers; on internal rules; and on internal rules about how to complain (*Zákon o Sociálních Službách 2021*). The office of the Public Defender of Rights (from here on the Ombudsman), who makes regular visits to residential care institutions, has drawn special attention to this obligation to provide information in Easy Language or alternative formats.

Although no specific legislation guarantees the right to accessible information, ‘soft-law’ instruments have pushed the accessible information agenda forward. The ‘Client-oriented public administration 2030’, a key document of the Ministry of Interior, presents its overarching strategy for public administra-

tion. Improving communication between public administration and the public, including citizens with disabilities, is stated as goal number five. A budget of CZK 30 million (EUR 1.26 million) has been estimated for the realization of four activities to achieve this goal, one of them focusing on citizens with disabilities (Ministry of Interior 2019a).

The National Plan for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2025 is the second strategic document to address accessibility issues. Its main goal is to support the integration of people with disabilities into society. The accessibility of public administration and public services should be improved by three specific measures: 1) the creation of a ‘Where to Office’ application, which provides citizens, including people with disabilities, with information on the accessibility of all public administration offices and the services they provide; 2) in co-operation with organizations representing people with hearing impairments, basic information on the activities of individual ministries could be translated into Czech Sign Language, and 3) designing and testing of training for the application of Easy Language methodology for local government employees, the results of which could be used to routinely train designated staff of the public administration in Easy Language as part of their lifelong learning education (Government Board for Persons with Disabilities 2020). The last activity is currently suspended because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but should resume in 2021.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

As the historical perspectives highlight, Easy Language was mainly promoted by the disability community in the last decade. Now, the topic also appears in public administration strategies and documents. Stakeholders can be divided into three groups: 1) non-governmental organizations (mainly disability organizations but also transparency organizations) and social services for people with disabilities, 2) public administration, and 3) academic institutions.

Mainly three organizations of and for people with intellectual disabilities, **Inclusion Czech Republic**, **Rytmus** and more recently **Quip** have regularly produced Easy Language material (Rytmus 2021, Inclusion Czech Republic 2021c). They also provide training in Easy Language or training to become

evaluators of Easy Language for people with intellectual disabilities (Inclusion Czech Republic 2021b). Social services for people with intellectual disabilities should also use Easy language to produce their own internal rules, guidelines, complaint procedures, and other important information, such as personal assistance (Pohoda 2019). However, systematic work on Easy Language materials is still lacking even in these services.

In public administration, the **Ombudsman** has taken the lead in the field and has adopted a real strategy to progressively deliver only Plain Language material. More recently, it has also extended its efforts to Easy Language in the framework of its new competence related to disability issues<sup>3</sup>.

In November 2016, an **Expert Group for Accessibility of Public Administration and Public Services** was established, whose objective is to improve co-ordinated governance accessibility, i.e. the mechanisms by which public administration and public services are accessible to all citizens, in particular to people with disabilities. This expert group focuses on evaluating the current situation and proposes systematic changes in the field of accessibility. Although no representative of people with intellectual disabilities is involved on a permanent basis, it provides opportunities to discuss issues related to accessibility at the inter-ministerial level and to bring the agenda of easy-to-read information forward in all sectors (Government Board for People with Disabilities 2021).

Two ministries, the **Ministry of Interior** and the **Ministry of Justice**, as well as some regional and local administration, provide Plain or Easy Language texts, but their quality may vary. The website on Quality Public Administration (Ministry of Interior 2020) provides information on Plain and Easy Language and informative texts in Easy Language. This guidance material has the potential to bring a breath of fresh air to all public administration, from national to local level. The Ministry of Justice website provides a catalogue of life situations (divorce, arrest, a relative in jail) in which practical advice can be found in Plain Language (Ministry of Justice 2021).

Academic stakeholders are fewer in number: the Institute of the Czech Language, the highest linguistic authority, takes the state of affairs as given and

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 3 The Office of the Defender of Rights (Ombudsman) is the independent monitoring body according to Article 33.2 CRPD since 1.1.2018.

remains unconvinced about any stylistic innovations: ‘Inspired by the business practice (and certainly also by the European institutions), particularly public administration strives to conceive (or at least to present) its activities as a service to citizens and to communicate accordingly; that is, in a forthcoming and friendly manner, and to give “user-friendly” advice to different agendas. It is pointless to argue whether or not this attitude is “sincere”; what is more important is that it always inevitably runs into limitations conditioned by the constitutive features of the institutional sphere; i.e., mainly the fact that verbal as well as non-verbal acts within this sphere are [legally, S.C.] binding.’ (Hoffmannová et al. 2016: 181).

### 3.4 Funding

No specific funding is dedicated to the production of Easy Language texts or their analysis. However, non-profit organizations have used several grants to produce Easy Language material, as an element allowing full participation of people with intellectual disabilities, as support material for training in active citizenship skills, or just to provide access to key information (e.g., material related to health issues). The funding sources have been the State or municipal grants, and to a larger extent, grants from the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway, which have funded several projects since 2004.

From the academic perspective, there is no dedicated source of funding, but accessibility-related grant proposals are subject to regular competition. The most important national grant providers are the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR) for basic research, and the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (TAČR) for applied research. Recently, the Ministry of Culture launched its own programme – the Applied Research and Development of National and Cultural Identity Programme (NAKI II).

## 4 Target Groups

Accessibility of information has been promoted by disabled people’s organizations (DPOs), mainly those representing people with intellectual and psycho-

social disabilities and people with sensory disabilities. The frequent argument of disabled people's organizations – that (Plain and) Easy Language are not only for people with disabilities but for everybody and may also aid elderly people, people with low education, people whose first language is not Czech – has not been received positively by the relatively homogeneous Czech population. Evidence from English-speaking countries shows that Plain Language helps poor readers substantially more than skilled readers (Mills and Duckworth 1996). Therefore, local organizations convey the message that any step towards better comprehension among common readers is simultaneously a benefit for people with cognitive disorders. Many bureaucrats do not feel comfortable publishing Easy Language texts, as they are afraid of degrading their image (and if one may even dare to say, their importance).

Easy Language texts and materials are therefore primarily written for people with cognitive disabilities (birth and acquired disabilities), and this is well reflected in the choice of material currently available.

## 5 Guidelines

Until recently, the only guidelines available for Czech Easy Language were those written by Inclusion Europe 'Information for all!' and adapted to the Czech language by Inclusion Czech Republic (Inclusion Europe and Inclusion Czech Republic 2013).

The basic rules for Easy Czech are: 1) Think about the reader and their typical life situations and include only necessary information, 2) Use simple words or explain complicated ones, include concrete examples and make short sentences, 3) Avoid the use of irony, metaphors, double meanings, foreign words, or expert jargon, 4) Use the active voice rather than the passive voice and avoid negation, 5) Convey the key information at the beginning and keep the structure of the information clear, 6) Create a visually appealing text: short paragraphs, spacing between paragraphs, and legible font (sans serif), and if possible, include illustrations to accompany the text (photographs, pictograms etc.). Finally, the most important rule: ask a reader to evaluate the output. As

an illustration of these rules of Easy Language, an extract of a document on the elections to the Senate is provided in Appendix 1.

The next example presents instructions for suspects and the accused, with their rights and obligations explained in Plain Language by one simple, clear sentence and a reference to the corresponding paragraph in the Code of the Criminal Procedure. The instructions fit on one page and each topic is illustrated with a pictogram: an extract of the text translated into Plain English<sup>4</sup> would read as follows:

*when the Police have brought you in*

Notification of a third person §33/5 TR

*You have the right to tell someone about your detention.*

Detention/arrest duration §33/5 TR

*You must be released or taken to court within 24 hours of arrest or within 48 hours of pre-trial detention.*

This text is very comprehensible, but according to the Easy Language guidelines, the paragraphs of the law would not be included and each sentence would relate to one single situation. For instance, the moment of arrest, the pre-trial by the court, and the moment of release would be treated in separate sentences. This would be considered a simplification, despite making the text slightly longer.

In 2019, with the support of civil society, the Ministry of Interior developed a methodology for the creation of Easy Language and comprehensible texts. The document is both a pamphlet in favour of comprehensible texts and practical guidance to ensure that administrative documents addressed to the public are also comprehensible and accessible to people who have difficulties reading complicated texts (Ministry of Interior 2019b). The guidance is accompanied by several documents in Easy Language as a practical illustration

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4 The original Plain Czech text is:

*Když vás přivedla policie*

*Vyrozumění třetí osoby §33/5 TR*

*Máte právo dát o svém zadržení někomu vědět.*

*Lhůta pro zadržení či zatčení §33/5 TR*

*Do 24 hodin od zatčení či 48 hodin od zadržení musíte být buď předáni soudu, nebo propuštěni.*

of its use. As part of inter-ministerial co-operation, methodological and guidance documents were also created and published to improve communication between officials and people with autism (Government Board for People with Disabilities 2016). The focus is on oral communication, but it is an important building block.

The Ministry of the Interior plans to implement pilot training for the application of the Plain and Easy Language methodology for employees of regional public administration, in collaboration with representatives of the relevant ministries.

One of the measures of the new National Plan, based on the text of the ČSN ISO 17069 technical standard, 'Accessibility measures and aids for accessible meetings', is to prepare an electronic brochure that contains appropriate support measures and aid for people with disabilities to facilitate and fully participate in meetings.

## 6 Practical Outcomes

Close examination of the Easy Language texts and books available shows that the majority of documents are **informative texts**, dealing with practical issues for people with intellectual disabilities. Very few accessible texts are cultural or leisure related. So far, no fiction, drama or poetry have been translated into Easy Language. No mainstream newspaper or TV broadcaster offers any Easy Language programmes. The numerous educational programmes for children do not specifically use a simplified language to include children with special education needs.

Some informative texts act as symbols and practical tools for empowering people with intellectual disabilities, both within their community and outside it: for instance, since 2018, a few months before each election, **Elections leaflets** explaining the process of voting and the important aspects of each election have been produced on a regular basis (Inclusion Czech Republic 2021d). These leaflets help the campaign for the active citizenship of people with intellectual disabilities. **Brochures for applying or renewing ID cards and passports** can also be found in Easy Language (Ministry of Interior 2020). The possession

of an ID card has a particular significance because, until recently, people who were under plenary guardianship<sup>5</sup> were not obliged to have an ID card (all Czech citizens of aged over 15 are obliged to have this card). Such documents on public display dismantle the image of people with intellectual disabilities as passive citizens and promote their active involvement in their own affairs.

Last year brought about a comprehensive **brochure for new mothers** in Easy Language (Inclusion Czech Republic 2020) – about the practical steps regarding maternity leave and financial support for a child aged under four. Again, this is very symbolic material, as parenthood among people with intellectual disabilities is still considered a taboo in Czech society.

In 2016, a series of booklets on the topic of **relationships and sexuality** for people with intellectual disabilities was published (Inclusion Czech Republic 2016). Divided into seven parts, the booklets provide an overview of what is important in the lives of women and men. Each page contains an illustration accompanying the text, both for reasons of accessibility for non-readers and to provide practical guidance for social services staff or teachers at schools.

Before this, Inclusion Czech Republic also developed a website on **health issues** containing information in Easy Language about common diseases and common medical examinations (Inclusion Czech Republic 2021a). Explanations about how body organs function as well as advice on how to arrange health check-ups are proposed through videos and an interactive body map.

Czechia has a long tradition of educating pupils with special needs, listed by the Ministry of Education as pupils with intellectual disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities. Traditionally, these pupils have attended separate schools with small classes and specialized teachers. Now that inclusion is the default policy, the **teaching materials** and informal know-how of these specialists are in high demand among ‘ordinary’ teachers. The excerpt below is from a textbook of physics for ninth graders of schools for pupils with special needs (Macháček 2006):

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5 Plenary guardianship was abolished with the new Civil Code which entered into force on 1st January 2015.

*Mr. Sadílek is a mason. Once when he touched his cement mixer, he got an electric shock. There was voltage between the mixer and the ground. The current passed from the mixer through Mr. Sadílek's body down into the ground.*

[What did Mr. Sadílek do to make his mixer safe? First of all, he unplugged it. Then he took an iron peg and dug it into the ground. Then he connected this peg and the mixer with a piece of wire. The wire led the dangerous charge from the mixer into the ground. The mixer was safe again.]

Unlike regular textbook texts, texts for pupils with special needs typically do not contain mathematical formulas, and use inductive learning techniques (i.e., they list a number of everyday-life examples and make a generalization at the end rather than introduce general knowledge, which they later back with examples). However, as far as we know, there is no formal language standard for such learning materials. Our random inspection of textbooks by *Septima*, a dedicated publisher of textbooks for pupils with special needs, revealed profound differences in terms of accessibility. For instance, the texts in the aforementioned physics textbook were very accessible, whereas the biology textbook (Skýbová 2008) felt much more difficult to read. It replaced some text with photographs and charts, and the remaining text partly covered practical topics (*never eat unknown berries*), but some parts still followed the meticulously descriptive botanical curriculum of regular schools, introducing numerous highly specific terms for their own sake, such as in this text on mosses: *Polytrichum can be found in shady forests. The base of its body is formed by a stem with leaves. Adhesive fibres fix the stem in the soil to absorb water and dissolved minerals.* The Czech original reads even more alien than the English translation, as the English word *stem* is relatively common, but the Czech equivalent used in this context is specific to mosses (stems of trees and bigger plants would be called something else), and is thus outside the vocabulary of even educated people.

In relation to daily life and social services, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) in the framework of the 'Life like any other' project supporting the transformation of large residential institutions into community-type

services, has published a number of practical factsheets on **employment and social services** (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2021). In addition, about 100 civil servants (mainly from the Labour Office, which is attached to MoLSA) have been trained in communication needs and how to write information in Easy Language<sup>6</sup>.

The final practical life topic is **banking**, information on which has been developed and proposed to the Czech Banks Association by non-governmental organizations, for talking about banking and accommodation with people with intellectual disabilities. The original plan was to produce an Easy Language version of general conditions. This proved absolutely impossible, as banking materials are totally inaccessible and because many paragraphs refer to additional documents. The result would ultimately have been incomprehensible. However, after many efforts, a general practical guide on banking was drafted in Easy Language.

In addition to the informative texts, two initiatives in the field of culture are worth mentioning here. The largest and most famous **film Festival on Human Rights**, called **One world** took the risk of making the festival more accessible to people with disabilities and tried to reach out to all disability groups. They provide Easy Language leaflets about their programme (One World 2019) and films and have launched ‘relaxed projections’, with an adapted level of sound and light, as well as projection with audio description, Sign Language translation or an induction loop (One World 2020).

The **Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic** (SKIP) was the first mainstream organization to be open to Easy Language texts and readers with intellectual disabilities. They offered their members participation in workshops presenting the characteristics of people with intellectual disabilities and how to write in Easy Language (SKIP 2021).

In addition to the growing library of Easy Language texts and material, another important outcome is the monitoring of the obligation to provide Easy Language **material for clients living in residential care services**. Systematic reviews by the Ombudsman include checking the availability of Easy Language material and adequate orientation systems for people with intellectual disabili-

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6 Material on file with authors (training by Inclusion Czech Republic staff)

ities (including symbols rather than words). The Ombudsman then frequently recommends developing and using Easy Language material for clients of residential care services; for example: ‘Important texts concerning essential aspects of clients’ lives (such as service contracts, house rules, menus) should also be drafted in Easy Language formats’ and the staff must ‘pass the information to clients in a form that is understandable to them’<sup>7</sup>.

This monitoring also applies in **psychiatric hospitals**, where Easy Language material on patients’ rights should also be written and used with those who may need it. The Ombudsman described in her 2019 summary report: ‘we have often found the problem that the texts used by hospitals are mostly written in the language of the law (there is no ‘easy-to-understand’ summary), including complaint rules or house rules. Examples of good practice in this regard are, for example, instructions on the conditions for protective institutional sexological treatment in *Horní Beřkovice* or an information leaflet used in *Opava*; here the nurses also use educational sheets with checklists to verify that the patient has understood’ (Veřejný ochránce práv 2019).

Since 2015, the **Office of the Ombudsman** has adopted Plain Legal Czech as a rule along with its new communication culture. All new lawyers entering the institution are trained in Plain Language, and the focus is progressively also moving towards Easy Language, as the Ombudsman’s mandate includes monitoring the implementation of the CRPD. The changes in the structure and language of reports, for example, of systematic visits to detention facilities before 2016 and after 2016, show this evolution. Similarly, older information leaflets for citizens on different topics included texts in which efforts to avoid legal jargon and simplify the information had been made, but the content had remained complicated (Veřejný ochránce práv 2014). In comparison, newer leaflets are clearer, more attractive, and contain practical information. This illustrates well how content needs to be carefully selected, not only simplified. In addition, the leaflets include illustrations that contribute to better understanding (Veřejný ochránce práv 2020). More recently, a leaflet in Easy Language was produced to explain the role of the Ombudsman.

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 7 A simple search using the key words ‘*snadné čtení*’ offers relevant reports of systematic reviews in residential care by the Ombudsman: <https://eso.ochrance.cz/Vyhledavani/Search>

## 7 Education and Research

Easy Language has not been a topic of either academic research or educational instructions in Czechia. On the other hand, several research paths exist in linguistics, natural language processing, and pedagogy which are related to assessing the difficulty of educational texts and language proficiency levels.

The linguistic view of textual accessibility usually disregards typography or web design. The most common term for what remains is *readability* (or *clarity*, sometimes even *comprehensibility*). There are a number of formulas for automatically measuring this (DuBay 2007). A general issue with **readability formulas** is that they are language dependent. Some formulas (e.g., Kincaid et al. 1975) use apparently generic text features, such as numbers of syllables, but in fact even these are defined as well as extracted differently for individual languages. For instance, the Flesch Reading Ease (Flesch 1948) contains empirically obtained coefficients that rate English texts on a scale of 0–100, in which the lower the score, the less easy (more difficult) the text. When the same coefficients are applied to Czech texts, children’s books appear extremely complex and the rates for common newspaper articles even sink below zero, because Czech words generally have more syllables due to inflection. Smolík and Šlerka conducted a pilot study with several well-known readability formulas, which suggested that they roughly applied to Czech at least to the extent that children’s books appeared easier than scientific papers (Šlerka and Smolík 2010), but they did not fine-tune the formulas to fit the same scale as the language they had been designed for (English in all cases). An exploration of linguistic features that affect comprehension in Czech texts could help the adaptation of readability formulas to Czech.

As a first step towards this inquiry, Cinková and Chromý are working on LiFR (Chromý et al. 2021), a data set of administrative texts to examine these associations. These texts are in three versions: the original legalese and two paraphrases by lawyers, one of whom is a trained Easy Language expert. Comprehension of the versions has been measured by a survey with random respondents. At present, the data have been collected and are being cleaned and explored. Initial results show that the text versions written by the Easy Language expert were better comprehended than other versions, although they

were not expressly written in Easy Language. The data set will be used to adapt selected readability formulas to Czech. In addition, diverse text features will be extracted and correlations with the comprehensions will be sought, partly drawing on Cvrček et al. (2020), to define the style of this particular author in more precise linguistic terms, and to provide additional language-specific readability metrics, if any emerge from this experiment.

Readability-related research is also being conducted in Czech computational linguistics and **natural language processing**. For instance, Rysová et al. (2017) have trained a **CEFR-level statistical classifier** of essays written by foreign Czech speakers, and another of essays written by Czech pupils, to guess the grade they had received from their teacher. Barančíková is working on **automatic paraphrasing** using neural networks in a similar way to which they are used in Machine Translation (Barancikova and Bojar 2019: 125–132).

Another interesting branch of research is the **assessment of textbooks**. In Czechia, this dates back to the 1920s, when literacy in early education was a concern. International as well as domestic educational research boomed in the 1980s. At that time, modern textbooks, even for primary schools, were regularly written by experts with no teaching experience, who were unable to adjust to the cognitive level of their readers. The products were discouraging for students and teachers alike, and educational researchers struggled to find methods to control the cognitive load in the texts (Pluskal 1996, Průcha 1998). Unfortunately, their efforts never really reached beyond academic discourse: the regime was already on the verge of collapse when the Ministry of Education began to pay attention. Centralized research was discontinued and teams dissolved in the tumults of the 1990s. Meanwhile, private publishers started flooding the market with textbooks and other didactic tools. To be purchased by schools, these products have to comply with the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, but these guidelines are somewhat vague and focus on content rather than structure. This is certainly better than having poor, rigid guidelines, but on the other hand, there are not even any optional templates to follow. So, publishers compete to make their products as visually appealing as possible to succeed on the market, but the content is often poor, and headmasters lack a serious base on which to evaluate their actual didactic quality.

Already in 1992, individual researchers and full-time teachers founded the Czech Educational Research Association, a member of the European Research Association, which organizes annual conferences with workshops and sends out a bimonthly newsletter. Research funding has been scattered into individual grants. A larger team has since emerged at the Centre of Educational Research at the Masaryk University in Brno (Janoušková 2009, Knecht and Janko 2008). This team focuses on the contents and didactic structure of materials, and performs a basic readability assessment.

**Literacy and reading comprehension research** in Czechia is particularly concerned with early stages and young adults, with a focus on intellectual disabilities and special educational needs. It has a strong tradition going back to the 1950s. It generally aims for early detection and systematic intervention to bring the challenged individual as close to the norm as possible. Recently, this care model was extended and adapted to the needs of university students (Kucharská 2014).

The norm as well as deviations in text reception of any kind have been the subject of a significant bulk of research. For instance, Czechia was represented in the European ELDEL (Enhancing Literacy Development in European Languages) network (cf. e.g. Caravolas et al. 2019), which resulted in a diagnostic battery of reading comprehension tests for children. In developmental cognitive psychology, the inquiry targets specific linguistic phenomena (e.g. Smolik et al. 2016, Smolik and Bláhová 2016).

In the context of language culture and stylistics, Easy Language has never been an issue. The core stylistic concept has been, since the 1930s lectures at the Prague School, a set of *functional styles* and their associated elements. It is based on the assumption that ‘objective conditions of a communication’ ‘oblige the communicator to a given style-establishing behavior’ (Krčmová 2017), and has given rise to a self-perpetuating dispute on the ultimate set of functional styles and adequate communicative situations (Hoffmannová et al. 2016), far from the domain of language practitioners. Depending on classification granularity, the style is administrative and educational or scientific functional (with further subclassifications), but their cultivation is left to the corresponding domain experts.

## 8 Future Perspectives

The struggle for the democratic and inclusive use of the Czech language is definitely not behind us. The recent developments presented in this chapter show that the topic of comprehensibility, which was initially raised by a small group of non-governmental organizations and a few practitioners, now also interests academics and some key players in public administration.

A number of positive outcomes and activities can be considered promising practices. The intense work of the Ombudsman on Plain Language and accessible information for people with disabilities, the creation of documents in Easy Language by the Ministry of Interior, as well as the future pilot training for civil servants and its potential scaling-up for regional or municipal officials are all signs that the bureaucratic tradition of written Czech is slowly being questioned. The growing amount of academic research and articles on literacy and readability will also provide evidence-based arguments to advance the use of comprehensible texts. Whereas before, Easy Language publications were almost secret, they are now promoted and related by authorities as well as mainstream organizations, beyond disability circles.

However, the changes are slow: the issue concerns not only modifying how to communicate and how to write, but also taking the perspective of the reader into account and cultivating a new attitude towards citizens.

Based on the experience of more advanced countries in the field, a legal framework guaranteeing Plain Language (Plain Writing Act 2010: 124 STAT. 2861) and Easy Language, as with the Accessible Information Standard (National Health System England 2016), may be necessary at some point to achieve system change in Czechia. Citizens will have to prove that they deserve clear communication and fight for it.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Czech.

Standard Czech	Easy Czech
<p><b>INFORMACE O ZPŮSOBU HLASOVÁNÍ</b></p> <p>Volby do Senátu Parlamentu České republiky pátek 2. října 2020 od 14.00 hodin do 22.00 hodin a sobota 3. října 2020 od 8.00 hodin do 14.00 hodin (případně druhé kolo ve dnech 9. a 10. října 2020)</p> <p><b>Voličem je</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• občan České republiky,</li> <li>• který nejpozději 3. října 2020 dovrší věku 18 let;</li> <li>• ve druhém kole pak i občan České republiky, který nejpozději 10. října 2020 dovrší věku 18 let.</li> </ul> <p><b>Hlasování probíhá pouze na území České republiky, a to ve 27 senátních volebních obvodech, kde jsou volby do Senátu vyhlášeny. Volič může hlasovat pouze v tom volebním okrsku, kde je přihlášen k trvalému pobytu. Výjimkou jsou voliči hlasující na voličský průkaz (viz níže).</b></p>	<p><b>Jak se hlasuje do Senátu</b></p> <p>Které dny můžete volit? V pátek 2. října 2020 od 14.00 do 22.00 V sobotu 3. října 2020 od 8.00 do 14.00</p> <p>První kolo voleb do Senátu začíná v pátek 2. října 2020. V prvním kole je senátor zvolený tehdy, když ho zvolí více než polovina lidí. Když nebude zvolený senátor, bude se konat druhé kolo voleb do Senátu.</p> <p>Česká republika je rozdělena do 81 volebních obvodů. Každý volební obvod má v Senátu jednoho zástupce. Tomuto zástupci se říká senátor. Senát má tedy 81 senátorů. Do Senátu se tento rok volí jen 27 senátorů. V ostatních volebních obvodech se senátor letos nevolí.</p> <p>Kdy můžete volit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Když jste občanem České republiky.</li> <li>• Státní občanství máte napsané v občanském průkazu.</li> <li>• Když máte alespoň 18 roků.</li> <li>• Volit můžete jen ve volebním obvodu, kde máte trvalý pobyt. To znamená ve vašem městě nebo vesnici. Trvalý pobyt máte napsaný v občanském průkazu.</li> </ul>

<p><b>[INFORMATION ON THE METHOD OF VOTING</b></p> <p>Elections to the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Friday, October 2, 2020 from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM and Saturday, October 3, 2020, from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM (possible second round on 9 and 10 October 2020)</p> <p>A voter is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a citizen of the Czech Republic,</li> <li>• a citizen who has reached the age of 18 by 3 October 2020 at the latest;</li> <li>• in the second round, also a citizen of the Czech Republic who has reached the age of 18 no later than 10 October 2020.</li> </ul> <p><b>Voting takes place only on the territory of the Czech Republic, in 27 Senate constituencies where elections to the Senate are announced. A voter can vote only in the constituency where he/she is registered for permanent residence. Exceptions are voters voting on a voting card (see below).]</b></p>	<p><b>[How to vote for the Senate</b></p> <p>On which days can you vote?          On Friday, October 2, 2020, from 2.00 PM to 10.00 PM          On Saturday, October 3, 2020, from 8.00 AM to 2.00 PM</p> <p>The first round of elections to the Senate begins on Friday, October 2, 2020. In the first round, a senator is elected when more than half of the people elect him. If no senator is elected, there will be a second round of Senate elections.</p> <p>The Czech Republic is divided into 81 constituencies. Each constituency has one representative in the Senate. This representative is called a senator. The Senate therefore has 81 senators. Only 27 senators are elected to the Senate this year.          Senators will not be elected in other constituencies this year.</p> <p>You can vote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you are a citizen of the Czech Republic. Your citizenship is written on your identity card.</li> <li>• When you are at least 18 years old.</li> <li>• You can only vote in the constituency where you have permanent residence. This means in your town or village. You have a permanent residence permit on your ID card.]</li> </ul>
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## Easy Language in Finland

### 1 Introduction

Finland is one of the Nordic countries that has promoted Easy Language for decades as a practical tool for people with language barriers. It initially adopted the Easy Language model from Sweden in the early 1980s. For a long time, co-operation between Sweden, Norway and Finland actively created new input for developing Easy Language, although the Finnish language is very different from its neighbouring Scandinavian languages. In recent years, Easy Language co-operation among European countries has intensified considerably.

Finland has a population of 5.5 million. The country has two official languages, Finnish (about 4.8 million native speakers) and Swedish (about 290 000 native speakers)<sup>1</sup>. The majority language – Finnish – belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group, which originates from the Uralic language family and differs in many respects from most languages spoken in Europe. It is characterized by a rather complicated morpho-syntactic system, with 15 cases and suffixes added to nouns and verbs, no gender or grammatical article, and a negation word that resembles a verb. The closest relative languages to Finnish are Estonian and Karelian. (E.g. Kotus kielitieto 2021, ISO suomen kielioppi 2010.) Finland's minority language Swedish belongs to the Scandinavian North-Germanic languages of the Indo-European language family, characterized by special inflectional forms in nouns to indicate definiteness and in verbs to indicate medial or passive meaning (Nationalencyklopedin 2020). Finland Swedish is a regional variant of Sweden Swedish (Kotus kielitieto 2021).

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1 The other minority languages spoken in Finland are three Saami languages (about 10 000 native speakers), Karelian (about 5000 native speakers), Finnish Romani (about 3000 native speakers), Finnish sign language (4000–9000 native speakers) and Finnish-Swedish sign language (about 100 native speakers). (Kotus kielitieto 2021.)

In Finland, Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish are seen as varieties of these two languages<sup>2</sup>. They are thus associated more with recommendations and guidelines rather than with grammatical rules or standards. Their coverage and boundaries in relation to other language varieties, such as standard Finnish or standard Swedish, are difficult to show unambiguously (cf. Kielitoimiston kielioppiopas 2015: 27). As Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish have the status of language varieties, they are not covered or protected by the Language Act or any other legislation, and are not the responsibility of any authority (see chapter on Sweden). Still, for certain groups of people in Finland, Easy Languages are the only means to communicate or read.

The practical use of Easy Language for such a long time has been beneficial for Finland. It has brought with it a wealth of different Easy Language materials and a great deal of experience in using these materials with people with language barriers. The main shortcomings in Finland are the lack of legislation concerning Easy Language and the limited amount of research on it. Ensuring that future legislation and increased research work hand in hand on the practical development of Easy Language is an important goal for the years ahead.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The history of Easy Language in Finland goes back to the early 1980s, when the first Easy Finnish books were published and the Easy Language magazine for people with intellectual disabilities, *Leija*, was founded. In the beginning, Easy Finnish was primarily considered a language form for people with intellectual disabilities. However, it soon became obvious that it could also be applied to other people, for instance elderly people with memory-related illnesses, young readers with reading difficulties, or immigrants learning Finnish (e.g. Kulkki-Nieminen 2010: 30–32).

The first Easy Language books were mainly for children and young readers (Rajala and Virtanen 1986, Virtanen 2009: 142). Gradually, the genre extended

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2 This article mainly deals with Easy Finnish as a variety of the majority language Finnish, because most of the development work has been carried out in the Finnish language.

to adult literature. At the beginning of the 1990s, a national financing system to support Easy Language literature production was created (see Section 6). The general public has mainly reacted positively to Easy Language books, but in the first decades there were concerns that it may destroy the desire of Finns to read more demanding literature (Virtanen 2006: 99, 2009: 112–113). Gradually, this concern subsided and Easy Language literature was established as an accepted genre for readers who would otherwise be excluded from enjoying literature (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 136).

The producers of Easy Language materials soon noticed that Easy Language needed guidelines. The first guidebook on how to write, illustrate and lay out Easy Language material was published in 1986 (Rajala and Virtanen 1986). In the 1990s, the guidelines derived inspiration from international Easy-to-Read guidelines (IFLA 1997, ILSMH 1998<sup>3</sup>), but as these were based on Indo-European languages, they did not provide enough support for the production of Easy Finnish materials. This, in turn, led to deeper reflection on what kind of guidelines would be suitable for Easy Finnish, especially with respect to the morpho-syntactic structures of Finnish. Since the early 2000s, a great deal of effort has been put into developing principles that are appropriate for Finnish (Sainio 2000, Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 41–44, Leskelä 2019b: 110–111). The principles of Easy Finnish were collected to form the Easy-to-Read Finnish Meter (*Selkomittari*), which was published in 2018 (Leskelä 2020, see Section 5).

Co-operation between the Nordic countries has been important for Finland. Since the 1990s, ideas and innovations have been exchanged (see chapters on Sweden and Norway, Sainio 2000) in many informal meetings, seminars and joint projects. During the first decades, Finland closely followed Sweden in particular. The focus of the co-operation has gradually extended to other European countries.

The newspapers *Selkosanomati* in Easy Finnish and *LL-Bladet* in Easy Swedish began to appear in 1990. Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE launched its radio news in Easy Finnish in 1992. YLE news in Easy Finnish expanded

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 3 ILSMH stands for the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap, the predecessor of the current Inclusion Europe organization.

to television in 2015. This was a huge step, as it allowed people with language barriers to follow television news like everyone else. YLE news in Easy Swedish began in 2019 (See Section 6). At the turn of the millennium, the publishing of Easy Language materials gradually spread to the internet. The first websites in Easy Language were published by the Papunet Web Service (*Papunet – verk-kopalvelu*), founded in 2001 (Ohtonen 2002, Älli and Kyyhkynen 2006). Initially, the materials were often published as PDFs on the website. As the potential of online multimodality and interactivity was discovered and knowledge about the accessibility of online services improved, Easy Language materials were further developed to cover the various needs of people with language barriers. This meant developing Easy Language audio-visual materials, animations and videos, in co-operation with web designers and software developers working in the field of general accessibility (Leskelä 2019b: 65–70).

In Finland, the main promoters of Easy Language have been non-governmental organizations, the most active being the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD, *Kehitysvammaliitto*) and Inclusion Finland FDUV (organization for Swedish-speaking persons with intellectual disability). The Finnish Centre for Easy Language (*Selkokeskus*) was founded in 2000 and the Centre for Easy Swedish in Finland (*LL-Center*) in 2001. In a small country like Finland, connections and networking among different parties and professionals in various fields play a crucial role. Easy Language promoters have sought to make connections in various directions, with authorities and municipalities, promoters of accessible communication, speech therapists, linguists and researchers, sign language experts, print interpreters and audio describers, teachers, and special education experts. The channel for co-operation has been the Finnish Advisory Committee for Easy Language (*Selkokielen neuvottelukunta*), originally founded in 1984 as the working group for social and health organizations. The work on Easy Swedish has been co-ordinated by the Advisory Committee for Easy Swedish in Finland (*Referensgruppen*) since 2018 (see Section 3).

### 3 Current situation

Easy Language is well-established in Finland in practice, but its official and legal status remains rather weak. However, the general attitude towards Easy Language is mainly positive.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Both Easy Language and Plain Language have been developed in Finland for decades. The work on Easy Language has mainly been driven by non-governmental organizations, whereas Plain Language has been the responsibility of the Institute of Languages in Finland (*Kotimaisten kielten keskus Kotus*)<sup>4</sup>. The definition of Easy Language has been formulated by the Easy Language experts of the Finnish Centre for Easy Language and authorities at the Institution for Languages in Finland. It has been in use since the 1990s:

Easy Language is a form of language in which vocabulary, language structures and contents are modified to be more readable and understandable than in standard language. It is intended for people who have difficulties reading or understanding standard language.<sup>5</sup> (Selkokeskus määritelmä 2021.)

In Finland, Plain Language is defined according to the model of the Plain Language Association International:

A communication is in Plain Language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information. (Kotus Plain Language 2021.)

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4 Kotus in English, <https://www.kotus.fi/en>

5 Translated by the author.

In practice, it is not entirely clear how these two language forms differ from each other. However, as it is accepted in Finland that language varieties have no clear boundaries, Easy Language and Plain Language are seen as being on a continuum from very easy to more demanding language rather than as forming clearly defined categories. Based on this reasoning, Plain Language forms the linguistically most demanding part of Easy Language (see Section 5).

In Finnish, Easy Language is *selkokieli*, Easy Finnish is *selkosuomi* and Plain Language *selkeä kieli* or *selkeä yleiskieli*. In Swedish, Easy Language is *lätt språk*, Easy Swedish is *lätt svenska* and Plain Language is *klarspråk*.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Certain laws relate to Easy Languages in Finland. The **Language Act** addresses the linguistic rights of Finns to use their mother tongue, Finnish or Swedish, in dealings with public authorities (FINLEX 423/2003). However, this Act does not cover native speakers with a limited Finnish or Swedish language capacity. In accordance with the **Administrative Procedure Act**, an authority must use appropriate, clear and comprehensible language (FINLEX 434/2003). However, this has been understood to indicate the use of Plain Language, not Easy Language. The **Equality Act** prohibits discrimination and related grounds for discrimination, including language-related discrimination (FINLEX 1325/2014). So far, no complaints have been made to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman concerning incomprehensible language of official services (Non-Discrimination Ombudsman Annual Report 2018: 28–30). The **Act on Providing Accessible Digital Services** aims to ensure that online services are accessible to people with disabilities (FINLEX 306/2019). The Act's paragraphs do not mention Easy Language, but the preliminary works of law state that authorities must use Easy Language in certain situations. However, as there is no case law on this, the comprehensiveness of this declaration is difficult to assess (Leskelä 2019b: 39–41, 50–51).

Although the legislative status of Easy Language is not very strong, some changes may take place in the near future due to the UN Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities – the CRPD<sup>6</sup> – which Finland ratified in 2016. The CRPD mentions Easy-to-Read in the context of accessible communications and sends a clear message to each country to promote and increase its use. In some European countries, such as Germany, the CRPD has already strengthened the legislative position of Easy Language (Lang 2019, see chapter on Germany). Finland has yet to see such development, but the Finnish Advisory Committee for Easy Language has made this one of its main goals for the coming years (Selkokielen toimenpideohjelman 2019–2022).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

**The Finnish Centre for Easy Language** (*Selkokeskus*)<sup>7</sup>, founded in 2000, started as an Easy Finnish expert unit within the FAIDD (*Kehitysvammaliitto*) and is now integrated into FAIDD's Accessibility Unit. The centre publishes material in Easy Language, provides text services such as modifications from standard Finnish to Easy Finnish and Easy Language text commenting (chargeable services), and grants the national Easy Language logo for publications that meet the criteria of Easy Finnish (free of charge). It also provides information and guidance for writers and publishers, and training on writing and speaking Easy Finnish and making Easy Finnish layouts and illustrations for publications. The centre lobbies the importance of Easy Language to policymakers and authorities. It also distributes state grants for Easy Language literature, a task delegated to the centre by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The guidelines for Easy Finnish have been mainly developed by experts at the Finnish Centre for Easy Language. The Finnish Centre for Easy Language is financed by the STEA Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

**The Finnish Advisory Committee for Easy Language** (*Selkokielen neuvottelukunta*) of the Finnish Centre for Easy Language works as a co-operation channel for 53 different organizations, authorities, universities, learning institutes, and media that share a joint interest in promoting Easy Language in

6 CRPD in English, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

7 Selkokeskus in English, <https://selkokeskus.fi/in-english/>

Finland. The Advisory Committee aims to support the work of *Selkokeskus*, share information about Easy Language and increase collaboration. It has also published strategies for promoting Easy Language in Finland (Advisory Committee for Easy Language 2021).

**The Swedish-speaking centre for Easy to Read in Finland (LL-Center)**<sup>8</sup> was founded in 2001 as the Easy Swedish expert unit of Inclusion Finland FDUV. It provides services for everyone who needs Easy Swedish, including text services (modifications from standard Swedish to Easy Swedish, translations of Easy Finnish materials into Easy Swedish, text commenting, and free checking of Easy Swedish materials), and publishes the Easy Swedish newspaper *LL-Bladet* and other materials together with the Finnish Centre for Easy Language. The *LL-Center* arranges courses on writing Easy Swedish texts and offers training for Swedish-speaking reading representatives. It is supported by the Advisory Committee for Easy Swedish (*Referensgruppen*), which was founded in 2018 and has representatives from 14 different authorities and municipalities, organizations and learning institutes. The *LL-Center* is financed by the STEA Funding Centre of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

**Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE** broadcasts news in Easy Finnish on television, the radio and the internet (*YLE uutiset selkosuomeksi*) and in Easy Swedish on the radio and the internet (*YLE nyheter på lätt svenska*, see Section 6). **Inclusion Finland KVTL** (*Kehitysvammaisten Tukiliitto*) publishes the Easy Finnish Magazine *Leija* for readers with intellectual disabilities (Leija Lehti 2021, see Section 6). **Papunet Web Service** (*Papunet-verkkopalvelu*) promotes accessibility and the use of Easy Language on the internet (Papunet-verkkopalvelu 2021). **The Klaara Network** (*Klaara-verkosto*) at the University of Helsinki is a network of researchers interested in Easy Languages (Klaara network in English 2021, see Section 7). **The Institute for the Languages in Finland** (*Kotimaisten kielten keskus*) promotes Plain Language and contributes to the promotion of Easy Language via the Advisory Committee for Easy Language (Kotus in English 2021).

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8 LL-Center in English, <https://ll-center.fi/english/>

**The Ministry of Education and Culture** (*Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö*) supports Easy Language literature production by awarding yearly grants to authors, illustrators and publishers of Easy Language books (Easy Language Literature Grants 2021). **The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health** (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö*) finances the functions and publications of the Finnish Centre for Easy Language and the *LL-Center* (STEA grants 2021). **Many authorities** distribute Easy Language materials in various forms, for instance The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA), the Satakunta Hospital District (*Saatairaala*), the Finnish Tax Administration (*Verohallinto*), and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (*Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos*). Every year, **private publishing houses** publish approximately 20–30 new Easy Language books, for instance *Avain*, *Opik*, *Pieni Karhu*, and *Reuna* (Easy Language Literature 2021).

### 3.4 General attitude

The societal status of Easy Language in Finland is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, legislation to support Easy Language is largely lacking, promoting Easy Language is not the responsibility of any authority, no formal pathways exist for training Easy Language experts, and research on the topic is limited. On the other hand, the general attitude towards Easy Language is quite positive. The long, practical tradition of Easy Language has made it, at least to some extent, an accepted form of communication for people with language barriers. The use of Easy Language materials is constantly growing and expanding, and from time to time, it becomes a matter of public debate. Just recently, a Congressman held a public speech in Easy Finnish in Parliament, and the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE organized an Easy Language election panel before the parliamentary elections in 2019. These election panel will be organized again before the municipal elections in 2021. The need for Easy Language is also mentioned in the current government programme (Hallitusohjelma 2019).

Easy Language is mainly promoted in Finland through public funding. The main bodies responsible for Easy Language are non-governmental organizations, whose funding is bound to the financing of their mother organizations. Every year, these organizations apply for funding from the STEA Funding Cen-

tre, which distributes the profits of the national gambling monopoly *Veikkaus* to organizations (STEA grants 2021). This means that Easy Language development competes for funding with stakeholders devoted to sports, social and health issues and politics, who mainly provide project-based activities with shorter attention spans (e.g., peer support groups, excursions and camps). As developing a language form requires long-term work, this system may not be ideal. It has also been criticized for the fact that the money is raised for these organizations at the expense of individuals who are potentially addicted to gambling (e.g., Egerer 2018). The main problem with the funding is that the market for accessible services in Finland is still in its infancy. In view of the vague legislative status of Easy Language, it seems unlikely that this market will grow anytime soon to provide a funding channel for developing Easy Language.

#### 4 Target groups

In Finland, people who need Easy Language are divided into three main groups: 1) **People who have an innate and probably lifelong need for Easy Language** due to their neuro-biologically different language processing capacities (e.g. people with intellectual disability, people on the autism spectrum, and people with severe reading, concentration and perception difficulties), 2) **People whose linguistic skills are impaired** due to an injury, illness or trauma acquired during their lifetime (e.g. people with aphasia or memory-related illnesses), and 3) **People who are likely to only need Easy Language temporarily** and have another language or means of communication (e.g. people learning Finnish or Swedish as a second language, sign language native speakers, see Leskelä and Lindholm 2012, Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 25–30, Leskelä 2019b: 97–103).

These target groups are not divided into primary or secondary groups; they are all equally important. It is, however, recognized that they form heterogeneous groups and differ in respect to their linguistic needs and abilities (Leskelä 2019b: 103–104, Uotila 2020: 310). Those who have two different simultaneous causes may have the greatest need for Easy Language (e.g., a person with an

intellectual disability who has a memory disease or an immigrant person on the autism spectrum), but no research evidence on this exists (Virtanen 2009: 37). It has also been emphasized that belonging to one of the groups mentioned above does not automatically create the need for Easy Language (ibid. 37). This applies to all groups, but especially to the third group. Some Finnish language learners may only need Easy Finnish briefly before moving on to standard language, but for others, Easy Finnish may remain the main language form for coping in Finnish society (Leskelä 2019b: 101–102). It is also worth noting that some people may need Easy Language almost constantly in their daily lives, whereas others may only benefit from it occasionally.

At different times, the Finnish Centre for Easy Language (*Selkokeskus*) has estimated the number of people needing Easy Finnish in Finland. These estimates are based on statistical data from different population groups, the results of international literacy surveys, and data collected from non-governmental organizations for people with language barriers (Juusola 2019, Virtanen 2009). According to the most recent estimation (Juusola 2019), from 11%–14% of the population may need Easy Finnish, meaning 650 000–750 000 people in Finland. These estimates have taken into account the constant changes in group size (e.g., as language learners gradually achieve the standard language level or as the language skills of a person with dementia gradually deteriorate), but these changes are difficult to assess. The need for Easy Swedish in Finland has not been estimated yet, but some Easy Swedish experts have suggested that it is in line with the percentage of Finland's Swedish-speaking population, which would mean some tens of thousands of people (Leskelä 2019b: 102).

The need for Easy Finnish has gradually increased in Finland. In 2001 (Virtanen 2002), 4%–7% of Finns were estimated as needing Easy Finnish, whereas in 2014 (Virtanen 2014), this group size had increased to 8%–12% of the population. Today the estimate is 11%–14% (Juusola 2019). According to Virtanen, this is explained by the general growth of Finland's population, particularly the proportion of elderly people, and the increased number of people with immigrant backgrounds and pupils in special education (2014: 18). Juusola (2019: 3) adds to this list the increase in weak readers among young and adult Finns, which has also been observed in international literacy studies (PISA 2015, PIAAC 2012). These estimates articulate the difficulty of reliably

calculating the number of people needing Easy Finnish (Virtanen 2002, 2014, Juusola 2019); for instance, the risk of double counting or ignoring certain groups of people. They can only give approximate group sizes, as extensive research on the topic is lacking. However, as these estimates are made on the basis of approximately the same variables, the overall image they provide can be considered quite reliable. They are also in line with the results of the international literacy surveys on the number of weak readers in Finland (PISA 2018, PISA 2015, PIAAC 2012).

From time to time, there are discussions about the usability of Easy Language for the larger public. Certain readers may benefit from Easy Language in certain situations, but may not need to use it constantly. It is estimated that if these people, known as *inexperienced readers*, were included, the percentage of those needing Easy Finnish could rise to as high as 20%–25% (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 34, Virtanen 2014: 20). It is, however, good to bear in mind that these people may also benefit from Plain Language.

It is widely recognized in Finland that the kind of people needing Easy Language are very heterogeneous (e.g., Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 25–32, Virtanen 2002: 12–21, also Uotila 2020: 311). Due to their differences, they may experience different features of language as difficult or easy. There are discrepancies between the groups. On whose terms should the compromises in Easy Language be made? The following shows a concrete example of this dilemma: If there are two synonyms for a word, say the word *information* in Finnish, the loanword *informaatio* and the shorter, more frequent and indigenous Finnish word *tieto*, which one should be used in an Easy Finnish text? Some language learners would probably better recognize the loanword, but the Finnish original word may possibly be easier for native readers with intellectual disabilities or dyslexia. In practice it is not at all clear how the groups differ linguistically from each other (Leskelä 2019b: 103–104). When attempting to define a language form that would be particularly suitable for a certain group, say for people on the autism spectrum or immigrants, we tread on a minefield of stereotypes. There is no such thing as a typical autistic or immigrant reader. Instead, there is a wide spectrum of different individuals with varying skills and challenges, and the discrepancies within the same group may be even greater than those between the groups (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 31).

One attempt to resolve this persistent problem is to divide Easy Language into three levels of difficulty, though these levels have not yet been established in Finland. This division avoids stereotyping groups, because everyone can take advantage of the level that is most suitable for them, regardless of which group they belong to.

One aspect worth considering is the **potential of Easy Language to balance the power relations** between different language users. This applies to all groups with language barriers, but especially to communications between native and non-native speakers. If non-native speakers are addressed in Easy Language instead of standard language, the dominant position of native speakers is weakened, as Easy Language challenges native speakers in the same way that speaking the target language challenges non-native speakers. This may empower language learners, which is one of the special merits of Easy Language. However, it may also irritate some native speakers, as they may feel they are being forced to learn *a new language* to make it easier for immigrants. Thus, developers of Easy Language need to consider how to respond to such situations and explain the opportunities of Easy Language to a wider audience.

**The role of the target groups in developing and promoting Easy Language** has also occasionally been a topic of discussion. The widely used international slogan *nothing about us without us*, adopted by the disability movement, emphasizes the fact that people with disabilities should not be the objects of any measures without being involved themselves. In the context of Easy Language, this has been interpreted as referring to the roles of people with disabilities as Easy Language experts (Netzwerk Leichte Sprache 2021). In Finland, the importance of involving people with language barriers in developing Easy Language has been widely recognized, but a testing process involving people with disabilities is not a prerequisite for granting materials the Easy Language logo (Leskelä 2011). This is due to the general perception that all people with language barriers are equally important: none of them is considered a primary group. This in turn means that testing groups should include testers from all groups needing Easy Language. In practice, this would be quite difficult to arrange, and this may undermine the production of Easy Language materials.

## 5 Guidelines

After the first guidebook (Rajala and Virtanen 1986), the guidelines for Easy Finnish have been modified and refined over the decades in 10 different publications. The first guidelines relied on mechanical readability formulae and mainly treated comprehensibility as a computational equation: a text is comprehensible if it has short sentences with short words. In the 1990s, the Easy Language guidelines were influenced by international Easy-to-Read guidelines (IFLA 1997, ILSMH 1998), but also by the criticisms of Finnish linguists, which followed the same lines. A text's comprehensibility is not merely a matter of countable text surface features; it is also very strongly connected to internal cohesion and textual structures (e.g., Laurinen 1994, Kulkki-Nieminen 2001).

Gradually, the special features and requirements of the Finnish language were taken better into account in Easy Finnish guidelines. For example, new instructions were given for avoiding certain difficult infinitive and participle structures of Finnish (Kulkki-Nieminen 2010: 38–39). The guidelines have also been refined and expanded as experience in test readings with various reader groups has increased (Leskelä 2011) and on the basis of critical remarks and suggestions from researchers, language authorities and Easy Finnish experts (Leskelä 2020, Virtanen 2009: 112–118). For an explanation of the Finnish guidelines, see Appendix 1.

Recently, international co-operation has been important in further developing the guidelines – for instance, Easy Language experts from Germany and Switzerland have commented on the Finnish Easy-to-Read Meter (*Selkomittari*), and international Easy Language research has provided new, scientifically based perspectives that are also useful for Easy Finnish guidelines (e.g., Bredel and Maaß 2016, Bock 2019, see chapter on Germany).

In Finland, in addition to linguistic recommendations, many visual guidelines have been formulated (e.g., Rajala and Virtanen 1986: 32–35, Laukka 2002, Itkonen 2006, Virtanen 2009: 119–140, Leskelä 2019b: 173–210). As new technological solutions and publication forms have developed, Easy Language guidelines have followed. For instance, guidelines now cover accessible Easy Language websites, videos, animations, voice-overs, and e-publishing (e.g. Ohtonen 2002, Älli and Kyyhkynen 2006). For 15 years, recommendations

have also been provided for using Easy Language in spoken interaction (e.g., Kartio 2009, Leskelä 2012).

If reviewed from a general perspective, the guidelines for Easy Finnish could be described as practical rather than pedantic. Their main purpose has been to help the writers and producers of Easy Finnish materials understand the various needs of readers with language barriers (e.g., Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 39, Rajala and Virtanen 1986: 34–36). Because the readers are a highly heterogeneous group, Easy Finnish guidelines have recognized that *one size does not fit all*. Thus, they have stressed flexibility and multi-purpose adaptability as their goal. As a language variety, Easy Finnish has guidelines and recommendations rather than rules and standards. They encourage the writer/producer to process the text as a whole rather than cling to details: one single difficult word or structure rarely makes a text unreadable, but an inconsistent and confusing body of text often does (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 43, Sainio 2006, Kulkki-Nieminen 2002: 39–40). Although the guidelines suggest that poor visual solutions may greatly hinder the reading process, they refuse to give strict regulations concerning the visual appearance of a publication (Itkonen 2006). The guidelines also emphasize that writing Easy Language is not merely a technical performance; it is a matter of creativity and professionalism (Virtanen 2009: 64, 70, Sainio and Rajala 2002). Producing good Easy Language material is only possible for someone who can also create the same material in standard language.

## 5.1 Difficulty levels of Easy Finnish

Flexibility in relation to Easy Language determinants has many positive effect – producers of Easy Language materials dare to try out new adaptations and provide readers with a varied, multi-faceted range of materials. However, this has also led to problems of readers not always knowing whether the material they have at hand is easy or challenging enough for them (Leskelä 2019b: 160). Uncertainty can be frustrating and unmotivating if readers are offered materials that are too difficult or too simple. Partly because of this, a need has arisen in Finland to divide Easy Finnish into different difficulty levels. The following categories have been suggested (ibid. 160–172):

Level	Users
Easiest Easy Finnish	Users with the most severe language and reading difficulties, who need maximal simplified language, and probably do not read by themselves. This corresponds approximately to levels A1–A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).
Basic Easy Finnish	Average Easy Finnish readers, who are mainly able to read by themselves, but have considerable problems with standard Finnish. This corresponds approximately to levels A2–B1 of the CEFR.
Advanced Easy Finnish	Users with minor reading challenges. This corresponds approximately to levels B1–B2 of the CEFR.

Table 1: Difficulty levels of Easy Finnish.

This suggestion of dividing Easy Language into difficulty levels is based on the fact that Easy Language texts have always existed at different difficulty levels in Finland: some them being very easy, others being more difficult. However, the division also raises some questions. It seems relatively easy to outline the linguistic criteria for the two first categories, Easiest Easy Finnish and Basic Easy Finnish, but the third category of Advanced Easy Finnish comes rather close to Plain Finnish. Combining these two varieties is an option worth considering.

Other Nordic countries have made different categories for Easy Language literature. In Sweden, Easy-to-Read literature is produced at three difficulty levels (see chapter on Sweden), and in Norway at two levels (see chapter on Norway). Both Sweden and Norway have practical rather than strict linguistic criteria for these levels, and they only apply to Easy Language literature. It may not be possible to define precise linguistic criteria for each level in all Easy Finnish text genres, so although the first outlines for the criteria of Easy Finnish difficulty levels have been made, for the time being they still need to be treated as preliminary (Leskelä 2019a, 2020).

## 5.2 Criteria for writing Easy Finnish

Recently, the long-term work on Easy Finnish guidelines has been used to provide a background for developing the Finnish Easy-to-Read Meter (*Selkomittari*). The Meter is an evaluation tool that allows Easy Language experts and researchers to estimate whether a text is or is not Easy Finnish (Leskelä 2020). It includes 106 criteria for an Easy Finnish text, divided into four main sections:

Criteria	Subsections	Examples of criteria
Textual features, 32 criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General criteria</li> <li>• Subject and theme handling</li> <li>• Information burden</li> <li>• Tone and interaction with reader</li> <li>• Parse of the text</li> <li>• Text genre criteria</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The text contains no information gaps (reader obtains sufficient information at all points for understanding the text).</li> <li>• The subject is discussed from a perspective that is meaningful to the reader.</li> </ul>
Vocabulary, 18 criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General criteria</li> <li>• Explanations of words</li> <li>• Repetitions of words and references</li> <li>• Figurative language</li> <li>• Abbreviations and numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writer favours common everyday words that are supposedly familiar to the reader.</li> <li>• The words are explained in a natural manner that does not give the impression of “pointing the finger”.</li> </ul>
Morpho-syntax, 30 criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General criteria</li> <li>• Declension, conjugation and derivation of words</li> <li>• Sentence and clause constructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The text does not contain difficult infinitive and participial constructions (e.g., agent participle structure).</li> <li>• Rare cases of nouns are avoided (e.g., abessive, comitative and instructive).</li> </ul>

Criteria	Subsections	Examples of criteria
Visual features, 26 criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General criteria</li> <li>• Line divisions and columns</li> <li>• Type and size of font</li> <li>• Background and colours</li> <li>• Pictures and photos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The hierarchy and the reading order of the text is clear (e.g., headlines clearly differ from body type and the main headline differs from the subtitles).</li> <li>• The pictures (if used) are congruent with the main message of the text and help the reader understand it.</li> </ul>

Table 2: Criteria for writing Easy Finnish.

### 5.3 Guidelines for speaking Easy Finnish

Finland, unlike many other countries, has recommendations for using Easy Language in spoken interaction (ELI guidelines). These recommendations aim to help speakers in linguistically asymmetrical conversations in which the participants, linguistically more competent and less competent speakers, do not share the same language skills (Leskelä 2012, Leskelä and Lindholm 2012, Leskelä and Lindholm forthcoming). The theoretical background of the ELI guidelines is Conversation Analysis (e.g., Heritage 1984). As they are much newer than the Easy Finnish writing recommendations, they are still mainly preliminary. The ELI guidelines include 45 recommendations for the more competent speaker, divided into five main sections (Leskelä 2012: 279–298).

Sections	Subsections	Examples of guidelines
Orientation and context of the talk, 3 guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeasing the environment</li> <li>• Supporting orientation towards the situation</li> <li>• Paying attention to the context of the conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping the co-participant orient towards the situation at hands; indicating what happens now and next.</li> </ul>
Encountering the co-participant, 5 guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing time to react</li> <li>• Sensitive listening</li> <li>• Encouraging expression of views</li> <li>• Taking possible acquiescence into account</li> <li>• Considering ways to minimize the risk of losing face</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening sensitively to your co-participant.</li> <li>• Paying attention to your actions in the situation; yet not focusing solely on monitoring your own actions and use of language.</li> </ul>
Reciprocity and turn taking, 6 guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting co-participants' initiatives</li> <li>• Turn-taking</li> <li>• Sharing responsibility for the progress of the talk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upholding turn-taking and reciprocal progress of the conversation.</li> <li>• Asking questions but avoiding an interrogative tone.</li> </ul>
Verbal means of speech, 25 guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of frequent everyday vocabulary</li> <li>• Use of language structures common in spoken language</li> <li>• Structure of turn</li> <li>• Prosodic features that facilitate understanding</li> <li>• Facial expressions and gestures</li> <li>• Augmentative and alternative communication methods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving concrete examples when talking about abstract topics.</li> <li>• Speaking at a calm pace yet not slowing down speech or unnaturally stretching sounds.</li> </ul>

Sections	Subsections	Examples of guidelines
Checking and repairing understanding checks, 6 guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correcting misunderstandings</li> <li>• Repairing problems in understanding</li> <li>• Taking responsibility for not understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using common repair initiators to express difficulty understanding.</li> <li>• Avoiding overinterpretations. When unsure about interpretation, asking about it directly.</li> </ul>

Table 3: Guidelines for speaking Easy Finnish.

The ELI guidelines need to take into account the dynamic nature of using language in conversation. Speakers do not have much time for linguistic decisions, so they are probably unable to follow complicated guidelines concerning simple words and structures in the way that writers are. But, unlike writers, they receive constant feedback from their interlocutors and may thus change their language usage accordingly (Leskelä 2019b: 214). For the ELI guidelines this means that the recommendations given to speakers must be applicable to real language use in different speaking situations. The main purpose of ELI guidelines is to strengthen co-operation between linguistically asymmetrical speakers. This implies that maximal comprehensibility, which is the main goal of Easy Language writing, is only achieved if co-operation is the goal of Easy Language speaking (Leskelä and Lindholm, forthcoming).

## 6 Practical outcomes

Easy Language has been applied in Finland for many different purposes; for example, in the media and in the production of literature and informative texts. It has also been used in practical projects in which its applications have been tested and further developed.

## 6.1 Media

The Easy Language media in Finland provides media information in Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish for audiences with language barriers. This includes media publications, which have co-operated closely for decades by, for instance organizing joint campaigns, test reading events and reader meetings to obtain feedback from readers. They also occasionally commission external reader surveys to gain a deeper understanding of the needs and wishes of their users (Selkomeia 2021).

**YLE news in Easy Finnish** (*Yle Uutiset selkosuomeksi*)<sup>9</sup> has been broadcasted since 1992. The radio news was extended to the internet at the beginning of 2000 and redirected towards immigrants learning Finnish (Seppä 2006). Later, a goal was set to further expand the audience to, for instance, elderly people and people with aphasia (Virtanen 2009: 164–165). Since 2015, YLE has also provided a five-minute TV newscast in Easy Finnish every weekday. YLE's daily news material is chosen and processed into Easy Finnish by trained news editors, and mainly focuses on domestic news. The emphasis is on fast daily news that has not been covered by other Finnish Easy Language media with a slower news release rate (Seppä 2006: 176). As the starting point has been radio news, which must be understood audibly, YLE news in Easy Finnish has developed principles for radio news talk that supports understanding (Virtanen 2009: 165). Easy Finnish TV news pays special attention to ensuring that voice, subtitles and visual narration are congruent and proceed at the same pace. In addition, a great deal of work has been devoted to explaining news events and correlated vocabulary in Easy Finnish. However, linguistic simplification should not lead to disregarding general journalistic principles such as providing reliable and neutral news coverage and offering the audiences news material that follows conventional news structures (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 73–76). YLE news in Easy Finnish thus seeks to expand the range of Finnish news offerings, but should not be equated with, for example, actual and formal Finnish language learning materials, although they may be used as such. Thus, the primary task of YLE news in Easy Finnish is to help

9 YLE selkosuomi, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/selkoutuuset/>

target audiences understand news contents and the society around them, and not to teach certain features of language (Seppä 2006).

**YLE news in Easy Swedish** (*YLE Nyheter på lätt svenska*),<sup>10</sup> provides Easy Swedish news every weekday online and on the radio. It is partly aimed at the same audiences as Easy Finnish news, namely people with intellectual disabilities or elderly people with language barriers, though in this case, the mother tongue of the audience is Swedish.

The **Easy Finnish newspaper *Selkosanomat*** (earlier *Selkouutiset*)<sup>11</sup> is published as a printed newspaper (20 issues a year) and as online news with weekly news coverage. It is directed towards all people with language barriers and focuses on domestic and foreign news, sports, culture, and entertainment (Leskelä 2019b: 267–268, Virtanen 2009: 156). The online newspaper also provides weekly symbol-supported, picture-based news for readers with the most extensive language barriers (*Selkosanomat kuvilla* 2021). The newspaper is published by the FAIDD and aims to follow general journalistic principles in its news production. Due to its slower news release rate, its emphasis is not on daily news but on giving background information to news events and explaining larger news patterns (Virtanen and Österlund 2006: 158). In addition to the news, it offers general media text genres such as editorials, columns, causeries, and feature-type reportages (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 58).

The **Easy Swedish newspaper *LL-Bladet***<sup>12</sup> is the sister newspaper of *Selkosanomat*, published in co-operation with Inclusion Finland FDUV for Swedish-speaking people and with the FAIDD. Approximately 75%–80% of its content is similar to that of *Selkosanomat*, and the editors of both newspapers work closely together. *LL-Bladet*, however, also aims to provide contents that are especially interesting for Swedish-speaking readers (Leskelä 2019b: 269). Its reader profile is somewhat different from that of *Selkosanomat*; it has fewer readers with an immigrant backgrounds and more Finnish-speaking elementary pupils and high school students who are learning Swedish (Virtanen 2009: 157, Virtanen and Österlund 2006: 155–157).

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10 YLE på lätt svenska, <https://arenan.yle.fi/audio/1-50362086>

11 *Selkosanomat*, <https://selkosanomat.fi/>

12 *LL Bladet*, <https://ll-bladet.fi>

*Leija* magazine (*Leija*),<sup>13</sup> founded in 1983, is the oldest Easy Language media product in Finland. It is a magazine for young people and adults with intellectual disabilities, and includes information on current issues, readers' own stories, poems, opinions, and requests for pen friends. The needs and wishes of its readers are taken into account in both language and content choices. The interviewers and interviewees are often people with intellectual disabilities (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 77, Leskelä 2019b: 272). *Leija* is published as a printed magazine six times a year by Inclusion Finland (*Kehitysvammaisten tukiliitto*), in co-operation with *Me Itse*, a self-advocacy organization for people with intellectual disabilities (Virtanen 2009: 161).

A set of special guidelines has been developed for Easy Language news. As the general guidelines for Easy Language are sometimes insufficient or even contradictory to some journalistic principles, special guidelines are needed. For example, they urge journalists to follow the actuality and neutrality principles of journalistic news texts; to remember that the reader, perhaps having only a fragmentary perception of the news events, needs sufficient background information to process different media text types (news, opinions, features); and to make clear whose ideas, opinions and voices are reported in the text. They also remind us that news texts often include culture-bound assumptions and concepts that might be strange for a reader with language barriers. If such assumptions cannot be avoided, they must be explained (Leskelä 2019b: 270–271, Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 96, Seppä 2006, Virtanen and Österlund 2006).

## 6.2 Literature

The first Easy Finnish book, a translation of Norwegian author Bjarne Verthus' book, was published in Finland in 1983 (Rajala 2006). Since its early days, Easy Language literature has expanded to cover most of the main fiction genres available in standard Finnish, including novels, short stories, poetry, and some examples of drama (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 134). Non-fiction Easy Language books are also published every year in Finland. The first Easy

13 *Leija* Magazine, <https://www.tukiliitto.fi/tukiliitto-ja-yhdistykset/tukiliiton-lehdet/leija/>

Language books were mainly originals, but since the beginning of the 1990s, many standard Finnish books have been adapted to Easy Language books (e.g., Sainio 2006, Virtanen 2006, 2009: 144). Easy Language books are mainly produced by specialized writers, and some have a rather large production (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 137). Only a few famous Finnish authors have written books in Easy Language (see chapter on Norway; Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 135).

The annual number of new Easy Language books is rather modest at 20 to 30 new books, at least in comparison to the volume of new books in standard language (about 11 000–13 000 new books per year). The total number of Easy Language book titles is little less than 500. The threshold for publishing Easy Language books in Finland is high. Only a few rather small publishing houses are specialized in Easy Language literature. The bigger publishing houses mainly see this type of literature as financially risky, despite state grants for Easy Language literature (Leskelä 2019b: 274–275, see Section 3). However, although Easy Language books are usually not *bestsellers* for publishers, they are *steady sellers*; demand is low but permanent (Peltomaa 2006).

The quality of Easy Language books is controlled by the Working Group for Easy to Read Literature (*Selkokirjatyöryhmä*), which grants the national logo for Easy Language books. This working group, originally set up by the Ministry of Education and Culture, works under the auspices of the FAIDD, and has representatives from associations of authors, libraries and readers (Selkokeskus selkokirjatyöryhmä 2021). Book production is, however, not regulated through any national plan or strategy, and the annual variation of the number of books or those towards whom they are targeted is great. Generally, the idea that all books in Easy Language should look alike or be homogeneous in terms of linguistic difficulty has always been viewed critically in Finland. On this matter, Finland has adopted a common Nordic policy, based on the International Federation of Library Associations' (IFLA) Easy-to-Read guidelines (IFLA 1997, 2010).

**Easy Language fiction books**, both originals and adaptations, include books for adults, young readers and children. Many Finnish literature classics have been published as Easy Language adaptations, for instance, Aleksis Kivi's *Seitsemän veljestä* (Seven Brothers, adapted by Helvi Ollikainen and Pertti

Rajala, 1995) and Tove Jansson's *Muumipeikko ja taikurin hattu* (Finn Family Moomintroll, adapted by Pauliina Heine, 2003). More recent literature masterpieces, such as Salla Simukka's *Lumikki-trilogia* (The Snow White Trilogy, adapted by Hanna Männikkölahti, 2017, 2018) and Tuomas Kyrö's *Mielensäpahoittaja* (The Grump, adapted by Ari Sainio, 2019) have also been published in Easy Language. Easy Language originals include novels and short stories, for instance Marja-Leena Tiainen's *Tyttö lukitussa huoneessa* (Girl in a locked room, 2019) and Sanna-Leena Knuutila's *Ne lensivät tästä yli* (They flew over here, 2017). A relatively small amount of poetry has been published, mainly poems written directly in Easy Finnish, for instance, Ari Sainio's *Sinun käsiesi hyväily* (The Light Touch of Your Hands, 1995) and Tuija Takala's *Onnen asioita* (Things of Happiness, 2017).

**Easy Language non-fiction books**, mainly originals, include guides and reference books on various themes, for instance, natural sciences, history, culture, social issues, Finland and Finnish culture, sexuality, art, health, illness, disabilities, and famous personalities. Some examples of popular non-fiction Easy Finnish books are Tittamari Marttinen's *Seksistä selkoa* (About Sex in Easy Language, 2019) and Markus Hotakainen's *Avaruus* (Space, 2015).

**Books in Easy Swedish** are rarely published in Finland, perhaps because Easy Swedish books from Sweden are used in Finland (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015). Some examples of popular Finnish Easy Swedish books are Maria Turtschaninoff's *Maresi* (Maresi, adapted by Jolin Slotte, 2016) and Kjell Westö's *Där vi en gång gått* (Where we once walked, adapted by Peter Sandström, 2015).

A set of special guidelines for Easy Language literature has been developed. In order to keep the book production vibrant and innovative and the book selection diverse and attractive to a variety of readers, these guidelines emphasize the creative nature of the writing process (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 138, Virtanen 2009: 150). They urge the writer to consider the theme of the text: traditional and easily predictable themes may be new and fresh for an inexperienced reader, but Easy Language literature can also contain unconventional and surprising themes. The guidelines encourage the writer to present changes of time, place, situation, and states of affairs as clearly as possible and to cut down side plots in order to highlight the main plot, at

the same time being careful not to reduce the text to a dull series of reported events. They also recommend limiting the number of characters and describing each of them in a way that makes them easy to recognize in the text (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 142–146, 160–163, 190, also Virtanen 2009: 152, Sainio 2006, Sainio and Rajala 2002).

### 6.3 Informative texts

Informative materials have been produced in Finland in both Easy Finnish and in Easy Swedish since the 1980s. They include practical information on how to cope with basic everyday issues, for instance, housing, studying, working, moving, taking care of health issues and daily chores, socializing, and participating in community activities. They also include material on topics such as fundamental human rights, citizenship and politics, but more works are published on practical topics. Few legislative texts have been adapted to Easy Language in Finland. The Constitution of Finland and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities can be found in Easy Language, but other legislation in Easy Language is fragmentary (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 99).

The producers of informative Easy Language materials vary from authorities and municipalities to non-governmental organizations. Enterprises have not very actively produced information in Easy Language, not even marketing materials for buyers who might experience language barriers. Some Easy Language informative materials appear on a fairly regular basis, for instance brochures on social security benefits produced by The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA selkosuomi 2021, KELA lättläst 2021), but for the most part, informative materials only appear occasionally.

The publication formats of informative materials are also diverse. Many materials are no longer, or at least not only, in printed form; they are also available online. The increase in the amount of Easy Language online material has both positive and negative effects. People needing Easy Language may have insufficient digital skills and equipment, which make them more dependent on printed materials than other citizens, and potentially excluded if printed Easy Language materials gradually disappear (see chapter on Germany). However, Easy Language online materials also have advantages. It is easier to keep up to

date with rapidly changing information online than it is in printed materials. Online materials can be individually adjustable to the user's needs. Moreover, as communication with authorities often demands completing and delivering different kinds of forms, which are particularly difficult text types for people with language barriers, accessible, interactive smart forms in Easy Language could well be a future innovation (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 98–99, 112).

Informative Easy Language materials are mainly produced in accordance with the general guidelines for Easy Language. However, a few special guidelines have also been developed. For instance, these guidelines encourage the writer to carefully consider the appropriate accuracy level of the given information and to favour the conventions of the chosen text type (e.g., instructions, general presentation, memorandum, decision, form, etc.) if there is no particular reason to change it. They advise reflecting extensively on different approaches to motivate the reader to read on (e.g., addressing the reader, using dialogue, making use of emotions and personal experience, questions that arouse the reader's curiosity, interesting claims as starters) and using different ways to provide information (e.g. information boxes, infographics and visual features, voices, animation, games, videos, cartoons, humour). They also ask the writer to submit the text for revision by an expert on the theme, but to be careful that the expert review does not make the text more difficult (Leskelä and Kulkki-Nieminen 2015: 132).

#### 6.4 Other projects

The development of Easy Language adaptations has been strongly project-oriented in Finland. Many innovations, services and procedures have started as projects in disability organizations, and subsequently have led to wider distribution and applications in society. This is largely due to the funding system that finances Easy Language work in Finland, as the STEA Funding Centre favours project-oriented approaches (see Section 3). The positive aspect of projects is that they enable open-mindedly experimenting with new approaches, including trial and error, which in turn enables quick reactions to different societal problems and needs. However, project funding is also short term and easily

leads to short-term thinking and aiming for quick results. The projects below have been especially influential in developing Easy Language in Finland:

**Supported interaction** (*Tuettu vuorovaikutus*), a project carried out by the FAIDD (*Kehitysvammaliitto*) in 1995–1997. This project aimed to find ways through which people with intellectual disabilities and the elderly with memory-related illnesses could have access to reading in small reading groups, regardless of whether they were literate. In these groups, they read Easy Language materials (newspapers, books, brochures) and discussed them. The project highlighted how both written language and spoken language may be difficult for people with language barriers (Hintsala 1997, Hintsala and Kartio 2002).

The **Easy Language and interaction** project (*Selkokieli ja vuorovaikutus*), carried out by the FAIDD in 2007–2009, further developed the model of linguistically and socially supported discussions. The project included recordings of a large amount of video data on both dyadic and multiparty discussions, involving people with intellectual disabilities, young people with dysphasia, and young adults on the autism spectrum. These data were analysed by means of Conversation Analysis and were used as a basis for formulating preliminary guidelines for using Easy Language in interaction (ELI guidelines, see Kartio 2009, Leskelä and Lindholm 2012).

The **Reading representatives in Swedish-Finland** (*Läsombud i Svenskfinland*), carried out by Inclusion Finland FDUV in 2010–2013, trained Swedish-speaking reading representatives to read Easy Swedish materials in centres for elderly people and people with intellectual disabilities. The reading group model was developed further by taking advantage of the *läsombuds* activity experiences of Sweden's *Centrum för Lättläst* (see chapter on Sweden), and by implementing the results in Finland (LL-Center 2021).

**Together** (*Yhdessä*) was a joint project of the FAIDD and the Union for Senior Services (VALLI, *Vanhus- ja lähimmäispalvelun liitto Valli*) in 2017–2019, in which people with immigrant backgrounds learning Finnish had joint reading sessions with elderly Finns in day-care centres and other care units. A new model was developed which combined the use of Easy Language materials and allowed different Easy Language target groups to become familiar with each other. On the annual 'I will read to you' day (*Minä luen sinulle -päivä*) hundreds of voluntary readers with immigrant backgrounds shared reading

moments with elderly people and those with learning disabilities around Finland (Valli 2021).

The **Papunet Web Service** began as a project in the FAIDD in 2001–2003, but unlike many other projects, received permanent funding and continued later as its own unit in the FAIDD. The aim of the project was to create an online service that would be easy to use for those who needed Easy Language and people with speech impairments (Ohtonen 2002). The service has contents in Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish, in standard Finnish and standard Swedish, in Bliss Language and in symbol-supported Easy Language, and it provides a base for innovating and investigating what Easy Language could be online. The long-term outcome of this project was the launching of accessibility and Easy Language on the internet in Finland, one milestone of which was the implementation of the Accessibility Directive of the EU in Finnish legislation in 2019 (Papunet-verkkopalvelu 2021).

## 7 Education and Research

So far, the **training of Easy Language experts** has mainly been carried out by the Finnish Centre for Easy Language (*Selkokeskus*) and the Centre for Easy Swedish (*LL-Center*). The Finnish Centre for Easy Finnish has trained over 40 experts who, in addition to providing Easy Finnish text services, provide training on how to write and speak Easy Finnish and how to make an Easy Language publication (layout and illustrations). For these training courses, together with its experts, the Centre has developed comprehensive training material that covers a wide range of topics, discussion themes and exercises. Courses related to web accessibility are held in co-operation with experts from the Papunet Web Service. The *LL-Center* provides training courses on Easy Swedish and for Reading representatives.

The Savonia University of Applied Sciences (*Savonia Ammattikorkeakoulu*) offers Easy Language **training for healthcare professionals**. These courses are available in both the vocational degree programme and in-service training. They deal with Easy Language, accessibility and communication in health work assignments (Savonia AMK 2021).

**Demand for Easy Language training** has grown significantly in recent years, and the need to extend the responsibility for organizing training to other parties such as adult learning centres, learning institutes and universities has been discussed. This is also mentioned as one goal in the Finnish Easy Language Action Plan published by the Advisory Committee for Easy Language (Selkokielen toimenpideohjelma 2019–2022). Many professionals in various occupations need at least a basic understanding of Easy Language, for instance teachers, therapists, health and social care professionals, press officers, and journalists. Designing practical Easy Language training material that is sensitive to the specific needs of each profession is a time-consuming task that must be carried out in collaboration with experts of the profession. The knowledge of Easy Language that a doctor needs to provide good care for a patient with language barriers is not the same as the information that would help a press officer write an Easy Language ministry bulletin.

Finland does not yet have a **formal higher education path for educating Easy Language experts** or for providing courses on accessible communication at the university level (see chapter on Germany). However, preliminary plans for this are under way. The University of Helsinki provides individual theoretical and practical courses, workshops and teaching experiments on Easy Finnish in the optional studies of Finnish Language and Translation Studies. Tampere University also offers courses on Easy Language and accessibility. These are important new openings, as the lack of formal higher education in Easy Language is problematic in many ways. For instance, as long as Easy Language is not part of the formal training of language professionals, Easy Language expertise will not be properly identified or recognized. From a practical point of view, linguists in Finland do not have the same employment opportunities in the growing field of accessibility as engineers and software developers. Due to this, linguistic aspects are often overlooked and considered unnecessary or too difficult to implement when developing accessible technologies and innovations.

**Research on Easy Language** is growing rapidly in Finland. In order to provide a channel of collaboration for researchers interested in Easy Language, the Klaara network<sup>14</sup> (*Klaara-verkosto*) was founded in 2018 at the University of

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14 Klaara network in English, <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/klaara-network/in-english/>

Helsinki. Klaara aims to provide opportunities for networking, joint projects and sharing, and freely testing ideas and views. In recent years, some Easy Language research projects have also received significant foundation funding. The ‘At the core of Easy Language’ (*Selkokielen ytimessä*) research project (2020–2022), funded by the Kone Foundation, aims to study what Easy Finnish is like and what it should be like, and to provide new information for giving recommendations regarding spoken Easy Finnish, explaining in Easy Language texts, and core vocabulary in Easiest Easy Finnish (Klaara-tutkimus 2021). The ‘Easy Swedish in Finland’ (*Lätt finlandssvenska*) project (2021–2023), funded by the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, aims to study both written and spoken Easy Swedish and Finland Swedish Sign Language. In 2019, the first international Easy Language Research conference was organized by Klaara in the University of Helsinki, and gathered over 80 researchers and experts from around the world to reflect on key research issues of the topic. A little later, the Finnish linguistic research journal *Speech & Language (Puhe & Kieli)* published a thematic issue on Easy Finnish research (Puhe & Kieli 4/2019).

So far, two dissertations on Easy Language have been published in Finland. Irja Vinni’s dissertation study *Tekstistä selkoa* (Making sense of what you read, 1998) was in the field of special education. Vinni explored differences in the reading comprehension of adults with intellectual disabilities in Easy Finnish and standard Finnish texts, and the factors that influence comprehension, using test readings, interviews and observations as methods. Auli Kulkki-Nieminen’s dissertation study *Selkoistettu uutinen* (Easy Language News, 2010) was in the field of linguistics. Kulkki-Nieminen compared news texts published by the Finnish News Agency (STT) and their adaptations into Easy Finnish in the Easy Finnish newspaper *Selkosanomat* (earlier *Selkouutiset*). She presented a linguistic analysis, based on systemic-functional grammar, of the ways in which these news texts differed, and investigated the writers’ linguistic choices in the modifying process. No dissertations have been written on Easy Swedish yet. However, several doctoral studies on both Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish are currently underway at various universities in Finland (Klaara-tutkimus 2021).

Easy Language has been the subject of master’s theses somewhat more widely and for a longer time in Finland. The first master’s theses appeared in 1992, but for some time these theses were mostly isolated cases. Over the last ten

years, however, there has been a significant increase in the number of master's theses on Easy Finnish, and a few master's theses on Easy Swedish have also been published. The growing number of master's theses on Easy Language and accessibility is a positive sign of the increased research interest in the subject.

The multidisciplinary nature of Easy Language may be one reason why research on this topic is now growing in Finland. Easy Language has linguistic roots and attachments, but also has anchors and special interests in many other disciplines, such as disability studies, sociology and psychology, education, literature, journalism, logopedy and phonetics, graphics and art sciences, technology studies, and political economics. This overwhelming multidisciplinary nature brings with it a variety of scientific methods, traditions and terminologies, which is in many ways inspiring, but which may also at times be laborious and confusing. This, however, can be translated into a resource for Easy Language research, as it demands that researchers thoroughly reconsider their premises and delimitations.

## 8 Future perspectives

In many ways, the prospects of Easy Language in Finland are promising. A general awareness of the need for Easy Language and research on the topic is growing. International co-operation between European countries has intensified and expanded views on Easy Language. Although not all the models and standards of other countries can be implemented in Finland, they contribute valuable new aspects and visions to the work.

The vision of the future of Easy Language in Finland is articulated in the Finnish Easy Language Action Plan (*Selkokielen toimintaohjelma*), published by the Finnish Advisory Committee for Easy Language in 2019. In the best future, according to the Action Plan, in Finland, Easy Languages and the communicational rights of people with language barriers are better supported by national legislation. Easy Language should thus be an established form of communication used widely by authorities and municipalities, and there should be an authority that is responsible for promoting and regulating the use of Easy Finnish and Easy Swedish in Finland. The Action Plan highlights the impor-

tance of a wide supply of informative materials that cover a range of different areas of life, versatile publishing of Easy Language literature and evolving Easy Language media that provide up-to-date information in simplified forms. It also emphasizes the need for more research on Easy Language as well as the need for experts who are specialized in different fields and able to provide diverse materials and know-how on the topic. To create more expertise, a higher education path for training Easy Language professionals at the university level is needed. In general, the Action Plan believes that Easy Language will best be developed through co-operation between people with language barriers, experts in the field, and researchers (Selkokielen toimenpideohjelman 2019–2022).

There is good reason to assume that this vision could eventually be realized. However, three obstacles, all inextricably linked, may slow down or even prevent this future, namely money, resources and attitudes. Traditionally, linguistic expertise is not very highly valued in Finland. This can be seen in the low number of investigations into language-promoting processes in enterprises and administrative organizations. Linguistic consultation has often been ignored, even in linguistic projects such as the naming of administrative bodies and agencies by authorities and municipalities, or when creating new online services for communicating with people and developing accessible technologies. This attitude also casts a shadow over the work of Easy Language in the form of a reluctance to adequately resource activities, employ experts and invest in Easy Language when strategies, projects and reforms are planned – even when they concern people with language barriers. This is the core problem: overall, the promotion of Easy Language is not ignored or rejected because of negative attitudes towards, for example, people with disabilities; it is ignored or rejected because language itself is seen as a less important factor (cf. Tiirilä 2014). Language is considered something that naturally accompanies all projects. It is assumed that it does not require special effort or language professionals. As this is the general attitude, it is understandable that competition for the scarce resources directed towards language processes in Finland is fierce. Promoting Easy Language is thus seen as an extra drain of finances that takes resources away from other language projects which are already hard pressed for funds.

However, the solution to this problem is not to stop pursuing the vision of Easy Language in Finland described above, but to take part in these dis-

cussions as actively as possible and to call for language awareness. It is crucial that we show that language inevitably has a central position in all activities and services directed towards citizens, and that supporting languages means supporting people (Tiililä 2020). As language has such a strong influence on human lives, it can also exclude and marginalize people. And that is why we have Easy Language.

## Author

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Finnish.

Standard Finnish	Easy Finnish
<p><b>Kirjastokortti ja lainaaminen</b> Kirjastokortin ja tunnusluvun saat mistä tahansa Helmet-kirjastosta ilmoittamalla osoitteesi ja esittämällä kirjaston hyväksymän voimassaolevan henkilötodistuksen, jossa on valokuva ja henkilötunnus. Kirjastokortin myöntämiseen tarvitaan Suomessa oleva osoite.</p> <p>Source: <a href="http://www.helmet.fi/Preview/fi-FI/Info/Asiakkaana_kirjastossa/Kirjastokortti_ja_lainaaminen">http://www.helmet.fi/Preview/fi-FI/Info/Asiakkaana_kirjastossa/Kirjastokortti_ja_lainaaminen</a></p>	<p><b>Kirjastokortti</b> Saat kirjastokortin ja siihen kuuluvan tunnusluvun Espoon, Helsingin, Kauniaisten ja Vantaan kirjastoista tai kirjastoautoista. Ensimmäinen kirjastokortti on maksuton. Kun haet kirjastokorttia, ota mukaasi voimassa oleva henkilötodistus. Se voi olla</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU-maiden henkilöllisyystodistus</li> <li>• passi</li> <li>• suomalainen ajokortti</li> <li>• kuvallinen Kela-kortti.</li> </ul> <p>Kirjastokortti on henkilökohtainen.</p> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.helsinginseutu.fi/hs/selkosivut-fi/Vapaa-aika/kirjastot/kirjastokortti/">https://www.helsinginseutu.fi/hs/selkosivut-fi/Vapaa-aika/kirjastot/kirjastokortti/</a></p>
<p><b>[Library card and borrowing</b> You can get a library card and PIN from any Helmet library by providing your address and presenting a valid ID card, accepted by the library, which has a photo and ID. To issue a library card, an address in Finland is required.]</p>	<p><b>[Library card</b> You can get a library card and its code from libraries or library buses in Espoo, Helsinki, Kauniainen and Vantaa. The first library card is free. When you apply for a library card, take a valid identity card with you. It can be a</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU identity card</li> <li>• passport</li> <li>• Finnish driving license</li> <li>• Kela card with a photo.</li> </ul> <p>The library card is personal.]</p>



## Easy Language in Germany

### 1 Introduction

German is the official language in Germany and Austria, and one of the official languages in Switzerland, South Tyrol (Italy), Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, East Belgium, and the Opole Voivodeship (Poland). This chapter focuses on Easy German in Germany. Several other regional languages (Sorbian, Frisian) are also spoken in Germany, but are mainly limited to local residents. Currently no Easy or Plain Language activities are known to be related to these regional languages.

At the end of 2019, Germany had 83.2 million inhabitants, 7.9 million of whom were living with a severe disability. The origins of these disabilities can be broken down as follows: 97% are acquired, 89% are caused by disease, 1% are caused by accidents or occupational diseases, only 3% are congenital or acquired during the first year of life, and 6% are due to other causes. The most relevant factor for disability is old age, that is, most disabilities are acquired during the more advanced stages of life: 44% of people with severe disabilities belong to the 55–74-year age group and 34% are 75 years or older. Only 2% are children and adolescents under 18 years of age (Maaß 2020: 31).

The purchasing power of the 55+ year group in Germany is EUR 720 billion a year (Destatis 2021). Accessible communication is therefore not only related to the participation in society of people with different needs; it also has an economic perspective. The market is considerable for accessible communication products that provide an income for the ever-growing number of specialists and text experts.

Disability may take the form of communication disabilities, which is the case in cognitive disability, prelingual hearing loss, aphasia, dementia type illnesses, and Parkinson's disease. This group comprises 2.2 million people in

Germany, roughly 3% of the German population. Factors other than disability may also cause a need for accessible communication products: poor reading skills, diverging education opportunities, live-changing events such as forced migration, etc.

German is a Germanic language of the West Germanic branch which includes English, Dutch and Afrikaans. German has a rich inflection system with a quadripartite case system for nouns, adjectives and pronouns (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative), a three-gender system (masculine, feminine, neuter) and a pronounced system of verbal inflection with many irregular verb forms (Dryer and Haspelmath 2013).

Easy Language has a relatively short tradition in Germany, the first efforts dating back to the Inclusion Europe initiative in the late 1990s. Most prominent are the efforts of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (the Easy Language Network<sup>1</sup>) which is sustained by the empowerment movement of people with cognitive impairments and their care service providers. Easy Language has been the subject of scientific research since 2010 and has constantly developed. Easy Language has been given a firm legal status (see Lang 2019) leading to a robust translation market and an increasing level of professionalization of Easy Language translators. It is part of university curricula and professional formation programmes, and is currently expanding to oral formats.

## 2 Historical perspectives

As mentioned above, the beginnings of the German Easy Language movement date back to the Inclusion Europe initiative. Inclusion Europe was founded in 1988 and was, at the end of the 1990s, the initiator and leader of the Pathways project, which aimed to create a best practice for lifelong learning among people with cognitive impairments (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 67).

The pilot project *Wir vertreten uns selbst* (We represent ourselves autonomously, 1997–2001) led to the foundation of the empowerment association

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1 Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, <https://www.leichte-sprache.org>

*Mensch Zuerst* (People First Germany<sup>2</sup>) (Maaß 2015: 19). *Mensch Zuerst* is one of the members of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache*, which was founded in 2006 and is today the most influential among the empowerment-related organizations that promote Easy Language in Germany. In September 2009, *Mensch Zuerst* presented a petition comprising more than 13 000 signatures claiming the right for people with communication disabilities, especially with cognitive impairments, to more publicly available Easy Language texts. The petition was officially handed to the Vice President of the German parliament at the time who stated that Easy Language was a prominent instrument to achieve inclusion and equality for people with cognitive disabilities (BIZEPS 2021).

The petition was an important catalyst for the creation of the legal status that Easy Language currently has in Germany. Currently, the availability of Easy Language texts is mandatory for federal websites in Germany, alongside the availability of German Sign Language. With the implementation of the European Accessibility Act and EU Directive 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies, even more text types will be requested in accessible formats in different media.

In January 2014, the Research Centre for Easy Language (*Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache*) was founded at the University of Hildesheim<sup>3</sup>, forming a pillar of Easy Language research in Germany. It is dedicated to applied sciences in the field of linguistics and translation studies. A first compendium of scientifically based rules for translators was published in 2015 (Maaß 2015) and was followed by the *Duden Leichte Sprache* (Bredel and Maaß 2016a-c, see Section 3). The Duden is a publishing house that issues a dictionary series on a regular basis covering different aspects of the German language. In Germany, it is perceived as the most influential and standard-setting institution in terms of the German language, and it provides sets of rules on German grammar, spelling and language use (Maaß 2020: 69).

From 2014 to 2018, the first Easy Language research project with federal funding was carried out (the LeiSA project, Schuppener and Bock 2019, Bock

2 Mensch zuerst, [www.menschzuerst.de](http://www.menschzuerst.de).

3 German Research Centre for Easy Language, [www.uni-hildesheim.de/leichtesprache](http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/leichtesprache).

2019, Goldbach and Bergelt 2019). Since then, Easy Language research has thrived in Germany.

Currently, a DIN SPEC PAS<sup>4</sup> Easy Language is being developed as a basis for future public tendering (DIN SPEC PAS 33499). A DIN SPEC PAS is the precursor of an industrial norm developed by a consortium of experts to be made publicly available. It will be evaluated in three years' time and may eventually be promoted as a norm or integrated into legislation.

### 3 Current situation

This section discusses the basic concepts of Easy Language in Germany. First it presents the most important definitions and the social and legal context of Easy Language. It then introduces the stakeholders and the general attitude to Easy Language in Germany. Finally, it describes the funding situation.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Easy Language is a variety of German with maximally enhanced comprehensibility (Bredel and Maaß 2016a). It is defined by guidelines and concrete rules and is limited to basic vocabulary and a maximally simple sentence structure. Terms and concepts beyond basic vocabulary have to be explained. The layout is perceptibility enhanced so that Easy Language texts visibly stand out from the standard. Plain Language is more open and less concretely defined, and covers the area between Easy Language and standard language. Currently, an intermediate form (Easy Language Plus) is being modelled and applied in text practice (see Maaß 2020). In German, the following terms are used: *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language), *Einfache Sprache* (Plain Language), *Leichte Sprache Plus* (Easy Language Plus).

As regards media formats, Easy Language is predominantly produced in the form of written texts, often enriched by illustrations. However, a recent devel-

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4 DIN stands for *Deutsches Institut für Normung* (German Institute for Standardization), SPEC stands for *Specification*, PAS stands for *Publicly Available Specification*.

opment is Easy Language interpreting, which takes place in inclusive meetings and conferences (Schulz et al. 2020). Written texts are produced in print or online, the latter being the media channel for Easy Language texts preferred by tendering authorities, especially in the field of political participation and legal texts. However, online text reception is not the preferred access route to information for some of the target groups; for example, people with cognitive impairments, senior citizens. These groups are ‘offliners’: 48% of the 70+ age group are offliners in Germany (D21-Digital Index 2020: 14, Maaß 2020: 31). In Bosse and Hasebrink’s (2016: 98) survey, 52% of people with cognitive impairments living in facilities are also offliners. Providing information exclusively online does not serve these users.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Easy Language is mentioned in the Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (*Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz, BGG*). This Act was first passed in 2002, and amendments have been continually made to adjust it to European legislation. Plain Language is mentioned as the first means, and if it does not suffice, Easy Language must be used. This has led to a practice in which Easy Language is preferred. Plain Language is currently rarely used in Germany, but Easy Language has a very active text practice, especially in administrative bodies’ tendering processes.

Another important legal foundation of Easy Language in Germany is the Accessible Information Technology Regulation (*Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung, BITV 1.0 – 2002; BITV 2.0 – 2011*), which applies to the area of information and communication technology in the exchange between administrative bodies and citizens. It regulates the accessibility of websites, mobile apps, e-government tools of all kinds, and graphical interfaces. It was drafted on the basis of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C<sup>5</sup>). The first version of the BITV was issued in 2002, and the amended version (BITV 2.0) in 2011, which is adapted to the second version of the WCAG (WCAG 2.0). The BITV 2.0 was the first

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5 W3C World Wide Web Consortium, [www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org).

among Germany's laws and regulations to expressly mention Easy Language: it states that Easy Language should be used to explain the content and navigation of each and every federal agency homepage. Most importantly, it contains an appendix with 13 basic rules that specify what Easy Language is and how Easy Language texts should be designed. The BITV 2.0 has been of major importance for the perception and presence of Easy Language in official contexts in Germany. It has also given rise to the development of an Easy Language translation market.

As mentioned above, the DIN SPEC PAS<sup>6</sup> standard is being developed by a consortium of about 70 people who are involved in Easy Language in Germany from the areas of science, translation and empowerment. It formulates recommendations for Easy Language that are intended to replace the BITV 2.0 basic rules for public tendering.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In Germany, some of the Easy Language stakeholders are officials. Easy Language is part of the inclusion policy of **government and administration bodies**. Easy Language translation is therefore a subject of public tendering by these authorities. On the federal level, the implementation of the accessibility regulations is monitored<sup>7</sup>. This monitoring body was set up in March 2020 in compliance with European regulations on communicative accessibility. Germany has governments on federal as well as on federal state levels. Each of these levels has separate legislation with regard to accessibility and inclusion. The Federal Government, all Federal State Governments and also most Cities and Regions have representatives of people with disabilities who are responsible for the implementation of the inclusion policy in their respective scope of action. Easy Language is their responsibility and they keep close contact with empowerment organizations. This results in a tight network of responsibilities for inclusion and a multifold effort for its implementation.

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6 DIN stands for *Deutsches Institut für Normung* (German Institute for Standardization), SPEC stands for *Specification*, PAS stands for *Publicly Available Specification*.

7 BFIT-Bund, <https://www.bfit-bund.de>.

Among the non-governmental organizations, the private organization *Aktion Mensch*<sup>8</sup> funds many initiatives in the field of inclusion, including communicative inclusion and Easy Language. *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache*<sup>9</sup> is the largest association of text providers from inclusive settings; it has crafted the most widely used practical Easy Language guidelines. The **Association of Interpreters and Translators** (*Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer BDÜ*<sup>10</sup>), with more than 7000 professional members, as well as the **Associated Interpreters and Translators of Northern Germany** (*Assoziierte Dolmetscher und Übersetzer in Norddeutschland, ADÜ*<sup>11</sup>), are Germany's largest professional associations of translators and interpreters who dedicate their efforts to Easy Language. They have certification programmes for their members.

### 3.4 General attitude

Communicative accessibility and Easy Language are relatively new topics in Germany, but during the last 10 years, progress has been rapid in all fields. Easy Language however, is not always well-received, especially if the texts are not compliant with the German language standard. Some features of Easy Language trigger strong negative responses in the general population. These are mainly the features that separate Easy Language texts from standard expectations with regard to, for example, orthography and layout (Maaß 2020). These features tend to be more pronounced in texts that have been executed in inclusive settings. The Easy Language bureaus of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* have shaped Easy Language text conventions to make the texts stand out from regular text practice. Through their differentness and their inclusive production process (i.e., the integration of target members as proofreaders), such texts serve a symbolic function of making the Easy Language target groups visible to the public. On the other hand, their differentness also triggers rejection in the primary target groups and leads to reduced acceptability of Easy Language in the general population (Maaß 2020).

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8 Aktion Mensch, <https://www.aktion-mensch.de>.

9 Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, <https://www.leichte-sprache.org>.

10 BDÜ, [www.bdue.de](http://www.bdue.de).

11 ADÜ Nord, <https://adue-nord.de>.

### 3.5 Funding

Easy Language translations have to be paid for by each tendering authority or client. There is no public funding for the development of text to comply with the Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (*Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz*, BGG) or the Accessible Information Technology Regulation (*Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung*, BITV 2.0). There is no systematic funding for literature or any other text types in Easy Language. Products of accessible communication have to be claimed by each individual with disabilities in the framework of a personal budget or subsidies for participation (e.g., vocational training). In practice, written Easy Language texts are rarely granted funding under this line. These means are more often used for spontaneously produced forms of accessible communication such as Sign Language interpreting or speech-to-text interpreting. Easy Language profits from these means in the form of Easy Language interpreting or complexity-reduced forms of speech-to-text interpreting.

A very important funding line for Easy Language comes from *Aktion Mensch* (Initiative human<sup>12</sup>), the largest private funding organization in the field of disability management. *Aktion Mensch* grants funds for accessible events, but also funds private bodies' accessibility projects, among which are Easy Language translation bureaus that work with an inclusive approach.

## 4 Target groups

Easy Language has been promoted as a tool for the communicative inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities (often named 'learning difficulties'). Paragraph 11 of the German Federal Act on Equality for People with Disabilities expressly addresses people with cognitive and mental disabilities (Lang 2019). Paragraph 4 of the same Law specifies that people with disabilities have the right to choose the aids and devices necessary for their disability. Under this regulation, people with other types of communication impairments have also successfully claimed Easy Language texts. Such impairments may include pre-

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12 Aktion Mensch, <https://www.aktion-mensch.de>.

lingual hearing impairment, aphasia, dementia-type illnesses, autism spectrum disorders, and multiple disabilities (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 139ff, Rink 2020: 142ff). Easy Language has also been used to grant access to people without disabilities who have other forms of communication difficulties due to functional illiteracy, recent immigration or immigration with separation-type acculturation strategies (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 166ff, Rink 2020: 29ff, Ahrens 2020, Pehle and Schulz 2021). These groups cannot claim accessible communication services on the grounds of the Act on Equality for People with Disabilities, but may profit if texts are made publicly available to include target groups with disabilities. The group of people without disabilities in need of Easy Language outnumbers the groups with disabilities by far, as Table 1 shows:

	Estimated size of group	Permanent need of Easy Language	Oral communication skills in German on (near) native level	Oral communication skills in other than German language on (near) native level	Fluent reading skills in other than German language
Dyslexia	470,000	-	+	+/-	-
Cognitive disability	400,000–800,000	+	+	+/-	-
Dementia	1,300,000	+	+	+/-	+/-
Prelingual Hearing Impairment	80,000	+/-	-	+	-
Aphasia	130,000–240,000	+/-	-	-	-
Functional illiteracy Alpha-Levels 1–3	6,200,00	-	+/-	+/-	+/-
Functional illiteracy Alpha-Level 4	10,600,000				
German as a second language	>1,000,000	-	-	+	+/-

Table 1: Size and profile of Easy Language target groups (Maaß 2020: 190, based on Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 142)

The target groups are highly heterogeneous in their requirements and their capacities. Not all need Easy Language for all text types. Some groups and individuals would be more adequately addressed in somewhat more enriched forms of easy-to-understand languages, such as Plain Language or Easy Language Plus. Easy Language is nevertheless often chosen as the only means of communicative inclusion, as it is believed to include the most extensive range of user profiles. However, this might be a misconception, as potential users are often deterred by Easy Language because they consider it inadequately simplistic and potentially stigmatizing (Maaß 2020).

## 5 Guidelines

In Germany, the guidelines have been developed from different perspectives. On the one hand, sets of rules have emerged from practical work with primary target groups and then been established by empowerment groups. On the other hand, scientifically grounded guidelines critically reflect the state-of-the-art in linguistics, cognitive science and comprehensibility research.

### 5.1 Practical guidelines

The German title of the brochure ‘Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand’ is *Informationen für alle. Europäische Regeln, wie man Informationen leicht lesbar und leicht verständlich macht*. It was published by Inclusion Europe (2009; for a discussion of the Inclusion Europe guidelines see Maaß 2015: 64ff, Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 84ff and Maaß 2020: 71f), an initiative of empowerment groups for people with cognitive disabilities and their families. Accordingly, the brochure sees people with cognitive disabilities as the priority target group of Easy Language. The materials have been developed for and published in different languages, including German. Most of the formulated rules are applicable to all project languages with very few rules added for some single languages. The Inclusion Europe brochure was the first among the Easy Language guidelines, but is rarely used today in German text practice.

The most widespread among the practical guidelines in Germany is the Easy Language manual *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache*. These guidelines were made public in 2009 on the network’s website<sup>13</sup> and were later published on the website of the Ministry of Work and Social Affairs<sup>14</sup> (*Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*, BMAS; 2013, the ministry responsible for the concerns of people with disabilities). The publication on the ministerial homepage lends high visibility to the network’s manual which is sometimes even used as reference material in public tendering processes. The network aims for participation of the primary target groups as proofreaders in text production processes, with a strong preference for the group of people with cognitive disabilities. *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* sees this group as a gatekeeper ‘down to the level of each single text’ (Maaß 2020: 71), but the target groups actually include a greater range of profiles<sup>15</sup>:

<p><b>Leichte Sprache hilft vielen Menschen.</b></p> <p>Zum Beispiel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Menschen mit Lern-Schwierigkeiten.</li> <li>• Menschen mit der Krankheit Demenz.</li> <li>• Menschen, die nicht so gut Deutsch sprechen.</li> <li>• Menschen, die nicht so gut lesen können.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Easy language helps many people.</b></p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People with a cognitive disability.</li> <li>• People with the illness dementia.</li> <li>• People who can not speak German very well.</li> <li>• People who can not read very well.</li> </ul>
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Table 2: Adapted from *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2013: 16): Target audience of Easy Language (Maaß 2020: 72)

This gap between the target groups on the one hand and the aspired role of the group with cognitive impairments in the text production process on the other often leads to problematic results with respect to the acceptability of the texts produced under these circumstances (Maaß 2020: 72).

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 13 Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, [www.leichtesprache.org](http://www.leichtesprache.org).

14 BMAS, [www.gemeinsam-einfach-machen.de](http://www.gemeinsam-einfach-machen.de).

15 Translated by Christiane Maaß.

The Accessible Information Technology Regulation (*Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung*, BITV 2.0) implements the Act on Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (*Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz*, BGG) with regard to online information of federal public administration bodies. Appendix 2 of the BITV's second version provides a short outline of how Easy Language texts are meant to be produced. The Appendix lists 34 requirements for the linguistic and typographic outline compiled in 13 regulations. Although these regulations are somewhat inconsistent and imbalanced, the BITV 2.0 has proven to be very important for the Easy Language text practice and translation market.

These three practical guidelines introduced in the previous paragraphs add up to a total of 120 rules, only 17 of which are present in all three sets of guidelines (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 82ff, 2016b: 21ff; an English summary in Maaß 2020: 74ff), as shown below:

<b>Visual and medial design</b>	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
<b>Word structure</b>	5.	Short words
	6.	Separation of compound words with hyphens
	7.	No abbreviations
	8.	No passive voice
<b>Vocabulary</b>	9.	Easy-to-understand words
	10.	Preferably no foreign words
	11.	Foreign words are explained where they are needed
<b>Sentence structure</b>	12.	Short sentences
<b>Semantics</b>	13.	No negation
<b>Text</b>	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

Table 3: Rules common to all three sets of practical guidelines (according to Bredel and Maaß 2016b: 22, English version in Maaß 2020: 75)

These 17 rules provide a representative outline of Easy Language, but are not sufficient to sustain text creation and translation processes. However, even though they are not sufficient for translators, they are convenient for identifying a text as an Easy Language text and are thus helpful for clients and tendering authorities. For an illustration of the German guidelines, see Appendix 1.

## 5.2 Scientifically based rulebooks

In contrast to other languages, Easy German not only has practical guidelines, but also scientifically based rulebooks. These were developed at the University of Hildesheim, where the Research Centre for Easy Language (*Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache*) was founded in 2014. They are based on theoretical evidence from several disciplines. Studies carried out in empirical linguistics, cognitive science and comprehensibility research are evaluated and geared to the needs of Easy Language target groups.

The first scientific guidelines, called *Leichte Sprache. Das Regelbuch* (Easy Language. The Rulebook) were written in German in 2015, and are available in both printed form and online (Maaß 2015). They are divided into three parts: an introduction to the subject of Easy Language, its legal position and target groups; an evaluation of the existing practical manuals; and a presentation of the Easy Language ruleset elaborated by the Research Centre for Easy Language used at the time. The main resources for the *Regelbuch* (Rulebook) were the practical manuals presented above, experience from translation projects carried out by the Research Centre for Easy Language, and the preceding research on German grammar, text, specialized communication, and translation.

*Duden Leichte Sprache* (Duden Easy Language, Bredel and Maaß 2016a-c, see Section 2 for a description of Duden) is more sophisticated in terms of empirical and scientific evidence. It consists of three volumes: a comprehensive scientific manual (Bredel and Maaß 2016a), a guidebook for the wider public (Bredel and Maaß 2016b), and a workbook (Bredel and Maaß 2016c). The scientific manual (Bredel and Maaß 2016a) compiles the research related to and helpful for the subject of Easy Language. It describes Easy Language from a 'sociolinguistic perspective as a strategically reduced variety of German' (Maaß

2020: 84) which is frequently perceived by average readers as a provocation and potentially stigmatizes the primary target groups, especially if it displays certain features (such as widespread layout features) that are described in the manual. It describes the main functions of Easy Language and deduces the characteristics it should have in order to enable these functions. Easy Language is placed in the context of other complexity-reduced varieties such as Plain Language or Foreigner Talk (Ferguson 1971). The required features are deduced on the basis of perception/perceptibility and comprehension/comprehensibility research as well as research on the different Easy Language target groups. Easy Language is placed in the context of translation studies and defined as a form of intralingual translation (Maaß 2019, Maaß 2020: 171ff). The manual describes the structure of Easy Language on all language levels, also with regard to the required layout features, and conceptualizes its central structural principles, such as proximity, maximum explicitness and continuity, as well as its core functions of comprehensibility and perceptibility. The book concludes with a draft of a Plain Language rule model (For a more extensive overview, see Maaß (2020: 83ff)). Bredel and Maaß (2016b) contains a digest for the practical application of the scientific manual, and Bredel and Maaß (2016c) is a self-instruction workbook for Easy Language translators.

## 6 Practical outcomes

This section presents some perspectives of the implementation of Easy Language in Germany. They concern informative texts, multimedia settings, literary publications, and other areas (e.g., cultural or multi-modal communication).

### 6.1 Informative texts

Due to the many legal regulations that have been implemented regarding Easy Language and accessible communication in Germany, Easy Language is thriving in legal and administrative communication as well as in organizational communication: all administrative bodies on the federal, and most on the

federal state level, as well as many German Cities and Regions offer Easy Language on their homepages, even if sometimes to a very limited extent. Most of these texts are purely informative, but others are also interaction texts (i.e., texts that trigger interactive behaviour, e.g., when dealing with municipal services). Rink (2020) provides an outline of information and interaction texts in legal communication in Easy Language in the framework of a project with the Ministry of Justice of the Federal State of Niedersachsen (Lower Saxony).

In recent years, political parties or public administration have provided many texts in the area of political participation: polling information, political party programmes, explanations of the German political system, news, etc. The latest newcomer is texts from the domain of public health, in the attempt to improve the health literacy of vulnerable groups that have been identified as not being able to access standard health information (Schaeffer et al. 2016, 2018). Although a great deal remains to be done, in recent years progress has been enormous.

## 6.2 Media

Most Easy Language material is written text distributed online or in print. This does not comply with the media preferences of the primary target groups which are under-average internet users with poor reading proficiency (Maaß 2020: 30ff). Nevertheless, Easy Language material in forms other than writing is still rare. Some material is in audio formats, such as the audio tracks of written Easy Language texts, read by professional news-speakers. This service is provided by the North German Broadcasting Association (*Norddeutscher Rundfunk*, NDR). Another service is available from Germany's Broadcasting Association (*Deutschlandfunk*) and distributed via radio. Easy Language subtitles are still very rare and are limited to certain projects (e.g., fairy tales in Easy Language and Sign Language by the NDR<sup>16</sup>; for Easy Language subtitling see Marmit 2021 and Maaß and Hernández Garrido 2020).

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 16 NDR, <https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/service/gebaerdensprache/Maerchen-in-Leichter-Sprache-und-Gebaerdensprache,maerchengebaerden100.html>.

### 6.3 Literature

In Germany, literary texts in easy-to-understand languages are available to only a very limited extent and are predominantly in Plain Language. There is no official funding policy and only a few rather small publishers currently dominate the market (*Spaß am Lesen Verlag*<sup>17</sup>, *Naundob Verlag*<sup>18</sup>, *Passanten Verlag*<sup>19</sup>). Their publications include some translations of popular literature but are mostly original works by Plain Language authors. To date, Easy and Plain Language literature remains a great necessity in Germany, as do general entertainment texts of all kinds.

### 6.4 Other projects

Forms of accessible communication, including Easy Language, are increasingly present in the cultural field: in museums (Rantamo and Schum 2019, Scheele 2021, Al Masri-Gutternig and Reitsstätter 2017), in opera or theatre performances (Mälzer 2017, Mälzer and Wünsche 2019) or in recreational parks (Kröger 2020). These institutes use Easy Language on their websites, but also in complex multimodal situations that combine different sign systems; Easy Language is only one of the resources used in the situation (Kaul 2021). In inclusive events, Easy Language interpreting (Schulz et al. 2020, Degenhardt 2021) and Easy Language speech-to-text interpreting (Witzel 2019) are used for accessibility in live situations. This is a rapidly expanding market for Easy Language service providers.

## 7 Education and research

Easy Language is established as part of different academic programmes in Germany: the *Barrierefreie Kommunikation* (Accessible Communication) master's degree programme at the University of Hildesheim focuses on Easy Language

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17 Spaß am Lesen Verlag, <https://einfachebuecher.de>.

18 edition naundob, [www.naundob.de](http://www.naundob.de).

19 Passanten Verlag, [www.passanten-verlag.de](http://www.passanten-verlag.de).

translation. Furthermore, the *Sprache, Kultur, Translation* (Language, culture, translation) bachelor's degree programme includes a module on Easy Language. Programmes of further training are typically offered outside university curricula, for instance by the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* or by the largest professional association for translators in Germany, the *Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer* (BDÜ, the Professional Association of Interpreters and Translators).

On the post-graduate level, the first doctoral Easy Language programme dedicated to the empirical research of the scientific ruleset began in August 2018 (the 'Simply complex' – Easy Language research group, Univ. of Mainz/Germersheim); these doctoral projects engage in user-oriented research design and explore the relationship between linguistic complexity, cognitive processing and comprehension of Easy Language features and texts (for the first results see Part 4 of Hansen-Schirra and Maaß 2020b). April 2020 saw the beginning of the doctoral programme on accessible medical communication at the *Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache* ('Accessible medical communication' research group, BK-Med).

As a research subject, Easy Language has been studied from different perspectives: mainly linguistics (see, e.g., Bredel and Maaß 2016a-c, Bock 2019, Fix 2017, Lasch 2017), translation studies (see, e.g., Maaß 2019, Hansen-Schirra et al. 2020a-b), specialized communication research (see Schubert 2016, Rink 2020, Welch and Sauberer 2019), and educational theory (see, e.g., Schuppener and Bock 2019, Kilian 2017). More recently, more disciplines have become aware of the phenomenon, ranging from psychology (an overview in Christmann and Groeben 2019) and German studies (with multiple publications, like many of the contributions in Bock et al. 2017) to museology (see, e.g., Rantamo and Schum 2019, Scheele 2021, Al Masri-Gutternig and Reitstätter 2017).

Germany also has a wide range of methodological approaches for investigating Easy Language. From a theoretical perspective, Easy Language is described as a language variety of German (Maaß 2015, Bredel and Maaß 2016a-c, 2017, 2018, 2019). Corpus-based studies empirically show the properties of Easy Language (Rink 2016, 2019, 2020, Maaß 2019, Maaß and Rink 2017, 2018). Taking the viewpoint of the user, empirical cognitive experiments reveal the cognitive processing costs of reading Easy Language texts (Hansen-Schirra

and Gutermuth 2018, Gutermuth 2020, Hansen-Schirra et al. 2020a-b, Deilen 2020, Schiffl 2020, Sommer 2020). Finally, questions of inclusion and participation are also addressed from the perspective of special needs pedagogy (Goldbach and Bergelt 2019, Schuppener et al. 2019, Bock 2019, Lange 2018, Bock et al. 2017).

From a chronological perspective, academic Easy Language Research began in 2010 at the University of Hildesheim in the context of translation studies and research on expert–lay communication. As a result of intense research activities and different translation projects in the field of legal communication, the Research Centre for Easy Language was founded in January 2014. Also in 2014, the LeiSA (*Leichte Sprache im Arbeitsleben* ‘Easy Language in professional life’<sup>20</sup>) project began at the University of Leipzig, which involved a mixed team of sociologists and linguists. This project is currently ongoing in the LeiSA-parti at the University of Cologne<sup>21</sup>. In April 2016, a national Easy Language conference took place at the University of Leipzig which gathered together researchers from various fields such as German studies, sociology, psychology and comprehensibility research, translation studies, and specialized communication research. This conference led the way to various co-operation in the field and to further research (proceedings in Bock et al. 2017).

## 8 Future perspectives

Easy Language faces various challenges. One of the most urgent requirements involves developing and establishing text type patterns in thematic areas that have not yet been the focus of Easy Language practice and research. In many areas, Easy Language texts are still unavailable. However, text production and translation processes need to be professionalized in order to provide perceptible, comprehensible texts that are at the same time acceptable and relate to the previous knowledge of the users. These are the prerequisites for Easy Language texts to be action-enabling for the primary target groups.

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20 LeiSA, <https://research.uni-leipzig.de/leisa>.

21 LeiSA-parti, <https://idsl2.phil-fak.uni-koeln.de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/leisa-parti-leichte-sprache-im-arbeitsleben-partizipativ>.

Many Easy Language texts in Germany are written in a way that is not acceptable to some of the primary and secondary target groups. This is especially the case when the texts sharply diverge from standard expectations; for example, in terms of orthography, layout, or more generally, text type and discourse standards. Texts that are very different from the standard can potentially stigmatize users, as texts of poor acceptability are perceived as a hazard to the standard language and the primary target groups are perceived as being responsible for threatening it. Professionalization is only part of the solution; another direction to be considered is the differentiation of various complexity levels in order to balance comprehensibility and acceptability in accordance with the user groups' needs.

For Germany, the development of Easy Language Plus, as an intermediate stage between Easy and Plain Language at the tipping point between comprehensibility and acceptability, may serve this purpose (for an outline, see Hansen-Schirra and Maaß 2020a, Maaß 2020). Another challenge in the field of professionalization is the adaptation of interlingual translation tools such as translation memories, terminology management, or even machine translation or text simplification for Easy Language translation (Klaper et al. 2013).

Despite the dynamically developing research situation of Easy German, huge research gaps remain in the areas of modelling and validation that require a synergetic research approach: previous research has focused exclusively on the perceptibility and comprehensibility of Easy Language texts. As mentioned above, existing Easy Language texts may not promote inclusion and potentially even impede it because of their stigmatizing character. Therefore, researching and potentially remodelling the set of rules and guidelines according to these additional categories is essential, as it will lead to the empirical validation of Easy Language Plus.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy German.

Standard German	Easy German
<p><b>Opferschutz:</b>                      Jedes Opfer einer Straftat erhält von der Polizei oder der Staatsanwaltschaft ein Merkblatt, aus dem es seine Rechte ersehen kann, z. B. anwaltliche Beratung und Vertretung bei der Wahrnehmung seiner Interessen im Strafverfahren, Erlangung von Schadensersatz, Schmerzensgeld und sonstiger Entschädigung.</p>	<p><b>Opfer-schutz</b>                      Sie sind Opfer von einer Straf-tat?                      Zum Beispiel:                      Eine Person hat Sie verletzt?                      Oder eine Person hat Ihre Sachen beschädigt?                      Dann haben Sie bestimmte Rechte.                      Sie können einen Anwalt bekommen.                      Sie können vielleicht Geld bekommen.                      Die Polizei gibt Ihnen Informationen.</p> <p>Source: Leichte Sprache in der Niedersächsischen Justiz, Information on the project, <a href="https://www.mj.niedersachsen.de/startseite/leichte_sprache/pilotprojekt_leichte_sprache_in_der_niedersaechsischen_justiz/pilotprojekt-leichte-sprache-in-der-niedersaechsischen-justiz-123609.html">https://www.mj.niedersachsen.de/startseite/leichte_sprache/pilotprojekt_leichte_sprache_in_der_niedersaechsischen_justiz/pilotprojekt-leichte-sprache-in-der-niedersaechsischen-justiz-123609.html</a></p>
<p><b>[Protection of victims:</b>                      Each victim of a crime will be given an information leaflet by the police or the public prosecutor from which he/she [literally: 'it' as 'victim' is neuter in German] can learn about his/her [literally: 'its'] rights, e.g. legal counselling and representation in the execution of his/her [literally: 'its'] interests in the criminal proceedings, restitution of damage, compensation for pain or other forms of compensation.]</p>	<p><b>[Protection of victims</b>                      Are you a victim of a crime?                      For example:                      Has a person injured you?                      Or has a person done damage to your property?                      Then you have certain rights.                      You can perhaps get a lawyer.                      You can perhaps get money.                      The police will give you information.]</p>

## Easy Language in Hungary

### 1 Introduction

Hungary is a country in Central Europe. It covers an area of 93 030 km<sup>2</sup> in the Carpathian Basin and borders Slovakia to the north, Ukraine to the north-east, Romania to the east and south-east, Serbia to the south, Croatia and Slovenia to the south-west, and Austria to the west. With about 9.7 million inhabitants in 2019, Hungary is a medium-sized Member State of the European Union. The population has been declining since 1980. Hungary's capital and largest city is Budapest. Other major urban areas include Debrecen, Szeged, Miskolc, Pécs, and Győr.

The foundations of the Hungarian state were established in the late ninth century AD by the Hungarian grand prince Árpád after the conquest of the Carpathian Basin. His great-grandson Stephen I ascended to the throne in 1000 AD, converting his realm into a Christian kingdom. The seminal opening of the previously restricted border with Austria in 1989 accelerated the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and subsequently the Soviet Union. On 23rd October 1989, Hungary became a democratic parliamentary republic. It joined the European Union in 2004 and has been part of the Schengen Area since 2007. It is a member of numerous international organizations, including UN, Nato, World bank and Council of Europe.

The only official language in Hungary is Hungarian, with 9.82 million people (99%) speaking it as a first language and 0.68 million people (1%) speaking it as a second language. Hungarian is one of the 24 official languages of the EU. Outside Hungary, it is also spoken by Hungarian communities in present-day Slovakia, Western Ukraine (Subcarpathia), Central and Western Romania (Transylvania), Northern Serbia (Vojvodina), Northern Croatia, North-Eastern Slovenia (Mur region), and Eastern Austria. It is also spoken by Hungarian

diaspora communities worldwide, especially in North America (particularly the US and Canada) and Israel. With 13 million speakers, it is the largest member of the Uralic family in terms of the number of speakers. Under the terms of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Hungary provides special protection for the Armenian, Boyash, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Rusyn, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Ukrainian languages. In November 2009, the Hungarian Parliament unanimously passed Act CXXV of 2009 on Hungarian Sign Language.

The Hungarian language is phonetic, i.e., a writing system in which a letter or a combination of letters represent each speech sound. However, many ambiguous words may cause difficulties for people with intellectual disabilities. The language is also enriched by foreign words, the proper interpretation of which requires knowledge of their meaning and the Hungarian equivalent. A significant feature of the Hungarian language is that it appends suffixes, even several suffixes (syllables, signs, suffixes) to the word. For example, in the Hungarian word *ablakomban* which means ‘in my window’, the *ablak* part means ‘window’, the *om* part means ‘my’ and the *ban* part means ‘in’. In many cases, the suffix changes the meaning of the word so significantly that it can be difficult to interpret. Words, in turn, depend on formation, composition, and other aspects. Although words longer than seven syllables are written separately or hyphenated, understanding complex word combinations can be problematic. People with intellectual disabilities may need support for understanding words with abstract meanings and pronouns, as well as complex and long sentences.

The Survey of Adult Skills, part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), successfully gathered a representative sample of 6149 adults aged 16 to 65 with a residential address in Hungary from 250 settlements in the country. In international comparison, Hungary is slightly below the OECD average in terms of reading comprehension and problem-solving skills. Among the Hungarian adult population, 25–34-year-

olds performed best in comprehension tasks, whereas 55–65-year-olds had the lowest average scores (Magyar Távirati Iroda 2019)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The development of Easy Hungarian can be divided into seven steps from 2002 to the present. It began with a research programme, followed by the publication of a set of rules translated into Hungarian. This was followed by the publication of easy-to-understand materials in Hungarian. Following this, the need arose for Easy Hungarian to become known to as many professionals as possible who come into contact with people with intellectual disabilities. At the same time, a complex development programme was carried out to prepare people with intellectual disabilities for independent living and self-advocacy. The aim was to create equal access to public administration information. Easy-to-understand communication was integrated into university programmes with special pedagogical content to make Easy Hungarian applicable in the school system. Building on the results achieved, a large-scale, four-year development programme began on January 1st, 2020.

The historical antecedents of accessible communication<sup>2</sup> in Hungary can be dated back to the early 2000s. In 2002, the European umbrella organization Inclusion Europe co-ordinated the international research project ‘Promoting the Human Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Civil Society’. The starting point was the United Nations (UN) Standard Rules (1993). The Hungarian Alliance of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (*Értelmi Fogyatékosággal Élők és Segítőik Országos Érdekvédelmi Szövetsége*, ÉFOÉSZ) also participated in the project. Information was collected from professionals, parents, and people with intellectual disabilities. The authors of the report drew the

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1 More information on the results of the first measurement in Hungary is available in Hungarian here: [https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dr\\_lukacs\\_fruzsina\\_a\\_magyarorszagi\\_piac\\_felmeres\\_eredmenyei.pdf](https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dr_lukacs_fruzsina_a_magyarorszagi_piac_felmeres_eredmenyei.pdf).

2 In Hungarian, the terms used are *könnyen olvasható* (easy-to-read), *könnyen érthető* (easy-to-understand) and *könnyen érthető kommunikáció* (easy-to-understand communication). To follow the practice of this handbook, we use the terms *accessible communication*, *Easy Language* and *Easy Hungarian*.

following picture of the situation of Easy Language in Hungary in 2002: its use is not regulated by law and its reputation is far from satisfactory. This research is considered the starting point of the written history of Easy Language in Hungary (Gyene et al. 2002).

The next notable event in 2002 was when the ÉFOÉSZ published a Hungarian translation of the 1998 publication of the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap (ILSMH). These were the first Hungarian guidelines for the creation of Easy Language materials (Csató 2002), and they paved the way for the production and distribution of Easy Hungarian publications (see more in Section 5).

The ministry responsible for disability policy also understood the importance of Easy Hungarian. To promote legal knowledge and awareness among people with intellectual disabilities, between 2004 and 2010, the Ministry issued several disability policies and legal documents in Easy Language (e.g., the National Disability Program, the Madrid Declaration, the Employment Policy Guidelines, People with Disabilities) under the remit of the Department for Disability Policy. The Easy Language adaptations were prepared by the ÉFOÉSZ (Horváth 2020).

Later, in 2006, the ÉFOÉSZ suggested that training should be developed to spread Easy Hungarian in Hungary. Thus, with the support of the EU, the development of training began at the organization then known as the Public Foundation for the Opportunity for the Disabled (*Fogyatékosok Esélye Közalapítvány*, FOKA, later *Fogyatékos Személyek Esélyegyenlőségéért Közalapítvány*, FSZK – the ‘Public Foundation for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities’) (see more in Section 7).

In 2009, the Down Foundation (*Down Alapítvány*) launched a programme called Mental Accessibility to promote accessible communication and create a barrier-free environment for people with intellectual disabilities. It focused on public administration, and attempted to cover everything from situation analysis and needs assessment to the development of educational materials, training and implementation. The project gathered the experiences of 150 people with intellectual disabilities on dealing with applications for identity cards, passports, tax and social security identification numbers. (*Társadalombiztosítási Azonosító Jel*, TAJ) or applications for various social

benefits, but also the preparation for banking transactions. Easy Hungarian templates and procedures have been prepared to help these people cope with these procedures; and training has been provided for public administration officials (Leveleki and Gruiz 2009).

An important milestone was when Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Loránd University (Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bárczi Gusztáv Gyógypedagógiai Kar) started offering courses on Easy Language in 2012, followed by Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged (Szegedi Tudományegyetem Juhász Gyula Pedagógusképző Kar) in 2015. (see more in Section 7).

The next stage of development was the launch of a currently ongoing state-funded programme at the University of Szeged in 2020: ‘Creation of an Easy Language Information Centre’ (ELIC, *Könnyen Érthető Információs Központ*, KÉIK, see more in sections 6 and 8).

### 3 Current situation

Although Easy Language emerged in Hungary two decades ago following the research of the Hungarian Alliance of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (ÉFOÉSZ) (Gyene et al 2002), no significant results regarding this language variety have been obtained. Two universities run professional workshops and two non-governmental organizations train professionals in the social field. However, the results of the professional workshops are not yet widely available. The general public knows little about the existence of Easy Hungarian.

#### 3.1 Definitions

In Hungary it is considered very important to distinguish between Plain Language (*közérthető fogalmazás* ‘comprehensible writing’ or *világos beszéd* ‘clear speech’) and Easy Language. They are seen as two, artificially developed language levels that have a different target group, and different sets of rules. Plain Hungarian is more commonly used in public administration, and justice and

financial services (Benkovicsné 2018), whereas Easy Hungarian is used in the world of people with intellectual disabilities (Horváth 2020).

In Hungary we call Easy Language *Könnyen Érthető Kommunikáció* (easy-to-understand communication), abbreviated as *KÉK*, which means 'blue' as a colour. This abbreviation is also popular among professionals and people with intellectual disabilities because the materials of Easy Hungarian are marked with the well-known logo of Inclusion Europe, which is also blue. In Hungary, the terms *könnyen olvasható* (easy-to-read), *könnyen érthető* (easy-to-understand) and *hozzáférhető információ* (accessible information) are also used in publications. The terms *Easy Language* (*könnyű nyelv*) and *Easy Hungarian* (*könnyű magyar*) are not used at all. The reason for this, in our opinion, is that the professionals who deal with simplified language are not linguists or communication specialists, but special educators, sometimes even social workers, who work with people with intellectual disabilities. The pedagogical aspect is much more characteristic of the Hungarian approach than the linguistic one.

There are currently no debates in Hungary on Easy Language. No research groups exist, and no scientific conferences or outreach workshops specifically dedicated to Easy Language have ever been held. However, two authors have addressed the concept of Easy Language in a written publication. These are presented below.

Farkasné created the first Hungarian definition of Easy Language on the basis of some international and national examples of the topic, and with the participation of experts through experience. 'Easy Language is a version of the common language; it uses its vocabulary and follows its basic rules. Easy Language is the representation of important content units of information in common language or the elaboration of independent information content in a simple, clear form that serves to make the information understandable. The processing of information through Easy Language is supported by the adequate use of pictures and illustrations, which observe the content-related and formal rules of adaptation' (Farkasné 2018a: 70)<sup>3</sup>.

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3 Translated by the authors.

According to Horváth (2020), instead of defining Easy Language, it would be more appropriate to define the concept of ‘encoding an Easy Language message’. Based on the literature and his research experiences from interviews, he proposed the definition below.

An Easy Language message aims to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities who require a high level of support to understand standard information can enjoy reading and accessing humanity’s cultural assets in the same way as others. It also ensures that when they have this information, they will be able to make decisions about their lives on the same terms as others. In this way, they will be able to exercise their human and civil rights to self-determination. When we speak of encoding an Easy Language message, we mean the process by which the communicator composes their verbal, written-, picture-, or film-based message according to written encoding rules that correspond to the decoding abilities of the person with intellectual disabilities receiving the message, i.e., their competence to recognize, perceive, and interpret the message. In this process, the communicator employs one or more people from the target recipient group to verify the intelligibility of the Easy Language message communicated in writing or as a picture or video. The goal of encoding an Easy Language message may be to convert an existing message into an Easy Language message or to create a new Easy Language message. An existing message is converted into an Easy Language message in the same language (Horváth 2020).

Defining the Easy Language concept is not limited to print and online literature. Based on the principle of equal access to the definition of the concept, Farkasné (2018b) made a video in Easy Language about the concept of Easy Language.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Easy Hungarian is still little known and uncommon in Hungary. The only legal basis for its development is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Hungary signed the CRPD 2007 and in the same year added it to Act XCII of 2007. It entered into force in Hungary on 3rd May 2008. The CRPD can be considered the fundamental document of disability policy.

However, the Hungarian literature and disability policy documents show no provisions of the CRPD being applicable to Easy Language (Horváth 2020).

The CRPD includes cross-cutting Easy Language provisions that can and should be taken into account when interpreting its full text. On the other hand, it highlights areas of everyday life in which the creators of the CRPD deemed consideration of Easy Language especially important. The CRPD's Articles 2, 3, 4, and 9 on accessibility are significant from a horizontal perspective. Article 2 defines the concept of communication, Article 3 explains the basic principle of accessibility, Article 4 identifies the necessary state obligations, and all these articles explicitly contribute to the realization of the human right to Easy Language. The CRPD highlights four areas of everyday life for the use of Easy Language. These are freedom of opinion and expression and access to information (Article 21), education (Article 24), participation in political and public life (Article 29), and participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (Article 30) (Horváth 2020).

In Hungary, however, no laws have been enacted to make the rights to Easy Language consistent with the CRPD. Moreover, no regulations governing the day-to-day operation of Easy Language have been implemented.

Perhaps the only exception is the law governing the procedure for assessing the capacity to function (CXXX of 2016 on the Code of Civil Procedure), which states that 'the summons and information served to the defendant during a trial must be consistent with the mental state of the party' (Section 443(4) of the Act)<sup>4</sup>. However, no data or information on how this provision is implemented in practice are available.

The role of spoken Easy Language in the lives of children and adults with intellectual disabilities is unquestionable. Consistent use of labelling information resources aimed at people with intellectual disabilities provides them with predictability. Spoken Easy Language is important in kindergartens and schools for children and students with intellectual disabilities. For example, in school, a special education teacher explains the curriculum to children with intellectual disabilities in spoken Easy Language. Therefore, it is very important to develop the speaking skills of special educators. It is also important in the life

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4 Translated by the authors.

of adults with intellectual disabilities in social institutions or in cases in which people with intellectual disabilities act independently in public administration.

Spoken Easy Language also applies to information given on the radio or TV. It can also be important at conferences. Unfortunately, spoken Easy Language has no tradition in Hungary yet.

Several sections of this chapter state that Easy Language is not widely used in Hungary. Although there is no scientific or experiential data on society's attitude towards Easy Language, all the initiatives so far have received a positive response. Education development ideas are well received by both teachers and social professionals. In 2020, the press also reported Easy Hungarian many times.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In Hungary, no central organizations currently manage developments related to Easy Language on a national level. There is also a lack of Easy Language offices and agencies. Any developments in the field are carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and higher education institutions, often independently of each other.

An important stakeholder is Rita Farkasné Gönczi, an independent expert. She developed the first Easy Hungarian website<sup>5</sup>. The website is very informative, and publishes news related to Easy Hungarian. Of particular note is the Easy Hungarian kitchen menu, from which people with intellectual disabilities can download Easy Hungarian recipes for preparing various foods and drinks. She was one of the first people to create Easy Hungarian materials on behalf of the Ministry responsible for disability policy, and was one of the developers of Easy Hungarian training courses. From the very start, Rita Farkasné Gönczi has participated as a trainer in professional training programmes for professionals.

Since 1900, special education teachers have been trained at the **Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Loránd University** (*Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bárczi Gusztáv Gyógypedagógiai Kar*).

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5 Könnnyen érthető kommunikáció – könnyen érthető élet, <http://konnyenertheto.gonczirita.hu/>.

The Budapest-based university is a key player in the training of disability specialists in Hungary<sup>6</sup>.

The **University of Szeged** (*Szegedi Tudományegetem*) is the second oldest university in Hungary: its history can be traced back to the Middle Ages. The training of special education teachers began in 2002. After structural changes at the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education (*Juhász Gyula Pedagógusképző Kar*), an independent Institute of Special Needs Education (*Gyógypedagógus-képző Intézet*) was established in September 2007. The Institute aims to train special education teachers so that they can enter work equipped with thorough, comprehensive, and up-to-date theoretical and practical knowledge that can be further extended<sup>7</sup>.

The **Hungarian Alliance of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, ÉFOÉSZ**, was established in 1981 as an umbrella organization for local organizations concerned with the care and rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities in Hungary. The ÉFOÉSZ represents 50 member associations, 25 local branches, and 22 000 individual members all over the country, and offers nine community-based services<sup>8</sup>.

The Budapest-based **Down Foundation** (*Down Alapítvány*) was established in 1992. It provides many social services to people with intellectual disabilities, and also employs them. Their important activity is to promote the adoption of children with Down's syndrome and to support these families<sup>9</sup>.

The **Hand in Hand Foundation** (*Kézenfogva Alapítvány*) has been working since 1993 for a tolerant society in which people with disabilities can live with dignity. The main task of the foundation is to promote the cause of people with disabilities, especially those living with intellectual disabilities and the most disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those living with multiple disabilities. The Foundation has contacts with people with disabilities both directly and

6 Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bárczi Gusztáv Gyógypedagógiai Kar, <https://barczi.elte.hu/en/>.

7 Szegedi Tudományegyetem Juhász Gyula Pedagógusképző Kar Gyógypedagógus-képző Intézet, <http://www.jgypk.hu/tanszek/gyogypedagogia/in-english/>.

8 Értelmi Fogyatékosággal Élők és Segítőik Országos Érdekvédelmi Szövetsége, <https://efoesz.hu/>.

9 Down Alapítvány, <https://www.downalapitvany.hu/node/337>.

indirectly, at all stages of their lives, and involves family, professionals, and charities, or addresses society as a whole<sup>10</sup>.

The **Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities Non-profit Ltd.** (*Nemzeti Fogyatékoságügyi- és Szociálpolitikai Központ Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft.*, FSZK) was established by the Hungarian State to promote equal rights, social integration, and complex rehabilitation of people with disabilities. Its mission is to contribute to the creation of a society in which every person with a disability can participate equally as a full citizen.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4 Target groups

The target group of Easy Language is a highly debated topic both internationally and in Hungary. The primary target group includes people who need assistance for completing intellectual tasks, for example, people with intellectual disabilities. In the 2011 census, 58 761 people reported having a communication or information retrieval disability in Hungary (Tausz et al. 2015).

The target group could also include deaf people who use Sign Language as a first language and in practice learn the national language as a second language. Easy Language could also be useful for people with low language competence, for people with a different native language to the language of the Easy Language information source, or for children and elderly people.

At the same time, too broad a definition of the target group of Easy Language risks inhibiting the communication rights of people with intellectual disabilities. Information that is easier to understand can help many people. The real challenge is determining the language level at which to communicate with people with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, Hungary focuses its forces to close co-operation with this target group.

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10 Kézenfogva Alapítvány, <https://kezenfogva.hu/>.

11 Today: Nemzeti Fogyatékoságügyi- és Szociálpolitikai Központ Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft., <https://fszk.hu/>.

## 5 Guidelines

Creating Easy Language information suitable for the language competence of a target group (people with intellectual disabilities) is subject to complex, complicated rules that also apply to perceptibility (the formal appearance of a text) and comprehensibility (the content of a text). No Hungarian logo has been designed, implemented, or used to identify Plain Language or Easy Language texts. In Hungary, the comprehensibility of Easy Language information must be checked by one or more members of the target group (people with intellectual disabilities), if possible, as paid work (Csató et al. 2009, Európai Bizottság 2015, Farkasné 2018a, Katona and Maleczki 2016).

The function of a rule system is to help the communicating person find the methods for encoding their message at the level closest to the decoding competence of the receiver of the message. Rules are the cornerstones of Easy Language; without them, there would be no accessible information. A great number of different rules exist on both the international and national stage.

Currently, there are five rule systems for Easy Hungarian language. Four of these are translations of foreign language rules, but the fifth is an extract in Hungarian based on these four. The first rule system was published in 2002 (Csató 2002)<sup>12</sup>, and was superseded by three inter-connected rule systems created in 2009 through international co-operation (Inclusion Europe and the Hungarian Association for Persons with Intellectual Disability 2009a, 2009b, 2009c)<sup>13</sup>. The publication year of the Hungarian rule system is unknown (Grüz n.d.)<sup>14</sup>. All five rule systems were developed and published by civil organizations, and their use is not mandatory in Hungary. As for their scope, four of

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- 12 *Egyszerűen, érthetően. Útmutató könnyen érthető tájékoztatók készítéséhez* (Make it Simple! European Guidelines for the Production of Easy-to-Read Information for People with Learning Disability for authors, editors, information providers, translators, and other interested persons).
- 13 *Információt mindenkinek! A könnyen érthető kommunikáció európai alapelvei* (Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand). *Az egész életen át tartó tanulás oktatóinak képzése. Iránymutatás azoknak az embereknek a képzéséhez, akik könnyen érthető dokumentumokat készítenek* (Training lifelong learning staff. Guidelines on training people to write documents that are easy to read and understand). *Ne írjon nekünk, nélkülünk! Hogyan vonjunk be értelmi fogyatékkal élő embereket könnyen érthető szövegek készítésébe* (Do not write for us without us. Involving people with intellectual disabilities in the writing of easy-to-read texts).
- 14 *Hogyan készítsünk könnyen érthető környezetismereti segédanyagot? – Irányelvek* (How to make Easy Language materials – Guidelines)

them are used nationwide (Csató 2002, Gruiz n.d., Inclusion Europe and the Hungarian Association for Persons with Intellectual Disability 2009a, 2009b, 2009c), and one is used specifically in the civil organization that published it (Gruiz n.d.) (see more in Section 8). For an illustration of the Hungarian guidelines, see Appendix 1.

The Guideline for the Education of Children and Pupils with Special Educational Needs, issued by the Ministry of Human Resources (Decree 32/2012 (X. 8.)), also deserves a mention. These guidelines remind special educators working with children and students with intellectual disabilities of the importance of formulating simple sentences that are easy to understand, familiar to the students, and arouse their interest (or are tailored to their interest). When writing a text, one must follow the rules of Easy Hungarian (Emberi Erőforrások Minisztere 2020).

## 6 Practical outcomes

Although Easy Language is increasingly present in education (especially in the training of bachelor's students in special education and the continuing education of social workers), its practical results are still quite limited. This chapter focuses on the results achieved so far.

### 6.1 Media and literature

In Hungary, neither the public service nor the commercial media currently use Easy Language. The **online journal** *Index*<sup>15</sup> was an exception for a short time (2019 and 2020). In 2020, the ÉFOÉSZ and *Index* published **Easy Language news** related to the municipal elections and coronavirus.

The self-advocacy group of the ÉFOÉSZ operates an **online news portal** entitled *Együtt Velünk* (Together with Us)<sup>16</sup>, which publishes Easy Language news. The authors report on their work at the national and international level

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 15 Index kereskedelmi hírportál, [https://index.hu/mindekozben/poszt/2019/10/09/konnyen\\_ertetho\\_cikkek\\_az\\_onkormanyzati\\_valasztasrol\\_az\\_indexen/](https://index.hu/mindekozben/poszt/2019/10/09/konnyen_ertetho_cikkek_az_onkormanyzati_valasztasrol_az_indexen/).

16 Együtt Velünk, <https://egyuttvelunk.onervenyesites.hu/>.

to protect the interests of people with intellectual disabilities. Self-advocates regularly publish Hungarian translations of the newsletters of the European Platform (EPSA, *Önérvényesítők Európai Platformja*). They also report on their tasks for teaching Easy Language.

No Easy Hungarian books have yet been published in Hungary. In higher education, students learning Easy Language have translated works of fiction (novels, poems) or excerpts from them (novels) as part of project work. However, these are not available to the public.

## 6.2 Informative texts

In Hungary, Easy Language publications are primarily for adults with intellectual disabilities. These publications are mainly produced by NGOs and are provided free of charge in print or online. Topics include disability policy, office administration, information on public transport, independent living, cooking and eating, shopping, health, leisure activities, social benefits, and employment.

## 6.3 Other projects

The ÉFOÉSZ has developed a **mobile app** called *Önálló Életvitel* (Independent Living) to support independent living among people with both lower and higher support needs. The app also has a read-aloud function for people who cannot read. It is very easy to use. People with intellectual disabilities can use this app to plan, for example, using public transport (how to get from A to B) or shopping (what to eat or drink). They can use it when they need help (e.g., they can easily call an ambulance or the police). They can create a list of daily tasks. The application only works on the Android operating system and is optimized for two types of devices.<sup>17</sup>

The Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Loránd University, has organized a **Disability Science Conference** every year since

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<sup>17</sup> Önálló Életvitel app, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=hu.codevision.foesz&hl=hu&gl=US>.

2010. In 2018<sup>18</sup> and 2019<sup>19</sup> it was a pioneering initiative to organize and hold a conference section in Easy Language by and with people with intellectual disabilities (see more in Section 8).

The ‘Creation of an Easy Language Information Centre (ELIC)’ programme<sup>20</sup> is financed by the Government (from the central budget) for the four-year period 2020–2023. The whole project is based on a Government decision (1264./2019(V. 7.)) on the establishment of the Complex Therapeutic Centre in Mórahalom<sup>21</sup>, within the framework of which services for people with disabilities will be established.

The programme is administrated by the Special Needs Education Training Institute (*Gyógypedagógus-képző Intézet*) at the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged (*Szegedi Tudományegyetem Juhász Gyula Pedagógusképző Kar*). The new centre will work in co-operation with the ÉFOÉSZ and the Ásotthalom Department of the Csongrád-Csanád County Sunshine Home. Other members of the network are the Csalogány Unified Special Educational Methodological Institution (USEMI<sup>22</sup>, *Egységes Gyógypedagógiai Módszertani Intézet*, EGYMI) in Budapest, the Kozmutza Flóra USEMI (*Kozmutza Flóra Egységes Gyógypedagógiai Módszertani Intézet*) in Hódmezővásárhely, and the Bárczi Gusztáv USEMI in Szeged. The centre will have a close connection to Easy Language target groups. People with intellectual disabilities living in the

18 Hatodik Fogyatékoságtudomány Konferencia, <https://barczy.elte.hu/content/hatodik-fogyatekosagatudomanyi-konferencia.e.190>.

19 Hetedik Fogyatékoságtudománnyi Konferencia, <https://www.barczy.elte.hu/content/hetedik-fogyatekosagatudomanyi-konferencia.e.258>.

20 Könnyen Érthető Információ Központ, KÉIK, <https://www.facebook.com/konnyenertheto> and <https://konnyenertheto.hu/>.

21 Mórahalom is a small town in south Hungary 20 km from Szeged.

22 USEMIs may be established for assisting the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN), together with other learners. Within the framework of the institution will be a unit that exclusively performs kindergarten, primary school, school, or secondary school activities, and conducts developmental education for learners with SEN, as well as a mobile network of special educators and conductors. USEMIs may also fulfill the tasks of family support services and school healthcare services, as well as lend special education and conductive education tools and aids. They may also operate a hall of residence. More information in English about special education services in Hungary is available here: Hungary, Separate Special Education Needs Provision in Early Childhood and School Education, [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/separate-special-education-needs-provision-early-childhood-and-school-education-29\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/separate-special-education-needs-provision-early-childhood-and-school-education-29_en) and Country information for Hungary – Systems of support and specialist provision, <https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/hungary/systems-of-support-and-specialist-provision>.

Csongrád-Csanád County will be able visit the centre if they want to obtain information in an Easy Language form and exercise their rights of communication. The centre will also employ two people with intellectual disabilities.

The professional, financial and administrative part of the 'Creation of an Easy Language Information Centre' programme is managed by a three-member project management team. The eight-member advisory board consists of university staff and representatives of the partner organizations. Their task is to develop the concept, go through the feasibility plan of each programme, monitor, and participate in the dissemination of the results. An important aspect in the organization of the programme is the right to participate, and the commitment to include people with intellectual disabilities. Thus, the Advisory Board and all sub-programmes have members with intellectual disabilities. The participation of people with intellectual disabilities is guaranteed at all stages of the programme, from the development of the concept to the implementation of the smallest details. Thirty people have already worked in the implemented sub-programmes in the past year.

Every element of the project is novel: people with intellectual disabilities participate in university training for special education teachers and peers that prepare them for Easy Language methodology as educators. People with intellectual disabilities from the Csongrád-Csanád County who complete the training will be able to check the comprehensibility of Easy Language information and will work at the ELIC, the first Easy Language Information Centre (KÉIK) (See more in Section 8).

## 7 Education and research

Currently, no accredited or informal courses in Hungary specifically provide training for professionals in making Easy Language materials. There is also a lack of training for people with intellectual disabilities, who are the primary target group of Easy Language, in tasks related to checking the comprehensibility of Easy Language materials (See more in Section 8). However, at the same time, in Hungary, Easy Language is included in the bachelor's and master's degree programmes and professional examinations of special educators working with

children and students with intellectual and learning disabilities. Perhaps this explains why most of the research can also be linked to the higher education institutions that provide Easy Language courses.

## 7.1 Education

A recent exploratory study (Horváth 2020) presented results from various forms of teaching Easy Language in Hungary. The Public Foundation for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities (*Fogyatékos Személyek Esélyegyenlőségéért Közalapítvány*, FSZK) had an **accredited training programme** for trainers to teach Easy Language. However, this is no longer available. The number of professionals qualified for this task in Hungary today is eight, which is rather few (Horváth 2020). The Public Foundation for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities (FSZK) had accredited programmes in health care (40 hours), pedagogy (30 hours) and in the social field (30 hours), but these credentials have expired, and have not been renewed. The social training was organized by the Hand in Hand Foundation (*Kézzenfogva Alapítvány*). Authorization has been renewed twice, but the contents have not changed since 2009. Eleven people were trained in Hungary in Easy Language for healthcare, 9 people for teacher training, and 127 people for the social institution system. However, there is no information on how these qualified experts use their acquired knowledge. It is not known whether they still work in positions in which they need the knowledge they acquired in the programmes, and if so, whether they use the verbal rules of Easy Language and Easy Language information sources, or create such sources themselves (Horváth 2020). An examination of the quality of the programmes showed that the content of the training programmes has not changed since they were first created. They exist as online teaching material, as a collection of texts (Csató et al. 2009), as an educational film (Gáspár and Szekeres 2008) and as a workbook (Farkasné 2014); that is, only four products (Horváth 2020).

The range of **additional educational programmes** lags far behind the educational programmes found in the CRPD. The educational capacity (two civil organizations) to offer this type of programme, and the number of qualified Easy Language trainers (eight people) and people with actual educational expe-

rience (six people) is extremely small in itself. Moreover, in comparison to the educational requirements stated in the CRPD, this capacity will definitely not be sufficient for taking further steps. Educational materials for Easy Language programmes are still very sparse: some can still be used today, but most are outdated and do not include any knowledge gained since their publication (Horváth 2020). Today, the ÉFOÉSZ and the Hand in Hand Foundation (*Kézzenfogva Alapítvány*) have a social continuing education programme (30 hours).

According to the results of the exploratory study presented above, new procedures were needed for educational development and accreditation after the academic year 2012/13. Based on the training development activities, the integration of Easy Language into the courses at the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Loránd University took place in four steps during 2012–2021.

In the first stage (the academic year 2012/13), in the bachelor's degree programme of Special Education, Easy Language was included in the framework of various courses as partial knowledge. In the second stage, a mandatory, stand-alone subject of Easy Language in the professional examination for special education teachers was announced for the academic year 2017/18, starting from the autumn semester. The course covered two consecutive semesters, and lasted 15 hours per semester. This educational organizational solution paved the way for true competency development for special education teachers. A full academic year is sufficient time for the development of spoken Easy Language, and for example, the rule system of Easy Language, to become real practical knowledge.

In the third step (in the spring semester of academic year 2017/18) Easy Language appeared in the 'Teacher of special needs education' master's course. Of this 24-hour course, six hours were spent learning Easy Language. It is important to note that participatory educators were involved in teaching Easy Language. Participatory education is new to higher education. The emergence of people with intellectual disabilities as educators is beneficial in several ways. Students learning special education knowledge have direct contact with people with intellectual disabilities. Already in the seminar session they can determine whether they are able to speak in Easy Language and whether the Easy Language texts they produce can be understood. Thus students are taught and tested by adults with intellectual disabilities while they are preparing to edu-

cate children with intellectual disabilities. The roles are temporarily reversed (Horváth et al. 2019).

Finally, in the autumn semester 2020/21, the first – albeit optional – Easy Language MOOC<sup>23</sup> was created for the ‘Teacher of special needs education’ master’s programme. The essence of the MOOC course, which is specifically designed for distance learning, is that students complete the course according to their own schedule, acquire knowledge independently, and complete assignments on their own. They do not meet with the lecturer in the classroom or online. However, the lecturer, as a mentor, continuously supports the learning process of the students online.

At the Institute of Special Needs Education, Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged, similar progress has been made as a result of training development activities. In the bachelor’s degree programme in special education, Easy Language initially appeared as partial knowledge within the framework of the mandatory subject ‘Educational Support for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities’. It was taught as a 30-hour elective course from spring semester 2016/17. In the context of higher education, this was the first time that Easy Language appeared as a stand-alone subject (Horváth and Magyar 2017). In the academic year 2017/18, we also integrated this knowledge into specialized continuing education introduced in Vojvodina (Serbia). One school year later, Easy Language became part of a 60-hour mandatory course as 15 hours in the specialization of education of people with intellectual disabilities<sup>24</sup>. Another year later these 15 hours increased to 30 hours.

Easy Language courses are taught using a project-based learning method. Students generally work in groups of three to five. The groups each create Easy Language materials that could actually be used in special education work. For example, they create policies for schools in Easy Language or an easy-to-un-

23 Massive Open Online Course, taught by Péter Horváth.

24 The Special Needs Education programme is an eight-semester bachelor’s programme. After a general introduction to special needs education and associated disciplines (including human biology, the theory of education, psychology, arts) students continue their studies in one or two specializations from their third semester. These specializations are the following: Education of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Education of People with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders, Education of People with Hearing Impairment, Education of People with Intellectual Disabilities, Education of People with Learning Disabilities, Education of People with Physical Disabilities, Education of People with Visual Impairment, and Speech and Language Therapy.

derstand version of a curriculum. They also often create a cookbook or an instruction manual for household appliances in Easy Language. Easy Language films and translations of news from standard news portals are another example. Hundreds of examples of such materials have been produced in recent years, and some are of such good quality that they could actually be used in practice.

Thus, the development of higher education training is moving from the teaching of Easy Language as partial knowledge to the emergence of Easy Language as an independent unit of study. Easy Language was initially an optional area of knowledge and has become mandatory. The number of hours and the amount of time available for training has increased (a move from a one-semester subject to a two-semester subject). People with intellectual disabilities work as co-lecturers at the university. In addition to classroom education, remote education has emerged in the form of online courses. The knowledge is gradually integrated into the undergraduate programme, then into various continuing education courses, and finally into the master's programme. The Easy Language method has also been taught to representatives of Hungary across the border.

## 7.2 Research

Very little Hungarian scientific research exists on the subject of Easy Language (Almási 2018, Fischborn 2018, Hegedűs 2020). Some studies of Easy Language can be found in bachelor's and master's dissertations or in postgraduate theses, as well as in the framework of the New National Excellence Program<sup>25</sup> (*Új Nemzeti Kiválóság Program*, ÚNKP) funded by the Hungarian Government.

BA and MA dissertations at the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Loránd University and at the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged have partly focused on the systematic study of international and Hungarian literature as Easy Language (Almási 2018, Fischborn 2018, Hegedűs 2020) and partly on the work of NGOs active in the field of Easy Language (Galai 2020). Other bachelor's and master's dissertations have

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25 Új Nemzeti Kiválóság Program, <https://stip.oecd.org/stip/policy-initiatives/2017%2Fdata%2F-policyInitiatives%2F15888> or <http://www.unkp.gov.hu/unkp-rol>.

investigated the extent to which existing Easy Language information carriers correspond to the written rule system of Easy Language (Keszey 2020, Vecseri 2020). One bachelor's dissertation has compared the comprehensibility of an Easy Language and a standard message (Német 2020), and a master's dissertation has examined the use of Easy Language in the integration process into education (Berényi 2019). Rimaszombati (2018) investigated language levels and produced a case study on the use of self-developed Easy Language teaching materials. Szarapka (2019) introduced a news column in easy language on a Hungarian-language news portal in Vojvodina (Serbia) and presented this innovation in her dissertation.

Horváth's (2020) PhD dissertation examined the implementation of the rights to Easy Language in Hungary contained in the CRPD and in the history of Hungarian vocational education. According to his results, in Hungary, continuing education courses are only accredited for professionals who already have secondary or higher education. Continuing education courses are offered to those working in healthcare, social services and public education. As a result of the advanced training, 155 people were able to use Easy Language. However Easy Language was not integrated into any of the bachelor's or master's degree programmes in higher education until 2012/13 (Horváth 2020) (See the first part of Section 7 (Education and research) for more about the degrees of development after 2013).

As part of the New Excellence Program (*Új Nemzeti Kiválóság Program, ÚNKP*) funded by the Hungarian Government, a new study is investigating the language development of children and adults with intellectual disabilities using the TROG-H test ('Test for Reception of Grammar, Hungarian version')<sup>26</sup>. The study has assessed almost 80 students with intellectual disabilities from four primary schools. The research is not yet complete, but some observations

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26 "The TROG-H (Test for Reception of Grammar-Hungarian; Grammar Comprehension Test) examines grammatical comprehension using 72 items. For each task, the participant must choose one of four pictures that corresponds to the phrase or sentence. This is the first Hungarian language test to contain normative data collected from a representative sample of a wide age range (from 3 to 14 years of age, from a total of 1476 children). We hope that the test can be widely used in the case of language and communication developmental disorders, such as specific language developmental disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, and cerebral palsy, but that it can also be used to test the language comprehension of adults with aphasia." (Lukács et al. 2013: 1) Translated by the authors.

regarding the comprehensibility of negative statements are already clear. For example, understanding negative statements is difficult for students with intellectual disabilities. During the test recording, two-thirds of the students who gave an incorrect answer marked the picture that was the confirmation pair of the negative statement as a good answer. For example, the picture 'dog is sitting' was chosen instead of the picture 'dog is not sitting.' Thus, it seems that it was not the missing vocabulary (dog, sitting) that caused the problem. This confirms the rule that sentences with a negative statement should be avoided in Easy Language, and that it is more effective to use positive sentences (Horváth and Hegedűs 2021).

Studies based on the dissertations above appeared in a special issue of the Hungarian academic journal 'Disability and Society' (*Fogyatekosság es tarsadalom*) in the spring of 2021. This journal is available online<sup>27</sup>, and is the first study volume in which articles specifically related to Easy Language are published in Hungarian.

Some scientific results regarding the characteristics and development of language competence of people with intellectual disabilities, based on Hungarian measurements, could also be built upon.

Several important research topics are related to Easy Language: 1) the study of the comprehensibility of the Easy Language message (are Easy Language messages easier for children and adults with intellectual disabilities to understand than standard messages?); 2) the scientific basis for a set of rules describing the creation of Easy Language messages; 3) the compliance of Easy Language messages already created using the rules; 4) the comprehensibility of textbooks and teaching aids used in the education of students with intellectual disabilities in public educational institutions; 5) examination of the language development of children with intellectual disabilities (especially the receptive side of language) and communication of adults with intellectual disabilities; 6) the level of language comprehension and reading of people with intellectual disabilities; and 7) perception and comprehension of various media (perception and interpretation of written text and visual and / or auditory information supporting or replacing written text).

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27 Fogyatekosság és Társadalom, <http://fogyatekossagtudomany.elte.hu/>.

## 8 Future perspectives

As no set of rules currently exists for the peculiarities of the Hungarian language, the primary task would be to develop such a set, which could be used for the preparation of Easy Hungarian materials and which are based on scientific research. At the Institute of Special Needs Education, Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged, a team of special needs education teachers, Hungarian language teachers and linguists is currently working on a set of rules for Hungarian.

In Hungary, services providing equal access to information for people with intellectual disabilities are still lacking, and the employment rate of these people is low, especially in occupations that require intellectual activity. At the beginning of 2022, a new publicly funded Easy Language Information Centre (ELIC) will open at the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged. Its aim will be to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities, and to create a world in which everyone can live together.

The centre has two main objectives. First, to develop preparatory training for the practical application of the Easy Hungarian method for special education teachers. Second, to develop a training programme for people with intellectual disabilities to test the comprehensibility of Easy Language messages. The Centre will organize training in all counties in Hungary and in the capital (Budapest), using instructors with intellectual disabilities, for a total of 400 special education teachers and 200 people with intellectual disabilities.

A 16-hour course, which prepares students for Easy Language, will also be offered at the University of Public Service (*Nemzeti Közzolgálati Egyetem*) as a continuing education programme for civil servants, starting in 2021.

Since 1st January 2020, a research and working group at the Institute of Special Needs Education, Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged, has been co-operating with other stakeholders and making plans for a new centre. According to Steklács (2019)<sup>28</sup>, the eye-tracking method can be useful in educational research. The use of eye-tracking studies can also provide a better

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 28 Szemmozgás, Tanulás, Olvasás, Szemkamerás Kutatóműhely, <https://eye-tracking-education.webnode.hu/in-english/>.

understanding of how students with intellectual disabilities read. The results of this research could be used to create Easy Language educational materials. Therefore, the Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, Institute of Special Needs Education, University of Szeged plans to conduct this type of research in 2021.

Also in 2021, the first two-day international Easy Language conference will be held in Hungary at the Institute of Special Needs Education, Juhász Gyula Faculty of Education, University of Szeged. Learning about national and international good practices is essential. It also provides a platform for professional discussions on, for example, the concept of Easy Language, the usability of materials written in Easy Language and the role of people with intellectual disabilities in the creation of Easy Language products.

Below are recommendations for naming new disability policy goals in Hungary. First, Easy Language should be put on the disability policy agenda, and the Hungarian Parliament should hold a professional policy discussion day on Easy Language. Second, the Parliament and the Government should revise the National Disability Programme, which is considered the fundamental document of Hungarian disability policy. Although Easy Language is not a language in its own right, it is a version of the Hungarian language, and the right to Easy Language should be included in the Constitution, similarly to Hungarian Sign Language (HSL). Third, in order to secure the right to Easy Language as stated in the CRPD, the Hungarian Parliament should also create a separate law on Easy Language, similar to the provisions of Act CXXV of 2009 on Hungarian Sign Language and the use of Hungarian Sign Language. If this does not appear to be an achievable goal, as a further option, these legal requirements could also be created by amending Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights and Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities. Fourth, the National Cultural Fund should issue a separate tender for the translation of literary works into Easy Language, for the creation of Easy Language for museum pieces, and for the development of Easy Language theatrical productions.

Hopes are high that the coming decade will see significant progress in asserting the communication rights of people with intellectual disabilities.

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Hungarian.

\*A mi nevünk Csány Júlia,  
Nyul Zsófi  
és Ótth-Kovács Réka.  
Mi a szegedi egyetemen tanulunk.  
Mi készítjük a házirendet.



Reméljük,  
hogy szívesen használjátok a házirendet.  
Sok sikert kívánunk nektek a tanuláshoz!



Csány, Júlia, Nyul, Zsófi, and Ótth-Kovács, Réka. A Szegedi és Tisza menti Baross György Általános Iskola és Gimnázium Házirendje (2017)

Lájjátok,  
hogy kit milyen rajzzal jeltünk.

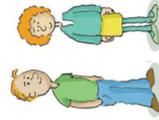
Ő a tanár néni



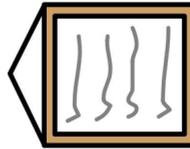
Ő az igazgató



Ők a szülők



# Házirend



A házirendben arról olvashatsz,  
hogy mit szabad csinálnod.  
Ezek a te jogaid.



A házirendben arról olvashatsz,  
hogy mit kell csinálnod.  
Ezek a te kötelezettségeid.



A házirendben arról olvashatsz még,  
hogy viselkedj az iskolában.  
Ezek a szabályok.



<sup>2</sup>Our names are Júlía Csányi,

Zsófi Nyúl

and Réka Ócút-Kovács.

We study at the University of Szeged.

We made this school policy



We hope

that you feel free to use this policy.

We wish you success in your studies.



<sup>1</sup> Csányi, Júlía; Nyúl, Zsófi; and Ócút-Kovács, Réka. Szeged and its Area Balczí Gyászki- Unified Special Education Methodological Institution (Easy Language school policy) (2017)

You can see  
the drawing of the characters.

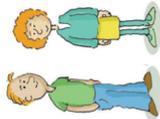
She is  
the  
teacher.



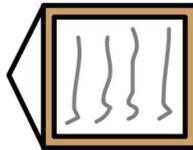
She is the principal.



They are the parents.



# School Policy



In the school policy  
you can read about  
the things you can do.  
These are your rights.



In the school policy  
you can read about  
the things you have to do.  
These are your obligations.



In the school policy  
you can also read about  
how to behave in school.  
These are the rules.





## Easy Language in Iceland

### 1 Introduction

Icelandic is the official language of the 364 000 inhabitants of Iceland (Statistics Iceland 2020), and for the majority it is their first language. However, the proportion of immigrants has grown rapidly in recent years: in 2020, immigrants formed 15% of the population in comparison to 8.8% in 2015 and 2.4% in 1998 (Statistics Iceland n.d.). The number of foreign students studying at the University of Iceland has also increased. In the academic year 2019–2020, foreign students made up 1549 (out of 13 333) or 11.6% of the university population (University of Iceland 2020). In 2017, four hundred students applied to study Icelandic as a second language at the University, adding up to over 40% of all applications to the School of Humanities that year (Halldórsson 2017). Icelandic texts in Easy Language are needed for this diverse population, not only for their Icelandic language studies, but also for their participation in the Icelandic community.

Because of the strong reading culture in Iceland (Einarsson 2014, Goldsmith 2013, Pálsson 1989), Icelandic citizens have generally developed good literacy and language skills; or at least this was the case until the 20th century (OECD 2019, Ólafsdóttir and Sigurðsson 2017). In 2000, when the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was introduced, Icelandic youths' reading comprehension performance corresponded to the OECD average. Subsequent tests, however, have shown a steep decline. This downward trend is also manifested in the rising proportion of students at the lowest levels of competence and a declining ratio at the highest levels (Directorate of Education 2019, Ólafsdóttir and Sigurðsson 2017, 2019). Clearly, this growing population needs to have access to information in language that is easily understood.

In the 18th century, scholars adopting the Enlightenment ideology emphasized the right of ordinary people to have access to, for example, science and

medicine texts, in a language understandable to them. The Icelandic Society for the Learned Arts (*Hið íslenska lærdómslistafélag*) wrote a series of publications with this as its guiding principle. There was also a marked tendency in these publications to avoid the use of foreign words and idioms, thus advocating linguistic purism (Halldórsson 1979: 78, as cited by Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 215). This linguistic policy of language transparency; that is, Plain or Easy Language and the preservation of the Icelandic language, is still strong in Iceland (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 216).

Since settlement in Iceland in the year 874 (Hilmarsson-Dunn and Kristinsson 2010: 211, Kristinsson 2019: 135–136, Kvaran 2005) the Icelandic language has preserved its basic vocabulary and grammar (Kristinsson 2019: 135–136). To succeed in this, Icelanders have created new words for new concepts over the years instead of borrowing from other languages (Kristinsson 2019: 135–136, Kvaran 2005). Whereas other languages have readily adopted English technological words, for example, Icelanders have created their own new Icelandic words. New words are often constructed by combining existing words or word parts, thus creating compound words. For this reason, the language can be quite transparent, making it often easy to detect the meaning of individual words. As an example, the word *hlaupahjól* is made from *hlaup* meaning ‘run’, and *hjól* meaning ‘wheel’ and ‘bicycle’, clearly illustrating the function of the object, *hlaupahjól*, which in English is called *scooter*.

What also distinguishes Icelandic from other Germanic languages is its system of declensions and conjugations: nouns, pronouns, numbers, and adjectives are declined on the basis of their context, gender and number, and verbs change accordingly. Because of all the noun declensions, verb conjugations and different grammatical structures, Icelandic is considered more grammatically complex than, for example, English, Norwegian, and even German. While German indeed has many declensions and conjugations, its grammar has, in contrast to Icelandic grammar, become simpler over the years. The fact that Icelandic grammar has remained ‘complicated’ is one of the language’s main characteristics (Kvaran 2005: 26).

Thus, when composing Icelandic texts in Easy or Plain Language, writers can take into account the transparency of Icelandic words, making it possible

for readers to detect the meaning of newly encountered words. Icelandic grammar, however, can be a barrier.

## 2 Historical perspectives

After the economic collapse in Iceland in 2008 (Kristinsson 2016: 91–92), a need arose to increase transparency in Icelandic society. For example, Icelanders became aware that their constitution was written in language that was only comprehensible to a few, in particular those educated in law. People claimed that it was not written ‘in common style’ and contained ‘too many legal terms’, incomprehensible to the general public. However, despite these debates, the constitution remains unchanged.

Plain Language was first officially mentioned in a legal context in 2011, in the Act on the Status of Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language in 2011 (Sigurðardóttir et al. 2011). Article 10 asserts that the language used by the authorities ‘shall be of good quality, easy to understand and precise.’

In 2015, the National University Hospital researched the experience of women visiting pregnancy and maternity wards, for example, to monitor whether they found the information they received satisfactory (Kristinsson 2016: 90–91). In their answers, many complained that they did not understand the terms on the signboard – *ómskoðun* (ultra-sound scanning, ultra-sonography). This is a pure Icelandic term, but is rarely used by Icelanders, whereas the loan word *sonar* is the generally accepted alternative, used in both spoken and written Icelandic. Thus, even though Icelanders tend to invent new words for new concepts, some exceptions to this ‘rule’ have to be taken into consideration when texts are composed with the objective of being understood by Icelandic laypeople.

A Parliamentary Resolution was passed on a policy and action plan for the rights of people with disabilities in 2017–2021 (Alþingi 2017). The plan states that people with disabilities have the right to access information on their rights, available services and so on in Easy Language.

### 3 Current situation

#### 3.1 Definitions

The Icelandic terms for Easy and Plain Language are *auðlesið efni* (easily read material), *auðskilinn texti* (easy text), *skýrt mál* (clear language) and *einfalt mál* (Plain Language). Thus, Easy or Plain Language is clear, easily read, and simple.

Easy Language is a variation of the Icelandic language that is intended for people with limited Icelandic language skills, who need easily comprehensible language. Plain Language, on the other hand, is spoken or written language about a complex topic in an academic or formal field (e.g., legal, medical), which is intended for laypeople without specific knowledge of the field.

#### 3.2 Legal and societal context

The mention of Easy and Plain Language in an Icelandic legal context is limited to the Act on the Status of Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language from 2011, and the Parliamentary Resolution on the policy and action plan regarding the rights of people with disabilities from 2017 (Alþingi 2017, Sigurðardóttir et al. 2011). The parties responsible for the implementation of the 2017 resolution were the Ministry of Social Affairs; the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture; the Directorate of Health; the Mission of the State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre; the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities; local authorities; and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities.

The main issue of the Icelandic language policy for the period 2020–2024 is the increasing number of inhabitants of foreign origin in Iceland's growing multicultural society. In Icelandic schools, a large number of students have first languages other than Icelandic, and the role of the schools is to provide all learners with equal learning opportunities, in which skills in the Icelandic language play a pivotal role. The focus is on effective language instruction for youths and adults. The council also emphasizes the need to take measures to ensure that Icelandic is, and can be, used in all social settings: in restaurants and shops, when communicating with technology, when reading signboards, etc. However, nowhere is it stipulated in the policy that texts should be presented in Easy or Plain Icelandic language.

Easy Language translations have to be paid for by each tendering authority or client, whether these be legal authorities, local authorities, political parties, health services, educational authorities or institutions, disability services, broadcasting institutions, or social media. In Iceland, there is no systematic funding for literature, nor any other types of text written in Easy or Plain Language.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

The role of the **Icelandic Language Council** (n.d.) is to provide the authorities, in particular, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, with guidance on the Icelandic language and to publish recommendations on language policy. It also annually evaluates the status of the language in society and highlights examples of good practice and current challenges in the official use of the language.

The **National Association of Intellectual Disabilities** (n.d.) has recently taken on the responsibility of acting as a centre for Easy Language text composition, in accordance with the Parliamentary Resolution concerning a policy and an action plan for the rights of people with disabilities for 2017–2021, Act 5 (Alþingi 2017). It also leads the field in providing guidelines and information in Easy Language.

## 4 Target groups

As previously mentioned, Icelandic laypeople need Plain Language when they read texts in specific fields such as law. The target groups of Easy Language, however, include language learners and people with reading difficulties, language disorders and/or disabilities.

Many immigrants need to have access to practical information in Easy Language, and second/foreign language learners of Icelandic need reading material at a suitable level of difficulty to advance in their studies. Through the years, different reasons have inspired people to learn Icelandic as a foreign or a second language. Foreign scholars and students have studied the language as

part of their linguistic research, to be able to read Icelandic works of literature, or to conduct their research in Iceland (Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies 2005). In these current times of increased globalization and migration, work and travel also motivate people to learn the language. Icelandic is taught at more than a hundred universities around the world under the supervision of the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies (Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies n.d. a, Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið 2019). As part of the national budget for the cultivation of Icelandic language and literature, the Icelandic government supports classes in modern Icelandic at approximately 14 foreign universities (Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies 2005, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies n.d. b). Due to the rising number of students in Iceland and abroad who acquire Icelandic as a second or foreign language, there is an increasing demand and need for literature and information in Easy Icelandic.

Among the Icelandic citizens who may need texts in Easy Language are the 7%–10% of the population with specific language disorders (Icelandic Association for Speech and Language Therapists n.d.) and approximately 6% who have intellectual disabilities (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities n.d.). In addition, in recent years, standardized tests have shown that around 30% of 15-year-old learners in Iceland do not have basic reading fluency skills (Hansen 2019). Furthermore, 25% of the same age group demonstrated very limited reading comprehension performance in the 2018 PISA test; that is, under the second proficiency level (OECD 2019). This ratio had increased dramatically since the first PISA assessment in 2000, when it was 14% (Directorate of Education 2019, Ólafsdóttir and Sigurðsson 2017, 2019). This young population clearly needs Easy Language texts.

## 5 Guidelines

The first ever guidelines on how to write a text that is easily understood were published in 2009: *Auðskilinn texti: Kennslurit um gerð auðskilins texta* (Sigurðsson 2009). The publisher was *Ás styrktarfélag*, a non-profit organization

and one of the leading companies that provide services to people with disabilities in Iceland (Ás styrktarfélag n.d.).

Visual design	Attractive front page
	Large letters, at least 16 points
	Clear and simple type font
	Words not split between lines
	One sentence per line
	Break long words down with hyphens
	Split text into many paragraphs
	Text and headings left-aligned
Word structure	Short words
	No abbreviations
	Use numerals
	Avoid symbols like %
Vocabulary	High frequency words
	Short words
	Use pronouns, like I and you, when possible, as it makes the text personal and therefore easier to understand
	When low-frequency words or idioms cannot be avoided, explain their meaning
	Use the same words for the same concepts
Sentence structure	Short sentences (preferably under 15 words, max. 40)
	Use full stops instead of commas
	Start a new sentence with conjunctions if it shortens the previous sentence

Semantics	No negations
	Reader should not have to infer the meaning from context, use explicit statements
	Be objective rather than subjective
	Use idioms sparsely
	Give examples from everyday life
Text	<b>Bold</b> most important parts of the text. Don't <u>underline</u> or use <i>italic</i> , or CAPITAL LETTERS
	Put the most important information first
	Make use of images

Table 1: The *Auðskilinn texti: Kennslurit um gerð auðskilins texta* (Sigurðsson 2009) book gives detailed guidelines on the presentation of Easy or Plain Language.

Icelandic Easy Language consists of short phrases, few subordinate clauses, not too many nouns at the cost of the use of verbs, and no loanwords from other languages (mainly English). Easy Language avoids the use of unnecessary words, as well as specific word sequences, and long word combinations that make new words. Easy Language should include few or no rare or specific words, or conjunctive verbs. Furthermore, it should follow pragmatic rules according to situations and audiences/readers (Kristinsson 2005, Kvaran 2001, Sigurðsson 2009). For an illustration of these guidelines, see Appendix 1.

As vocabulary is an important factor that affects a text's level of difficulty, it is wise when composing texts for foreign or second language learners to limit the range of vocabulary (the number of different words) at the start and then add to it steadily once a strong foundation has been formed (Schmitt 2008). In this regard, the vocabulary of the story collection for Icelandic language learners *Textar í íslensku fyrir erlenda stúdentu* (Texts in Icelandic for Foreign Students) (Sigmundsson 1998) has been revised to align with the four hundred most common words in Icelandic according to the Icelandic Frequency Dictionary (*Íslensk orðtíðnibók*, Magnússon et al. 1991).

An example of a specific word sequence that may be problematic, and not easily understood by all speakers of the Icelandic language, is the narrative

inversion (*frásagnarumröðun*). Narrative inversion is when the common word sequence of Icelandic: subject, verb, object, is changed so that the verb is at the beginning of the sentence (Þráinsson 2005: 602). This structure is commonly used in storytelling, dating back to the Icelandic sagas, as well as in news reporting and other instructional texts (Þráinsson 2005: 272, 604). Shaking up the common word sequence increases a sentence's level of difficulty. Stylistic inversion (*stílfærsla*), which was common in old Icelandic and is still used in formal language today, has the same effect (Þráinsson 2005: 605): a single word – a participle, adverb, particle or adjective – is moved up in the word sequence (Þráinsson 2005: 579–580).

Features such as font, letter size and line spacing can influence how easy a text is to read. People who have difficulties reading on the internet because of dyslexia, visual disturbance or for other reasons sometimes have the option of changing the visual characteristics of texts on Icelandic webpages using *Stillingar.is* (n.d.). An example of a website that offers the option of changing visual settings is the news site *Mbl.is* (n.d.) which has a special page for readers that offers the same news in a layout of individual preference; for example, with big white letters on a black background.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Despite growing awareness of the need for Easy and Plain Language, such options are still lacking when it comes to the media, literature and informative texts.

### 6.1 Media

RÚV, the Icelandic National Broadcasting Services, as well as other Icelandic media, present the news in standard Icelandic. However, RÚV (n.d. a) also has a special children's website and every weekday broadcasts children's news on its TV channel. In the programme, the main headings are discussed in a way that children can easily understand, and important terms and words are explained. Although the news is delivered in clear language, it is not the lan-

guage usage but the content that mainly distinguishes it from standard news. As an example, many interviewees are children. In addition, to provide a service to people whose native language is not Icelandic, RÚV translates some news into English and Polish – English being a widely spoken language and Polish being the mother tongue of 38.1% of Iceland's immigrants (RÚV n.d. b, n.d. c, Statistics Iceland 2019). Despite addressing a portion of the target group for Easy Language, these programmes do not substitute Easy Language news. The need for easy news in Icelandic therefore continues to exist.

Icelandic web dictionaries, such as *Snara.is* and *Malid.is*, do not have Easy Language options, such as those that the English language dictionary *Merriam-Webster* offers children and English language learners, in which the definitions have been phrased and examples specifically chosen for the intended users (Merriam-Webster 2007, 2020).

## 6.2 Literature

There is no tradition in Iceland of publishing simplified literature. In classes teaching Icelandic as a second language, adults have typically had to read children's books or other short stories that were not written specifically with difficulty level or content in mind, including the use of figurative language and allusions.

The first collection of fictional stories written for people studying Icelandic as a second language, *Árstíðir – sögur á einföldu máli* (Seasons – Stories in Easy Language) broke new ground in the Icelandic literary world (Pálsdóttir 2020). The book was published by *Una útgáfuhaus*, a new, progressive publishing house with strong grass roots, and contains 101 flash fiction stories. Treading new ground, the author encountered some challenges in the process of writing the book, but the result was well received (e.g., O'Donnell 2020, Summers 2020).

## 6.3 Informative texts

The Easy Language informative texts published during the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 were made available in Icelandic, English and Polish in the media and on health care websites, for example (National Association of Intellectual Disabili-

ties et al. 2020). Other examples of informative texts available in Easy Language include a text on the topic of violence against disabled women and the laws on services for disabled individuals with a prolonged need for help, found on the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities' website (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities n.d., Snæfríðar-Gunnarsdóttir and Traustadóttir n.d.). Finally, on the website of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children's (n.d.), the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child has been published in Easy Language that is understood by children (see Appendix 1).

## 7 Education and Research

Second language studies were first offered as an MA programme at the University of Iceland during the academic year 2016–2017 (University of Iceland 2016). The focus of the studies is on applied linguistics, multilingualism, and the teaching, learning and usage of second and foreign languages. The teaching of Icelandic as a second language has only been an academic programme in the School of Education since the year 2019. However, courses in this field have been offered since the beginning of the century.

Children with first languages other than Icelandic receive support in Icelandic as a second language at school, both the newly arrived in Iceland and those with longer residence; that is, when needed (Alþingi 2008). However, teachers complain that they are poorly prepared to meet the needs of this student population (Ágústsdóttir 2020, Jónsdóttir 2020, Ólafsson 2019). Teachers also complain of a shortage of quality teaching material in Icelandic as a second language for different age groups, and that textbooks suitable for learners of different proficiency levels in the Icelandic language are needed in various school subjects (Ágústsdóttir 2020, Jónsdóttir 2020).

Although there is little research on Easy or Plain Icelandic, some studies have been conducted in nearby fields. Þórisdóttir (2017) showed in her study of Icelandic 5th and 6th graders reading science texts, that 98% of words must be understood for successful reading comprehension. This means that if students cannot understand two or more words out of every one hundred they fail to sufficiently grasp the content (Þórisdóttir 2017). This is consistent with findings

of studies of students working on texts in English (Hu and Nation 2000, Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski 2010).

The main aim of research by Pálsdóttir and Ólafsdóttir (2019) was to investigate the consistency of word frequency in Icelandic and English texts from the reading and natural science literacy sections of the 2018 PISA tests. The OECD translation and adaptation guidelines establish non-language specific criteria for how the difficulty of words relates to their frequency, length or specialization. When determining whether words are complicated or simple, the guidelines claim that longer words tend to be more complicated, technical and/or abstract than shorter words (OECD 2016: 11). The guidelines do not require translators to refer to word frequency lists when selecting words of similar difficulty to that in the original texts. Pálsdóttir and Ólafsdóttir used the *VocabProfile* (Cobb n.d.) software to gather information on the frequency of English words. Their work was based on two corpora: *The New General Service List* and *The New Academic Word List*. When the English texts were passed through the software, an instantaneous frequency-based classification of the words was obtained. The 1000 most common word category was represented by blue, the next 1000 by green, followed by pink for the next 1000, yellow for the next 1000, and words that were less common than the above, or did not exist in the corpora, appeared in red. Information on the frequency of Icelandic words was obtained from a frequency list from the *Icelandic Gigaword Corpus* (Steingrímsson et al. 2018, Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies 2017), and the Icelandic words were then divided into the five frequency bands above.

The results of the study indicate that the share of words in the highest frequency band was lower in the Icelandic translated texts than in the English versions, and the share of Icelandic words in the lowest frequency band was higher in all four analysed texts. In addition, the English words were more evenly distributed between the five frequency bands than the Icelandic words. Specifically, a discrepancy and imbalance was revealed in that two thirds of the Icelandic words that were found to be in a different frequency band from the original English words were less common in Icelandic than their English counterparts were in English. Over 30% of the more frequent Icelandic words were longer than their less frequent synonyms, which suggests that for Icelandic words, the rule that longer words tend to be less frequent than shorter

words does not always apply. It must, however, be kept in mind that knowledge on the strength of the relationship between word frequencies in the Icelandic Gigaword Corpus and the word knowledge of Icelanders at different ages is insufficient.

One source of information worth mentioning in this respect is the book *Tíðni orða í tali barna* (Frequency of words used in children's speech) (Einarsdóttir et al. 2019). This is a corpus of Icelandic words used by two to eight-year-old children when expressing themselves in oral communication with adults. It is based on 100 107 running words, comprising 3879 lemma listed in order of frequency and word class. The corpus provides a valuable reference when choosing words for teaching Icelandic as a second or foreign language, when supporting children with a specific language disorder, and when writing texts in Easy or Plain Language.

## 8 Future perspectives

Awareness of the need for texts in Easy and Plain Language in Iceland is growing. However, at present, no strong official policy exists to protect the growth and accessibility of such texts: the Icelandic Language Council was unsuccessful in addressing the issue in the 2020–2024 language policy, and the Parliamentary Resolution for 2017–2021 only applies to people with disabilities, excluding other groups in the target population for Easy and Plain Language. Although it is true that in some cases, Easy or Plain Language texts benefit people across the different target groups, in other cases the texts need to be tailored to specific needs. Individuals with language and/or mental disabilities, immigrants and language learners, citizens with poor literacy skills, and readers of specialized texts such as legal documents, may not have anything in common other than the desire to be able to easily access information. Providing individuals with texts tailored to their needs is an important factor for making them feel included and heard. Easy Language texts support civil consciousness, making it easier for people to be active citizens and make informed decisions. Thus, the phenomenon of Easy Language texts should receive more attention from Icelandic politicians and scholars alike.

Further research is needed on language content and form for making Icelandic texts more easily understood. Training in the writing of Easy Language is not yet available and no formal assessments exist. As elsewhere, the problem faced by Easy Language development in Iceland is a shortage in funding. Of even more concern is the lack of legal/official guidelines and support. Last but not least is the challenge of making Easy Language accessible and recognized.

Publishing Easy and Plain Icelandic Language texts would enhance the unification of diverse groups by giving individuals equal access to information and education, thus promoting a common source of comprehension.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Icelandic.

Standard Icelandic	Easy Icelandic
<p>Í samningi þessum merkir barn hvern þann einstakling sem ekki hefur náð 18 ára aldri, nema hann nái fyrir lögræðisaldri samkvæmt lögum þeim sem hann lýtur.</p> <p>Aðildarríki skulu virða og tryggja hverju barni innan lögsögu sinnar þau réttindi sem kveðið er á um í samningi þessum, án mismununar af nokkru tagi, án tillits til kynþáttar, litarháttar, kynferðis, tungu, trúarbragða, stjórn-málaskoðana eða annarra skoðana, uppruna með tilliti til þjóðernis, þjóðháttar eða félagslegrar stöðu, eigna, fötlunar, ætternis eða annarra aðstæðna þess eða foreldris þess eða lögráðamanns.</p>	<p><b>Hugtakið barn</b> Barn er einstaklingur undir 18 ára aldri.</p> <p><b>Öll börn eru jöfn</b> Öll börn eiga að njóta allra réttinda Barnasáttmálans án tillits til hver þau eru, hvar þau búa, hvaða tungumál þau tala, á hvað þau trúá, hvernig þau hugsa og líta út, af hvaða kyni þau eru, hvort þau eru fötluð, rík eða fátæk og án tillits til þess hvað fjölskylda þeirra gerir eða trúir á. Aldrei skal koma fram við barn af óréttlæti.</p>

Standard Icelandic	Easy Icelandic
<p>[For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.</p> <p>States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.]</p>	<p><b>The meaning of 'child'</b> A child is a person who is younger than 18</p> <p><b>All children are equal</b> All children have the rights stated in the UN Convention on the Right of the Child, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, how they think, what they look like, whatever their sex, whether they have a handicap, are rich or poor, no matter what their family does for a living or what they believe in. It is forbidden to treat a child unfairly.]</p> <p>The United Nation's Convention on the Right of the Child. Here the United Nation's Convention on the Right of the Child has been written in language that can be understood by children.</p>



## Easy Language in Italy

### 1 Introduction

Italy is a south Central European country that forms a peninsula delimited by the Alps and surrounded by several islands, with a long Mediterranean coastline. Its capital is Rome. Italian is the official language of Italy, the Republic of San Marino and Vatican City. In Italy, 93% of the population are native Italian speakers. Italian is also used as a common language in France (the Alps and Côte d'Azur) and in small communities in Croatia and Slovenia. It is a national language in Switzerland and has official status in some of its regions (see chapter on Switzerland).

Italian belongs to the Italo-Western group (Eberhard et al. 2020, Giacalone Ramat and Ramat 1997) and it is one of the five most widely spoken Romance (or Latin) languages. Its sound system is similar to that of Latin or Spanish. Its grammar is similar to that of the other modern Romance languages, with a rich inflectional morphology, agreement of adjectives and nouns, use of definite and indefinite articles, loss of noun declension for case, two genders (masculine and feminine), and an elaborate system of perfect and progressive verb aspects (Encyclopedia Britannica 2015).

Italy has approximately 29 native, living, spoken languages and related dialects (Eberhard et al. 2020), which are spoken approximately by 50% of the population as a mother tongue, though they are not official. Full bilingualism is only legally granted to German, Ladin, Slovene, and French, and enacted respectively in the three autonomous regions<sup>1</sup> of Trentino Alto-Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Valle d'Aosta. Many dialects are mutually unintelligible.

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1 In Italy, autonomous regions became autonomous in order to take into account their cultural differences and protect linguistic minorities. They have legislative, administrative and financial power to a varying extent, depending on their specific statute. The five autonomous regions are: Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige, and Valle d'Aosta (Aosta Valley).

Italy has approximately 60 million inhabitants, of which 6% (3.1 million, half of which are older than 75) live with disabilities and health-related conditions that severely impair their quality of life – as reported by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (*Istituto nazionale di statistica*) (ISTAT 2018, 2019). In Italy, the distribution of functional disabilities, including sensory and motor disabilities, is comparable to its average distribution in Europe, with 2% of the Italian population reporting severe vision limitations, 4% severe hearing loss, and 7% difficulties walking. Women are more affected than men (ISTAT 2019: 30–31).

Overall, disability has a considerable societal impact: people with disabilities work less and are normally public employees; their social and cultural life is severely reduced (ISTAT 2019). The number of schoolgoers with disabilities and mental health problems is growing (Giuliani 2018). They select their secondary school type from a narrow range of choices, they often drop out of school, and are not provided with adequate, professional or constant support. Overall, the inclusion of people with disabilities in education is still problematic and suffers gender inequalities as well as general inequalities in the achievement of high educational qualifications (ISTAT 2019: 43).

Such data dramatically impact the context of inclusion and accessible communication: people suffering from sensory and learning disabilities often have limited literacy, are under-educated, and can only access content successfully if it is specifically adapted to their needs. Other types of communication disabilities, including chronic illnesses such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, dementia, depression, or aphasia – which in Italy affect a considerable part of the population – cause mild to severe communicative limitations. So, enhancing the potential of this large population group and giving it the means to function properly and contribute to society is in order – as also claimed by Italian President Mattarella on Disability Day in 2019 (Mattarella 2019, see also Mattarella 2020).

## 2 Historical perspectives

Easy and Plain Language in Italy have a relatively short tradition. Although the most vigorous debate on the need for clear and effective writing reached Italy in the 1990s (Sciumbata 2018, Viale 2008), some significant milestones trace back to earlier years.

In the 1960s, the Italian writer Italo Calvino (1971) drew attention to the disadvantages of the vagueness and lack of standardization of non-literary Italian (see also Bhatia et al. 2005), and to the complexity of bureaucratic language – or ‘anti-language’. Anti-language displays a lexical and syntactic opacity linked to its indirectness, which makes it artificial (Giunta 1997). The features contributing to its artificiality include the extensive use of periphrases, complex formulas, or routinized expressions substituting direct formulations, as well as what Calvino (1971) refers to as ‘semantic terror’, i.e., the fear of using clear words (e.g., the selection of the reflexive movement verb *recarsi*, ‘to make one’s way’, over the more common and more frequently used *andare*, ‘to go’). Quite the opposite of what Plain English (Cutts 2013), Plain Italian (Cortelazzo and Pellegrino 2002, Sciumbata 2020), and general guidelines suggest (Inclusion Europe 2009).

According to some scholars, the complexity of the Italian bureaucratic style is simply a variant of the educated standard (e.g., Serianni 2003); according to others, it is the result of historical and political choices that have later been challenged:

Philosopher Giovanni Gentile, Minister of the Department of Public Education, demanded the adoption of a complicated written style and mandated that Italian students gradually learn to write in a complex manner (Vezzoli 1996). Due primarily to these historical linguistic trends, we now find many Italian documents written in what Italo Calvino called *lantilingua* (‘the anti-language’) (Calvino 1971). Use of this alienating language persists in spite of efforts by famous linguists, such as Tullio De Mauro, Giacomo Devoto, Bruno Migliorini, Leo Pestelli, and Italo Zingarelli, to promote simplicity and clarity in writing. (Crivello 1988: par. 3)

In Italy, academic work on language simplification was initiated in the 1980s and the 1990s by a group of Italian linguists (Cortelazzo and Pellegrino 2002, De Mauro 1997, Lucisano and Piemontese 1988, Piemontese 1996) interested in topics such as the readability of Italian and the best practices for writing in an intelligible or easy-to-understand way.

An important milestone tracing back to the 1990s is the publication of the Style Code (*Codice di stile*) by the Italian Minister and Law Professor Sabino Cassese which opposed the ‘verbose Italian style’ (Dipartimento per la Funzione Pubblica 1993). The book recommends simpler ways of writing administrative documents based on the needs of the addressees, and tackles layout principles and general text organization recommendations that are still in use today. These recommendations were consolidated a few years later in the Style Manual (*Manuale di stile*), edited by Law Professor Alfredo Fioritto (1997).

The pleas for clarity in administrative language were reinforced in the 21st century. In 2002, the Italian Public Service Department launched the *Chiaro!* (Clear!) project on legal language simplification (Cortelazzo 2002). This project was the result of a specific directive of 8th May 2002 and of the previous ‘Directive on communication activities of public administrations’ of 14th February 2002. It continues the previous initiatives of the Department, and points to a new awareness of how important it is for the Government to provide information that is easy to understand, highlighting that easy information is in fact the right of every citizen. Despite the limitations and the prescriptive nature of the project (Cortelazzo 2002), it is certainly an important step towards the recognition of inclusive communication.

In addition to these national and local initiatives, which are currently growing despite remaining inconsistent and difficult to trace, joining the Inclusion Europe network through the EU project *Pathways 2 – Adult Education for People with Intellectual Disabilities*<sup>2</sup> represented an invaluable opportunity for Italy to compare itself with other countries, to make its mark in the sector and to capitalize on EU expertise and good practices.

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2 Pathways 2, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/>; cf. an Easy Italian press release: <http://www.anffas.net/it/progetti-e-campagne/progetti-conclusi/pathways-2>.

The recent participation of Italy as a partner in diverse EU projects (e.g., EASIT and Train2Validate)<sup>3</sup> is a further sign of its vitality and dynamism in learning and implementing accessible communication formats.

### 3 Current situation

Italy's current position in terms of the awareness, recognition and implementation of Easy and Plain Language is not easy to determine. The following paragraphs tackle some aspects of Easy and Plain Language in Italy to help the reader orient to some extent, but also to make the reader aware of the flexibility of the situation. Specifically, they explore some definitory aspects as well as the main contexts in which Easy and Plain Language are implemented. Their social status and the nature of the stakeholders in the field is also illustrated. Note that no Easy or Plain Language activities related to the regional languages mentioned in the introduction are known.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Broadly speaking, Easy Language, a minimal language variety, is a variety of language with maximally enhanced comprehensibility for an audience with cognitive and intellectual disabilities (Maaß 2020, Perego 2020a). Easy Language concerns not only language, but also paralinguage. Besides reducing the message to the minimum (content- and language-wise), it relies on *easification devices* (Bhatia 1983) that guide users through the text via language-independent features, enhancing its comprehensibility and increasing its usability. Usability is the extent to which something is user-oriented, cognitively effective, and satisfactory. Text usability depends on the degree of text complexity, readability and ambiguity (Perego 2020a: 19). Easification devices include page

3 The EASIT project (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training, 2018–2021; <https://pagines.uab.cat/easit/en>) is currently working on the incorporation of simplified (or 'Easy-to-Understand'; E2U; EASIT 2019) language principles into audiovisual translation (Matamala and Orero 2019). The Train2Validate project (Professional training for easy-to-read facilitators and validators, 2020-2023; <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/>) aims to produce material for the training of easy-to-read validators and facilitators as well as testers with cognitive and intellectual disabilities.

layout and the use of pictures and/or images. In contrast, Plain Language covers the area between Easy Language and standard or even specialised language, and is meant to make the message (of specialized texts) readily available to all (i.e., non-specialist users). Both Easy and Plain Language are user-centred, reader- vs text-oriented varieties.

The official website definition of Easy Italian offered by Anffas Nazionale, the National Association of Families of Persons with Intellectual and/or Relational Disabilities (*Associazione Nazionale Famiglie di Persone con Disabilità Intellettiva e/o Relazionale*)<sup>4</sup>, is given below in back-translation, following the original text layout:

Easy-to-read language is language that helps people  
read and understand difficult information.  
Information that is easy to read and understand is important  
for the life of people with disabilities.  
Information that is easy to read helps people  
find the things they need to know.  
It helps them make decisions and choices.  
Easy-to-read language  
makes lifelong learning  
easier to deal with  
for people with intellectual disabilities.<sup>5</sup>

The terminology used to refer to Easy and Plain Language is still flexible, not unique, quite varied, at times ambiguous, and sometimes the two labels and implied notions are used as synonyms<sup>6</sup>. Easy Language is referred to as *Lingua* (or *linguaggio*) *facile da leggere e da capire* (easy-to-understand and easy-to-read language). The shorter form *Linguaggio facile da leggere* (easy-to-read language) is widespread and used by, for instance, Anffas Nazionale itself, though

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4 Anffas Nazionale, <http://www.anffas.net/>.

5 Anffas Nazionale, *Linguaggio facile da leggere, Linee Guida*, <http://www.anffas.net/it/linguaggio-facile-da-leggere/linee-guida/>.

6 See also Table 2 in chapter on Switzerland: According to the authors, in the French and Italian-speaking regions, the labels used suggest a similar scenario in which no formal distinction is made between Easy and Plain Language.

it hints too directly (and in some cases inappropriately and misleadingly) at the readability (vs general comprehensibility, which might also refer to aural texts) of written text and their accompanying facilitating images or pictures. *Lingua facile* (Easy Language), another more neutral lexical variant, is found in several contexts. In the expression *linguaggio controllato* (Piemontese 1996), the participial adjective *controllato* refers to easy writing techniques. Finally *Linguaggio facile* seems an adequate compromise, as it merges the linguistic and non-linguistic simplification strategies that characterize this variety.

As regards Plain Language, both the English loan word *Plain Language* and the expression *semplificazione linguistica* (language simplification) are used to refer to this variety or to simplified texts in which it is not necessary to make a sharp distinction between Easy and Plain Language. The word ‘clarity’ (cf. *Linguaggio chiaro e semplice*, ‘Clear and simple language’) is also found in some contexts (Tab. 1). Interestingly, the EASIT has project opted for the use of the inter-label Easy to Understand (or E2U) (*facile da capire*) as an umbrella term to cover all forms of language comprehension enhancement, including, and also falling in between, Plain Language and Easy Language (EASIT 2019, Inclusion Europe 2009, Matamala and Orero 2019, Perego 2020a).

Easy Language	Lingua facile da leggere e da capire Linguaggio facile da leggere e da capire Linguaggio facile da leggere Lingua facile Linguaggio facile Scrittura controllata
Plain Language	Plain Language Semplificazione linguistica Linguaggio chiaro e semplice
Easy-to-Understand Language	Lingua facile da capire

Table 1: Easy Language and Plain Language in Italian: terminological differences

The use of the Italian terms *lingua* and *linguaggio*, which still co-exist in a seemingly synonymous form, is an interesting definitory aspect that has not

yet been resolved in the Easy Language vs Plain Language debate. The words *lingua* and *linguaggio* both translate as *language* in English. *Linguaggio* has a rather hyperonymic value, covering both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. It refers to the more general ability, typical of – but not restricted to – human beings, to communicate through both verbal and body language, or any unspoken variable of communication: tone of voice, paralanguage, proxemics, etc. *Lingua*, on the other hand, can only refer to a structured system that is used by a certain community (ethnic, cultural, etc.) to communicate. It is the concrete and historically determined way in which the faculty of language is manifested (e.g., Beccaria 1996). Whether this distinction is clear to non-specialists is not obvious and might be the reason why the two terms are still too often used interchangeably.

A closing terminological note describes the way Easy and Plain Language activities are referred to in Italy. Thorough research carried out with colleagues in a European project setting (EASIT 2019) generated the following four clusters of labels: creation/writing, adaptation/editing/translation, validation/revision, and quality control. When necessary, in this paper, we use the English multiword label to refer to each activity, which in Italian can be translated as *produzione/scrittura*, *adattamento/traduzione*, *validazione/revisione*, and *controllo della qualità*.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

It is difficult to define the current status of Easy Language in Italy, where sparse initiatives exist but clear legislation on the matter, or consistent use of this minimal language variety, is still lacking. Viale (2010, but see also Vellutino 2018), for instance, lists a series of key legislative milestones relating to communication accessibility and inclusion in the administrative realm, but they relate more to Plain Language than to Easy Language. The list shows that the concern for transparency in the quest for efficacy (and I would add usability; Perego 2020a) in administrative communication began to appear in formal documents and laws around the 2000s – quite late compared to other countries. However, instructions on how to apply clear writing principles to administrative texts

and laws are not contained in these documents, and Easy Language is never explicitly referred to, although appeals to clarity are made.

Regarding the legislative framework, the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted on 13th December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and ratified in Italy in 2009 by Law 18/2009, requires the ‘translation of texts and important information into Easy-to-Read and Understand forms’ (Art. 9). Even though the CRPD is binding in Italy, no national law seems to incorporate or implement this explicit requirement. However, autonomous regions, which enjoy freer legislation, tend to be more sensitive to matters regarding inclusion and to implement regulations in favour of disadvantaged target audiences. A virtuous example: on 14th July 2015, the self-governing Province of Bolzano, commonly known as South Tyrol (*Alto Adige* in Italian), in the Trentino Alto Adige Region, issued Law 7/2015, Participation and Inclusion of People with Disability (*Partecipazione e inclusione delle persone con disabilità*). The law is available in an Easy Language version, and emphasizes all forms of easified communication (*comunicazione facilitata*) and maintains that laws and other official documents that particularly concern people with disabilities must also be written in Easy Language (Chapter 9, Art. 29).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In Italy, one very active stakeholder is the National Association of Families of Persons with Intellectual and/or Relational Disabilities (*Associazione Nazionale Famiglie di Persone con Disabilità Intellettiva e/o Relazionale*), known as Anffas Nazionale (previous name Anffas Onlus). It is a major association created by parents, relatives and friends of people with intellectual and/or relational disabilities, and operates at local, regional and national levels to promote and protect human rights. It works strenuously towards the ideals of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, and social inclusion. Anffas Nazionale normally participates in most activities and projects linked to language simplification.

Other Nazionale associations cater for specific users and address Easy Language. The Association of People with Retinopathy and Low Vision (*Associazione Pro Retinopatici ed Ipovedenti*), known in Italy by the acronym APRI, mainly works for people who are sight impaired. The Golden Thread League

(*Lega del filo d'oro*) is engaged in the assistance, education, rehabilitation and reintegration into family and society of deafblind and psychosensory disabled children, young people and adults.

Substantial work related to the communication accessibility sector is being carried out in one of the five Italian autonomous regions: **Trentino Alto Adige**. This is a trilingual region (Italian/German/Ladin) with strong connections with the German-speaking countries. It has managed to capitalize on the collaboration with Germany on Easy Language matters and has succeeded in applying the German good practice to the Italian more intricate and multifaceted context. The Easy Language office *okay – l'ufficio per un linguaggio facile*<sup>7</sup>, is a branch of the private not-for-profit Lebenshilfe ONLUS Association. It operates in the self-governing Province of Bolzano and is devoted to supporting people with disabilities and their inclusion<sup>8</sup>.

The results of the EASIT project conclude this section on the current situation in Italy. The data gathered for the EASIT project offer an up-to-date snapshot of the most established and produced formats, the activities performed most often, and the fields of application of Easy and Plain Language in Italy (Perego 2020b, see also EASIT 2019, Perego 2020a)<sup>9</sup>. These data are based on an online survey designed for experts in the field (Italian sample: N = 19, 74% female, mainly adults with an age range from 51 to 60). They mostly have more than one area of expertise and many also work as trainers. Some have or come from a profession that is not related to Easy or Plain Language (e.g., teaching, journalism or writing, research, education, the cultural sector, psychology, publishing or graphic work, etc.). This suggests that their involvement with Easy or Plain Language has developed at a later stage in their lives and the

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7 okay – l'ufficio per un linguaggio facile, <https://www.lebenshilfe.it/163d1749.html>.

8 Lebenshilfe ONLUS, <https://www.lebenshilfe.it/>.

9 Overall results show that the Italian situation does not differ dramatically from the general European situation as far as the (solid and varied) educational and professional background of the experts is concerned, as well as the scant training opportunities that are offered and the limited involvement of academia in training. On the other hand, some specificities of the Italian situation do emerge, such as the dominance when E2U is concerned, both in training and in practice, and the unbalanced implementation of E2U which abounds in the area of education and overlooks other crucial areas of communication. The results of the Italian survey point to the need for more consistent and systematic training as well as more awareness-raising of communicative integration and inclusion through simplification (Perego 2020a, 2020b).

production of Easy and Plain Language content is not always their primary or full-time job. I believe that this is partially explained by the older age of Italian experts in comparison to the average European age (Perego 2020b).

In Italy, Easy Language is the most often produced modality, and only rarely do experts work with and produce both Easy and Plain Language formats. Printed content is the format that almost all the experts work with, followed by digital content, produced by half of the respondents, and audiovisual content, which is still in its infancy. The creation/writing of Easy Language is the most performed activity: approximately 70% of the respondents normally create new content. Easy Language adaptation/editing/translation and validation/revision are performed by only a few respondents. Plain Language seems to be overlooked when it comes to professionally producing content. Unfortunately, in Italian public contexts, simplified language materials are often produced by non-expert personnel (Sciumbata 2017). As for the field (EASIT 2019: 30, Perego 2020a: 81), Italian experts mainly produce educational content, and operate less frequently in the areas of public administration and justice, culture and literature, media and journalism – the latter being completely overlooked. This shows an imbalance in the creation of simplified content. The content is still mainly directed towards schools rather than the rest of social and public life, where in fact it would actually be equally crucial.

#### 4 Target groups

**Easy Language** is normally meant for users with disabilities, particularly cognitive disabilities (or learning difficulties), prelingual hearing impairment, aphasia, dementia-type illnesses, autism spectrum disorders, or multiple disabilities (Gargiulo and Arezzo 2017, IFLA 2010). Easy Language can, however, benefit both people who have severe literacy deficits and basic level language learners.

**Plain Language** is normally meant for all users accessing specialized content. Fortis (2003: 3) defines it as the language variety that manages to make information available in the simplest and most effective way, and is free of unnecessary complexity (though his definition does not delineate complexity). The author illustrates Plain Language using a metaphor and compares

it to ‘the shortest way between two points, i.e., the sender and the recipient of the message’<sup>10</sup>. The level of simplification and usability of Plain Language, however, make it also useful for people with mild forms of communication disabilities or mild illiteracy, intermediate language learners, tourists, young children, and many others. In spite of its considerable potential application for several end users, no widespread active Plain Language text practice is currently implemented in Italy.

A target group that could extensively exploit **both language varieties** is immigrants. According to recent census data (ISTAT 2020), in 2019 the number of immigrants in Italy was slightly over five million (one million more than in 2011, and approximately four million more than in 2001). Twenty-three per cent of these migrants are Rumanians, i.e., speakers of a Romance language that shares morphological and structural similarities with Italian, and the rest belongs to countries and cultures that are very distant (Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, Ukrainians, Filipinos, Indians, Bangladeshi, Egyptians, Pakistani, etc.), and might considerably benefit from accessible communication, given their severe functional illiteracy and their educational needs, especially in the area of Italian as a second language (Wagner and Kozma 2005).

As stressed for other countries, it is difficult to classify clear user groups for each language variety. The target groups are always heterogeneous in their backgrounds, literacy levels, requirements and capacities (Maaß 2020, Perego 2020b), and some groups and individuals would be more adequately addressed by more enriched forms of easy-to-understand languages, or generally enriched forms of communication that require the simultaneous use of diverse senses (Maaß 2020).

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10 Translated by the author.

## 5 Guidelines

Currently, Italy's official Easy Language guidelines are the Italian translation of the Inclusion Europe recommendations sponsored and translated by Anffas Nazionale. These guidelines, the Italian version of which is entitled *Informazioni per tutti. Linee guida europee per rendere l'informazione facile da leggere e da capire per tutti* (Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand) (Inclusion Europe 2009), are available online. They represent a major step in a country that up to now lacked rules on this subject. These guidelines do not include language-specific recommendations on how to produce Easy Italian. However, some recommendations do exist, and compiling them in the same place would certainly be beneficial for actors in this area. For an illustration of Easy Italian, see the excerpt in Appendix 1.

As far as Italian is concerned, Easy and Plain Language recommendations are often mixed or listed interchangeably. The thirty 'clear language' rules issued by Cortelazzo and Pellegrino (2002) are closer to a set of Plain Language guidelines, even though they include recommendations that would also be suitable for Easy Language content. Fortis (2003) and Sciumbata (2017, 2020) are useful reference publications that guide readers towards the acquisition of simplification strategies – but again they lean towards Plain Language: the former offers linguistic recommendations through a descriptive perspective; the latter (Sciumbata 2017) focuses on the simplification of bureaucratic language, with examples and practical language-specific tips on improving text readability for the benefit of general users. However, we still cannot talk of Easy Italian standards. What is referred to as *scrittura controllata* (controlled writing) in Piemontese (1996) is closer to the Easy Language than the Plain Language pole of the continuum. The volume authored by Gargiulo and Arezzo (2017) is another useful purveyor of recommendations, examples, and hands-on exercises.

Some of the specificities of Easy and Plain Italian can be seen by the works mentioned above. Cortelazzo and Pellegrino (2002), Fortis (2003) and Sciumbata (2017, 2020), for instance, emphasize the need to avoid or limit the subjunctive mood as well as the past and present participles: explicit forms are always preferred. They propose staying away from impersonal forms and Latin words or expressions. They also suggest avoiding the combination of the 'd'

consonant (*d eufonica*, ‘euphonic d sound’) with the Italian conjunctions *e*, ‘and’, and *o*, ‘or’ before a vowel. Accordingly, the Italian temporal expression *e ora*, ‘and now’, is considered better and more accessible than its counterpart *ed ora* employing a linking or euphonic sound. However, it appears that this rule has never been tested empirically to assess whether such a stylistic adjustment has the desired effect of making a text less taxing for a struggling reader. This lack of empirical testing of each recommendation is a general problem. If we wish to duly label what is complex and what is simple (or usable) we need established linguistic measures of complexity and reception research that involves the end users rather than recommendations based on intuition.

Double negation, which is frequent in Italian style (e.g., *non infelice*, ‘not unhappy’) should be replaced by a single word (e.g., *felice*, ‘happy’), which is more straightforward: interpreting double negation sentences correctly as equivalent to affirmative sentences is known to take longer than processing its affirmative counterpart. Such structure is acquired late by native speakers, thus posing serious cognitive load and hindering comprehension (e.g., Carpenter and Just 1975, Jou 1988). This means that negative information is psychologically more difficult to process.

We can now move to the lexical level. Given the tendency of Italian towards ‘obscure ways of expression’, most authors maintain that it is important that in Easy Italian common (e.g., *ricordare*, ‘to remember’) and concrete words (e.g., *segnali*, ‘(road) signs’) substitute formal and low-frequency (e.g., *rammentare*, ‘to recall’) or abstract (e.g., *segnaletica*, ‘signage’) items. On the same note, simple verbs (e.g., *assicurare* and *pagare*, ‘to insure against’ and ‘to pay for’) should be preferred to long and intricate circumlocutions (*provvedere alla copertura assicurativa* and *provvedere al pagamento*, ‘to provide insurance coverage’ and ‘to arrange payment of’). This also applies to nouns: *sfratto*, ‘eviction’, is better than a longer noun phrase such as *provvedimento esecutivo di rilascio*, ‘tenant removal from rental property’. Furthermore, the use of mild or indirect words or expressions to substitute those considered too harsh, blunt, unpleasant or embarrassing, is quite common – but not efficient in terms of enhanced comprehensibility. In this respect, the use of the direct verb *morire*, ‘to die’, would boost text comprehensibility more than the use of euphemistic multi-word expressions such as *passare a miglior vita*, ‘to pass away’. Figurative expressions

(*correre come un pazzo*, ‘to run like crazy’) should be avoided irrespective of their level of idiomaticity (e.g., Gargiulo and Arezzo 2017: 136–137).

Finally, a strategy used by the Easy Language office *okay – l’ufficio per un linguaggio facile* is to use a dot to break down long and morphologically complex words such as *perseguirate* (to persecute), which in Easy Italian is written *per.seguitare*.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Due to the lack of a strong tradition of Easy and Plain Language content production, it is difficult to find large amounts of accessible material in many fields. However, as illustrated in the following paragraphs, informative texts outnumber other text types, though even they remain scant.

### 6.1 Informative texts

A large proportion of the Italian informative material produced or translated into Easy Language and designed for people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities is provided by Anffas Nazionale. In spite of the diverse initiatives of its local or regional branches, the central webpage of the association includes a dedicated section called *Linguaggio facile da leggere* (Easy-to-Read Language), containing the Italian Inclusion Europe guidelines, as well as Easy Italian distance learning didactic resources for students with disabilities; various documents on healthcare, tourism, and everyday life; and important laws and conventions. Accessible video and audio files (e.g., on the right way to surf the web and use social networks, all created under the framework of the *SafeSurfing* project<sup>11</sup>) are also available along with the Easy Language video and the CRPD manual (UNGA 2006), which was translated into Easy Italian in 2011<sup>12</sup>. Recently, Easy Italian print and audiovisual coronavirus information

11 Anffas Nazionale, SafeSurfing, <http://www.anffas.net/it/progetti-e-campagne/safe-surfing/>.

12 Anffas Nazionale, Convenzione Onu e disabilità: Quale applicazione in Italia?, <http://www.anffas.net/it/news/1361/convenzione-onu-e-disabilita-qual-e-applicazione-in-italia>.

has been produced<sup>13</sup> to enhance the comprehensibility of this new phenomenon and to instruct people on how to behave to prevent the virus spreading and becoming infected.

Anffas Nazionale also contributes to the production of content for third parties. For instance, the consumer rights manual commissioned by the Consumer Movement, or tour guides to places of cultural interest<sup>14</sup> have been produced, such as that for the Trieste Museum of Natural History, for which both Easy Language and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) materials are available (Span et al. 2016)<sup>15</sup>.

A pioneering initiative has been undertaken in the self-governing Province of Bolzano, in the autonomous Region of Trentino Alto Adige: a rich, official bilingual website in Easy Italian has been designed for all citizens to easily access information<sup>16</sup>. In the same region, outstanding work is being carried out by the German *Netzwerks Leichte Sprache* and the German Centre for Easy Language Research at Hildesheim University (see chapter on Germany) and by the private association *Lebenshilfe ONLUS* through its dedicated Easy Language office *okay – l'ufficio per un linguaggio facile*, which translates and validates documents into Easy Language based on the recommendations issued by Inclusion Europe. Furthermore, *Lebenshilfe ONLUS* is currently planning to develop and offer Plain Language services along with the established Easy Language services they have been working on for some time now. The name assigned to this mode of simplification is based on the established German label (*einfache Sprache*) and will be *lingua semplice*.

The importance of language accessibility in delicate realms such as the legal realm is shown by the work of some private companies that offer translation of legal documents into Easy Italian.

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13 Anffas Nazionale, Coronavirus: 10 consigli in facile da leggere per non ammalarsi!, <http://www.superando.it/files/2020/03/coronavirus-consigli-easy-to-read.pdf>.

14 Anffas Nazionale, TURISMO E SERVIZI, <http://www.anffas.net/it/linguaggio-facile-da-leggere/documenti-facili-da-leggere/>.

15 Museo di storia naturale, Museo accessibile, <https://museostorianaturaletrieste.it/museo-accessibile/>.

16 Amministrazione Provincia Bolzano in lingua facile, <https://lingua-facile.provincia.bz.it/>.

## 6.2 Literature and Media

The literature and media fields have been overlooked in Italy, and outcomes remain scarce. Again, Anffas Nazionale plays a role in the provision of this type of content. Currently, one children's book is available on its website in Easy Italian, *L'avventura di Oliver tra i ricordi* (Oliver's adventure among memories), by Gabriella Fredduselli (2006), along with some comic strips and magazines in both Easy Language and AAC<sup>17</sup>.

A noteworthy initiative has been the first Italian Easy-to-Read monthly journal *Due parole. Mensile di facile lettura* (Two words. An Easy-to-Read monthly journal)<sup>18</sup>, issued in 1989 by the Rome University *La Sapienza*. Its first online version was launched in 2001 when the print version became financially unsustainable. The journal was designed to be the first high-level readability journal at a time when not many existed (a situation which is no different today). Never properly advertised, *Due parole* managed to spread through word of mouth and good reviews by scholars and specialists. However, its last issue was in 2006 (Piemontese 1996).

As emerged from the EASIT survey carried out in Italy (Perego 2020b), simplified content seems to be usually, though not yet extensively, produced in the **field of education**. In fact, school material for children with intellectual disabilities is produced by several school publishers. Simplified material in Italian is also provided for foreign learners of Italian. Anffas Nazionale has produced specific material in Easy Italian and in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) to support the new distance learning needs that emerged during the coronavirus outbreak in 2019<sup>19</sup>.

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 17 Anffas Nazionale, Didattica a distanza: risorse e materiali per alunni e studenti con disabilità, <http://www.anffas.net/it/linguaggio-facile-da-leggere/didattica-a-distanza-risorse-e-materiali-per-alunni-e-studenti-con-disabilita/>.

18 Due parole, mensile di facile lettura, [http://www.dueparole.it/default\\_.asp](http://www.dueparole.it/default_.asp).

19 Anffas Nazionale (n.d.), Didattica a distanza: risorse e materiali per alunni e studenti con disabilità, <http://www.anffas.net/it/linguaggio-facile-da-leggere/didattica-a-distanza-risorse-e-materiali-per-alunni-e-studenti-con-disabilita/>.

### 6.3 Other projects

**Guidelines** in Italian also represent a recent and important outcome. As mentioned earlier in the text, the EU project *Pathways 2* led to the creation of the first European standards on how to make information easy to read and understand (*Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand*, 2009). Anffas Nazionale sponsored the translation of these standards into Italian (*Informazioni per tutti. Linee guida europee per rendere l'informazione facile da leggere e da capire per tutti*, 2009). The translation process involved end users in both the actual translation and the validation process. Participation in the project enabled Anffas Nazionale to give Easy Italian real visibility for the first time, but also to start in-house training and produce Easy Italian writers, trainers and validators who actively create, translate and validate (still today) all Anffas Nazionale material.

An early but nonetheless impactful project in the field was initiated by the Italian linguist Michele Cortelazzo (Padua University), who set up a website with his team (last updated in 2010) that is fully devoted to the simplification of administrative language<sup>20</sup>. The website is called *Linguaggio amministrativo chiaro e semplice* (Clear and simple administrative language), which may either accidentally or deliberately have avoided the Italian terms used to refer to either Easy or Plain Language. The website lists 30 rules (*regole*) for writing clear and simple administrative texts, with suggestions that are meant to produce 'effective and elegant texts'<sup>21</sup> (Cortelazzo and Pellegrino 2002), thus seemingly focusing more on style than on objective or empirically based recommendations. The website also includes a corpus of administrative texts rewritten (or rather 'translated') according to the criteria of linguistic simplification and communicative effectiveness; a collection of norms relating to the efforts made for the simplification of administrative language and, more generally, for public communication, a bibliography, links to related websites, and a collection of articles.

More recent projects are those involving **inclusive tourism**, especially in the Alpine and pre-Alpine territories, by the Interreg project GATE (Granting

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20 Linguaggio amministrativo chiaro e semplice, <http://www.maldura.unipd.it/buro/>.

21 Translated by the author.

Accessible Tourism for Everyone)<sup>22</sup>, launched in 2018. This is an impressive example of how intangible culture can also be made accessible through wise use of language and effective, targeted communication.

Given the lack of a strong Italian network on the subject, it is not easy to obtain an overview of what is actually being done or even whether there is overlap. The recent University of Trieste Research project *Facilitating communication in the healthcare setting*, for instance, launched in 2020, explores the possibilities of facilitating **communication between professionals and patients** in the healthcare setting by taking into account simplification strategies in both vertical and horizontal communication, thus considering people with cognitive difficulties and people with low schooling, and patients belonging to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Russian, Romanian, etc., but also Swahili, Somali, Hamar, Arab Moroccan) in the contexts of medical co-operation in the so-called Low-Income Countries.

## 7 Education and research

The EASIT data (Perego 2020b) show that in Italy, the provided and received **training** – though scarce – mainly concerns Easy Language rather than Plain Language, although sometimes the two modalities are taught together. In terms of activities, Easy Language creation/writing is always taught, whereas Easy Language adaptation/editing/translation and validation/revision – in this order – are only occasionally tackled. Plain Language, on the other hand, is not given the same emphasis in training. In terms of formats, all Italian experts have been trained to work with printed or digital content, but not necessarily with audiovisual content. When it comes to teaching how to apply the principles of Easy and Plain Language in specific fields, the focus (and implementation) is limited to education, in which half of the Italian respondents had in fact already been trained. The fields of media and journalism, as well as culture and literature, in turn, are overlooked (Perego 2020b; a different scenario can be observed in other European countries: see EASIT 2019 and Perego 2020a).

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 22 The gate project for inclusive tourism, <https://gateproject.dolomitiunesco.info/>.

The EASIT data do not reveal where exactly training takes place. However, they show that in Italy (as well as in some other EU countries, cf. Perego 2020a, 2020b, EASIT 2019) systematic training is still needed, and is not fully or consistently established. Only approximately half of the people who work in the Italian Easy and Plain Language sectors have received training. Moreover, the training that they have received is not intensive, with the same number of respondents (approx. 40%) having received training of 10 to 30 or 30 to 60 hours, and only 20% more than 60 hours. Furthermore, the training mainly occurs outside the academic world, and takes the form of one-off workshops or in-house training, vocational courses, and even self-training sessions. Anffas Nazionale, for instance, offers training opportunities for people who wish to become experts in the production, adaptation and validation of accessible information for people with intellectual disabilities. This *ad hoc* training offered by Anffas Nazionale focuses on teaching Easy Italian techniques based on the Italian version of the Inclusion Europe (2009) guidelines, and aims to form people who can not only actively operate but also teach in the sector. End users are reserved specific training to become Easy Italian validators. Anffas Nazionale courses are currently available, and are also interactive, with trainers correcting the task and exercises of the trainees.

As far as **research** is concerned, we already mentioned that in Italy this is still limited, inconsistent and above all, not empirical. Scientific publications are scarce, and mainly pertain to Plain rather than Easy Language, or to other in-between varieties which apply different levels of simplification. Plain Italian has been studied specifically – and applied more or less successfully – in the sector of bureaucratic, institutional and administrative (vs regular) language, with various authors, mainly from the field of Italian linguistics, working towards what they call ‘clear style’ (e.g., Cortelazzo and Pellegrino 2002, Fioritto 1997, 2009, Lubello 2016, Lucarelli 2001, Vellutino 2018, Viale 2008). The need to research (or rather, suggest) ways to simplify the style of institutional texts is linked to their ‘obscure’ nature (e.g., Giunta 2017). The language of the documents of public administration and courts is in fact often referred to in Italian as *legalese* and *politichese* (e.g., Dardano 1985), which are clearly derogatory terms for the language of politics and legal matters.

The concern for **readability**<sup>23</sup> (in Italian *leggibilità*, Perego 2020a: 19) has produced noteworthy research projects and outcomes. The development of language-specific measures and software that help determine the level of **usability** of a given text should be highlighted. The Gulpease index (De Mauro 1997, Lucisano and Piemontese 1988, Mastidoro and Amizzoni 1993, Piemontese 1996), for instance, is a readability index used to assess how complex, readable and usable an Italian text is. It takes into account the length of a word in characters rather than syllables, which has proven to be more reliable for assessing the readability of Italian texts. It ranges from 0 (lowest readability) to 100 (maximum readability) (Tonelli et al. 2012). The Gulpease index can be calculated using the automatic fee-based online service *Corrige!*<sup>24</sup> to help evaluate the textual quality of documents and verify their readability. The fee-based software READ-IT is a similar advanced readability assessment tool which combines traditional raw text features with lexical, morpho-syntactic and syntactic information (Dell'Orletta et al. 2011). READ-IT was developed at the *ItaliaNLP Lab* at the *Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale 'Antonio Zampolli'* (ILC-CNR)<sup>25</sup>, which brings together scholars from computational linguistics, computer science and linguistics, to work on developing resources and algorithms for processing and understanding human languages, paying particular attention to the Italian language.

## 8 Future perspectives

In Italy, the implementation of Easy and Plain Language is still irregular and still in progress. This means many challenges are still to be faced. The lack of a mono-referential expression for the two language varieties is one of the gaps that needs filling, and an indication that the field is still new and flexible, in need of being established. The status of Easy Language in Italy is another blurred issue: in spite of growing references to the need for clear communica-

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 23 The degree to which printed information is unambiguous on the basis of the language fluency of the reader, the message communicated, and the quantity and the quality of the delivered text.

24 Corrige, [www.corrige.it](http://www.corrige.it).

25 ItaliaNLP Lab, <http://www.italianlp.it/>.

tion in several types of documents (particularly administrative documents), Easy Language does not seem to enjoy a firm status in the country, though at least some autonomous regions give it the deserved emphasis. The lack of its consistent implementation confirms this situation. This might be one of the reasons why Italy is still lacking unique language-specific official and widespread guidelines – a considerable challenge to meet in the near future – for the benefit of experts in the field and end users. It is currently possible to retrieve language-specific instructions in diverse publications, but a unique reference is the desired direction. In this respect, the involvement of academia is needed as much as a larger, stronger and more collaborative national network, enabling researchers and stakeholders to know what is being done, to share knowledge and competences, to capitalize on previous outcomes, to exploit cross-fertilization opportunities and to avoid duplicating work, effort, and results.

Increased participation of academia in research and training is also envisaged in this country where language is still perceived as too ‘obscure’ to be inclusive. The contexts in which Easy and Plain Language are taught and the type of training experts receive in fact show that academia in Italy is currently not yet ready (or willing?) to offer fully-fledged formation in this important and emerging field, where structured curricula would make great a difference and benefit all citizens in the long run.

In addition, the sensibilization of authorities and citizens should also be enhanced. This could be done either directly or indirectly, via lobbying and implementing inclusive models of communication, enhancing the status of Easy and Plain Language, and using them in a growing number of contexts. In this respect, the work of Anffas Nazionale and other stakeholders in the sector is paramount. It should be sustained and disseminated more widely. The work of the EASIT project is certainly stirring waters in at least the audiovisual sector, and could potentially also have a wide impact on other sectors. Because Easy-to-Understand Language is still not implemented systematically in the media or journalism, nor in the culture and literature sectors in Italy, a joint effort could make major, much needed changes.

The ultimate, remarkable area of interest that deserves research in the Italian, but also wider context, is the empirical study of text complexity and usability in relation to Easy and Plain Language. Although readability measures

are being taken into use, systematic, linguistic and cognitive research on the text parameters that determine complexity is still lacking. We strongly believe this could dramatically change the views on, and the applications of, inclusive communication.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Italian with an English back-translation.

Standard Italian	Easy Italian
<p>STALKING</p> <p>Indica il comportamento controllante messo in atto dal persecutore nei confronti della vittima da cui è stato rifiutato (prevalentemente è l'ex partner). Spesso le condotte dello stalker sono subdole, volte a molestare la vittima e a porla in uno stato di soggezione, con l'intento di compromettere la sua serenità, farla sentire braccata, comunque non libera.</p> <p>Fonte: Opuscolo dell'associazione "Donne contro la violenza – Frauen gegen Gewalt"   Source: Brochure from the association "Women against violence – Frauen gegen Gewalt"</p> <p>(<a href="https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/opuscolo_RavonA.pdf">https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/opuscolo_RavonA.pdf</a>)</p>	<p>STALKING</p> <p>Stalking è una parola inglese e significa: per-seguitare.</p> <p>Un uomo ti per-seguita per esempio quando:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ti segue tutto il tempo.</li> <li>• Ti aspetta quando esci da casa o dal lavoro.</li> <li>• Ti manda tutto il tempo messaggi o email.</li> <li>• O ti telefona tutto il tempo.</li> </ul> <p>E tu non lo vuoi.</p> <p>Fonte: traduzione di <i>okay – l'ufficio per un linguaggio facile</i>   Source: translation by <i>okay – the easy language office</i></p> <p>(<a href="https://www.donnecontrolaviolenza.org/contents/files/Per_il_mio_bene.pdf">https://www.donnecontrolaviolenza.org/contents/files/Per_il_mio_bene.pdf</a>)</p>
<p>[STALKING</p> <p>This is controlling behavior by a persecutor towards the victim by whom they were rejected (mostly it is an ex-partner). The stalker's behaviors are often subtle, aimed to harass the victim and put them in a state of subjection, with the intent of compromising their peace of mind, making them feel cornered, basically not free.]</p>	<p>[STALKING</p> <p>Stalking is an English word and it means to persecute.</p> <p>A man is stalking you, for example, when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He follows you all the time.</li> <li>• He waits for you when you get out of your house or from work.</li> <li>• He sends you text messages or emails all the time.</li> <li>• He phones you all the time.</li> </ul> <p>And you do not want him to.]</p>

## Easy Language in Latvia

### 1 Introduction

Latvia, or the official Republic of Latvia, is a Baltic region country in Northern Europe. Its capital is Riga. The Latvian State was founded in 1918 and maintained its independence until the Second World War. In 1944, Latvia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. Latvia regained its national independence in 1991, at which time the Latvian language became the only official language in Latvia. In 2004, Latvia became a member of the European Union. Since then, Latvian has been one of the 24 official languages of the European Union.

According to data from the Central Statistical Bureau, at the end of 2020, Latvia had 1 896 000 inhabitants. The population has historically been multinational: 10 different nationalities are officially registered in Latvia. The indigenous peoples of Latvia are Latvians, and the second largest population group are Russians, at 25.2%. Together with several representatives of other nationalities (Ukrainians, Belarusians, etc.), they form the Russian-speaking community of Latvia. Most Russian-speaking residents entered Latvia during the Soviet occupation, and many of them have not fully integrated or learned the Latvian language.

Historically, some of Latvia's population moved to live outside the country. Since the end of the 19th century, more than 370 000 Latvians have left Latvia in several waves of emigration, and they currently form the Latvian diaspora abroad. The largest Latvian diaspora – about 120 000 people – live in Britain.

Latvian, one of Europe's most ancient languages, rooted in Sanskrit and with an Indo-European past, shares a common bond with only Lithuanian. These two languages form a separate branch of the whole European language classification. For Latvian to have survived, despite invasions by different na-

tions from near and far, is nothing short of astounding. Latvia's counties have different dialects, the most widely used of which is the Latgalian dialect, spoken in the Eastern part of the country.

A large part of the country's population is also fluent in Russian. During Soviet Union times the Russian language was imposed as the official language, thus all official documents were in Russian. The effects of this language, as well as the impact of the long years of Soviet occupation, are still felt. Part of the country's population poorly understand the Latvian language. Russian becoming the second official language has been discussed on several occasions, but the preservation and development of the Latvian language has been recognized as a way of strengthening the sense of belonging to the national cultural area.

The large Latvian diaspora abroad and the considerable proportion of the country's population with poor Latvian language skills constitute an important group alongside other traditional target groups of Easy Language, and accordingly create opportunities for its future development.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The idea of Easy Language came to Latvia from Sweden in the second half of the 1990s, when representatives of the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability organisations *Sustento*, made a study visit to Stockholm to visit various organizations, including the Easy Language Centre. The idea of introducing Easy Language in Latvia was born immediately, in the first meeting with the Easy Language Centre in Sweden, and so co-operation with the Swedish Easy Language Centre (*Centrum för lättläst*, see chapter on Sweden) began. This work was completed in 2014, after which additional resources were sought for materials.

The first book published in Easy Language was *Milda dzīvos Rīgā* (Milda will live in Riga), written by Britt Nedestam and Dace Uzore (1999). The original text and illustrations of the Latvian girl Milda, who begins her independent life, was prepared in co-operation with the day care centre for people with intellectual disabilities.

A new organization, the **Easy Language Agency** (*Vieglās Valodas aģentūra*), was founded in 2000. It has been the only organization in the country that is

constantly and resolutely active in the field of Easy Language for different target groups. Through the agency's work, Easy Language is becoming increasingly familiar and is now used by many different organizations. Easy Language has developed in Latvia in several different ways.

Initially, the Easy Language Agency relied solely on the experience gained in Sweden and only produced materials for people with intellectual disabilities. The agency consisted of teachers from special education institutions, who jointly produced various materials and organized other activities. The activeness of the Easy Language Agency led to an increased national interest in Easy Language, particularly in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities.

In 2001, for the first time in Latvia's history, following the initiative of the Easy Language Agency, all municipal election materials were prepared in Easy Language, including informative posters and a booklet *Kā vēlēti?* (Do you know how to vote?).

In the mid-2000s, several Easy Language publications were issued by the Gaismas School (*Gaismas skola*) and the Boarding School for Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf Children of Valmiera (now the *Gaujaskrastu skola*), as well as by the Pelču Special Boarding School-Development Centre (*Viduskurzemes pamatskola – attīstības centrs*). During this time, some teaching materials were also published, for example, *Ģeogrāfija. Vieglā valodā* (Geography in Easy Language, Āboliņa 2002).

In 2009–2010, the World Association of Free Latvians (PBLA) published different materials for teaching and learning the Latvian language. The publications in this area were merely an attempt to demonstrate the need for Easy Language; the opportunities for its use have not yet been fully determined.

In 2014, the Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability organizations SUSTENTO participated in the EU project Tourist Guides for People with Intellectual & Learning Difficulties in Europe. As part of this project, tourism guides from five countries, including Latvia, acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to fully involve people with intellectual development disabilities or learning difficulties in tourism activities. The guides learned to use Easy Language, both verbally and in writing. Some of them said that the knowledge of Easy Language helped their everyday work. Nevertheless, not many specific tourist groups actually use Easy Language for guiding tourists. In 2016, the

Zelda resource centre for people with psychosocial disabilities carried out a project to train different service providers to use Easy Language in communication and when preparing information.

In 2015–2017, most of Latvia's ministries created an 'easy-to-read' (*Viegli lasīt*) homepage section, for which the Easy Language Agency prepared texts in Plain Language. Despite the effort to include the Easy Language section on the websites, its information was limited to a brief description of the ministry's activities and contact information. Each ministry made this section at its own discretion, and no common approach to these issues was developed at the public administration level.

For a long time, the activities of many organizations, including the Easy Language Agency, were limited due to a lack of national interest and public awareness. However, by 2019, interest in the need for Easy Language had increased, possibly due to the new EU legislation on accessibility to public websites. This gave rise to the restoration of the Easy Language Agency and its activities.

### 3 Current situation

Easy Language is becoming increasingly recognizable in society, facilitated by the need to use it on the official websites of public administration institutions. The circle of Easy Language users is expanding, and the demand for Easy Language is growing accordingly. Although national legislation does not include a strict requirement to use Easy Language as a form of communication, thanks to the active involvement of various stakeholders, the use of Easy Language is increasing.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Latvia uses Easy Language definitions from various other languages such as Swedish and English, as well as those used by other organizations such as Inclusion Europe and IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations). Latvia has yet to adopt an official definition of the Easy Language (*vieglā*

*valoda*) that was developed in Latvia at the end of the 1990s and is still in use today. In Latvia, the most commonly used definitions are based on IFLA 1997:

1. Easy Language is a simplification of linguistic text that makes it easier to read, but not easier to understand the content.
2. Easy Language is a simplification of text, content, and form that makes it easy to read and to see content.

The work of the Easy Language Agency is based more on the second definition, since it is considered that not only the creation of text should be in line with the basic principles of Easy Language, but also the structure and design of the text.

Easy Language is divided into three levels in accordance with Swedish practice: Level 1 is the simplest and Level 3 is the most complex. Some countries also have a fourth level which in English translates into Plain Language, but to date, Latvia has no corresponding level. Due to the lack of a stable, commonly understood term in Latvian, a number of different terms are used, for example, *vienkāršā valoda* (plain language), *atvieglotā valoda* (relieved language).

It is still difficult to draw a strict line between Easy and Plain Language, mainly because there are no commonly accepted definitions of the differences between them. Unfortunately, this leads the individuals who are responsible for the publication of information to do what they believe to be best, inevitably resulting in increased use of Plain Language instead of Easy Language. This makes the information more difficult to read, through no fault of the writer.

### 3.2 Societal and legal contexts

In 1999, when Easy Language was new in Latvia, the government developed the concept of 'Equal Opportunities for All' (*Vienlīdzīgas iespējas visiem*) to enable the inclusion of people with disabilities in society, and for the first time, it acknowledged the need for Easy Language at a national level. The concept included publishing Easy Language editions in Latvia in a similar way to that in Sweden. Different kinds of texts were planned, containing, for example, information on society and everyday life, fiction, and news.

Unfortunately, the programme never passed the official recommendation stage and the state institutions responsible for its implementation, i.e., the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Science, showed no particular activity in this area.

There is still no legislation in Latvia to determine the need for the use of Easy Language. The only official regulation is based on the Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and on the accessibility to websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. Based on this, the website of Latvia State institutions should also include the heading *Viegli lasīt* 'Easy to Read'. However, the rules do not state what information the 'Easy to Read' section should include and what level of Easy Language should be used. This decision is left to the authorities. In practice, this means mainly contact information and a brief description of the work of the institution, rather than up-to-date information.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Although there is no consistent policy on the use of Easy Language in Latvia, different stakeholders recurrently engage in working with one of the Easy Language audiences.

The public authorities periodically show an interest in Easy Language. **The Ministry of Education and Science** has prepared some training tools for special school children with intellectual disabilities. This result does not necessarily correspond to the basic principles of Easy Language but at least gives teachers something they can use in their work. **The Ministry of Welfare** has developed accessibility guidelines which also include a section on the accessibility of information. This section has a part on Easy Language as one of the tools for accessing information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the **Ministry of Health** prepared information on rules for emergencies in Easy Language. This information was supported by the World Health Organization (WHO). The **Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs** are interested in providing information that is accessible to migrants.

One of the most interested bodies in recent years, which has encouraged a number of co-operation projects with the Easy Language Agency, is the **Lat-**

**vian Language Agency.** The projects concern the use of Easy Language for the Latvian diaspora and minority students. They offer a training programme and regularly provide teacher training in the use of basic Easy Language principles to improve the perception of learning materials. A video about Easy Language has also been created for teachers, and the methodology for learning basic Easy Language principles is available online for teachers to use in their everyday work. **The University of Latvia** is also interested in the development of Easy Language. In 2020, it initiated an Erasmus+ project for further developing Easy Language in Latvia.

**The Latvian capital city, Riga City Council** has recently shown an interest in preparing information in Easy Language. Easy Language is to become part of their accessibility strategy. Training is arranged for the staff of the City Council's one-stop agencies to improve their communication with clients.

Two higher education institutes in Latvia work in the field of Easy Language in special pedagogy. **The Liepajas University of Pedagogy** (*Liepājas Pedagoģijas universitāte*) has a special education faculty from the Soviet times. They still have students on courses of special education. These students together, with their teachers, prepare texts for special education purposes. They work in close co-operation with the *Liepajas Livupes* primary school for children with intellectual disabilities. Many teaching materials are created for children with severe intellectual disabilities. In another higher education institute, the **Rezekne Academy of Technologies** (*Rēzeknes Tehnoloģiju akadēmija*), students on both levels – bachelor's and master's degrees – complete a special training course on alternative communication of which Easy Language is a part.

**Non-governmental organizations** play the most important role in the development of Easy Language in Latvia. Easy Language materials, books, training courses, and other activities have been funded by different projects in co-operation with different national partners, focusing on the accessibility of information. Most commonly, these partners are organizations that work with one or more of the Easy Language target groups. The day care centre for people with intellectual disabilities, **Saule**, was one of the first to start using Inclusion Europe guidelines in Latvia. Inclusion Europe also arranged Easy Language training for social workers. At the moment, Easy Language is only used inside

the day care centre as a tool to communicate with clients. In some projects, different non-governmental organizations have promoted Easy Language.

The resource centre for people with mental disabilities, **Zelda** (*Resursu centrs cilvēkiem ar garīgiem traucējumiem Zelda*), regularly works with the staff of the Municipal Police by providing training on communication with people with mental disabilities, of which part is Easy Language theory and practice. The non-governmental organization **Papardes zieds** (*Biedrība Papardes zieds*) works with issues of sexual and reproductive health prepares information on sex-related issues for students with intellectual disabilities.

The **Easy Language Agency** (*Vieglās Valodas aģentūra*) is the only non-governmental organization that does not represent any particular group but that has set itself the goal of promoting the development of Easy Language in Latvia to ensure that information is accessible to everyone.

### 3.4 General attitude

As the use of Easy Language in Latvia has no systematic approach, most commonly, it is occasionally used in different projects that include the preparation of information in Easy Language or the training of employees or other target groups. Professionals, i.e., teachers, social workers in day care centres and some ministry officials who work with target groups have only a partial understanding of Easy Language and do not develop a wider vision of its use or its benefits for society.

For a long time, the most important challenge in Latvia was the lack of guidelines tailored to the specific features of Latvian. This hampered a common understanding of the conformity or non-compliance of text with Easy Language requirements. A huge challenge is the lack of public awareness of the need for Easy Language and the importance of promoting an accessible information idea. Part of the public is in denial of an audience with perceptual disorders because it considers their inability to capture information their own problem which does not require seeking a solution as a society.

In general, the lack of understanding and lack of interest of the state and society has led to fragmented, unsystematic and unco-ordinated activities in the field of Easy Language. For example, information on state and local au-

thorities' and institutions' websites is legally required to be in Easy Language, but there is no common understanding of how to do this. This often results in not only an incomplete but sometimes a totally non-functional publication, which in the worst case leads to discrediting Easy Language.

Therefore, building a common understanding and methodology is a major challenge and the objectives can only be achieved through the co-operation of all stakeholders. Governmental influence is of paramount importance for both the development of a single policy on access to information and the provision of the necessary financial resources.

#### 4 Target groups

In the early 2000s, when Easy Language arrived in Latvia, people with different kinds of disabilities were generally considered the target group – the deaf, people with intellectual disabilities, etc. At the moment, the Easy Language Agency, as the only organization in the country that promotes Easy Language, sees a much wider audience for Easy Language, including people with disabilities due to different causes, but also people without disabilities.

Governmental institutions use increasingly complex language to avoid possible accusations of providing incomplete, ambiguous information. Modern society on the whole is less and less willing to read a complex text to understand the idea it contains. Therefore, Easy Language will become increasingly necessary not only in specific target groups, among which its need is determined by objective preconditions, but also for a much wider audience, which is simply not ready to perceive complex information. However, Easy Language is still primarily used in Latvia for only certain target groups.

Currently, the first and most important target group of Easy Language is **people with intellectual disabilities**. According to the statistics of Latvia, around 16 000 people with intellectual disabilities currently live in the country. Some of these stay at home and visit day care centres but many are in institutions. The exact number of **people with dyslexia** in Latvia is unknown but may be about 5% of the population. Unfortunately, not enough attention is paid to

the needs of this group, many of which are students placed in special schools, whose education is poor and inefficient.

**Deaf people** are a very specific target group of Easy Language in Latvian. Those with a prelingual hearing impairment have very poor language and need Easy Language for reading, but many claim to need only sign language. Schools for children with hearing impairments still use Easy Language to prepare teaching materials. Statistics show that about 15% of people have different levels of hearing impairments in Latvia.

In addition to the groups already mentioned are people with psychosocial disabilities, elderly people with cognitive disabilities, diaspora, people for whom Latvian language is not their mother tongue, and people with brain injuries or who have suffered a stroke. All of these may benefit from the Easy Language system.

A sensitive issue is the use of Easy Language without compromising human self-esteem. Some Easy Language audiences, such as deaf people or seniors, are keenly receptive to texts in Easy Language, but the general public attitude is that they are less valuable to society because they use Easy Language. Literary translations into Easy Language face a similar problem – part of society sees them as low-value, literally discrediting publications.

## 5 Guidelines

Previously, Latvia had no specific Easy Language guidelines of its own. Their development began in late 2020 in co-operation with the University of Latvia, Vilnius University and three non-government organizations – the Easy Language Agency (*Vieglās valodas aģentūra*), the Information Collection and Dissemination Centre (*VšĮ Informacijos kaupimo ir sklaidos centras*) in Lithuania, and the Risa Institute, Centre for General, Functional and Cultural Literacy (*Zavod RISA, Center za splosno, funkcionalno in kulturno Opismenjevanje*) in Slovenia. Until the development of these guidelines, Easy Language was used in Latvia on the basis of the Swedish guidelines. The *Vieglās valodas vadlīnijas* (Easy Language guidelines) were translated into Latvian by the Easy Language Agency but were not officially published.

The current Easy Language Guidelines divide the basic principles of easy language into six different categories: text formatting, morphology, lexicology, syntax, text design, and illustrations in Easy Language texts. Each of these categories includes both the well-known basic principles of easy language accepted elsewhere in the world and recommendations appropriate for the specifics of the Latvian language. In Latvian, for example, the meaning of verbs changes according to prefixes. The same verb with three different prefixes results in three words of different meanings. Therefore, the need for the use of the prefix should be carefully considered. Latvian also tends to use a great deal of auxiliary sentences, separating them with commas and sometimes creating long cascades of auxiliary sentences. This complicates the perception of the text, because it is not clear which auxiliary sentence refers to which word and the basic idea of the sentence is lost. For an illustration of the Latvian guidelines, see Appendix 1.

The *Towards adult education for people with intellectual disabilities*, carried out in the 2007–2009 project by Inclusion Europe with the support of the European Union’s Lifelong Learning Programme, was important for Latvia. The Latvian partner organization *Saule*, the day care centre for people with intellectual disabilities, first adapted the guidelines for the use of Easy Language in adult education for people with intellectual disabilities.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Latvia does not have many publications in Easy Language and most of those that exist were published in the first half of the 2000s. There are several reasons for this. During this time, the Easy Language Agency was actively supported by funding from Sweden. In addition, other financial resources were relatively easily available, as Latvia had not yet joined the European Union. However, later, the lack of funding, as well as the poorer capacity of the Easy Language Agency, significantly reduced the number of editions. Only a few materials were adapted on the different websites. An available source of current news in Easy Language is a daily radio news programme that summarizes the most important information of the day in a small overview. Since 2019 however, the

Easy Language Agency has resumed its activities more actively and has already produced visible results with several national and international projects, as well as its involvement in international activities in this field.

## 6.1 Media

As national legislation does not state that Easy Language must be used to ensure access to information, and due to a lack of funding for this type of project, Latvia has not developed any media in Easy Language.

In 2001, the Easy Language Agency published a **newspaper** in Easy Language, *Spārni* (Wings), which compiled social information. The newspaper was part of a small project and had only six editions. In 2016, in co-operation with the Latvian State Radio and Easy Language Agency, **radio news** in Easy Language was also launched. The idea was taken from a similar broadcast in Finland (see chapter on Finland), and experts from the Easy Language Agency trained radio journalists in Easy Language on several occasions. The news is read once a day and summarizes the most significant events of the day. The same messages can also be read on the lsm.lv social media portal.

## 6.2 Literature

Latvia does not have many Easy Language literature publications. Any that do exist are published as part of specific projects. In the early 2000s, the Easy Language Agency launched the Latvian Classics Library series in Easy Language. Unfortunately, funding was only available for two books – *Noveles* (Anča et al. 2004a) and *Pasakas* (Anča et al. 2003). A colouring book for children was produced that explained the meanings of Latvian sayings – *Mana krāsojamā parunu grāmata* (Anča et al. 2004b). The fairy tale *Rūdis* (Sunda et al. n.d.), a story about troll with an intellectual disability was also translated from Swedish.

Although several works of Latvian literature classics have been translated into Easy Language and adapted to a specific audience, most frequently for pupils of special schools, none are available as a general release publication (e.g., fairy tales about flowers written by famous Latvian author Anna Sakse – *Pasakas par ziediem*, n.d.). They are only available online and for work with

pupils at each particular school. Several books are available for children among the diaspora, to assist in language learning: *Roku rokā* (Cīrule et al. 2001), Easy and Understandable Latvian Grammar, Latvian Language Book 2, etc.

### 6.3 Informative texts

In the first half of the 2000s, the Easy Language Agency also issued information booklets on various topics such as banking, employment, and sexuality, as a part of several projects. For instance, *Banka* (Bank), *Kā atrast darbu* (How to find a job), *Pazīsti savu ķermeni!* (Get to know your body!), *Ieva un Aleksis* (Ieva and Alex), *Ieva* (Ieva), *Aleksis* (Alex), *Cilvēks kas strādā* (A person who works), *Kas ir pašvaldība* (What is a municipality?).

Several translations of policy documents have emerged in recent years, for example, the Easy Language Agency translated information from the UN on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Academic Information Centre translated information on the functioning of the National Contact Point for the purposes of their website.

### 6.4 Other projects

The Easy Language Agency, as a partner of the University of Latvia, participates in the **Promoting the use of easy language for social inclusion** Erasmus+ project. The project is carried out together with colleagues from Lithuania and Slovenia and will run until autumn 2022. Its overarching goal is to improve linguistic and communicative inclusion. It directly targets two big groups: potential Easy language translators and writers, who are responsible for creating information for people with permanent or temporarily limited reading proficiency. The project has several activities.

A comparative study has been conducted of the project countries' situations in terms of the **acceptance of Easy language** by people with permanently or temporarily limited reading proficiency, and Easy language writers, translators and researchers on the one hand, and the acceptance of Easy language by society at large on the other. The project aims to comparatively study the

situation in the selected countries over the span of two years in order to accurately measure results.

A comparative study of **Easy language guidelines** has also been conducted in Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia. It created the grounds for the analysis of core shared and language-independent aspects for forming the basis of common European training contents. The training opportunities for Easy language translators in the selected countries were compared and further developed as an online course. This gives grounds for exploring the opportunities for a future professional certification for Easy language translators to enhance recognition of their roles and their career profile.

Multi-language **dictionaries of synonyms** have been developed which contain recommended words, complemented by lists of semantic primes, and Easy Language materials that might be repurposed in different training situations. The project develops graded readers, Easy Language level descriptors and performance standards.

The Latvian Ministry of Education and Science is currently implementing an unprecedented project in Latvia in the **field of educational resources**. It involves the adaptation of three-level digital learning resources to students in grades 7–9. The adaptation of Level 1 teaching materials is intended for children with severe intellectual disabilities and is carried out by the Easy Language laboratory at the University of Liepaja, Faculty of Pedagogy & Social Work. The adaptation of Level 2 teaching materials is intended for children with moderate intellectual disabilities and is prepared by the Easy Language Laboratory of the Rezekne Academy of Technology. The Easy Language Agency is preparing the adaptation of teaching materials for pupils without intellectual disabilities but with significant perceptual disorders.

## 7 Education and research

In Latvia, the Easy Language Agency provides **practical seminars** (8–32 academic hours) on the possibilities for using Easy Language and the basic principles of adaptation and preparation of texts. The seminar programme includes a short introduction to Easy Language and its history in Europe, and information

on different target groups and their different needs. It also covers the rules of preparing and adapting Easy language texts according to the needs of different audiences. Practical text adaptation training is provided for participants to develop their skills and to teach them to use theoretical knowledge in practice. 'Easy Language as an aid to teachers in creating an inclusive learning environment and ensuring the availability of learning content' (*Vieglā valoda kā palīgīdzeklis pedagogiem iekļaujošas mācību vides veidošanā un mācību satura pieejamības nodrošināšanā*) is a new professional competence development training programme developed especially for teachers. Its aim is the adaptation of teaching materials.

The Easy Language Agency operates **training courses** for different groups in society, including social workers, public relation specialists, educators, and local government employees, whose work focuses on informing the public and serving customers. Participants also include employees of various institutions such as the Welfare Ministry, the State Revenue Service, Riga City Council, and Latvian radio. These courses take place within the framework of various other projects, as well as through the funding of companies interested in training themselves.

No Latvian universities specialize in the field of Easy Language, which unfortunately means limited academic research on and no higher education in the language. Although various aspects of its use have been studied by students from different universities in their bachelor's and master's degrees, the main work has been in radio news and the use of Easy Language as an aid for the integration of immigrants and refugees, as well as its use for children with intellectual disabilities.

## 8 Future perspectives

Further development of Easy Language could take a number of important directions. First, national legislation should be designed to set the standards and uses of Easy Language in different areas, not only on the websites of national and local authorities. Second, a single strategy should be developed that includes communication between public authorities and customers (written

and verbal) and training of service providers. Third, Easy Language should be seen as a communication tool not only for people with disabilities but for a much wider audience, thereby reducing the stigma created by Easy Language.

Discussion with the Latvian Parliament to develop clear and understandable legislation on royalties has begun. Work has also started on developing legislation on using Easy Language in public places.

An academic base for Easy Language should be established, involving different universities representing specialist subjects such as linguistics, psychology and pedagogy. At the moment, some of the people involved in working on Easy Language issues are students, and hopefully this will lead to the beginning of an academic network in this field. The University of Latvia is already involved in the project and we hope that other Latvian Universities will be interested in following their example. A methodological basis should be established for the creation and assessment of the compatibility of Easy Language texts at different levels. Theoretical knowledge and best practices of other languages could be part of this basis, but it is important not to neglect the specific characteristics of the Latvian language. In co-operation with the Latvian Language Agency, an Easy Language methodology has already been developed for teachers. The next steps are to develop further methodologies for other professional groups who currently work with our target groups.

We still need to create a strong network of professionals in the field of Easy Language. Therefore, different training programmes should be developed to provide Easy Language training for specialists who are capable and ready to adapt information according to the needs of each particular audience type. Currently we have one national media (Latvia Radio) in Latvia which provides a short news programme every day. To improve the situation, a modern national media policy should be developed which considers Easy Language an integral part of the provision of information. The library for blind people in Riga is the only one that provides accessible information for different audiences, and they also have some material available in Easy Language. To make Easy Language materials accessible to everyone in Latvia, a national network of libraries should be built. This would ensure that Easy Language editions are available to everyone, regardless of their place in life.

Although Easy Language is a necessity in our schools and for other target groups, still very few literary works have been translated into Easy Language. Therefore, in co-operation with the Ministry of Culture of Latvia, work has begun on the creation of the Latvian classical library. This would provide a selection of works from the most prominent Latvian authors for translation. In addition to this, one of the most outstanding modern Latvian writers, Nora Ikstena, has agreed to allow her work *Mātes piens* (Mother's Milk, 2015) to be translated into Easy Language, making her an Easy Language ambassador. This will help reduce the stigma associated with the use of Easy Language.

The greatest challenge in the future will be ensuring that the citizens of Latvia understand the importance of Easy Language in ensuring that any person who needs information is able to receive it.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Latvian.

Standard Latvian	Easy Latvian
<p>Var palīdzēt e-asistents E-asistents palīdz cilvēkiem, kuriem ir grūtības pieteikt nepieciešamos pakalpojumus elektroniski. Šo pakalpojumu var saņemt sev tuvākajā Valsts un pašvaldību vienoto klientu apkalpošanas centrā, ierodoties personīgi un uzrādot pasi vai ID karti. Darbinieks izdrukās un palīdzēs aizpildīt pilnvaru, uz kuras pamata pieteiks elektronisko pakalpojumu. Ar e-asistenta palīdzību var pieteikt pabalstus VSAA, piemēram, slimības, bezdarbnieka vai invaliditātes pabalstu u.c. E-asistenta pakalpojums ir bez maksas. <a href="https://www.sustento.lv/var-palidzet-e-asistents/">https://www.sustento.lv/var-palidzet-e-asistents/</a></p>	<p>Latvijā daudzus pakalpojumus var saņemt elektroniski. Tam ir vajadzīgs internets. Dažiem cilvēkiem internetu lietot var būt sarežģīti. Tāpēc Valsts un pašvaldību klientu apkalpošanas centros strādā e-asistenti. Viņi var palīdzēt saņemt elektroniskos pakalpojumus ikvienam. Jāatrod sev tuvākais apkalpošanas centrs. Pie e-asistenta jānāk ar savu pasi vai ID karti. E-asistents izdrukās pilnvaru. Viņš to var palīdzēt aizpildīt. Uz pilnvaras pamata e-asistents piesaka vajadzīgo elektronisko pakalpojumu. Tā var pieteikt slimības vai invaliditātes pabalstu. Var izmantot arī citus elektroniskos pakalpojumus. E-asistenta pakalpojums ir bez maksas.</p>

<p>[The e-assistant helps people who have difficulties applying for necessary services electronically. This service can be obtained at the nearest State and local government customer service centre by visiting in person and presenting a pass or ID card. The employee will print and help you fill in the power of attorney on the basis of which the electronic service will be submitted. With the help of an e-assistant, you can apply for benefits to The State Social Insurance Agency: sickness, unemployment or invalidity benefits, etc. The e-assistant service is free of charge.]</p>	<p>[Many services can be electronic in Latvia. You need the internet. Some people may find it difficult to use the internet. Therefore e-assistants work in the State and local government customer service centres. Find your nearest service centre. Come to the e-assistant with your pass or ID card. The e-assistant will print the power of attorney and help you fill it. The power of attorney lets the e-assistant apply for the electronic service you need. You can apply for sickness or disability benefits, etc. E-assistant service is free.]</p>
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## Easy Language in Lithuania

### 1 Introduction

Lithuania has a population of 2.8 million. The official language in the country is Lithuanian, and the other main languages are Russian and Polish. Lithuanians make up about 80% of the population of Lithuania. Lithuanian is also spoken by the autochthon Lithuanian populations in some border areas of Poland and Belarus, and by numerous Lithuanian expatriates in other countries (Subačius 2002: 3). This means that more than three million people consider Lithuanian their mother tongue.

The Lithuanian language, like the other Baltic languages, belongs to the Indo-European language family, and seems to have changed more slowly than other Indo-European languages, as the contemporary forms of these languages have features similar to those of such ancient languages as Sanskrit, Greek and Latin (Schmalstieg 1982). However, the late development of standard Lithuanian offers certain advantages to learners of the language. Even native speakers believe that pronunciation is almost entirely consistent with spelling: that is, that the words are pronounced exactly as they are spelled. One letter usually corresponds to one sound (Subačius 2002: 6).

In Lithuanian, verbs are conjugated according to person, number, tense, aspect, voice, etc. The verb changes in accordance with the person it is referring to; for example, *aš einu* 'I go', but *ji eina* 'she goes', and the number of subjects: *aš einu* 'I go', but *mes einame* 'we go'. The tenses in Lithuanian are the present, past, past frequentative, and future tenses. Aspect connects the Lithuanian verb to the flow of time, for example, *tu eidavai* 'you used to go' and *tu ėjai* 'you went', both relate to the past, but the former is frequentative. Voice indicates the passive or active actor; for example, *aš matau* 'I see' and *aš esu matomas* 'I am being seen' (Cooljugator n.d.).

Due to the ancient features of Lithuanian grammar, most foreign students find it a very difficult language to learn. Some learners are frustrated by the mobile stress in the different forms of the same word, which sometimes outwits even native speakers. All this is the heritage of Proto-Indo-European, traps set for the learner of Lithuanian by the history of sounds. The very concept of an ending is difficult to grasp if a person speaks only English. It can be frustrating to have to learn five declensions, each with seven cases, both in the singular and the plural (Subačius 2002: 6).

People with disabilities comprise 8.43% of the total Lithuanian population. In 2019, 15 359 children had some type of officially recognized disability. The total number of people with disabilities in Lithuania is 236 000 (data from the Lithuanian Department of Statistics 2019). Twenty-nine per cent of people with disabilities are employed. The users of Easy and/or Plain Language in Lithuania include people with an immigrant background (73 751 individuals), people with dementia (31 944), and people with poor reading skills or low education. In accordance with to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), 77 800 people in Lithuania are graded ISCED 0 (less than primary education), ISCED 1 (primary education), or ISCED 2 (lower secondary education).

## 2 Historical perspectives

For 50 years, Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union and implemented an exclusion- and isolation-based disability policy. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lithuania inherited a widely developed network of large residential social care institutions for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. The decades of exclusion that people with disabilities had experienced had resulted in stigmatizing attitudes towards them, a lack of awareness of their rights in society, and a restriction-oriented disability policy.

Since 2004, Lithuania has been a Member State of the European Union, and important developments in the field of disability are related to the country's international commitments. One of these obligations is the deinstitutionalization of care for people with disabilities, which started in 2014. The essence

of this reform is to help people with disabilities to live in the community as equal citizens, to promote their rights, and foster the culture of inclusion. Deinstitutionalization leads to a holistic transformation of the lives of people with disabilities and aims for inclusion in the community, the provision of community-based services, and living arrangements, employment, supported decision-making, etc.

These developments also require an adjusted and disability-friendly informational environment, including information available in Easy Language. Unlike in the 'old' Member States of the European Union, these developments in Lithuania are new and rather random, instead of coherent and alleged processes.

The development of Easy Language in Lithuania began in early 2000, thus its history is currently being slowly created. This process has been facilitated by the international commitments initiated and propagated by disability non-governmental organizations and funded by international donor organizations. However, still today, the development of Easy Language is insufficiently prioritized on the disability policy agenda as well as in discourse.

### 3 Current situation

#### 3.1 Definitions

Easy Language is a variety of Lithuanian language, the comprehensibility of which has been maximally enhanced. It is defined by international guidelines such as 'Information for All: European Standards for making information easy to read and understand', developed by Inclusion Europe in 2009, and has concrete rules adapted to the peculiarities and features of the Lithuanian language, although this adaptation is rather unofficial and based on solitary ad hoc initiatives. For example, the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations defines Easy Language as *a new, essentially simplified text, prepared on basis of original information. It is dedicated to those users for whom linguistically simplified text is insufficient and who are in need of additional visual information that supplements the textual information* (Internetas visiems 2018: 59). Terms synonymously used in Lithuania include *lengvai skaitoma kalba* (easy-to-read

language), *lengvai suprantama kalba* (easy-to-understand language) and *lengva kalba* (Easy Language).

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Easy Language and Plain Language are not explicitly mentioned in any Lithuanian laws or legislation. Plain Language is not used in Lithuania. The Lithuanian legal system lacks directions and provisions on Easy Language. Certain laws, such as the Law on the rights of patients and compensation of damage to their health (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas. Lietuvos Respublikos pacientų teisių ir žalos sveikatai atlyginimo įstatymas 1996-10-03), stipulate that:

The patient, upon presentation of the documents confirming his identity, shall be entitled to receive information about his state of health, diagnosis, methods of treatment or examination applied in the health care institution or alternatives known to the doctor, potential risks, complications, side-effects, the prognosis of the treatment and other circumstances that may have an effect on the acceptance or rejection by the patient of the proposed treatment, as well as about the consequences of rejecting the proposed treatment. The doctor must give the patient this information in a comprehensible form, taking into account his age and state of health, explaining special medical terms. (Art. 5 Right to Information, official translation)

Since Easy Language is a new phenomenon and is not widespread, society lacks knowledge and awareness of it. Thus, it is not possible to estimate whether there is public support for Easy Language or opposition against it. On the one hand, the Government has to comply with certain international obligations (e.g., obligations of the UN Committee for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)), one of which is ensuring accessible information for certain groups of people with disabilities, but on the other hand, a comprehensive and systemic attitude towards Easy Language is lacking, which in turn results in the absence of research, training, and legislation in this field.

Easy Language has not yet become part of the disability policy of governmental and administrative bodies. Certain governmental institutions (such as the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) have piloted some *ad hoc* initiatives by providing information in Easy Language. For example, since 2015, the website of the Lithuanian Department of Disability Affairs has contained the text of the UN CRPD in Easy Language. In addition to these institutions that are directly responsible for disability policy, some other governmental institutions have also introduced initiatives. One such example is the Important and Easy Understandable Information on the Parliamentary Elections on 11th October 2020. The Law stipulates that all information related to the elections, including debates, party programmes and voting bulletins, must also be provided in Easy Language, and this initiative was jointly developed by the Central Electoral Commission and Society for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, *Viltis*. Such initiatives are the result of the long-lasting advocacy efforts of disability organizations.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In addition to the abovementioned advocacy efforts directed at governmental institutions, disability non-governmental organizations provide expertise, initiate projects, and publish information in Easy Language. Two main organizations working in the field of Easy Language are **Viltis** (Society for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities) and the **Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations**. Both organizations participate in international projects that aim for the inclusion of people with disabilities. They also publish texts in Easy Language, collaborate with governmental institutions, and develop standards and guidelines for the usage of Easy Language in Lithuania. In addition to these initiatives, *Viltis* publishes texts in Easy Language on a regular basis in their quarterly magazine as well as information in Easy Language on their website<sup>1</sup>.

In Lithuania, no sustainable regular funding is available for the promotion of Easy Language. Certain solitary non-governmental initiatives receive project-based funding, but this ends when the project ends. This type of funding

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 1 Society for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities 'Viltis', [www.viltis.lt](http://www.viltis.lt).

is characterized by a lack of sustainability and feasibility. Governmental initiatives are a recent phenomenon; they are very few in number and are funded from the state budget. Since they started only several years ago, it is not yet possible to assess their sustainability and feasibility.

#### 4 Target groups

The target groups of Easy Language include **people with disabilities**: individuals with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, dementia, or multiple/complex disabilities. Easy Language is also useful for a number of people without disabilities, such as **illiterate individuals**, or **those with an immigrant background**. Another important group is **people with dyslexia**, who face difficulties in institutions of higher education. Some universities provide information and recommendations for their teachers on helping students with dyslexia, which include using larger fonts and pictures and allowing additional time during exams. Some educational material and tools provide guidance for parents and teachers about the learning and teaching process of students with dyslexia. One such instance is a free online book called ‘Simply about Dyslexia’ published by the Lithuanian Library for the Blind in 2020. The book is dedicated to parents of children with dyslexia to help them understand their needs and reveal their strengths and potential. Other books about dyslexia, such as ‘The Archipelago of Dyslexia’ (Gedutienė 2017) or ‘Dyslexia – from Evaluation to Overcoming’ (Gedutienė 2018) focus on the educational needs of students with dyslexia.

#### 5 Guidelines

The first guidelines, recommendations and standardization of Easy Language in Lithuania appeared in the last decade. Since then, only a few guidelines or recommendations have addressed Easy Language and adjusted it to the Lithuanian context. In most cases, they have been the result of international projects, and their dissemination and active usage has ended at the end of the respective project. Among these publications are the European Recommendations on

developing texts in Easy Language, and the ‘Shift in business, public sector, and society: new standards fighting discrimination’ guide on standards and recommendations for developing information in Easy Language.

The ‘Easy Reading. Information about writing texts in Easy Reading’ guide was originally written by the Swedish author Ulla Bohman, and was translated into Lithuanian and adjusted to the Lithuanian context in 2016. The guide contains information on the concept of Easy Reading and the key components of text, including content, language, layout, and pictures. The language part is adjusted to the Lithuanian context and discusses certain features of the Lithuanian language that might impede understanding of texts. The guide suggests avoiding words with a double meaning, such as *indas*, which means both citizen of India and a dish; or metaphoric expressions such as ‘something is as unnecessary as a fifth foot for a dog’. However, other linguistic features of the Lithuanian language and issues related to its grammar are omitted from this guide. For an illustration of these guidelines, see Appendix 1.

Some of the above-mentioned projects’ products are no longer available or accessible after the they ended. Such a lack of continuity also means that new Easy Language initiatives cannot rely on earlier developed platforms and have to start from scratch. Such a trend leads to a lack of true ‘ownership’ of the theme, a lack of sustainability of the products developed, and a lack of a systemic, holistic approach towards the development of Easy Language in Lithuania.

## 6 Practical outcomes

These diverse initiatives by civil society, governmental institutions, media representatives, and international partners have led to some practical outcomes. Among these outcomes are a journal, websites, a TV Show, and guidelines, developed during joint projects. These are presented below.

### 6.1 Media

A good, long-existing example of a publication containing information in Easy Language is the *Viltis* journal. Since 1997 it has been published quarterly by

the Society for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities – *Viltis*. This journal covers more than mere disability issues, and also focuses on other aspects of social life that are relevant for everyone: travelling, achievements, summer camps, projects, news on policy and legislation, etc.

One of the main projects related to Easy Language is the development of a **website about Easy Language**. The website, which itself is in the Easy Language format, was developed in collaboration among the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations and the Swedish organization *Centrum för Lättläst*, the Latvian Easy-to-Read agency, and *Viltis*. The project aimed to increase society's awareness of disability. However, despite the importance and necessity of this initiative, the website is currently inactive and inaccessible.

Another current **media project called *Aš galiu*** ('I can') began on the 1st July 2015 and continues today. The project is implemented by a private television channel and the Department for the Affairs of Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The goal of this project is to inform society of disabilities, to raise awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, and to fight stigma, stereotypes, and incorrect practices in all fields of life. The information includes disability-related articles, reports, messages, and awareness-raising initiatives. A significant part of this information is also provided in Easy Language. Although the project aims to follow broader aims such as initiating relevant discussions in society, it explicitly focuses on issues related to disability and mainly addresses audiences of people with disabilities. The messages developed and broadcast by the project lack broader societal aspects that could be translated into Easy Language.

The European **recommendations for texts in Easy Language** were developed in the framework of an international project co-ordinated by Inclusion Europe and funded by the European Commission, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency under the Grundtvig Programme (2007–2009). The outcomes of the project were four methodological aids for professionals on how to develop texts in Easy Language.

A '**Puzzle**' project (Developing easy-to-read formats for people with intellectual disabilities) was implemented in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA2 - Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices programme in 2016. The project aimed to facilitate access to information, education, and

training for young people and adults with intellectual disabilities in Greece, Poland and Lithuania. The trainers and experts of the project were from the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media and the RIX Research & Media Centre at the University of East London in the UK. The project resulted in the ‘Easy Reading. Information about writing texts in Easy Reading’ guide, which is briefly described in Section 5.

In 2018, another project-based activity was implemented by the Lithuanian Equal Opportunities’ Ombudsman and the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations and funded by the European Social Fund Agency. A project called **‘Shift in business, public sector, and society: new standards fighting discrimination’** focused on fighting discrimination and raising awareness of the needs of vulnerable populations. The emphasis of this project was on vulnerable groups’ participation in the labour market and educating employers about their particular needs. Part of this project focused on fostering the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the labour market. The project’s website (Lietuvos Respublikos lygių galimybių kontrolieriaus tarnyba ir Lietuvos negalios organizacijų forumas 2021) contains useful resources for institutional support, educational materials, research, and legislative data.

## 6.2 Literature

Good examples of literature in Easy Language are scarce. In 2020, the Lithuanian Library for the Blind issued a book about coronavirus in Easy-Read format. Originally, this book was published in English for children ‘Coronavirus: A Book for Children about COVID-19’. It has now been translated into Lithuanian and adjusted according to the requirements of Easy Language.

Some publishing houses have experimented with the easy-to-read concept and adjusted the literature to the needs of children. These adjustments include shorter sentences, larger fonts and pictures. However, these books are not specifically dedicated or adjusted to the needs of people with disabilities, and do not correspond to the requirements of Easy Language.

### 6.3 Informative texts

Informative texts in Easy Language are important because they enable reaching all target groups and providing them with relevant information. Some websites occasionally provide certain information in Easy Language, but this is not a frequent practice. One of the main governmental institutions that actively provides information in Easy Language is the Department for the Affairs of Disabled. Some instances are the UN CRPD in Easy Language and information in Easy Language about COVID-19.

Another active organization in disability rights issues is the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations. They also publish texts in Easy Language on their website. One of their initiatives is the provision of commentaries on the UN CRPD in Easy Language. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, this website was currently inactive. *Viltis* is also active on social media. On its Facebook page, *Viltis* shares texts and information on the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in Easy Language. The ‘Independent living’ association has recently issued two publications on the UN CRPD in Easy Language. The editors of these publications involved people with intellectual disabilities as lay experts, who were responsible for proofreading the texts and providing feedback and comments. The final versions of these publications were corrected and adjusted according to their remarks. These publications are accessible online: UN CRPD General Remark No 4 on Inclusive Education (in Lithuanian) and UN CRPD General Remark No 7 on Working with Disability Organizations (in Lithuanian).

As already mentioned in Section 2, one of the newest informative texts is related to the parliamentary elections – Important and Easy Understandable Information about the Parliamentary Elections on 11th October 2020. It was jointly developed by the Central Electoral Commission, the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations and *Viltis*.

### 6.4 Other projects

Some cultural objects also provide information in Easy language. The **National Museum – Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania** is one of the most popular museums in Vilnius. Its exhibition includes a description in Easy Language.

Some Vilnius University professors participated in this initiative and helped draft information in Easy Language. One of these was Associate Professor Violeta Gevorgianiene, according to whom these descriptions do not fully correspond to the requirements of Easy Language, but the simple texts developed by disability experts are helpful for understanding the information (personal communication with Violeta Gevorgianiene, 2020).

It is worth noticing that some upcoming large-scale cultural events in Lithuania aim to be accessible to people with disabilities. A good example of this is the **'Kaunas for all. Design for happiness. Kaunas 2022'** guide, dedicated to a year-long cultural event in Kaunas – Capital of Europe in 2022. In a friendly and stylish manner, this publication provides information on the main principles of Easy Language on social media, in social networks, and in cultural events, emphasizing the needs of people with diverse disabilities.

The Declaration of Riga, signed by the EU Member States in 2006, recommends that equal participation of all citizens in the Digital Society is more than just a social necessity. It is also an economic opportunity that should also be offered to people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The European Commission adopted documents related to the implementation of (EU) Directive 2016/2102 of 26th October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. The Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2018/2048 of 20th December 2018 on the harmonized standard for websites and mobile applications was drafted in support of (EU) Directive 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council. As a result, in 2018, the Lithuanian Forum of Disability Organizations together with the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman Office developed a guide called **'Internet for all'** on digital information and recommendations for adjusting the digital environment to the needs of people with disabilities. Some chapters of this guide are dedicated to the principles of Easy Language.

As mentioned above, the process of **deinstitutionalization of care** of people with disabilities is currently underway in Lithuania. The official website dedicated to deinstitutionalization (Pertvarka 2021) also includes information in Easy Language, as well as some basic information on the main principles of Easy Language.

## 7 Education and research

One of the main activities in Lithuania related to education on Easy Language was an EU-funded project called ‘**Development of Special Teaching Aid**’, in 2004. An independent experts’ group was formed, which provided consultations and recommendations for the development of special teaching aid and textbooks. In the framework of the project, these recommendations were translated and adjusted to the Lithuanian context. Unlike other initiatives, the establishment of the independent experts’ group is set in legislation and still functions today.

In 2005–2007, the development of **textbooks for children with special needs** began. It was based on the principles of Easy Language and a set of principles. The EU provided support and covered the publishing costs of these textbooks. The main principles were that the content corresponded to the students’ cognitive abilities; that the methodological system was applicable to diverse learning styles; and that the visual material, text design, language style, and complexity corresponded to the students’ cognitive abilities.

According to the teacher and teaching aid author, Mrs. M. Pošiūtė-Žebelenė (cited in Ragickaitė 2016), adaptation of textbooks is a very complicated process: the text needs to be shortened, and some parts might be lost. It also requires agreement with the authors as to what can be modified without losing meaning. In some cases, a middle ground between the requirements of Easy Language and the original text is chosen, which means adjustment of the textbook material, avoiding unnecessary visualization or associations, and keeping only the information needed to form basic abilities. This requires competent pedagogues who can work with and adjust the teaching materials and explain them in Easy Language.

In Lithuania, no research has been conducted on Easy Language, except for some thesis written in recent years. Although these students’ works only scratch the surface of the entire complexity of this theme, they can be considered the first, promising initiatives. One example is the master’s dissertation: ‘Development of layouts of publications “General Comments of the United Nations Committee on the rights of people with disabilities”’ written by social work student Kristina Dūdonytė in the Alytus University of Applied Sciences in 2020.

She involved people with intellectual disabilities as consultants in the writing process. The dissertation resulted in an Easy Language publication called ‘The right of people with disabilities to obtain a good education in the same places as people without disabilities’ (Savarankiškas gyvenimas 2020), which is available online and thus has significant potential for practical application.

Vilnius University social work student Migle Baltrunaite is currently working on her master’s dissertation ‘Accessibility of information in Easy language for people with intellectual disabilities in Lithuania’ (2021). The goal of this dissertation is to identify the most relevant areas in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and to evaluate the availability of information in Easy Language in these areas.

## 8 Future perspectives

The knowledge about and responsibility for Easy Language should be divided and shared between disability non-governmental associations, governmental institutions, and academia. Moreover, a knowledge centre or a think-tank should be established to take over the ownership of the topic, accumulate the necessary know-how, advocate the development of the necessary legislative measures and take responsibility for international collaboration with foreign experts, researchers and change agents in the field. A meeting in the form of a seminar, workshop or roundtable could help gather all the national experts and stakeholders together and facilitate further joint actions. These could be the first measures for moving forward with this important theme, to establish a platform, and switch from sole initiatives to a systemic change.

It is also worth noting that during the process of preparing this chapter, new, relevant information on new initiatives in this theme emerged constantly, which proves that the subject of Easy Language is currently gaining momentum in Lithuanian society.

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Lithuanian.

Standard Lithuanian	Easy Lithuanian
<p>Tik įtraukus švietimas gali užtikrinti neigaliųjų kokybišką išsilavinimą ir socialinį vystymąsi bei garantuoti, kad įgyvendinant teisę į mokslą būtų laikomasi visuotinio ir nediskriminavimo principų</p> <p>Neįgalūs besimokantieji gauna pagalbą, skirtą užtikrinti veiksmingą perėjimą nuo mokymosi mokykloje prie profesinio ir aukštojo išsilavinimo bei galiausiai išėjimo į darbą. Ugdomi besimokančiųjų gebėjimai ir pasitikėjimas savo jėgomis, besimokantiesiems sudaromos tinkamos sąlygos, jie vertinami ir egzaminuojami lygiateisiškais pagrindais, jų gebėjimai ir pasiekimai yra sertifikuojami lygiai su kitais asmenimis.</p> <p>Įtrauki ugdymo aplinka – tai prieinama aplinka, kurioje kiekvienas jaučiasi saugus, palaikomas, skatinamas bei galintis išreikšti save ir kurioje yra daug svarbos teikiama besimokančiųjų įtraukimui į pozityvios mokyklos bendruomenės kūrimą. Pripažįstamas bendraamžių vaidmuo mokymosi procese, kuriami pozityvūs santykiai, stiprinama draugystės saitai ir formuojamos palankaus požiūrio nuostatos.</p> <p>Source: Neįgaliųjų teisių komitetas Bendroji pastaba Nr. 4 (2016) dėl teisės į įtraukų švietimą, <a href="http://www.ndt.lt/wp-content/uploads/Comment-4_Education_vert_final.pdf">http://www.ndt.lt/wp-content/uploads/Comment-4_Education_vert_final.pdf</a></p>	<p>Kodėl įtraukus mokymas yra svarbus? Įtraukus mokymas yra labai svarbus. Jis gali padėti žmonėms su negalia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gauti gerą mokymą, kas yra jų teisė;</li> <li>• būti labiau savarankiškiems ir išmokti daugiau įgūdžių;</li> <li>• prisijungti ir būti kažko dalimi;</li> <li>• vėliau gauti darbą ir pasisekimą savo gyvenimuose.</li> </ul> <p>Įtraukus mokymas gali padėti visiems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gauti geresnį mokymą;</li> <li>• išmolti apie vienas kitą ir gerai sutarti.</li> </ul> <p>Source: Žmonių su negalia teisė gauti gerą mokymą ten pat, kur mokosi žmonės be negalios. (2020), <a href="https://savarankiskasgyvenimas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/1-leidiny.pdf">https://savarankiskasgyvenimas.lt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/1-leidiny.pdf</a></p>

Standard Lithuanian	Easy Lithuanian
<p>[Only inclusive education can provide both quality education and social development for persons with disabilities, and guarantee universality and non-discrimination in the right to education.</p> <p>Learners with disabilities receive support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to work. Learners' capacities and confidence are developed and learners receive reasonable accommodation and equality in assessment and examination procedures, and certification of their capacities and attainments is on an equal basis with others.</p> <p>Inclusive learning environments must create an accessible environment where everyone feels safe, supported, stimulated and able to express themselves, with a strong emphasis on involving students themselves in building a positive school community. Recognition is afforded to the peer group in learning, building positive relationships, friendships and acceptance.]</p>	<p>[Why is inclusive education important? Inclusive education is very important. It can help people with disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get a good education that is right for them</li> <li>• do more on their own and learn more skills</li> <li>• join in and be part of things</li> <li>• get a job later on and do well in their lives</li> </ul> <p>Inclusive education can help everyone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get a better education] </li></ul>

## Easy Language in the Netherlands

### 1 Introduction

In December 2020, about 17.5 million people lived in the territory of the Dutch kingdom. For most inhabitants, Dutch Standard Language is their native language. It is also the native language of most inhabitants of Flanders in Belgium, of Suriname in South America, of several islands in the Caribbean, and of some smaller groups of people throughout the world. The estimated number of Dutch native speakers worldwide is about 25 million.

The linguistic border between Dutch and German has been established gradually and its precise location is largely due to political factors. A 'dialect continuum' remains and any boundary drawn in the historical continuum between a Dutch and a German dialect will always be arbitrary. The origins of Dutch Standard Language lie in Old Low Franconian, because of the dialectic differentiation within the West Germanic group. As Dutch Standard Language, like every language, changes over time, the Dutch Language Union<sup>1</sup>, in Dutch-Flemish co-operation, has been given a mandate to review and make recommendations on the official spelling of Dutch Standard Language.

Dutch Standard Language is the official language taught in schools in the Netherlands and used by the government and in the public domain in legislation, administration, commerce, media etc. In addition to Dutch Standard Language, the Netherlands has two other official languages. The first is the standardized West Frisian Language, spoken by around one million people, mainly in the Dutch province of Friesland. The second is the Dutch Sign Language, which was officially recognized in the Netherlands in September 2020. Of the possible 230 000 sign language users in the Netherlands, Dutch Sign

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1 Taalunie, <https://taalunie.org/>.

Language is the first language for 40 000. As regards the Frisian Language, official recognition implies that all chapters of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148; 1998)<sup>2</sup> are applicable in, for instance, culture, education and juridical procedures. The consequences of the recent official recognition of Dutch Sign Language imply that the Dutch government should take measures to also meet these obligations for Dutch Sign Language.

Furthermore, the Netherlands has a variety of regional languages and dialects. These are a form of language that people speak in particular parts of the Netherlands and other Standard Dutch-speaking countries. These dialects contain some different words and their grammar also varies. Dialects are nowadays mainly used in day-to-day communication between people within a region and are used to express and support regional cultural identity in conversations, films, literature, poetry, etc. Dutch dialects and regional languages are not spoken as often as they once used to be (Driessen 2006). Some researchers consider children who are raised speaking the Dutch standard language as well as a regional language or dialect to be multilingual (Cornips 2012). Cornips shows that multilingualism (in her research defined as the combination of learning both the Limburgish regional language and the Dutch Standard Language) helps children master both languages better.

An interesting and relatively new phenomenon is Street Language, used by youths who mainly live in the larger Dutch cities. Street Language incorporates elements of, for example, Italian, American, Moroccan (Arabian or Berber), Turkish, Sranatongo (Surinam) and Papiamentu (Dutch Antilles). Research on the question of whether the use of Street Language harms or benefits the mastering of Dutch Standard Language is inconclusive (Cornips and de Rooij 2017).

An illiterate person is someone who can read but does not do so because of a lack of motivation (Moser and Morrison 1998). Acquiring sufficient verbal and reading skills is considered to be of utmost importance to succeed in today's Dutch society. If families pay little attention to reading and writing, a child's language development can lag behind, and this poses a fair risk that as an adult, the child will not function on the required Dutch 2F language level

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2 European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, <https://rm.coe.int/1680695175>.

(see section 3 for a definition). In the Netherlands, the motivation to read and the development of reading skills of youngsters and adults is stagnating. Nielen and Bus (2013) claim that a large group of average readers in Dutch elementary school (about 62% of the pupils) have shown a significant decline in reading motivation over the years. According to their research, half of Dutch adolescents consider reading of any kind an obligation only, and not an activity to be enjoyed.

In 2019, the triennial Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) PISA study (Program for International Student Assessment) was updated. The figures showed that the reading skills of Dutch 15-year-olds had deteriorated, up to point at which 24% could not read at the required Dutch literacy level (Gubbels et al. 2019). Dutch children and adults increasingly combine (electronic) media use with other activities or use multiple media simultaneously (media multitasking; Foehr 2006). Due to the of diminished ability to switch cognitive tasks, the quality of the reading experience can deteriorate if reading is interrupted frequently, as other things require immediate attention. Decreased concentration can lead to diminished understanding of a text and subsequently to less enjoyment. The Reading:Time (*Lees:Tijd*) report published by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Bureau (SCP; Wennekers et al. 2018: 85) makes this relationship clear: the more people combine reading with other (general or media) activities, the less absorbed they are in what they read. The report states that the current low level of reading motivation will negatively impact the future reading skills of the whole Dutch population. Currently, around 30% of all Dutch adults do not read at all.

Based on the 2013 PIAAC figures (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies), the 2018 factsheet on low adult literacy, which was published by the Foundation for Reading and Writing (*Stichting Lezen en Schrijven*<sup>3</sup>), claims that about 2.5 million adults in the Netherlands, of whom 1.8 million are aged between 16 and 65, experience difficulties with reading, writing and/or arithmetic calculations. Often, they also have inadequate digital skills. More specifically, 273 000 people have difficulty understanding spoken and written language, 1.1 million people have difficulties with spoken or writ-

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3 Stichting lezen en schrijven, <https://www.lezenenschrijven.nl/>.

ten language and arithmetic, and almost half a million people have difficulty with arithmetic only. This concerns women more than men and the issues increase with age. About 55% of the total group are Dutch born; the rest are mainly immigrants.

Living with a physical or intellectual disability can be a challenge in the Netherlands. Over two million people in the Netherlands have a disability, including people with limited or no hearing or sight and those with physical or intellectual disabilities. Accessible communication is important for them and they would benefit from accessible language solutions.

Due to all these changes in the general population, and for those with disabilities, in the Netherlands the need for Plain Language and Easy Language solutions is rising rapidly.

## 2 Historical Perspectives

The official efforts to promote Plain and Easy Language use in the Netherlands are fairly new. Until recently, the Dutch government aimed almost exclusively to reduce low literacy by promoting Dutch Standard Language classes on the required level. In 2011, the Dutch government launched the Action Plan Low Literacy 2012–2015: Literacy in the Netherlands (*Actieplan Laaggeletterdheid 2012–2015: Geletterdheid in Nederland*) to promote literacy in the Netherlands. This plan describes an adult literate person as someone who can read, write and understand a short, simple statement about matters of everyday life. Generally, ‘literacy’ also encompasses ‘numeracy’; the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. A person without knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic whatsoever is termed illiterate. However, most people are not illiterate, but they have not mastered a sufficient level of literacy to function comfortably in society, which leads to major consequences for both the person and society. Youths aged below 16 should not be diagnosed with low literacy, but with ‘language deficiency’, as they are still in the process of acquiring reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Nevertheless, nearly one in five young people is at risk of becoming ‘illiterate’ according to the 2019 ‘Read!’ (*Lees!*) report of the Council for Culture and the Education Council.

Subsidized by the Dutch government, in 2012 The Foundation for Reading and Writing developed a five-point action plan to reduce low literacy among Dutch citizens: (1) Low literacy should be placed on the agenda of politicians and the public, inspiring them to stimulate a positive learning culture for adults in which they can continue to develop themselves throughout life. One example is the Week of Literacy, held every September. During this week, people, companies and organizations are inspired to contribute to a society in which there is room for lifelong development, so that more people have the opportunity to learn to read, write, do arithmetic and more effectively use a computer or smartphone. This is important, as society will become stronger if everyone can participate. (2) Municipalities will receive advice to set up and implement a coherent approach to low literacy. Municipalities are in charge and can be supported by the Foundation. Through a ‘Growth Model Approach’ the Foundation provides support to municipalities and promotes regional and local policy development. The model helps determine goals and improvement points for a good integral approach. (3) Accessible learning opportunities will be promoted for adults in the areas of language, arithmetic and digital skills. Through sufficient formal (at school) and non-formal (e.g., with a friend) learning, the Foundation will try to provide good quality education that meets everyone’s needs. (4) Teaching materials and screening tools will be developed further, to find people with a low level of literacy and training will be provided for professionals and volunteers. This publication’s chapter on the development of Easy Language in Belgium describes several approaches to research on readability, which have also been developed or are applicable in the Netherlands. (5) Employers will receive help to address low literacy, so that employees can work on their basic skills in the workplace.

Furthermore, a nationwide four-point action plan was developed in 2018 to prevent (functional) illiteracy among Dutch citizens: (1) Extra attention will be paid to (functional) illiteracy and low literacy within the family, by stimulating children to read more and by reaching parents who have language difficulties. (2) An integral family approach will be promoted in municipalities. (3) Investments in language and numeracy education will be promoted, so that the number of children leaving school with low language levels decreases. (4) Parties that play a role in the lives of young families will be connected, to

ensure that the new generation of toddlers begins elementary school at the appropriate language level.

Considering all these measures to combat low literacy, it is remarkable that no comprehensive action plan to promote Plain or Easy Language has existed until now. Until recently, only occasionally were texts for the general public adapted into Plain Language. Texts were only sometimes written in Plain or Easy Language for special target groups (e.g., texts about vaccinations or the elections for people with disabilities). These adaptations have no official ground rules as no elaborated communication strategy has been presented.

One of the first Dutch attempts to use Easy Language was that by a non-governmental private partner, as early as in 1994. To reach people with intellectual disabilities in accessible language, the OKEE newspaper (*OKEE krant*<sup>4</sup>), distributed by the publisher Simple Communication (*Uitgeverij Eenvoudig Communiceren*) was introduced. In 2002, the publisher Learn Online by Yourself (*Leer Zelf Online*<sup>5</sup>) developed the *Steffie*<sup>6</sup> website to serve people with intellectual disabilities or (very) low literacy skills. The website can also be used by other people who benefit from Easy Language. Besides short and simplified texts, *Steffie* uses graphics and animated films to inform its users.

### 3 Current Situation

Recently, the Dutch government adapted its communication strategies. Besides still promoting activities to reduce low literacy as mentioned, more attention is now paid to government communication in accessible language. These activities almost entirely aim for Plain Language solutions.

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4 Uitgeverij Eenvoudig Communiceren, <https://www.eenvoudigcommuniceren.nl/kranten/okee-krant>.  
5 Leer Zelf Online, <https://www.leerzelfonline.nl/home/>.  
6 Steffie, <https://www.steffie.nl/>.

### 3.1 Definitions

As the Netherlands has carried out no official Plain Language (Dutch equivalent terms *Direct duidelijk*, *heldere taal*, *klinkende taal*<sup>7</sup>) or Easy Language (no official Dutch equivalent term but sometimes referred to as *Begrijpelijke taal*<sup>8</sup>) activities to date, the concepts have no official Dutch definitions. A scale is used for identifying a person's level of language proficiency, which varies from 1F to 4F (Meijerink 2008). As the Dutch Government has set a 2F proficiency level as the required minimum level of language use and understanding for Dutch citizens (equivalent to the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR<sup>9</sup>)), one could assume that this 2F level should be considered the Plain Language level. However, many citizens do not meet the criteria for mastering Plain Language at a 2F level. Unofficial estimates claim that more than 3 million adults, of which 2.5 million are classed as low literate according to the Foundation for Reading and Writing, urgently need language solutions on a more basic level. This means that they meet the criteria of the 1F proficiency level or even the 1F learners' level. Easy Language could help this group of people better understand messages.

The Netherlands has no officially established distinction between Plain Language and Easy Language, as there are no official Dutch ground rules for using these language variations. A communication can be considered to be in Plain Language if its wording, structure and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.<sup>10</sup> If people can read but cannot fully understand texts in Plain Language, Easy Language could be the solution for them. Easy Language is about making texts and language very easy to understand by, for example, writing short sentences, avoiding foreign words, and structuring content in a meaningful way. This benefits those who encounter language barriers in today's information society. Writing in Plain Language is growing in the Netherlands, whereas writing in Easy Language is not very common, except

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7 *Direct duidelijk*, *heldere taal* and *klinkende taal* could be translated as 'direct clear' or 'clear language'.

8 *Begrijpelijke taal* could be translated as 'understandable language'.

9 Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/cefr>.

10 Plain Language Association International, <https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/plain-language/what-is-plain-language/>.

for special groups such as people with intellectual disabilities. Speaking to listeners in Plain or Easy Language is rare in the Netherlands and to date, no formal training to learn or use it has been available.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

The Netherlands has so far not set governmental and private organizations any legal obligation to use Plain or Easy Language. At the turn of the millennium, the publishing of materials in Plain Language gradually spread to the internet, but no official guidelines were applied. However, since July 1st 2018, Dutch governmental organizations have been legally obliged to take the necessary measures to make their websites and mobile applications more accessible to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines<sup>11</sup>.

After a long process before ratification in July 2016, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was introduced in the Netherlands. The purpose of this treaty is to promote, protect and safeguard the human rights of people with disabilities. The central concepts of the treaty are inclusion, personal autonomy and full participation in society. Accessible communication is one of the key issues of the treaty obligations. To date, the Dutch government has not passed any laws on the use of Plain Language or Easy Language with respect to the obligations of the UN CRPD.

Aside from all the activities aiming to reduce illiteracy and low literacy, today the Dutch government and a growing number of private parties are becoming increasingly aware of the obligation to simplify the language level of (official) communication to avoid misunderstandings.<sup>12</sup> Dutch organizations that are members of Plain Language Europe<sup>13</sup>, and all public and private endeavours to address direct or clear communication (several words are used in the Netherlands for the same concept<sup>14</sup>) aim to communicate at a Plain Language level (the Dutch 2F level (Meijerink 2008), equivalent to the B1 level of the CEFR).

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11 Web Accessibility Initiative, <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>.

12 CommunicatieRijk, <https://www.communicatierijk.nl/>.

13 Plain Language Association International, <https://www.plainlanguageeurope.com/nl/>.

14 See footnotes 7 and 8.

Despite all the public and private measures to reduce and prevent illiteracy and low literacy, to promote digital skills and to use clear communication at a 2F level, many Dutch people are still unable to understand texts produced by the central government, municipalities, insurance companies, medical doctors, commercial companies, and others. The Dutch Government does not directly financially support Plain or Easy Language publications such as the *OKEE paper* or the *Steffie* website on a structural basis.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Several organizations participate in the initiatives of the Dutch government such as the Immediately Clear project (*Direct Duidelijk*) and the Count in with Language programme. Several Dutch organizations are members of Plain Language Europe.

The Foundation for Reading and Writing is the core Dutch organization that aims to reduce low literacy. The Alliance for Promoting Health Skills (*Alliantie Gezondheidsvaardigheden*<sup>15</sup>), in which many Dutch health organizations work together, promotes accessible language solutions (mostly on a Plain Language level) for low literate citizens. Neither the Dutch Association of Organizations for the Care of People with Disabilities (*Vereniging Gehandicaptenzorg Nederland*<sup>16</sup>) nor Disability Studies in the Netherlands<sup>17</sup> actively use or promote Easy Language, although their interest is growing and contacts with the Language for All project have been established.

*Steffie*, Readzone and Learn Online by Yourself are private partners that promote accessible language solutions. The Language for All project has a number of associated partners, which can be found on the website.

Most Dutch public libraries lend out a reasonable amount of Plain and Easy Language publications. Readzone (*Uitgeverij Eenvoudig Communiceren*<sup>18</sup>) publishes books for young readers and adults in easily accessible Dutch. In terms

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15 Pharos, <https://www.pharos.nl/factsheets/laaggeletterdheid-en-beperkte-gezondheidsvaardigheden/>.

16 VGN, <https://www.vgn.nl/>.

17 Disability Studies in Nederland, <https://disabilitystudies.nl/>.

18 Readzone, <https://www.readzonebooks.com/>.

of language difficulty, these vary between Plain Language and Easy Language. More information on both Readzone and *Steffie* is given in Section 6.

Learn Online by Yourself (*Leer Zelf Online*<sup>19</sup>) helps all kinds of vulnerable groups in society understand difficult information. It focuses on, for example, people with intellectual disabilities, seniors, low-literate people, migrants, children, prisoners, and clients of mental health care organizations. From working with these target groups for years, Learn Online by Yourself has become specialized in explaining difficult subjects in understandable and accessible language and, where possible, using illustrations and animations.

To serve people with intellectual disabilities, in 2020, some organizations that promote Easy Language use for people with intellectual disabilities began co-operation. Together they set up the Understandable Communication Network (*Netwerk Begrijpelijke Communicatie*<sup>20</sup>). The endeavours of the members sometimes follow guidelines on accessible information (e.g., the Guidelines for Accessible Information (ICT4IAL))<sup>21</sup>. However, often their solutions are practice based and many of the texts produced lack evidence-based solutions. The common elements of their writings are short, simplified texts, accompanied by pictures or drawings. Sometimes the organizations use a panel of self-advocates with intellectual disabilities as a sounding board for their text solutions, but state-of-the-art assessments of text comprehension are rarely conducted.

## 4 Target groups

Due to the reasons mentioned in sections 1 and 2, there is an overall, urgent need to address the problems of **people who have difficulties learning and using Standard Dutch Language**. They form a heterogeneous group of both children and adults, who require various forms of help. People who have poor reading and writing skills, in both the traditional and new (electronic) media, are at risk of missing information that could be important for them, such as

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19 Leer Zelf Online, <https://www.leerzelfonline.nl/home/>.

20 Netwerk Begrijpelijke Communicatie, <https://begrijpelijkecommunicatie.nl/>.

21 European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, <https://www.european-agency.org/resources/publications/guidelines-accessible-information>.

drug information or a letter from their municipality or insurance company. Not comprehending the information in these texts and not acting accordingly may have a major impact on their personal lives. Research shows that someone who is not a skilled reader or writer is less likely to find a job, less able to live a healthy life, and less able to adequately control their finances (Pleijers and Hartgers 2019).

Multiple target groups can benefit from Plain or Easy Language solutions: first, people who are learning **Dutch as a second language**. How quickly a person becomes a proficient Dutch language user depends on in-person factors such as language proficiency in the mother tongue, motivation and intelligence. When learning Dutch as a second language under unfavourable circumstances, people often do not speak, write or read Dutch Standard Language sufficiently well. People with a **Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)**, which is a neurocognitive development disorder, make more mistakes while speaking and reading than those without a DLD. (Some) people with **dyslexia**, a disorder in which a person has a persistent problem with spelling and reading at the word level, and children and adults with **psychiatric classifications** may have problems learning and using language, probably due to poor executive functioning. These people are at risk of missing the common thread in stories and their responses in words and in behaviour may be inadequate. Adults with severe psychiatric problems can sometimes become less fluent in language, as their previously undisturbed language comprehension and expression is influenced by the severity of the disorder or by the use of medication. This situation can be either temporary or permanent. Children and adults with **hearing and visual impairments** often have more difficulty acquiring and using Dutch Standard Language, especially when the special didactics required for their education are not met. If they have no other illnesses or impairments, their understanding of language need not necessarily be weakened. People with visual impairments benefit from clear fonts and large print. Blind people can use Braille. The preferred language of many prelingual deaf people is Dutch Sign Language. They may have difficulties learning, reading and understanding Dutch Standard Language and may thus perform below their chronological age, irrespective of their intelligence. People with **motor problems** may have difficulties reading and writing, although motor problems do not directly lead

to reduced understanding of a text. People suffering from **dementia** gradually experience difficulties understanding spoken language and written texts. Even if they have no intellectual problems, people with an **autism spectrum disorder** can still experience difficulties with the symbolic aspects of the language and with communication. They can certainly benefit from clear and concrete language. People with **intellectual disabilities** have more difficulties learning and using, reading, writing and understanding language, although this varies between individuals. With adequate support and education, many people with mild or moderate intellectual disabilities can learn to read, write and perform (rudimentary) arithmetic calculations. However, applying these skills under daily life stress is often difficult<sup>22</sup>.

## 5 Guidelines

Dutch organizations using Dutch Standard Language at the 2F level, even those supported by the Dutch government, have no common framework for text and formatting. They rather rely on general (international) recommendations<sup>23</sup> and on their own preferred solutions, which may substantially differ from each other. Most organizations working on language solutions for people who function on low literacy levels do not completely rely on evidence-based solutions. The levels of the texts they present vary in complexity and comprehensibility. Some of the solutions that these organizations use are backed by research evidence, but other solutions lack scientific grounds.

The **Language for All** project builds on the European standards for making information easy to read and understand<sup>24</sup>, the results of Dutch and international research on Plain and Easy Language, and on the research of the German *Leichte Sprache* (research discussed in the German contribution to this publication). The ambition of the Language for All project is to use evidence-based

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22 See also IFLA 2010, <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/120.pdf>.

23 For instance Plain Language Association International, <https://www.plainlanguageeurope.com/nl/>.

24 Easy to read, <https://easy-to-read.eu/european-standards/>.

solutions with respect to (easy) words, connected words, (the length and structure of) sentences, added pictures, and graphs and layout. Current guidelines can be found on the website<sup>25</sup> and are altered if new research is convincing. For an illustration of the Dutch guidelines, see Appendix 1. In the Language for All project, collaboration with the representatives of the intended target readers or listeners is standard procedure, including the assessment of understanding and appreciation of the proposed texts.

## 6 Practical outcomes

As clear definitions of Plain and Easy Language are missing in the Dutch context and neither concept is commonly used, practical outcomes have to be presented as accessible language outcomes on the levels of both Plain language and Easy Language.

### 6.1 Media, literature, informative texts

One of the first Dutch attempts to address people with intellectual disabilities in Easy Language, the **OKEE newspaper** (*OKEE krant by Uitgeverij Eenvoudig Communiceren*) still publishes 10 issues annually, which are filled with information that is of interest for the intended readers with intellectual disabilities on subjects such as the elections, cooking or COVID-19 statistics. The *Steffie* website is still a very busy platform, used by people with intellectual disabilities or (very) low literacy skills, but also by people who otherwise benefit from Easy Language. In addition to short and simplified texts, graphics and animated films are also used to inform users. The topics presented are, for instance, health-related matters, money matters, ideas for free-time activities, and how to travel safely.

Readzone (*Uitgeverij Eenvoudig Communiceren*) today publishes **books for young readers and adults** not only in easily accessible Dutch but also

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 25 Taal voor allemaal, <https://www.taalvoorallemaal.com/producten/schrijven-in-taal-voor-allemaal>.

in German, English and Spanish (e.g., a German newspaper called *Klar & Deutlich* in *Leichte Sprache*). It publishes more than 100 books annually and offers publications on both Plain and an Easy Language levels. These books are partly abridged versions of popular novels and novellas and are original publications written to serve readers who appreciate Plain or Easy Language versions. Examples are books about World War II or sports such as soccer, or classic novels such as ‘The Diary of Anne Frank’, ‘Jungle book’, ‘Tom Sawyer’ and ‘The Little Prince’; and novellas such as ‘16 and pregnant’, ‘A dangerous friend’, ‘Top model’ or ‘Snow from Mars’.

Dutch political parties are becoming increasingly aware of their low literate voters and are adapting their information to serve these voters, sometimes on a Plain Language level, sometimes using a form of Easy Language.

Many good examples of **health information** in Plain Language, sometimes even in Easy Language, can be found on, for example, the Pharos<sup>26</sup> website (texts, graphs and animated films). Examples are ‘how to communicate with your general practitioner’ ‘how to use your medication’ and ‘working with your physiotherapist’.

During the COVID-19 crisis, **official government information** has been translated into Language for All and made accessible in Easy Language for people with intellectual disabilities. This information can be downloaded for free and can be found on the Language for All website<sup>27</sup>.

## 6.2 Other projects

Two projects that promote accessible language for Dutch-speaking citizens have recently been set in motion. Notably, both projects promote the use of Plain Language.

The first is the **Immediately Clear** (*Direct Duidelijk*<sup>28</sup>) project: a (Plain Language) project that calls on everyone to communicate in such a way that they take their intended readers into account as much as possible. What questions

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26 See footnote 15.

27 Coronavirus, <https://www.taalvoorallemaal.com/zoekresultaten?e=suggest&q=coronavirus>.

28 Direct duidelijk heldere overheidscommunicatie, <https://www.directduidelijk.nl/>.

do readers have about the subject; what information do they expect to receive, and what do they already know about the subject? Communicators are asked to consider how to best help these readers. Communication should be personal. Texts should be written as clearly as possible, using understandable (although Plain) language (simple sentences and understandable words) and clear structures. Communication should be supported by images whenever possible. In 2018, co-operation was set up between the Dutch Immediately Clear campaign and the equivalent Flemish endeavour under the supervision of the Dutch Language Union.

The second programme is the **Count in with Language** (*Tel mee met Taal*<sup>29</sup>) programme, which carries out measures to improve the digital skills of Dutch citizens. Central government and local municipalities are committed to expanding this support network. In March 2019, the Alliance Digital Society (*Alliantie Digitaal Samenleven*<sup>30</sup>) was launched, in which public and private parties, knowledge institutions and experienced experts work together to digitalize the Netherlands.

A solution to promote accessible language among people who both are and are not proficient on the 2F level is the **Language for All** project (*Taal voor allemaal*<sup>31</sup>). This project was initiated by Professor Xavier Moonen and his team at the University of Amsterdam and the Zuyd University of Applied Sciences Heerlen, in collaboration with Koraal, a Dutch provider of services for people with intellectual disabilities, youth care and education<sup>32</sup>. The Language for All project aims to provide tools for creating easily accessible language products (written, online and spoken) for as many people as possible who need these language products. If people with (very) low reading skills and low text comprehension abilities (i.e., with limited deep reading skills<sup>33</sup>) are included in the target reader (or listener) group, the text should be on a level equivalent to the Dutch 1F or CEFR A2.

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29 Tel mee met taal, <https://www.telmeemetaal.nl/>.

30 Alliantie digitaal samenleven, <https://digitaalsamenleven.nl/>.

31 Taal voor allemaal, [www.taalvoorallemaal.com](http://www.taalvoorallemaal.com).

32 Koraal, <https://www.koraal.nl/>.

33 ThoughtCo, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-deep-reading-1690373>.

The Language for All method differs from other Dutch language approaches in two ways. First, it does not use Plain Language and favours Easy Language solutions. That is, Language for All texts are on a 1F (A2, CEFR) or even a CEFR A1 level, depending on who the text is targeting. Second, when the language product is meant to be accessible to the general public, no Easy Language solutions for special groups are used. For instance, no special texts are provided for people with mild intellectual disabilities who can read or for people who use Dutch as a second language. The founders of Language for All find that these solutions do not promote inclusion, and inclusion is obligated by the ratification of the UN CRPD. They consider special texts to be essentially exclusive in nature. This insight should be discussed in the future on an international level among scholars who promote Easy Language in their respective countries. However, if special solutions can help people with very low language skills to better understand a message (mostly on an A1 level) and do not intentionally exclude these people, a tailor-made solution in Language for All may be possible. As a rule, Language for All tries to cover as many recipients as possible with one solution on an Easy Language level; that is on a CEFR A2 level. In Germany the *Leichte Sprache plus* is an equivalent solution (see the German contribution to this publication). Language for All was inspired by the negative experiences of Dutch organizations working with Plain Language solutions, such as the City of Amsterdam and several insurance companies. Despite providing information on a CEFR B1 level, many people still did not understand their messages, resulting in a multitude of telephone calls, no-shows and online requests for help. Thus, they adapted The Language for All concept.

Many of the available Dutch online tools for indicating the level of difficulty of a text are not based on high quality research, and the algorithms used do not reflect rigorous research. An important Dutch research project on several aspects of accessible language (on a 2F or equivalent B1 CEFR level), was the programme of two scientific research organizations, the Dutch Association for Scientific Research (*Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek*) and the Netherland Care and Cure research center (*Zorg Onderzoek Nederland: ZonMw*): Accessible Language (*Begrijpelijke Taal*) 2010–2017. Several Dutch

language research groups and private partners participated in the project<sup>34</sup>. The research included accessible language in financial communication, voting assistance, promoting health education and low health literacy, and the measurement of the comprehensibility of texts. One of the results of the project is the **Knowledge Base Comprehensible Text**<sup>35</sup>, which includes the results of Dutch comprehensible language research and international research on text comprehension in both Dutch and English. Other interesting state-of-the-art research is that by Suzanne Klein on the use of cloze-testing for assessing text readability and that by Henk Pander-Maat on an evidence-based tool for analysing the level of readability of Dutch texts (Kleijn et al. 2019, Pander Maat et al. 2014).

### 6.3 Ethical considerations

A subject to be researched and discussed on a national and international level concerns the ethical aspects of applying accessible language. Many intended readers are only able to read and process a limited amount of information. The concepts on which this information is based may be very difficult for many of the intended readers to grasp. This implies that using accessible language (on both a Plain and Easy Language level) is not only about finding solutions on a word or sentence level, or through layout and illustration, but also about reflecting on the way in which the information is presented and on the amount of information that the intended readers or listeners can absorb. Not presenting all the information available could be considered a discriminatory act, as it prevents citizens having full access to all information. However, this can also be considered a dilemma. If these citizens had full access to all information, their lacking deep reading skills would prevent them from understanding this (complex) information and they would possibly not read this long, complex text at all. In Germany, legislation prescribes that, if a person so desires, all information should be translated into German Easy Language (*Leichte Sprache*). However, are the intended readers really able to understand this full and often dense information even if it is in Easy Language? The Language for All Am-

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 34 NWO, <https://www.nwo.nl/onderzoeksprogrammas/begrijpelijke-taal>.

35 Knowledge Base Comprehensible Text, <http://www.kennisbank-begrijpelijketaal.nl/en/>.

sterdam project chose another solution. After being tested by the very heterogeneous group of intended readers (all citizens of Amsterdam), compact information was presented in an attractive format for all citizens. To ensure full access to all the information available, a sentence was added to the compact information: ‘for this subject, many rules and regulations apply and you can find them on the Amsterdam website www.....etc. On this website you also can find more information on the subject’. This website information was on a Plain Language level (that is, on a 2F or equivalent CEFR B1 level).

## 7 Education and research

With two exceptions, no high-quality training is available in the Netherlands on how to learn and how to write Plain or Easy Language on any educational level. Academic training on the aspects of Plain Language or Easy Language is also lacking. Several private companies offer training modules for writing texts in Plain Language, but these differ in quality. The first exception is the Alliance for Promoting Health Skills (*Alliantie Gezondheidsvaardigheden*), in which the partners share knowledge and solutions (mainly on a Plain Language level, but sometimes in Easy Language) with people who have trouble reading and understanding written medical and health-related texts, and who are at risk of developing health problems and do not appropriately monitor their own health. The public knowledge base of the Alliance presents several solutions, of which some are based on research results<sup>36</sup>. The second exception is the Language for All project, which offers a brief training session on the project’s principles. After this, intensive training is offered for learning to write in Language for All, which includes a supervision programme for becoming a trained Language for All writer. Part of this training is to learn to co-operate with the intended readers and to test both the readability and accessibility of a concept text. This co-operation is seen as necessary and valuable, but the input

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36 Alliantie voor gezondheidsvaardigheden, <https://www.gezondheidsvaardigheden.nl/leren-en-inspireren/>.

of the test readers should be carefully handled, as although these test readers are experts in their own cases, they are not easy-read research experts.

There is a whole body of (inter)national research on the aspects of Plain Language. Some results are presented in the Belgian (Flemish) contribution to this publication and will not be repeated here. Dutch research on Easy Language on a CEFR A2 level is scarce. Many Dutch research projects on the aspects of Plain Language exclude people on a CEFR level A1 or A2. Thus, applying the research findings to this group should be done with caution. Research indicates that the solutions found in Plain Language research do not always apply to Easy Language use among people who have (very) low literacy skills and who suffer from severe text comprehension problems. Karremans and colleagues (2015), for instance, found, in contrast to the findings of other research, that adding pictograms and a motivational agent to a text on Lyme's disease for low-literate gardeners had no positive effects on their understanding of the text.

The concept of acceptability, that is, that all intended readers accept a given text as suitable and acceptable for them, is rarely the subject of Easy Language research. But research on both the readability and accessibility of a text are core activities of the Language for All project. As are finding research-based solutions to compose a message in the public domain in a form that is both understood and accepted by the intended readers or listeners with mixed levels of text understanding. Several multidisciplinary research projects have begun as part of Language for All. A simple tool was designed and is currently being validated, to quickly assess the comfort language level of an interlocutor, in order to improve mutual understanding. Several aspects of how to collaborate with people targeted by the Language for All messages are subjects of research, including how to assess the understanding and appreciation of texts among people with different levels of text comprehension. The results concerning understanding and the acceptability of texts in Language for All will be presented in mid 2021. In one project, aimed at parents of pupils, a letter in Language for All was found to be both more understandable and acceptable than the standard text used until then (Reichrath 2020). As research on adding images to Easy Language texts to improve understanding of the text is not yet conclusive, a systematic research project is currently underway. Some international

publications are under preparation, as is international research co-operation. Contacts have been drawn up with the Dutch Language Institute to include Language for All texts in easy-to-read corpora and to perform further research on linguistic properties. Research into automated text simplification, that is, automatically rewriting a (scanned) text in Language for All, is promising in theory, but has not yet been realized due to lack of funding.

## 8 Future perspectives

The need for Plain and Easy Language solutions will emerge in the coming decades in the Netherlands and as promotion of Easy Language is still lacking, this should be a core concern for government and private partners. In the Netherlands, high quality training in writing and speaking Easy Language should be established, on both a practical and an academic level. It is important to discuss and research, on a national and international level, the consequences of exclusion through Easy Language solutions for special groups and to study solutions that include as many people as possible with one Easy Language solution. More research is needed on the deep understanding and acceptability of easy-to-read texts by means of cloze reading, for instance.<sup>37</sup> More research is also needed on all the ground rules concerning Easy Language used in countries worldwide. Research on text difficulty has mostly covered Plain Language texts and it is unclear whether the results are applicable to easy-to-read texts. More research is needed on (adding) pictures to easy-to-read texts. Research on whether this really helps all people addressed by Easy Language solutions is still inconclusive. Eye-tracking research could reveal how several targeted groups use photos, pictograms, drawings etc. for understanding texts.

The inclusion of all citizens in all aspects of society is obligated by the ratification of the UN CRPD, and this is followed in almost all European countries. However, special texts are essentially exclusive in nature, and this should be a matter of (inter)national discussion among scholars and practitioners in the

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<sup>37</sup> Maine DOE News, <https://mainedoenews.net/2015/12/17/close-reading-developing-deep-understanding-of-texts/>.

field of Easy Language. The dilemma concerning the way in which and how much information should be provided to really help people understand texts in Easy Language should also be discussed, because their information absorption ability is limited, and even providing them with all the information available will not help them understand the matters that concern them.

## Author

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Dutch.

### **Problemen met omgaan met geld**

Omgaan met geld is moeilijk.

Je moet weten hoeveel geld je hebt.

En hoeveel geld je kunt uitgeven.

Als je meer geld uitgeeft dan je hebt, dan maak je schulden.

Schulden moet je betalen.

Je komt in de problemen als je schulden niet betaalt.

L\* kan je helpen:

- als je problemen hebt met omgaan met geld.
- om te leren om alleen geld uit te geven dat je echt hebt.

L zorgt er samen met jou voor dat:

- Je rekeningen betaald worden.
- Je weet hoeveel geld je elke week kunt uitgeven.
- Je van je schulden afkomt.
- Dat je geld over hebt om leuke dingen mee te doen.

Je kunt L bellen op telefoonnummer xxxxxx

\*Naam van de zorgverlener

**[Problems dealing with money**

Dealing with money is difficult.

You have to know how much money you have.

And how much money you can spend.

If you spend more money than you have, you create debts.

You have to pay debts.

You will get into trouble if you don't pay debts.

L\* can help you:

- if you have problems handling your money.
- Learn to only spend money that you really have.

L will work with you to make sure that:

- Your bills get paid.
- You know how much money you can spend each week.
- You pay your debts.
- You have money left over to do fun things.

You can call L at telephone number xxxxxx

\*Name of the service provider]

## Easy Language in Norway

### 1 Introduction

Norway has a population of 5.3 million (Statistics Norway 2020). Of these people, 11.3% have foreign citizenship, and 18.2% make up the immigrant population (Thorsnæs 2020). The administrative language is Norwegian, which has two different language variants in written form, namely *bokmål* and *nynorsk*. These language forms are very similar and can therefore be considered to be what Vikør (n.d.: 1) refers to as ‘written dialects’. Which form people prefer is typically related to where in the country they reside. Norwegian is the language spoken by the majority of the population, and exists in a variety of regional and local dialects. In addition, Norway has several official minority languages, such as three different variations of the Sami language, Norwegian sign language, Kven language, and Romani (Jahr 2020).

The population of Norway is diverse. Some inhabitants have challenges related to vision, hearing and movement, and others have developmental or psychosocial impairments. No official statistics exist in Norway on these various groups, and there are discussions on which criteria to apply: for example, medical diagnosis, the need for assistance or self-reporting of illnesses, diagnoses or functions (Jensen and Strand 2018). Based on unofficial statistics from user organizations, however, it seems that the prevalence of various types of impairment is approximately the same as that in other countries with similar living conditions.

According to the OECD (2019), reading is vital for educational success, economic participation, individual growth, and citizenship. Literature is a natural part of many people’s lives in Norway. A survey conducted by the Norwegian associations for booksellers and publishers revealed that 83% of the population read at least one book a year, whereas 26% read more than 10 books a year

(Bokhandlerforeningen and Den norske forleggerforening 2020). Women read on average 18.5 books in 2019, compared to the 7.9 books read by men. A total of 46% of households with children below 10 years of age read aloud to their children at least two to three times a week. The same survey found that 13% did not read any books at all, and the majority of these were below 60 years of age (Bokhandlerforeningen and Den norske forleggerforening 2020).

According to the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 20% of Norwegian teenagers have reading skills below level 2, which is the limit for what are regarded as the skills required for further education or participation in work life (Jensen et al. 2019). These figures are, however, above the average OECD figures. Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) show that the reading skills of adults in Norway are above the OECD average (see Table 1). These figures, however, are much lower among the immigrant population. The PIAAC literacy levels are measurements of the ability to interact with text to, for instance, access, identify or interpret information (OECD 2016). The PIAAC literacy scale (OECD 2016: 40) is divided into five proficiency levels of literacy. Level 1 is related to short texts and locating single pieces of information, while Level 2 demands matches between the text and information. In contrast, at Level 3, the texts become lengthy and dense, and the reader is required to understand both the text and its rhetorical structures. Consequently, literacy levels at Level 3 are required to read and fully enjoy a novel, whereas people with lower reading levels can only access information presented in shorter texts in easier language.

Reading level	Percentage
Not classified	2.2%
Below level 1	3.0%
Level 1	9.3%
Level 2	30.2%
Level 3	41.6%
Level 4/5	13.7%

Table 1: Reading abilities of Norwegian adult population (Statistics Norway 'Leseferdigheter Og Tallforståelse [Literacy and Numeracy]')

Although many people in Norway have a high level of literacy, a significant part of the population still has lower reading levels, and may struggle to read various forms of texts, such as news or mainstream books. Awareness is increasing of the fact that although language and communication skills are crucial in our society, these skills vary among the population. A study of people in prison found that about 40% experienced challenges related to reading and 50% had challenges with spelling. However, it has been suggested that this was related not only to conditions such as dyslexia, but also insufficient training and a lack of motivation and education (Jones et al. 2011). There is also the worrying development that young people read less than previous generations, and the comprehensive use of digital devices has caused concern regarding the reading skills of young people (Aamli 2020). This development has implications for the production of public information and communication, news and literature in Easy Language. Knowledge about and the implementation of Easy Language in our society will therefore not only benefit 'special readers'; it might also play a crucial role in increasing the reading skills of a broader population.

People who, for various reasons, do not read books are among those who may typically benefit from increased access to Easy Language material. Typical examples of such target groups are people with reading disabilities, people who are second language learners or simply people who have stressful periods, short- or long-term diseases or for other reasons occasionally prefer texts that are easier to read and comprehend.

The production of Easy Language material in Norway is based upon the ideas of inclusion and universal design. The overall aim is to ensure that all inhabitants have access to information, news, culture, and literature. Rather than developing special products for certain users, the purpose is to include a broader variety of people through the combination of Easy Language and high-quality content.

In Norway, Easy Language materials are mainly provided by two different organizations that collaborate closely with organizations and institutions in the fields of normal or standard language. These two organizations, *Klar Tale* and Books for Everyone (BfE), work in different fields – news and literature. Informative texts are mainly written in Plain Language. As it focuses on Easy Language, this chapter will emphasize media (mainly news) and literature. The

main focus will be on how Easy Language material blends in as a natural part of mainstream news and literature.

## 2 Historical perspectives

In Norway, initiatives to establish organizations that produce Easy Language material have typically come from people and organizations concerned with the rights of people with disabilities or special needs education. These organizations, namely *Klar Tale* and BfE, are now long established. They have gathered significant experience of producing Easy Language material and a deeper understanding of the extensive amount of people who actually benefit from Easy Language material. The end products have evolved from targeting a specific population to a broader diversity of people, acknowledging that all types of people may benefit from Easy Language materials. Consequently, the end products are no longer limited to people with reading or language challenges. Instead, such materials are aimed at all types of readers, who, for various reasons, require news or literature in Easy Language.

The easy-to-read newspaper *Klar Tale* started out as a test project in 1989, initiated by a special interest organization for people with intellectual impairments (*Forbund for psykisk utviklingshemmede*). The project proved successful, and there was a desire to continue its work. Consequently, the *Klar Tale* foundation was established in 1990. The initiative came from the central government administration in collaboration with the Norwegian press and representatives from different special interest organizations. These parties saw the need for a newspaper aimed at people who, for a variety of reasons, could not access news from the mainstream media. Today, *Klar Tale* has a broad target group that consists of everyone who requires news in Easy Language either permanently or for a short time period.

The BfE organization was established in 2003. The Department of Special Education had expressed concerns about the conditions for the production and dissemination of adapted literature for people with reading difficulties. Consequently, the department asked for a professional evaluation of the current situation. A committee and working group were established, comprising

members from organizations that promoted the rights of people with special needs education and representatives from the fields of art and literature. The committee completed a strategy document in 2002 (Books for Everyone 2002), which pointed out that the lack of adapted books contradicted the intentions of Norwegian law and the national and international conventions to which Norway was committed. Both the World Program of Action (UN 1982) and The UN's standard rules for equal opportunities for people with disabilities (UN 1993) emphasized the need for constructive facilitation of the environment and services to ensure the right of people with physical and/or cognitive disabilities to equal participation in society. Norway also looked to Sweden and their Centre for Easy-to-Read (see chapter on Sweden (2.2)) when establishing Books for Everyone.

The first easy-to-read books for children were published by the *Samlaget* publishing house in 1973 (Lande 2018). Since then, Norwegian publishing houses have issued many easy-to-read books for the reading education of children. BfE paid most attention to books for young people and adults. Due to limited funding, easy-to-read books for children with dyslexia and general reading difficulties, and children with a second language were not prioritized in either the book production or the *Boksøk.no* database. *Boksøk* (Book search) is an online service developed by BfE that comprises a large database of books regarded as accessible for a variety of target groups. The database comprises both books supported by the organization and mainstream books evaluated by BfE advisors. During the first years of BfE, books for children were only produced as 'specialized books' with, for instance, tactile illustrations or sign language.

In 2010, the *Leselykt* (Reading torch) project was launched, aiming to include easy-to-read children's books on *Boksøk.no*. A thorough search of the existing easy-to-read books revealed that very few of the books defined as easy-to-read were in accordance with the needs of children with reading difficulties. Most of the stories and the language were too complex. The reviews of these books showed a significant lack of accessible books for children with reading difficulties. Consequently, the development of children's books was added to the work of BfE. This insight also led to an increased awareness that 'easy to read' can mean different things, such as easily accessible texts for language learners without reading difficulties and easy-to-understand or adapted

texts to meet the needs of people with various forms of reading difficulties. As a consequence, BfE developed a flexible approach towards its target groups. Another example of an overlooked target group was elderly people who needed Easy Language literature. This group has also received attention from BfE in later years.

### 3 Current situation

Since the establishment of *Klar Tale* and BfE, the main transition has been the new potential target groups. In the beginning, the organizations produced material for quite specific and limited user groups. Over the years, however, attitudes have changed, and the organizations now target much broader user groups. This development may be related to an increased understanding in Norwegian society of universal design, but also the acknowledgement of diversity over deficiencies. Moreover, there is a broader understanding that reading impairments may be situational or contextual. For instance, stressful periods or illness may cause the same reading difficulties as, for instance, those related to dyslexia or impaired vision. People who are in the process of learning Norwegian are also an example of readers with a changing and contextual language challenge.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Plain Language has become a relatively common concept in Norway, known by the term *klarspråk* (clear language). Norway is a member of the Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) and hosted the PLAIN conference in 2019. Plain Language in Norway is mostly related to informative texts, essentially those used by authorities to inform citizens of rights, duties and social systems. The term relates to the international definition of Plain Language and emphasizes the use of clear and direct language that conveys its content as clearly as possible. This principle applies to the use of words, sentences and how information is structured. The goal is to empower a broader part of the

population to understand the society in which they live and to become independent, responsible citizens.

The term Easy Language is not commonly used in Norway, and Norway has no official definition for it. The related term ‘easy to read’, however, has been used in different manners and forms throughout the years, most commonly meaning literature aimed at young language learners. This genre has been a commercial success for publishers, but as previously mentioned, does not necessarily meet the needs of young readers with reading difficulties. Over the last two decades, however, two organizations working to promote Easy Language material have especially contributed to the awareness that easy-to-read texts are not convenient for only children learning to read. Such material may be vital for people of all ages, with or without reading difficulties. Whereas Plain Language is used to convey a clear meaning in important informative texts, Easy Language is used in slightly different manners in news and literature.

The PISA 2000 framework classifies texts in different ways, for instance, format. The framework distinguishes between continuous, non-continuous and mixed texts. All of these texts require different reading approaches. Easy Language material in Norway is typically concerned with the development of accessible continuous texts, such as newspaper reports, fiction and non-fiction literature. Informative texts typically use Plain Language with an aim to give clear content without room for misunderstanding. In contrast, a high quality easy-to-read fictional book uses Easy Language to create a text of artistic value that is open for co-creation with its reader. These different aspects of language will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

The principle that all citizens have equal rights and should be given the same opportunities to participate on all levels of society is firmly rooted in Norway. The awareness that language, both written and oral, can exclude people and obstruct democracy, however, has received less attention. Although the use of Plain Language to inform citizens has improved the quality of informative texts, the need remains to direct attention towards the fact that many people are excluded from cultural and literary experiences due to language barriers.

In this context, the potential of Easy Language, along with the importance of cultural and literature experiences, is now increasingly being acknowledged.

Norway ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN 2006) in 2013. This document has altered the status of people with disabilities in national and international human rights law (Strand 2014). Article 21 states that people with disabilities should have access to seeking, receiving and communicating information and ideas. Moreover, the CRPD requires that information intended for the general public be provided in accessible formats and technologies, facilitates the use of sign language and encourages mass media to make services accessible to people with disabilities (UN 2006).

The inclusion of everyone in general, and people with various reading difficulties in particular, is not only the ideal of many organizations in Norway. It is also a legal obligation. According to the CRPD (UN 2006), people with disabilities have the right to *'take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life'*. The Convention also states that access to places of cultural performance, such as libraries must be ensured (UN 2006). The Public Libraries Act of Norway also emphasizes the need to include all people. According to this law, public libraries should *'promote the spread of information, education and other cultural activities through active dissemination and by making books and other media available for the free use of all the inhabitants of Norway'* (Folkebibliotekloven 2014). It is not possible to achieve this task without universally designed products and services. Consequently, Easy Language material is an important contribution that enables libraries to comply with legal requirements.

An important principle incorporated in many parts of Norwegian society is the principle of universal design. The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (Ministry of Culture 2020) defines universal design as *'designing or accommodating the main solution with respect to the physical conditions, including information and communications technology (ICT), such that the general functions of the undertaking can be used by as many people as possible, regardless of disability.'* It should be noted, however, that universal design also addresses variations in age, gender, sexuality, language, and cultural background (Steinfeld and Maisel 2012). The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (Ministry of Culture 2020), last revised in 2020, enforces a special provision on ICT, which

entails that all ICT solutions should be universally designed. Consequently, this law applies to all types of digital services, such as online newspapers, library websites and bibliographic search user interfaces, such as *Boksøk*. The law does not specifically mention Easy Language but includes culture in the paragraph emphasizing equal opportunities for participation.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Easy Language material is mostly provided by two organizations in Norway (*Klar Tale* and BfE), which work in collaboration with stakeholders of standard language material. However, several other stakeholders work with specific target groups. In addition, several stakeholders aim to include a broader group of people by focusing on an inclusive language or language approach.

The awareness of clear language was strengthened by the *Klart språk i staten* (Clear governmental language) project, initiated by the **Language Council of Norway** (*Språkrådet*) and **Norwegian Digitalization Agency** (*Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT*) in 2009. The aim of this project was to inspire governmental offices in Norway to use Plain Language when communicating with citizens. Today, the **Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities** (KS) is responsible for educating employers in Norway's various municipalities on the use of Plain Language. KS offers advice, information films, courses, and seminars. In addition, the Language Council of Norway works on language diversity and language policy under assignment by the Ministry of Culture (The Language Council of Norway 2020). One of their purposes is to promote clear, accessible language that supports learning, a safe and efficient work environment, and participation in society for all citizens of Norway.

**The national broadcasting channel in Norway**, NRK, provides daily news in Norwegian, Sami and Norwegian sign language. The NRK does not focus directly on Easy Language, but is aware of the responsibility related to being the official national broadcasting channel promoting the Norwegian language. The channel has a committee that works specifically with language, which has produced, for example, a dictionary called 'The NRK language' (NRK 2020), and a handbook on how to use language in broadcasting (NRK 2010). Examples of the handbook guidelines are avoiding the use of foreign language and

difficult words, pausing between important words and content to allow the users to process the information, and using natural language. The aim of the NRK is to ensure high quality of the language used on TV and radio, and to use words and phrases that all people in Norway will understand (NRK 2010). The NRK also provides a news programme for children, called *Supernytt* (Super News). News on *Supernytt* is adapted to accommodate children, in terms of both language and content.

The news aspect of Easy Language in Norway is mainly provided by the *Klar Tale* (Clear Speech) foundation. The purpose of the foundation is to produce an easy-to-read newspaper that serves as an equivalent news channel to the mainstream media for people with language and reading difficulties. The *Klar Tale* foundation provides the overall framework for printing and distribution, such as announcing tenders and choosing who will publish the newspaper on their behalf. Its office is situated in Oslo, but its subscribers are from all over Norway, comprising individuals, organizations, group homes, and various types of offices.

*Aftenposten*, one of Norway's biggest newspapers, produces a weekly children's version of their newspaper, *Aftenposten Junior*. This has easy-to-read articles aimed at children, written and presented in a way that allows school-children to read the newspaper by themselves.

Two specialized TV producers, namely *TV BRA* and *Empo TV* produce content made by people with developmental impairments. *TV BRA* is an independent TV channel that produces weekly programmes, whereas *Empo TV* broadcasts monthly programmes on national TV channels. The features cover themes such as news, politics and culture.

The **Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille** (*Norsk lyd- og blindeskriftbibliotek*, NLB) produces and lends out braille books and audio books, directed at children, youth and adults. Their overall goal is to ensure that everyone has access to information and literature. The NLB was established in 1989, is organized under the Ministry of Culture, and is a national service. It does not produce content but makes existing books accessible through braille or audio, including fiction for the general population and textbooks for students. The library holds about 5500 titles in braille and 21 000 audiobooks

(Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille 2020). The NLB has approximately 90 000 registered members.

Norway has no specific **publishing houses** that work exclusively with Easy Language. Instead, the responsibility for Easy Language literature is shared by all publishing houses, authors, illustrators and graphic novel artists in collaboration with the BfE organization. The Norwegian name for BfE is *Leser søker bok* (Reader seeks book). Its main purpose is to produce books that can be read by people with different reading abilities, and to provide enjoyable fictional and non-fictional reading experiences for everyone. BfE develops books in co-operation with authors, illustrators, cartoonists, and publishing houses by providing financial support and editorial advice. Books developed in collaboration with BfE are closely followed by a BfE literary adviser, and only books that are supervised and approved by the organization can carry the BfE label (the organization's logo) as a sign of approval. BfE employees mainly provide consultancy for book development and information about Easy Language books for professionals and semi-professionals who convey literature, and develop and disseminate knowledge through organized feedback, seminars, courses, and handbooks.

To comply with the Public Libraries Act, all **libraries** must make literature accessible to all inhabitants of Norway (Folkebibliotekloven 2014). BfE collaborates with 370 public libraries all over Norway through the BfE network. The libraries in this network receive packages containing all new books with the BfE label free of charge. These book packages contain a newsletter with information and suggestions on how to facilitate the promotion of suitable target groups. BfE also inspires and teaches how to organize reading groups (*leseombudsordningen*) and language cafés through local reading representatives.

Due to their different areas of commitment, there is little collaboration between the different organizations promoting Easy Language in Norway. Information is exchanged, but there are only few discussions on the main aspects of Easy Language or how to increase the knowledge and status of Easy Language in Norway. Collaboration among the education, research, culture, and information departments is also scarce. These institutions are run by different administrations and hold different places in the state budget. The potential readers of Easy Language material, however, are not necessarily found in the

organizations responsible for it. A person with reading difficulties, for instance, will not necessarily go to a library or bookshop. Consequently, much work still remains to be done to reach all potential target groups, also non-readers. Even though Easy Language books are not made for educational purposes, every school student should still have the right to access such literature. Schools might be the only place where a child or young person meets literature. This issue needs to be addressed by making more types of books accessible in Norwegian schools, not only mainstream fictional literature.

### 3.4 Funding

Despite an increased awareness that language plays a major role in creating an inclusive society, the development and distribution of Easy Language material is not guaranteed permanent financial support. The *Klar Tale* foundation must annually apply for funding from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (*Bufdir*). The newspaper is financed through a separate grant under funding for organizations for people with disabilities. During its very first years, BfE received funding from the Ministry of Culture, but for the last 15 years, it has had to annually apply for funding from the Arts Council Norway. This, in addition to possible political changes and different budget priorities, has made BfE funding vulnerable. The lack of stability and underfunding indicates that Easy Language still has a low status. It also shows that awareness of the importance of access to news and literature in Easy Language is lacking. Increased, stable funding, as well as up-to-date material, is essential to develop the concept of Easy Language. In the state budget for 2021, BfE was moved back under the Ministry of Culture. BfE must still apply for funding annually, but the process is now less complicated, and the organization is ensured steady funding from one year to another.

## 4 Target groups

Reading difficulties may have several causes, such as illiteracy, reading impairments, ADHD, impaired vision, deafness, or illness. Moreover, the need

for Easy Language material may not necessarily be related to reading or developmental impairments; potential users may also be people learning a new language, people who are unwell, stressed, or tired. Reading difficulties can be situational and contextual, and people have several different needs and motivations for requiring Easy Language material. As a result of this awareness, the focus is not directed towards particular end users, but towards the qualities of the material. Examples of Easy Language measures are using easier words, avoiding long sentences, applying a well-organized dramaturgy, and using a clear layout.

*Klar Tale* emphasizes that the target group for the newspaper is people with reading and writing challenges. The target group is therefore not restricted to a specific reader, but to *any* reader who regards news as meaningful. These readers comprise people with reading difficulties such as dyslexia, but also people with general reading difficulties, people with aphasia, people who are learning Norwegian, and people who for other reasons need adapted news to comprehend the content. People with cognitive challenges are therefore also part of the broad target group. A podcast and an audio CD alternative have been developed for readers who prefer audio format or a combination of oral and written language. *Klar Tale* also offers automatic reading of digital texts on its website.

The BfE organization focuses on user needs rather than deficiencies, for instance, individuals who require large letters or less dense text segments rather than those who have impaired vision or dyslexia. Broadly speaking, everyone who finds reading mainstream books challenging belong to BfE's target group. The main goal is literary democracy: all people should have access to fictional books. Consequently, the type of books that the organization supports change and expand as new knowledge is gained on user needs. This knowledge acquisition also affects the way in which the books are presented by the official BfE website and the *Boksøk* online database. The different categories of books developed in collaboration with BfE are based on the format or form of adaptation of the books rather than their target groups. For example, the category of books for people with impaired vision is called 'Braille / Tactile pictures' instead of 'Books for people with visual impairments'. This is a deliberate strategy to avoid stigmatization and is in line with universal design thinking. The books in the different categories have a far wider range than only the primary target group,

and this broad secondary target group is vital for how BfE communicates information about literature. It should also be emphasized that most authors, illustrators and graphic novel artists who make adapted books in collaboration with BfE are not specialized artists working in the field of Easy Language. They are simply artists making books, who are willing to deepen their understanding of how a book can reach a broader or different target group.

Both *Klar Tale* and BfE constantly work with feedback from different readers. Some books are systematically tested on specific target groups, either after the book is finished or during the writing process. Methods that have been used are letting the author meet their readers, reading out loud from the text-in-making and asking for immediate feedback, or sending the entire text or parts of the text to specific readers. This method of gathering feedback *before* the text is finished is fairly new, and still under development. It does, however, comply well with the principles of participatory design, which has a strong foundation in Norway. Target group feedback has proven to be very important. The resources and time limits available affect how frequently target group feedback can be used. Nevertheless, the methods for such user testing could be systematized and developed further.

## 5 Guidelines

The two main Easy Language stakeholders in Norway, *Klar Tale* and BfE are similar, but still have notable differences, in how they approach Easy Language, due to the differences in the types of texts they provide. Both news and literature in Easy Language are developed by practitioners with extensive experience. Specialized journalists use their knowledge about different language challenges when developing the newspaper, and literature advisors collaborate with authors, illustrators and graphic novel artists when developing books. *Klar Tale* provides news texts that aim to give clear, direct information and at the same time invite the reader to make individual decisions and reflections based on the information. Fictional literature supported by BfE should be open for interpretation and co-creation with the reader. It is essential that the qualities of different genres are also retained in Easy Language texts.

*Klar Tale* has developed guidelines for easy-to-read language, communicated through the publishers. These guidelines are an extraction of common European rules for Easy Language text, for example those by Karde (2014). From the start, the editors have written regular news language in the same way as the Norwegian News Agency, adjusted on the basis of advice from representatives of the newspaper's different reading groups and special education teachers. In addition, *Klar Tale* journalists follow advice from language competition rules developed by Vinje (2009). The overall purpose is to write texts that are easy to read, but that provide content for adults. The guidelines and practical adjustments applied by *Klar Tale* can be summarized as follows: the main rule for every journalist is to write simply and precisely. The purpose is to help the reader understand the context. For an illustration of these guidelines, see Appendix 1.

The goal of *Klar Tale* is to illuminate events rather than to explain or teach. To reach this goal, the journalists refrain from colouring the language with fixed expressions, pictorial expressions and difficult foreign words. Nevertheless, they do introduce common, complex words so that readers are constantly challenged. Active language (sentences that make clear who does what) is required. The tone of the language is close to oral language, and the texts should mainly contain short sentences. They use both direct and indirect speech. The journalist also intentionally drops stop points into the text, such as sub-headings, to improve the reading flow. They also use the *Liks* (*Lesbarhetsindeks* in Norwegian) readability index. The language is close to everyday language.

The news articles are structured so that they are also meaningful for people who do not read the entire text. Captions with introductory words, as well as the title and introduction, provide the reader with a quick overview. In addition, the most important content is summarized in a separate column entitled 'Short and clear'. All the articles in the printed newspaper are shorter than mainstream newspaper articles. *Klartale.no* also provides shorter texts as an alternative to the main article. The *Klar Tale* foundation frequently asks professionals to evaluate the newspaper, to ensure that the product is suitable for the end user. Constant feedback is given by immigrant groups and others who use *Klar Tale* in teaching, and the newspaper co-operates with user organizations in connection with, for instance, projects or redesign. *Klar Tale* continues to

improve their guidelines to ensure that the newspaper is perceived as a relevant Easy Language news alternative in Norway.

BfE co-operates closely with its readers to make sure that Easy Language books are regarded as useful. Books suitable for people with reading difficulties should find a balance between being easy to read and being stimulating, and should not come across as being below the reader's current level of cognitive, intellectual and artistic abilities (Berget and Fagernes 2018). Experiences gained from producing and testing books, feedback from target groups, and dialogue with readers, authors, librarians, and teachers have resulted in a set of advice and criteria. These criteria are related to language, typography, dramaturgy, illustrations, and layout.

Linguistic considerations include using easy words instead of complex words, and avoiding foreign words and consonant accumulation. At the same time, BfE considers recognizability of common words to support reading, even if these words are long or compound. Thus BfE does not recommend splitting long words or using hyphens. It also aims to find a balance between short, easy sentences and reading flow. Too many short sentences create a staccato text and should be avoided (Berget and Fagernes 2018). This is an experience shared by *Dysleksi Norge* (Dyslexia Norway), an organization that frequently claims that a text without variation will become less engaging, which in turn does not support reading. Like *Klar Tale*, BfE advisors advocate the use of active constructions of sentences. BfE also encourages writers to use descriptive language, creating opportunities for the reader to fully engage in the story from the characters' perspectives.

Dramaturgical considerations include developing credible characters, using a clear voice and applying a reliable perspective. The use of retrospective style and flashbacks should be limited, and transitions between scenes must be clear. Typographical considerations typically include font type and size, spaces between letters, lines and paragraphs, line length, and the position of a line break in a sentence. Readability is also supported by frequent use of sections and shorter chapters. BfE recommends not dividing words over line breaks and not letting a sentence run from one page to the next.

In books with illustrations, other issues are considered, such as the relationship between the illustrations and the text, the type and style of the illustra-

tions (for example, whether they appear childish to the intended reader) and placement. In graphic novels, the 'reading direction' of illustrations, accuracy of expressions, and font type are important. Many graphic artists use handwritten letters in which the words are often placed very close to each other, and this may have a negative impact on readability. The tradition of comics is to use upper case letters, but the use of lower-case letters makes the text more accessible for readers with dyslexia. BfE discusses all the above-mentioned criteria with authors and editors. BfE books have not been researched, except for their line length (Berget and Fagernes 2018), but they are constantly adjusted based on feedback.

The author, illustrator or graphic novel designer is informed of the important considerations when creating books for readers of Easy Language. At the same time, these considerations must be seen in the context of well-written and well-crafted literature. Instead of making 'special books' for certain readers, the authors, illustrators, graphic novel artists and publishing houses aim to reach a broader diversity of readers. By making adjustments for certain readers, however, experience has shown that the books also become more usable for other readers. For example, a more readable font in graphic novels makes the text easier to read not only for people with reading difficulties and visual impairments, but also for all other readers. This is in accordance with the principles of universal design. Several books supported by BfE have won prizes in competitions with mainstream books, which shows that people with reading difficulties can enjoy the same books as readers who do not have such challenges.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Easy Language material in Norway is typically concerned with the development of accessible continuous texts, such as newspaper reports, fiction and non-fiction literature.

## 6.1 Media

The easy-to-read newspaper *Klar Tale* has digital and analogue versions. The digital paper is updated daily, whereas the printed version is distributed once a week. The weekly newspaper is also available as an e-newspaper and an audio alternative. *Klar Tale* has subscribers all over Norway. It is also available in most libraries, elderly homes and group homes, and is often used in educational situations and language cafés.

## 6.2 Literature

By September 2020, BfE had supported the production of 232 books, on average 10–15 books a year. These books can be divided into six categories: Easy to Read, Easy to Understand, Braille/Tactile Pictures, Big Letters, Sign Language/Sign Support, and Alternative Communication Signs (see Figure 1). Every category aims to offer a variety of genres and styles, comprising novels, picture books, graphic novels, poetry collections, short-story collections, or subject-oriented prose.

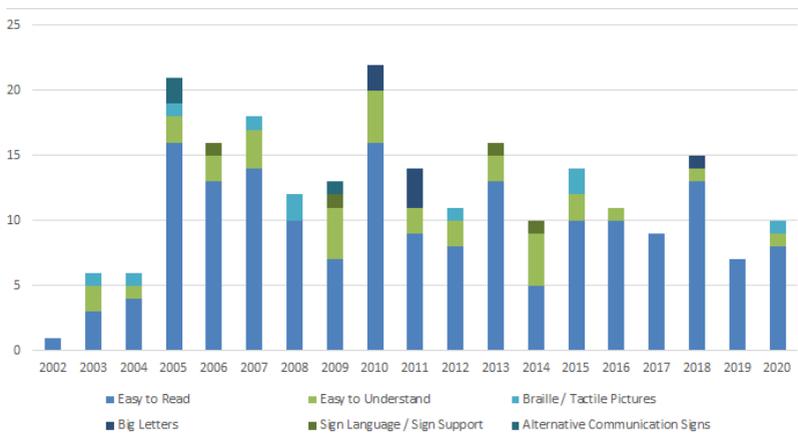


Figure 1: Production of books by BfE, according to publication year and category.

The two largest categories of books, ‘Easy to Read’ and ‘Easy to Understand’, both relate to Easy Language. ‘Easy to Read’ (*Litt å lese* in Norwegian) is the

most voluminous category with a huge variation of books for all ages. Books belonging to this category can be characterized as high-content/low-skills book or high-interest, low-level books, often referred to as HiLo books (Spadorcia 2005). The reading levels of these books are lower than the age of the reader but their topics and styles that match the age of the reader. The potential target groups of these books are people with dyslexia or general reading difficulties, second language learners, deaf people, people with concentration difficulties, elderly people without cognitive challenges, or readers for whom illness or fatigue temporarily makes it difficult to read. The second largest category, 'Easy to Understand' (*Enkelt innhold* in Norwegian), is characterized by being both easy to read and easy to understand. It contains books adapted for people with cognitive impairments as well as reading difficulties. The typical readers are divided into three main target groups: people with disabilities, people with dementia, and people with aphasia.

One common challenge is to ensure that Easy Language material reaches non-readers, i.e., readers who are not used to walking into a bookstore or a library and easily finding accessible books or news. Thus, it is important to address how adapted books or news are promoted. The main category, *Litt å lese* (A little bit to read), is also referred to as *Enkel tekst* (Easy to read). BfE uses the name *Litt å lese* more often for three reasons. First, to avoid confusion with books labelled 'easy to read' by publishing houses. Second, the label 'easy' may affect both the sense of accomplishment of finishing a book or the feeling of failure if you cannot manage to read an 'easy' book. Reading is not easy for people with reading difficulties. Adaptation makes literature accessible and possible to enjoy, but not effortless, which the term 'easy' might imply. Third, there might be a stigma related to the label 'easy'. Gambrell (2011) claims that many people with reading impairments select books that are too difficult because they do not want to be seen reading 'easy' books. Thus, the use of labels such as 'easy' might negatively affect the choice of books.

Another important element related to the promotion of books is motivation to read. Ross (2000) claimed that people often select books based on their life events and moods. Readers who are busy or under stress typically read short books, easy-reads or old favourites. Ross (2000) also presented several categories that affect the choice of books, such as reading experience, content

and intellectual effort. All these are typically included in the development and promotion of adapted books in Norway. Examples could be including people with cognitive impairments as the main characters in books directed at this target group, and producing books at different reading levels for young adults who may have varying reading experiences. Representation in literature is an important aspect on many levels. In Norway, awareness that readers with minority backgrounds should also find themselves represented in literature is increased. This issue should be reflected on further: Who writes books and who communicates the books? Who are the editors and the critics? To truly create a literate society that includes everyone, this perspective should be reflected on not only in the literature itself, but also in the structures surrounding the literature.

Rather than addressing potential target groups, BfE's categorizing system focuses on the way in which the books are organized. There are several reasons for this. As mentioned above, one important aspect is that it reduces stigma and probably increases the motivation of a person with reading difficulties to read the book. Furthermore, it does not limit end users to merely those with reading difficulties. These books are equally relevant for people learning a new language, or who are ill or stressed. Another issue is to avoid making the books 'look adapted'. When the books are published in mainstream publishing houses with regular book designs, the books are not perceived as different, which is also in accordance with the principle of universal design. One of BfE's goals is that every reader, regardless of their reading ability, should be offered high-quality books in terms of both content and design.

BfE develops fictional books and factual prose and does not focus on material such as schoolbooks or news. Moreover, it only supports new books. The main reason for this is to offer new, interesting books to people who require literature in Easy Language rather than publishing adapted versions of old books. This means no division between the 'real book' and the 'adapted version', which is also in line with the idea of universal design. An exception to this rule is adaptations in which the book changes form. One example is the adaptation of Eric Carle's story about the hungry caterpillar into a tactile book printed in Braille (Carle 2006). Another example is the adaptation of the classic novel *Sult* (Hunger) by Knut Hamsun into a highly artistic graphic novel aimed at

adults (Hamsun and Erntsen 2019). This adaptation gives people with reading difficulties the chance to read old classics with a new artistic take; books which would be more complicated in the original version for many types of readers.

Bias is often best met by experience, and such attitudes have become less of a challenge over the years. An increasing number of people and publishing houses have come to see that there is no reason to consider Easy Language books less artistic than mainstream books. Easy-to-read books are well received by their audience, obtain good reviews and have been translated into different languages. As mentioned, several books have also won prizes in competitions with high-quality mainstream books.

In addition to adapted books, several mainstream books might also be accessible for people with reading difficulties. These books can be found on the previously mentioned *Boksøk.no*. This bibliographic database is developed by BfE, which uses a carefully selected set of criteria when evaluating and choosing which books to include in *Boksøk* and applies one or several of their categories. Very few books fulfil the criteria. On average, about 3000 fictional books are published in Norway every year (Statistics Norway 2019). BfE evaluates approximately 500 of these books and incorporates 80–100 new books into *Boksøk.no*. In addition, BfE compiles the *100-lista* (translates ‘The list of 100’), which is a list of the 100 best Easy Language books on the market. This list is published annually, and is used by readers, teachers and librarians to find suitable, enjoyable books.

### 6.3 Informative texts

Informative texts in Easy Language are not very common in Norway. However, focus is increasing on the Plain Language (*klarspråk* in Norwegian) used by authorities to help Norwegian citizens understand their rights and obligations in society. An example of an authority that aims to change their information into Plain Language is the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). This administration provides crucial information on every citizen’s rights and obligations concerning employment, sick leave, childcare, etc. The goal of using Plain Language on websites and other information platforms is to increase the opportunities for equality and independent living in the Nor-

wegian population. Nevertheless, informative texts in both Plain Language and Easy Language are still required, and Norway could benefit from making such texts more accessible.

#### 6.4 Other projects

In recent years, the importance of language cafés in the context of inclusion has been acknowledged. Although many language cafés are held in libraries and by librarians, very few language café organizers use literature to facilitate conversation. BfE works to raise awareness of how rewarding the use of literature can be, even in language cafés with participants who are new to the Norwegian language. BfE has produced handbooks to increase knowledge on how to read aloud and how to organize language cafés using literature (Salinas 2018, 2019).

In 2018, BfE initiated a bilingual book project, the aim of which is to increase the knowledge and production of bilingual books in Norway. The project also aims to raise awareness of language, culture and dialogue by including second language writers, translators and readers in the development of books. Bilingual books for children are promoted in kindergartens and schools. Poetry collections for adults are simultaneously developed in two languages, in dialogue-based collaboration between the second language writer, a translator, an editor and a BfE literacy advisor. These books are promoted directly to language cafés, secondary language schools, high schools and youth clubs, libraries, and book shops.

### 7 Education and research

No formal education on Easy Language is available in Norway. In the field of media, training in easy-to-read language involves working at *Klar Tale*, reading examples of editorial work, and following the editor's rules and guidelines for easy-to-read language. All journalists working for *Klar Tale* are qualified and have experience of different kinds of newspapers. Education in Easy Language literature takes place in a similar way. BfE employees are typically librarians,

book sellers, literature experts, or authors. Training takes place through learning from others, working with texts, and examining examples of best practice.

Many potential readers of Easy Language literature have faced defeat and prejudice, leading to negative emotions being associated with reading (Retelsdorf et al. 2014). In order to reach out to every possible reader, it is crucial that librarians, teachers and other relevant actors are highly skilled in Easy Language literature and understand how to promote literature without making people feel stigmatized. BfE offers courses in the promotion of Easy Language literature all over the country.

Student librarians can study on an elective course in universal design at the Department of Archivistics, Library and Information Science at Oslo Metropolitan University. The course provides future librarians with knowledge about user diversity, ethical and legal requirements, and various forms of adapted literature. The overall purpose is to prepare library students for encountering a huge diversity of users, and to teach them how to promote Easy Language books to people. One of the main messages to the students is that adapted literature is relevant for all people: those with reading impairments, people learning a new language, and people who are ill, stressed or have difficulties concentrating. Everybody can benefit from Easy Language.

In Norway, reading in a variety of contexts has been focused on for many years. Learning to read is one of the main purposes of every child's education, and a great deal of resources is used for gaining more knowledge about reading. *Lesesenteret* (The reading center), located in the University of Stavanger, has the main national responsibility for researching, developing, educating, and sharing knowledge about reading. Despite this, very little research has been conducted on Easy Language in Norway. Overall, research on Easy Language is scarce on a global level, especially in terms of fictional literature. Printed books have received less attention, and more research is needed in this area (Berget and Fagernes 2018). One study of Norwegian adults with dyslexia revealed that it was important that such books do not look or feel adapted, because this may make the end users 'feel stupid' (Berget and Fagernes 2018). The findings of this study also indicate a need for more research on this type of printed, Easy Language literature in general.

Based on the experiences in Norway, it might be useful to conduct research projects in which organizations working with Easy Language collaborate with researchers. The study by Berget and Fagernes (2018) is an example of such collaboration. BfE participated in designing the reading experiment in this study and contributed books for user testing. Hopefully, such collaborations will inspire a stronger focus on Easy Language among researchers in the future.

## 8 Future perspectives

The principle behind universal design outlines a future goal, namely that people with reading difficulties are part of the news and literary cycle, without hierarchical placement. A real cultural democracy invites readers with diverse reading skills into an equal informational and literary space, where everyone is able to participate.

To reach this goal, systematic, broad and effective collaboration is needed between the different parts of Easy Language production. Practitioners, researchers, politicians, readers, target groups organizations, and the educational and cultural system must all acknowledge the need for Easy Language. They must work together towards a better understanding of Easy Language and how it can be used. Ideally, all types of readers should be involved in the development of Easy Language material.

Language, and its products, should not only be *for* everyone, but also *by* everyone. Dialogue is dependent on communication. Communication is dependent on language. As the overall aim of inclusion extends back to the origin and making of the product, including different kinds of readers in the development of Easy Language material further develops the concept of Easy Language.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of Easy Language news and Easy Language literature in Norway.

– Jeg er øyjente, fra Senja. Og tok utgangspunkt i det. Det er mange aspekter i dette med øyliv. Det kan være det fysiske, der du bor. Det kan være noe mentalt. Det var så mye jeg kunne skrive rundt det. Både billedlig og konkret, sier hun til nyhetsbyrået NTB. Og legger til:

– Og nå bor jeg jo ved øyene i Oslofjorden!

For familien Haukaas Mittet bor ved en halvøy ved Mosseveien. Det var da de flyttet dit at hun innså hvor mye hun hadde savnet utsikten over havet.

*Example of Easy Language news from Klar Tale, published 21 February 2021 on klartale.no*

[– I am an island girl from Senja. I began there. Life on an island has many aspects. Like the physical conditions where you live. Or something mental. I could have written about so many things. Using images or being specific, she tells the news agency NTB. She adds:

– And now I live by the islands in the Oslo fjord!

The Haukaas Mittet family lives by a peninsula near the Moss road. When they moved here, she realized how much she missed seeing the sea.]

– Tenk på hvordan dere lærte morsmålet, sier læreren.

Vi hermer etter lydene rundt oss.

– Fokuser på uttalen først, sier hun.

Jeg gjentar alle lydene jeg hører.

Jeg gjentar ordene inne i meg.

Om igjen og om igjen.

*Example of Easy Language literature, OG (novel) by Veronica Salinas, Cappelen Damm 2018.*

[- Think about how you learned your mother tongue, says the teacher.  
We imitate the sounds around us.

- Focus on pronunciation first.  
I repeat all the sounds I hear.  
I repeat the words inside myself.  
Again and again.]

Det jeg fryktet  
var å skrive om deg  
ikke til deg.

*Example of Easy Language literature, Vuggesang for liten kriger (poetry) by Selma  
M. Yonus, Aschehoug 2021.*

[What worried me was  
to write on you  
not to you.]

## Easy Language in Poland

### 1 Introduction

Poland is a country in central Europe, bordering Germany in the west, Czechia and Slovakia in the south, Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, and the Russian Kaliningrad Region in the east, and the Baltic Sea in the north. It is a parliamentary republic, with two parliament houses (lower: *Sejm* and higher: *Senat*) forming its legislative. The executive consists of the president, chosen in a general election as the official head of state; and the government, headed by the prime minister. Poland is divided into 16 administrative regions (voivodeships). The administration of a voivodeship consists of a regional assembly (*sejmik*), elected every five years in local elections and headed by a marshal, and a governmental representative (*voivode*), appointed by the prime minister.

The official language in Poland is Polish, indicated as a mother tongue by 98% of citizens. In the Opolskie voivodeship, German is an official auxiliary language. In the 2011 national census (Gudaszewski 2015: 69–70), less than 180 000 (almost 0.5%) citizens claimed not to use Polish in their communication at home. Languages other than Polish that are most commonly spoken at home are Silesian (whose status as a separate language, rather than a dialect, is disputed), Kaszubian (whose status as regional language allows it to be selected as a subject in the secondary school final examination and to be used in official communication in some municipalities of the Pomorskie voivodeship), English, and German. Outside of Poland, the overall size of Polish-speaking communities is estimated to be between 10.5 million and 21 million (Sękowska 2010: 20).

Polish belongs to the West Slavic language family, along with Czech and Slovak. Its inflection system is complex, with seven nominal cases, three genders and three verb tenses. Inflection allows a relatively free word order, with

semantic roles depending on word forms rather than their positioning in a sentence. Although not the only option, the subject-verb-object word order is the most common. Most common base words are up to three syllables long – hence readability formulae for Polish regard words of four syllables or more as long (Seretny 2006: 92, Piekot et al. 2015: 111, Gruszczyński and Ogrodniczuk 2015: 62).

In 2019, Poland had about 38 380 000 inhabitants. The median age was 41. Eighteen per cent of the population were over 65 years of age, and 4% (1.7 million) were over 80 years of age (Cierniak-Piotrowska et al. 2020). The greatest national minorities included Germans (about 140 000), Belarussians (over 40 000), and Ukrainians (almost 40 000). According to estimates based on the 2002 national census, about 130 thousand citizens over 16 years of age are people with intellectual disabilities (Kijak 2013: 38).

In the 2011–2012 PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) test, 19% of Poles aged between 16 and 65 achieved Level 1 or below in text comprehension. This result places low literacy in Poland four percentage points above the OECD average. Almost a third of the low-literacy respondents (32%) belonged to the oldest age group of 55–65 years (Burski 2013: 53, 63). This indicates a sizeable group potentially requiring Easy Language.

The Easy Language initiatives in Poland mostly focus on its written form (*teksty łatwe do czytania (i rozumienia)*, ‘easy-to-read (and understand)’). In oral communication, the approach seems to be more individualized, with no universal guidelines.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The first Polish Easy Language texts were published in 2002 in the *Spoleczeństwo dla wszystkich* (Society for Everyone) magazine, issued by the former Polish Society for People with Mental Impairment (*Polskie Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Osób z Upośledzeniem Umysłowym*, PSOUU, now the Polish Society for People with Intellectual Disability, *Polskie Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnością Intelktualną*, PSONI).

In 2010, the PSOUU, which is a member of the Inclusion Europe network, published a Polish version of the *Information for All* guidelines (cf. Abramowska 2015). SONI remains an active advocate of Easy Language and a prolific publisher of Easy Language materials. The publication of the guidelines also marked the beginning of systemic consultation of target group readers when writing Easy Language texts.

Poland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on 6th September 2012. For years after this, Easy Language still seemed to be underrepresented in various forms of accessible information (subtitles, sign language translation, audio description). Two reports on the implementation of the CRPD in Poland (Zadrożny 2015, Tomczyk 2017) have stressed the need for more Easy Language materials. The areas that especially need Easy Language texts are legal procedures, health, voting, culture, and recreation (Tomczyk 2017). The lack of Easy Language information may also lead to underreporting breaches of human rights among people with disabilities (Zadrożny 2015: 30).

Easy Language was first mentioned in the national law in the Ensuring Accessibility to People with Special Needs Act, passed on 19th July 2019 (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2019). The Act requires all public entities to publish ‘easy-to-read information’ on the scope of their activities on their websites (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2019: Art. 6 point 3c). However, despite using the term, the Act does not in any way define ‘easy-to-read’.

### 3 Current situation

The creation of the Plain Polish Laboratory at the University of Wrocław in 2010 marked the beginning of the Polish **Plain Language standard** (*prosta polszczyzna*). As it was beneficial for a greater portion of society, it gained wide recognition in both public and private institutions more rapidly than **Easy Language** (*teksty łatwe do czytania (i rozumienia)*). Although often confused as the same thing in public reception, the two standards function independently of each other. The Polish Plain Language guidelines involve less limitations to the language and form of a text than the Polish Easy Language guidelines. The

main difference between Polish Plain Language and Polish Easy Language is that the latter also simplifies content. Until the Accessibility Act was passed in 2019, Easy Language had little recognition among the general public. In general reception, it is still frequently confused with Plain Language.

The most active promoter of Polish Easy Language has been the **Polish Society for People with Intellectual Disability (PSONI)**. PSONI is a non-governmental organization with branches all across Poland. It supports people with intellectual disabilities and their families and promotes the rights and self-advocacy of people with intellectual disabilities (PSONI 2016a). It also runs numerous occupational therapy workshops and other therapeutic and training facilities across the country. PSONI publishes Easy Language texts (see Section 6) and advises authors from other institutions on Easy Language issues.

Easy Language texts have also been commissioned by local administrations and other public entities and prepared by other non-governmental organizations, mostly ones whose main focus is on other forms of accessibility such as subtitling or audio description. A small number of organizations (both non-governmental and commercial) offer translations into the Easy Language format.

#### 4 Target groups

Most Polish Easy Language texts are directed at people with intellectual disabilities. Easy Language information has also been prepared for low-functioning people with autism spectrum disorders. Some Easy Language brochures cover topics that are of interest to other potential target groups, such as the brochure on the rights of elderly and disabled voters, which was published before the 2014 European Parliament election. The need for Easy Language has also been mentioned in personal discussions by professionals working with deaf people. The discussion on the potential usefulness of Easy Language for other groups, in line with the universal design approach, has only recently transpired in the general public, following the legal requirement of publishing Easy Language texts.

Consulting representatives of the target group when creating Easy Language texts has been a part of the publishing process since the publication of the Inclusion Europe guidelines (2010). Organizations who author the Easy Language texts recruit consultants, usually people with intellectual disabilities. PSONI often consults members of their therapeutic facilities when publishing these texts, and the consultation is part of the therapeutic activities. The consultants' remarks are prepared by the consultants themselves or with help of their therapists and are sent to the authors in written form. In projects commissioned by external organizations, both authors and consultants are paid. In many cases, however, Easy Language texts are created on a non-profit basis. Many of the brochures bearing Inclusion Europe's Easy-To-Read logo do not acknowledge the names of the consultants, despite publication of the names being one of the organization's requirements.

## 5 Guidelines

There is currently no official set of Easy Language guidelines for Polish. The most popular guidelines are those prepared by Inclusion Europe (2010). Even though they include an 'Easy-to-read standards for the Polish language' section, they do not take the many specific features of Polish into account. PSONI's Easy Language authors also use a translated version of universal guidelines developed by Mencap (2000). No expert linguistic knowledge has been employed to develop the currently used guidelines. Practitioners have expressed a need for more extensive Easy Language textbooks and workbooks. For an illustration of the Polish guidelines, see Appendix 1.

As a result of several workshops with consultants with intellectual disabilities, PSONI has adjusted the publishing standards for its brochures. The adjustments include using a larger font (16 pt, as opposed to the 14 pt suggested in the Inclusion Europe (2010) guidelines) as well as less text and pictures per page (two paragraphs and illustration on a horizontal page).

Authors of Easy Language texts rely on their experience as well as the feedback provided by consultants with intellectual disabilities (see Section 4). No general standards have been developed for working with the consultants.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Easy Language has been most actively supported by PSONI, most notably in the Easy Language version of the Polish National Bank's website (NBP, Narodowy Bank Polski 2016, the site is no longer available). PSONI regularly publishes brochures on various aspects of daily life (such as health, work, relationships, rights of people with disabilities) in the series *Biblioteka self-advokata* (Self-Advocate's Library). Its quarterly magazine *Społeczeństwo dla wszystkich* (Society for All), published in both paper and electronic form, contains both standard language and Easy Language versions of some articles (cf. PSONI 2016b). Easy Language texts are also published by local PSONI branches.

Not much other activity was noted until the 2019 Ensuring Accessibility Act, which came into full effect in September 2020. As a result of the new legal requirements, an increasing number of public entities now commission or create Easy Language information for their websites. Due to the lack of official guidelines or requirements for Easy Language texts, the produced texts vary considerably in terms of quality, and the accessibility of some of them is dubious. The Easy Language texts on websites are usually published as downloadable pdf files rather than directly. An exemplary implementation of the Act can be observed in the city of Warsaw: a series of informative texts about all the administrative departments is being prepared, preceded by workshops for clerks. The workshops concern the needs of the target group(s) as well as the preparation of texts for translation into Easy Language. The authorities of Warsaw are also working on internal standards for both Plain Language and Easy Language information.

## 7 Education and research

There are currently no widely available regular training programmes or university courses for Easy Language authors. In 2017, PSONI held a series of open one-time workshops popularizing the idea of Easy Language in several cities in co-operation with the German organization *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language Network). Since 2019, PSONI has held several workshops (onsite

and, during the 2020 COVID pandemic, online) both for its own employees and other authors interested in the Easy Language standard. As part of a project funded by the Polish Ministry of Education, it has also carried out workshops for teachers of all levels of education, who are subsequently preparing a series of educational materials (to be published in 2021). In 2020–2022, the city of Warsaw is organizing a series of workshops under the name Warsaw Academy of Accessibility (*Warszawska Akademia Dostępności*), open and dedicated to city clerks, on various forms of accessible information, including Easy Language.

Research interest in Easy Language has so far been scarce in Poland. However, in 2021, two isolated projects were running. The first is a doctoral thesis project at the University of Warsaw, entitled *Wytyczne dla polskiego modelu tekstu łatwego do czytania* (Guidelines for the Polish Easy-to-read model), launched in 2014 and funded by the Polish Ministry of Science. The other, *Opracowanie i wdrożenie sposobu i standardu obsługi klienta z zakresu przygotowywania dokumentów w sposób dostępny* (Development and implementation of a method and standard of customer service – document preparation in an accessible way), started in 2019 and is conducted for the cities of Warsaw and Sopot by the certification company QS Zürich and the Spanish Easy Language organization *Asociación Lectura Facil*. It is co-financed by the European Social Fund and involves research carried out by linguists of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The projects aim to adapt the guidelines of the German *Leichte Sprache* and the Spanish *Lectura Facil* to the features of the Polish language.

## 8 Future perspectives

The 2019 legislation is a milestone and opens new perspectives for Easy Language in Poland. The number of available Easy Language texts has already started to increase rapidly and will likely continue to do so. We can expect this to trigger more recognition of the format in society. Such wider practice may provide materials and incentives for further research.

Despite this rapid development, the provision of accessible information is still unknown territory to many. Without clear, precise language-specific standards, the implementation of the new legal requirements will vary in quality. The

use of Easy Language can achieve the best effects by combining expert knowledge with practical insights into the needs of the target groups. This requires a multidisciplinary and inclusive approach in both research and practice. We hope that, following the legal changes, initiatives representing such approaches will find both interest and institutional support, which will lead to further development of best Easy Language practices.

## Author

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Polish.

Standard Polish	Easy Polish
<p><i>W ciągu ostatnich czterech lat Polskie Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Osób z Niepełnosprawnością Intelktualną przeobraziło się (...).</i></p> <p><i>Po pierwsze, w każdym Kole PSONI unoszą się słowa o „niezależnym życiu osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną”, „samostanowieniu” i „podmiotowości”.</i></p> <p><i>Po drugie, w każdym Kole PSONI działa grupa self-adwokatów i self-adwokatek, wspierająca Zarządy Kół w działaniach, reprezentująca swoje stanowisko w każdej sprawie dotyczącej osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. (...)</i></p> <p><b>Tak powinno brzmieć podsumowanie kadencji Zarządu Głównego PSONI 2020–2024 (...).</b></p>	<p><b>Co chce robić Zarząd Główny?</b></p> <p>Zarząd Główny pracuje dla Stowarzyszenia. W Zarządzie Głównym są ludzie z różnych miast w Polsce. Będą razem pracować przez 4 lata.</p> <p>W naszym Stowarzyszeniu najważniejsze są osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Zarząd Główny chce, żeby każda osoba z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną mogła niezależnie żyć. To znaczy mieć mieszkanie, pracę i znajomych, decydować o sobie.</p> <p>Osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną mogą decydować o Stowarzyszeniu. Na przykład brać udział w ważnych spotkaniach, mówić co dla nich jest ważne. Mówić czego im najbardziej potrzeba.</p> <p>Source: Zima-Parjaszewska, Monika. “Jak działać ‘na rzecz’? Co chce robić Zarząd Główny?” [‘How to work “for” [people with intellectual disabilities]? What does the National Board want to do?’]. <i>Spółeczeństwo dla wszystkich [Society for all]</i> September 2020: 2. Web. 22 February 2021.</p>

Standard Polish	Easy Polish
<p><i>[Over the last four years, the Polish Society for People with Intellectual Disability (PSONI) has been transformed (...).</i></p> <p><i>First, every PSONI branch has the terms ‘independent life of people with intellectual disabilities’, ‘self-determination’ and ‘subjectivity’.</i></p> <p><i>Second, in every PSONI branch, a group of self-advocates is at work, supporting the Branch Boards in their actions, presenting their position on every matter concerning people with intellectual disability. (...)</i></p> <p><b>This is what the summary of the PSONI National Board term 2020–2024 should sound like (...).</b></p>	<p><b>[What does the National Board want to do?</b></p> <p>The National Board works for the Society. In the National Board there are people from different cities in Poland. They will work together for 4 years.</p> <p>In our Society, people with intellectual disabilities are the most important. The National Board wants every person with intellectual disabilities to be able to live independently. This means: to have a home, a job and friends, and to decide for themselves.</p> <p>People with intellectual disabilities can make decisions about the Society. For example [they can] take part in important meetings, say what is important to them. [They can] say what they need most.]</p>

## Easy Language in Portugal

### 1 Introduction

Portugal is a European country located in the south-west, with two archipelagos in the North Atlantic. The Portuguese territory has a total area of 92 090 km<sup>2</sup>, bordered on the north and east by Spain and on the south and west by the Atlantic Ocean. It comprises a continental part and two autonomous regions: the Azores and the Madeira archipelagos. Portugal is the westernmost nation on the European continent. Its capital is Lisbon, a city with more than 2 800 000 inhabitants in its metropolitan area.

The official language in Portugal is Portuguese, one of Europe's first cultured languages of medieval times. As far as phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax are concerned, Portuguese emerged in the evolution from vulgar Latin (brought by the Romans in the third century BC) with some influences from other languages and a strong Celtic substrate. European Portuguese has 26 alphabet letters, 7 lexical notations and 11 punctuation marks, comprising a total of 44 graphemes, and a total of 35 sounds: 23 consonant phonemes, 14 vowels (oral and nasal), 12 diphthongs (oral and nasal), and 2 semivowels (Ortografia e Oralidade 2011).

According to Fernandes (2008), although 'Portuguese does not have a spelling system that can be considered one of the most opaque, it presents non-biunivocal relations between sounds and the graphemes that represent them, which contributes to a certain complexity. There are situations in which the same spelling may represent more than one sound, and other situations in which the same sound may be represented by more than one grapheme'<sup>1</sup>. The grapheme 'ç', for instance, can have the sound [k] or [s], and the grapheme 's'

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1 Translated from Portuguese by the author.

can have the sound [s], [z], [ʃ] or [ʒ]. On the other hand, the sound [z], for instance, can correspond to different graphemes, such as 'z', 's' or 'x'.

In the fifth century AD, a dialect called *galaico-português* (Galician-Portuguese) developed, which was different from other Iberian Roman languages. In the 16th century modern Portuguese began to emerge, and the first grammars were created in 1536, by Fernão de Oliveira and João de Barros. Some people still speak a language derived from an ancient kingdom, the Kingdom of Leon, called *Mirandês* (Mirandese). This language has less than 15 000 speakers and is only spoken in villages – almost 100% of the inhabitants of the village of Picote (*Picuote* in Mirandese), for example, speak only Mirandese. The spelling of Mirandese is naturally influenced by Portuguese, but it is a different language with a different development, structure and history. This minority language was granted official status in the region by the end of the 20th century. As far as we know, there are no Easy Language materials in Mirandese, or any discussion on the accessibility level of this language.

Portuguese sign language is also considered an official language. Along with Portuguese, Mirandese and Portuguese sign language, Portugal also has other languages, among them *Minderico*, spoken throughout the region of Minde; *Barraquenho* (or *Barranquenho*), a dialect close to Spanish, spoken in the municipality of Barrancos, Alentejo; and the Portuguese *Calló*, the language spoken by the large Roma community in Portugal. Other languages are also spoken by immigrant communities, such as Cape Verdean Creole (*Kabuverdianu*).

Portuguese is the official language in ten countries (Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Guinea-Equatorial, Macau, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe) which together total more than 280 million people. However, not all of those people speak Portuguese. This is relevant because the large community of people from the PALOPs (African countries with Portuguese as their official language) living in Portugal may not be proficient in Portuguese. For them it may be a second language, not spoken within the community.

The 1990 Orthographic agreement aimed to unify the spelling of Portuguese. This agreement was signed by seven countries<sup>2</sup> for which Portuguese is the official language and entered into force in Portugal, Brazil, Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe in 2009. From our perspective, the agreement did not fulfil its aim. Portugal and Brazil still have different spellings and accentuations, and some of the changes can make the understanding of written information more challenging.

The fact that the way in which people pronounce words is so close to the way in which they spell them results in some peculiarities, like the word *Egito* (Egypt), for example. Prior to the orthographic agreement it was written with a 'p', *Egipto*. All words derived from *Egipto* should be written with a 'p', like *Egipcíós* (Egyptians). Today, because of the new agreement, we write *Egito* (Egypt) – because we do not articulate the 'p' when speaking the word, but *Egipcíós* (Egyptians) – because we still pronounce the 'p' when saying the word. It can also be confusing that some words allow double spelling according to whether or not you pronounce a certain letter (e.g., *espectador/espetador*). Some words are no longer accentuated, like the word *para* (stop), which is written in the same way as *para* (to). Previously, *pára* was 'stop' and *para* was 'to'. Now the difference in meaning comes from the sentence context, and this can make it more difficult to understand when people have a low level of literacy or intellectual and developmental disabilities.

One of the largest Portuguese language dictionaries is the *Houaiss*. According to Correia (2007), this dictionary has around 228 550 entries. Today, the Portuguese language has terms that come from different languages such as Tupi, Quicongo, Quimbundo, Umbundo, Calló, Provençal, Dutch, Hebrew, Persian, Quechua, Chinese, Turkish, Japanese, German, Russian, English, French, and Italian (Cardoso and Cunha 2007, Piel 1989).

Figures from the last census (2011) tell us that Portugal has more than 10 million inhabitants. Of these, more than 500 000 were born in another country. For some of them, Portuguese is not their mother tongue. More than 277 000 are from countries in which Portuguese is the official language, but in actuality, varying creoles and local languages are used in everyday, less formal contexts.

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 2 Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal and São Tomé and Príncipe.

This is the case for all the former Portuguese Overseas' Territories in Africa and Asia. Portuguese, or a Creole variant, is also used informally, especially by the older generations, in Asia (India and Malaysia) because these territories (Goa, Malacca, etc.) were once part of the Portuguese Empire.

According to the contemporary Portugal database (PORDATA), in 2019, 21.6% of the population were at risk of poverty<sup>3</sup> and 4.7% of residents were foreigners<sup>4</sup>.

According to the CIA World Factbook<sup>5</sup>, in 2020, 4% of the Portuguese population (aged 15 or over) could not read or write. This is one of the highest percentages of illiteracy in Europe. In 2018, the reading performance of more than 21% of 15-year-old students was poor (level 1 or below) in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA assessment)<sup>6</sup>. Numbers from the 2011 census tell us that 3.8% of the population had difficulties or could not remember or concentrate on tasks, while 6.2% had difficulties or could not, using normal language, understand or be understood by others. The PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) has no data for Portugal, as we will only be joining this assessment in 2023.

## 2 Historical perspectives

In Portugal, the first Easy Language steps were taken in 1998, by FENACERCI, a Portuguese non-governmental umbrella organization working in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. At that time, it was called easy-to-

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3 PORDATA, População em risco de pobreza ou exclusão social: total e por grupo etário (%), [https://www.pordata.pt/Europa/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+em+risco+de+pobreza+total+e+por+grupo+et%C3%A1rio+\(percentagem\)-2331](https://www.pordata.pt/Europa/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+em+risco+de+pobreza+total+e+por+grupo+et%C3%A1rio+(percentagem)-2331).

4 PORDATA, População residente, estimativas a 1 de Janeiro: total, nacionais e estrangeiros <https://www.pordata.pt/Europa/Popula%C3%A7%C3%A3o+residente++estimativas+a+1+de+Janeiro+total++nacionais+e+estrangeiros-1815-314045>.

5 CIA World Factbook, <https://www.indexmundi.com/map/?v=39&r=eu&l=en>

6 PISA Assessment, [http://iave.pt/images/FicheirosPDF/Estudos\\_Internacionais/PISA/resultados2018/RELATORIO\\_NACIONAL\\_PISA2018\\_IAVE.pdf](http://iave.pt/images/FicheirosPDF/Estudos_Internacionais/PISA/resultados2018/RELATORIO_NACIONAL_PISA2018_IAVE.pdf).

read<sup>7</sup> language (ETR) and was based on the International Federation of Library Association Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials (IFLA 1997).

Between 1998 and 2009, FENACERCI translated several easy-to-read Inclusion Europe brochures into Portuguese, without any involvement of the target groups. The understanding was that important information should be accessible to all and that the accessibility concept should also include cognitive accessibility. However, only people working in the field of intellectual disability understood that this was important, and it did not affect policies or laws on accessibility and inclusion.

In 2009, the Pathways II project gave easy-to-read a different dimension, with the setting of European Guidelines<sup>8</sup> and specificities for different languages, and the involvement of the target groups as proofreaders, who thus contributed to the final documents produced. As well as FENACERCI, other organizations such as CANTIC<sup>9</sup> (a resource centre to support students with special needs) or CERCIOEIRAS<sup>10</sup> (a social co-operative providing services for people with intellectual disabilities) have also produced some materials using the European Guidelines as a compass for their work.

The concept of Plain Portuguese was introduced in 2007, when a private company 'claro.pt'<sup>11</sup> was founded. Claro.pt works closely with governmental bodies and institutes, as we can see if we look at their list of clients<sup>12</sup> (e.g., the Agency for Administrative Modernisation, the Portuguese Government, Social Security, the European Commission, and the Health Regulation Authority).

After 2009, FENACERCI started to disseminate the Easy Language concept and the need to ensure cognitive accessibility. Several easy-to-read documents and training materials targeting people with intellectual and developmental disability were produced. Easy-to-read is not just about simplifying content; it may also involve a different way to present the content, especially if we are talk-

7 We use the term 'easy-to-read' for materials produced before 2021, every time we refer to written materials.

8 Inclusion Europe, <https://www.fenacerci.pt/web/LF/docs/7.pdf>.

9 CANTIC reference to easy-to-read Inclusion Europe Guidelines, <https://cantic.org.pt/cantic/tag/leitura-facil/>.

10 CERCIOEIRAS, <http://www.cercioeiras.pt/a-voz-da-diferenca/trabalhos-realizados>.

11 Claro.pt, <https://claro.pt/>.

12 Claro clientes, <https://claro.pt/work/#clientes-todos>.

ing about laws and policy papers. FENACERCI has also provided easy-to-read training for professionals such as teachers, trainers, copywriters, and media professionals. However, the interest of public bodies and the Government in the need to ensure cognitive accessibility has only grown in the last few years.

In 2014, the first attempt was made to set up a publishing house dedicated to Easy Language. LusoReads started with great expectations, but unfortunately did not get very far. In 2014, the National Institute for Rehabilitation (*Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação, I.P.*)<sup>13</sup> set up a working group for accessible elections, inviting representatives of all kinds of disabilities and the National Elections Commission (CNE) to join. The objective was to produce information about elections and the electoral process that would be accessible to all citizens. This group is still working, but on an intermittent basis, and unfortunately it has failed to involve political parties and produce the results that were initially expected. The information is first adapted to Easy Language and then to Portuguese sign language and Braille.

In 2017, the Portuguese government launched the National Plan for Reading 2017–2027 (Plano Nacional de Leitura n.d. a), which had several aims, namely, to implement a set of measures to strengthen reading and writing skills and promote the inclusion of people with specific needs. The strategic framework of the plan recognizes the need to increase the number ‘of actions aimed at people with special needs, in compliance with the principles of inclusion and accessibility to literary adapted contents’<sup>14</sup> (Plano Nacional de Leitura n.d. b). However, we were unable to find any reference to Easy Language or cognitive accessibility in this policy document. This shows that there is still a lack of interest in and understanding of the need for Easy Language, and its importance in providing access to culture and information for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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13 INR, I.P., [https://www.inr.pt/noticias/-/journal\\_content/56/11309/238133](https://www.inr.pt/noticias/-/journal_content/56/11309/238133).

14 Translated from Portuguese by the author.

### 3 Current situation

Although the government and other stakeholders (e.g., professionals working in the disability field, politicians, academics...) now recognize the importance of the awareness of cognitive accessibility and the need to ensure access to relevant information for all people, a legal framework or recommendations that specifically address the need to produce information and culture in Easy Language and of scientific research on the topic are still lacking.

The private company Claro.pt works closely with public administration and other governmental bodies, but does not produce Easy Language materials. Again, it is important to stress that Plain Language is not the same as Easy Language, since Easy Language needs to consider the specific needs of people with disabilities, namely, intellectual and developmental disabilities.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Portuguese has no official definition of Easy Language, but a common understanding of it exists among professionals working on cognitive accessibility issues, mainly based on the IFLA (2010) and Inclusion Europe<sup>15</sup> definitions. Issues such as the use of short sentences, avoiding technical words or jargon and the use of the active voice, are just a few examples of what is accepted by all. Inclusion Europe developed a concrete set of rules that aims to make written information accessible to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In Portugal, FENACERCI uses and disseminates these rules, namely by providing training or producing Easy Language versions of relevant documents, targeted at people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

*Português claro* (Plain Portuguese) is a concept based on the right to understand information and connects with several of the Easy Language theoretical concepts and practical guidelines. There is no official definition of Plain Language in Portuguese. As mentioned above, one company advertises itself as being the ‘clarity agency’ – *agência da clareza*. This company works with

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 15 Inclusion Europe Checklist on easy-to-read, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/>.

several public and private organizations and also promotes training on how to produce information that is clear to all.

Portugal seems to have a mixed understanding of Easy Language and Plain Language. *Português claro* (Plain Portuguese) should be separated from *Leitura Fácil* (Easy Language), as they are not the same. Easy Language targets people with more severe limitations in reading and understanding written material, whereas Plain Language is mainly a way to ensure that most people can understand the information; it does not specifically target people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Center for Inclusive Design 2020). If information is provided in Easy Language, almost everyone can understand and access it, but this is not necessarily true about information in Plain Language.

In fact, some of the information that we found online about easy-to-read Portuguese confuse the two concepts, and even confuse the target groups. Although some claim to have followed easy-to-read guidelines and use the easy-to-read logo, an analysis of the information produced revealed that it is not accessible to those targeted by the Easy Language approach – people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and with more complex needs of support to understand written texts. This is the case with, for instance, Accessible Portugal<sup>16</sup>, which refers to Plain Portuguese and indirectly to the private company Claro.pt (by referring to one of its founders) and at the same time to the Easy-to-Read logo of Inclusion Europe. The same thing emerged from the analysis of a text that had received the ‘Culture Access Award – Linguagem Clara 2019’: it does not comply with the easy-to-read guidelines and is even written in a way that actually makes it more difficult to understand the message (Acesso Cultura Award 2019).

As already mentioned, official entities and private service companies seem to understand Plain Portuguese as an important tool, but Easy Language is mostly used by NGOs and service providers working in the intellectual disability field. Easy Language advocates have not consistently been able to show the need to regularly use this tool in all communication and training materials. In Portugal, Easy Language seems to be closer to what we call Easy-to-Read

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16 Accessible Portugal is a service of inclusive and accessible tourism.

(ETR). Material that is written in Easy Language is accessible to the vast majority of people, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

In Portugal, Easy Language is seen as something that is only needed by a small number of people, at least from the government perspective. The only governmental body that addresses this topic is related to disability, namely the National Institute for Rehabilitation (*Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação*). However, even this body does not push for legislation on the topic or even ensure that the information it produces is accessible to people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and so Easy Language remains a minor concern when inclusion and participation are discussed. Since the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2009, decision-makers made some inconsistent attempts to address the issue of the right to information and cognitive accessibility, but these were scarce and not included in the wider political understanding of the need to enable exercising of this right.

In 2020, the Commission to Promote Accessibility (*Comissão para a Promoção das Acessibilidades*) issued a report<sup>17</sup> that made the political understanding of accessibility clear –its 51 pages do not contain a single reference to cognitive accessibility and it focuses mainly on physical accessibility. People with a low level of literacy and/or intellectual disabilities are still not able to access culture, political and social information, or even just information in general, and are thus being pushed out of the information circle.

Although Easy Language has been around for some time now, its advocates have not been able to show its importance to the wider public and, most importantly, to policymakers and governmental bodies in general. However, some political parties have started to recognize the importance of ensuring that the information they produce is accessible to people with disabilities, and have made Easy Language versions of their manifestos or political programmes.

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 17 Report from the Commission to Promote Accessibility, <https://www.inr.pt/documents/11309/285392/Relatorio+FINAL+-+ComissaoPromocaoAcessibilidades.pdf/0800afb7-8e09-44eb-9110-44e9082678e1>.

Since 2020, the interest of decision-makers in Easy Language has begun to grow, slowly and gradually; but only in specific sectors, namely, those related to disability. The National Institute for Rehabilitation attempted to disseminate some Easy Language information about the Sars-CoV-2 virus<sup>18</sup>, but neither the Institute nor the Government committed to doing this themselves. Press conferences about COVID-19, for instance, are required to have sign language interpretation, but no attempt has been made to make them easy to understand for people with intellectual disabilities. Again, these people fall out of the information loop, disregarded by public authorities. Regardless of this, the last decade was quite ‘productive’ in the sense that interest in Easy Language grew, mostly from outside the disability field. This is described in more detail in the practical outcomes section.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

In terms of accessing information or knowledge, everyone should be able to be a stakeholder. However, some groups may benefit more if information and training are accessible. Those who are usually left out of the information loop are the ones on whom we should focus.

FENACERCI, a Portuguese non-governmental (NGO) umbrella organization working in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, has produced several documents and information in Easy Language for the last 12 years, using groups of people with intellectual disabilities to evaluate its accessibility level and propose changes, if needed.

**Members of FENACERCI** provide services for more than 25 000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, from birth to death. FENACERCI has community-based structures (co-operatives), with members strongly involved with the families of their clients (people with intellectual and developmental disabilities). FENACERCI itself is a member of several important organizations in the disability field, such as the National Monitoring Mechanism for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*Mecanismo Nacional para a Monitorização da Implementação da*

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18 The National Institute for Rehabilitation, <https://www.inr.pt/covid-19-leitura-facil>.

*Convenção sobre os Direitos das Pessoas com Deficiência*) or the Disability and Human Rights Observatory (*Observatório da Deficiência e Direitos Humanos*).

**Official entities, non-governmental organizations, service providers, and political parties** are some of the most relevant stakeholders. Among the different easy-to-read documents produced by FENACERCI are training materials for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, political manifestos (namely for *Bloco de Esquerda*, a political party), a vocational training curriculum in gardening (for CERCICA, a service provider), summaries of annual reports (for the annual reports of the Disability and Human Rights Observatory), and other publications on request (one example is the document on ethics in sport, from *Plano Nacional de Ética no Desporto*, a governmental initiative hosted by the *Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude*).

**Claro.pt** is an agency that works with Plain Portuguese. It engages with major media and communication companies, the government, insurance companies, banks, and so on. Although it produces simplified material and information, it does not target people with intellectual disabilities and the information it produces is not accessible to people in this group. We found no other public or private company or organization that worked with Plain Portuguese.

From time to time, interest awakens among public authorities/official entities, political parties and service providers, but not regularly. From our perspective, **the most relevant stakeholders are the people who will benefit from the information themselves**. They must be involved in the process of producing the written information. Only in this way will the specific aspects that ensure the accessibility of these target groups be addressed. Writing and producing information in Easy Language requires training and practice. In order to make sure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can contribute to producing accessible materials, they need to be trained. Only then will they gain the required skills to work side by side with the professionals who produce these materials.

## 4 Target groups

In general, Plain Language targets all people, as it is easier to understand information that is written in everyday language, regardless of your reading and comprehension level or your economic or social status. Easy language, in turn, targets people with more severe needs for support to understand written information, who do not understand information written in Plain Language and need a different level of simplified information and a specific layout.

Among these (but not exclusively) are people with a low level of functional literacy, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, deaf people, migrants, people with dementia, and people with psychosocial impairments. Easy Language is a tool that promotes inclusion and exercises the rights of groups that are usually left out of the information circle. By accessing relevant information, people are more capable of making decisions, claiming their rights, being involved and having a real say in their life plans. One example is political participation. Political parties' communication is not usually accessible for people with low literacy or poor reading skills. Practical issues related to how to exercise one's right to vote can also be difficult to understand. In order to reach all citizens, the National Elections Commission (*Comissão Nacional de Eleições*) has produced several easy-to-read documents that explain election procedures<sup>19</sup>.

## 5 Guidelines

In Portugal, the guidelines/standards for Plain Language and Easy Language follow the IFLA Easy Language Guidelines and Inclusion Europe Guidelines for materials that are easy to read and understand. The Inclusion Europe guidelines refer to some specific rules for Portuguese.

The guidelines for Portuguese are almost the same as those for any other language, and relate to content, format and design. Content is closely related

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<sup>19</sup> Comissão Nacional de Eleições – accessible information, <http://www.cne.pt/content/eleicoes-acessiveis>.

to the target group, and it is crucial to define this prior to starting to produce the information. When writing, one should use short sentences and examples to illustrate ideas/concepts, avoid the use of percentages or large numbers, write sentences using the active rather than the passive voice, use everyday words, and put the most important information at the beginning and the end of the text. Roman numerals should not be used, the use of pronouns as direct and indirect objects should be avoided, and colloquial verb tenses should be preferred.

The font should be large (e.g., Arial 14) and non-serif. The guidelines also give instructions about spaces between letters, words and sentences, and the use of visual effects (e.g., italic, underlining, shadows, etc.). The use of difficult words is not recommended, but if this is necessary, an explanation must be given. One important rule is to always start a new sentence on a new line, and to split sentences where you normally would when reading out loud. The guidelines also have recommendations regarding background, the type of images used and the layout itself. For an illustration of the Portuguese guidelines, see Appendix 1.

Although these guidelines were mainly designed for written information, they also include rules for electronic information, videos, and audio. In total, they contain 44 rules for written information, 29 for electronic information, 22 for video, and 17 for audio.

Both European and national projects have developed training materials<sup>20</sup> in Easy Language. Political parties have begun to ask for versions of their programmes and manifestos in Easy Language, to reach people with intellectual disabilities. At the European level, the MINCE project (Model for Inclusive Community Education) has developed a number of easy-to-read products, such as a curriculum and a guide for peer mediators (2017), and the COE-SI project (Change Organisations to Enable Social Inclusion) has developed counsellor training for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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 20 Training materials in easy-to-read from the MINCE project, [http://en.lebenshilfe-guv.at/english/mince\\_project/project\\_products](http://en.lebenshilfe-guv.at/english/mince_project/project_products);  
 Training materials from the COESI project, [http://en.lebenshilfe-guv.at/english/coesi\\_project/products\\_produkte](http://en.lebenshilfe-guv.at/english/coesi_project/products_produkte);  
 Training materials from the *Capacitar para a Cidadania* project, [http://plataforma-autorrepresentantes.pt/?page\\_id=890](http://plataforma-autorrepresentantes.pt/?page_id=890).

to acquire the necessary competences to act as inclusion counsellors (2019). At the national level, the *Capacitar para a Cidadania* (Empowering for citizenship) has developed a training curriculum to promote full citizenship and self-advocacy (2014).

The fact that no studies have examined Easy Language from a Portuguese linguistic perspective makes it harder to determine the specific issues that may need to be tackled. No papers or scientific articles related to Portuguese from Portugal seem to exist. Brazil has a vast collection of research on Easy Language, but Brazilian Portuguese is not exactly like the Portuguese in Portugal. Easy Language is handled by professionals who work in the disability field directly with the target groups, most of whom have no linguistic background.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Easy Language materials are mainly produced by the one umbrella organization working in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, FENACERCI. One example is the Easy Language version of the CRPD, published in 2010. FENACERCI's<sup>21</sup> version seems to be the only one in which the information is organized in a specific way to make it more accessible and usable by the target group, which was involved from the beginning every step of the way. The information is clustered according to the CRPD principles, and colour coded.

This makes it easier to understand specific rights, such as the right not to be discriminated against, which is related to several articles of the CRPD. People can find all of these grouped.

In 2019, for the first time, a political party published their electoral manifesto for the European elections in easy-to-read language and for the Legislative elections<sup>22</sup>.

In 2004, the Ministry of Culture, together with the Portuguese Institute of Museums (*Instituto Português dos Museus*), published a guide to accessibility in museums, which mentions the need to have accessible information for people

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21 FENACERCI 2010, [https://www.fenacerci.pt/convencao\\_flip/](https://www.fenacerci.pt/convencao_flip/).

22 Bloco de Esquerda, <https://www.bloco.org/media/ManifestoEuropeias2019LeituraFacil.pdf>.

with low levels of literacy (Temas de Museologia, Museus e Acessibilidade 2004). The guide proposes three accessibility levels, Level 1 being the most complex and Level 3 the easiest to understand<sup>23</sup>. However, none of these levels complies with existing recommendations, such as those of IFLA or Inclusion Europe: for example, the way in which sentences should be divided or font size.

In 2014, LusoReads published an easy-to-read novel, *O fastasma de Canterville*, by Oscar Wilde. The novel was adapted to Spanish by Eugênia Salvador and translated into Portuguese by Ana da Cruz. The book reached the list of books in the National Plan for Reading. However, today, the LusoReads website no longer exists: and the last activity on the Facebook page<sup>24</sup> was in October 2019.

The Inclusive Shared Reading Project<sup>25</sup> (*Projeto de Leitura Inclusiva Partilhada*, PLIP) emerged in 2011 from the personal project of some researchers of the Inclusion and Accessibility in Action Research Unit (*Unidade de Investigação, Inclusão e Acessibilidade em Ação*) of the Polytechnic Institute of Leiria (*Instituto Politécnico de Leiria, IPL*). It adapts original or already published works so that people with specific needs can access them through versions in new formats: books in Braille and in high-relief (for blind or poor-vision people); audio books (for those who prefer to listen); video books in Portuguese Sign Language (for the deaf) and in adapted formats such as pictograms and simplified versions (for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities or other limitations). The project is co-ordinated by Célia Sousa and access to the materials is only possible by online registration. Although some of the materials are labelled easy-to-read they do not comply with some of the most important guidelines for writing easy-to-read information, such as always starting a new sentence on a new line or cutting sentences where people would pause if reading out loud.

Before 2020, Easy Language was not used very much in informative texts. Some information about elections was produced by a working group led by the

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23 Guide for accessible museums, [http://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/static/data/publicacoes/acessibilidades/ipm\\_2004\\_museus\\_e\\_acessibilidade.pdf](http://www.patrimoniocultural.gov.pt/static/data/publicacoes/acessibilidades/ipm_2004_museus_e_acessibilidade.pdf).

24 LUSOREADS, <https://www.facebook.com/LusoReads>.

25 PLIP, <https://plip.ipleiria.pt/apresentacao/>.

National Secretariat for Rehabilitation, but most of the materials produced in Easy Language are training materials.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some information was produced in Easy Language, mainly about safety measures, social distancing<sup>26</sup>, the use of masks<sup>27</sup>, and COVID-19 symptoms. Some adaptations of informative documents from the World Health Organization addressed the situation of people with disabilities, for example, the ‘Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak’<sup>28</sup> and a document about domestic violence in the pandemic situation<sup>29</sup>.

## 7 Education and research

Since 2010, some **training** has been provided to professionals in different fields on how to make information accessible to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Most of this was offered by FENACERCI, which either organized it or invited trainers from other organizations and services. These training sessions were mainly for professionals working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities or other type of disabilities and members of the police force and other law enforcement officials responsible for communication and public relations.

There seems to be a lack of higher education curricula that addresses the topic of Easy Language or any research on these fields of knowledge. **Research** on the field of Easy Language and/or cognitive accessibility is scarce in Portugal. In fact, desk research was unable to identify any papers on Easy Language. One paper from 2013 indirectly addresses the topic of Easy Language, by mentioning it as a tool to ensure cognitive accessibility (Cruz and Monteiro 2013),

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26 FENACERCI, Distanciamento Social, <https://www.fenacerci.pt/docs/LF-distanciamentoso-social.pdf>.

27 FENACERCI, Como usar máscaras e luvas, <https://www.fenacerci.pt/docs/LF-uso-mascaras-luvas.pdf>.

28 FENACERCI, Considerações sobre a Deficiência durante o surto da COVID-19, <https://www.fenacerci.pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Consideracoes-sobre-a-Deficiencia-durante-o-surto-da-COVID.pdf>.

29 FENACERCI, Violência Doméstica, [https://www.fenacerci.pt/docs/LF-ViolenciaDomestica\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://www.fenacerci.pt/docs/LF-ViolenciaDomestica_COVID-19.pdf).

but does not investigate the topic itself. Academics have not yet understood that this is a new area of research that requires scientific findings to support what those working in the field with no linguistic background believe to be the road to follow.

The National Plan for Reading 2027 (*Plano Nacional de Leitura 2027*), the Linguistics Center of Universidade Nova de Lisboa (CLUNL) and the Institute of Systems and Computers Engineering, Research and Development in Lisbon (INESC-ID) decided to join together to create the *Ler + Fácil* ('Reading + Easy')<sup>30</sup> project. The project *Ler + Fácil*, aims to combat poor reading skills and practices among adults through an integrated digital solution with tools and automatic tests for European Portuguese that ensure the analysis, classification and conversion of literary works and more scientific and informative texts that are complex and formal for + Easy (A1-A2) and + Clear (B1) levels.

This shows the ongoing lack of understanding of the need for a sustainable body of evidence to demonstrate that Easy Language a) facilitates the understanding of complex information and b) potentiates participation and inclusion of otherwise discriminated groups.

## 8 Future perspectives

At the moment, most of the work on Easy Language is carried out by one non-governmental organization, as 'side' work, with very little funding (most often, the products are project outputs). As a result, Easy Language is not as widespread as it should be, and the training provided is not regular.

We need to bring academia into the field of cognitive accessibility and Easy Language. Without a proper scientific background to support the claim that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities benefit from Easy Language and that this is a powerful tool for inclusion, some sectors of society and politicians and decision-makers will continue to ignore the need to ensure access to information, education and culture for all people. This chapter mentions the lack of research several times, and this is in fact one of the major challenges

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 30 *Ler+Fácil*, <http://www.pnl2027.gov.pt/np4/lermaisfacil.html>.

in bringing academia to this side, to work together with professionals and with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We need to build a body of knowledge that will demonstrate why and how Easy Language can empower people with disabilities and promote social inclusion.

We also need to regulate the need to provide access information and ways to ensure that laws are respected. One other important aspect is to raise awareness of the topic and to train the different stakeholders in how to produce Easy Language materials. University courses related to the media must include the topic of cognitive accessibility and how to provide it in their curriculum. Guidelines should be adjusted to Portuguese on the basis of research by linguists, by professionals working with people with disabilities, and most importantly, by people with disabilities themselves. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities should receive proper certified training on how to evaluate and proofread Easy Language information. After all, they are the real experts.

## Author

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Portuguese.

Standard Portuguese	Easy Portuguese
<p>ESCOLHAS FORTES PARA RESPONDER ÀS CRISES</p> <p>Vivemos tempos de grandes incertezas e sob permanente ameaça de novas crises. O mundo não se recompôs da crise financeira internacional de 2007/2008, a instabilidade e os conflitos internacionais multiplicam-se e ninguém sabe que União Europeia resultará do Brexit e da reconfiguração política dos últimos anos. A estabilidade vivida em Portugal não apaga o sentimento de insegurança que aumenta com a precariedade como horizonte (recibos verdes, estágios, temporários, outsourcing, uberização) e o desemprego como ameaça. Os salários baixos tornam-se ainda mais curtos com a explosão do custo da habitação e não faltam as projeções sobre a queda demográfica e a insustentabilidade da Segurança Social. A todas estas crises e ameaças junta-se a maior de todas: a emergência climática. O aquecimento global está a acelerar e se nada for feito em 2030 teremos ultrapassado o aumento de 2° C na temperatura global, barreira a partir da qual se desencadeiam fenómenos irreversíveis de caos climático. No nosso país, os efeitos das alterações climáticas já fazem vítimas: fenómenos extremos, como os incêndios de 2017, são o exemplo mais trágico.</p>	<p>ESCOLHAS FORTES PARA RESPONDER ÀS CRISES</p> <p>Vivemos tempos de grandes <b>incertezas</b>. A qualquer altura podemos ter novas crises.</p> <p>O mundo ainda está a sofrer por causa <b>da crise financeira</b> internacional de 2007/2008.</p> <p>Além disso, cada vez temos mais conflitos internacionais e ainda não sabemos como vai ficar a União Europeia depois da saída do Reino Unido – <b>Brexit</b>.</p> <p>A estabilidade que vivemos em Portugal não apaga o sentimento de insegurança que aumenta com a <b>precaridade</b> como horizonte (recibos verdes, estágios, temporários, <b>outsourcing, uberização</b>) e o desemprego como ameaça.</p> <p>Os salários baixos tornam-se ainda mais curtos com o aumento do custo da habitação. Cada vez nascem menos crianças e a Segurança Social tem menos dinheiro. A todas estas crises e ameaças junta-se a maior de todas: <b>a emergência climática</b>.</p> <p>No nosso país, já sentimos os efeitos das alterações <b>climáticas</b>.</p> <p>Os incêndios de 2017, são um exemplo destas alterações. Com o clima não se negocia.</p>

Com o clima não se negocia. Faliu a política dos pequenos passos, da consciencialização individual e do capitalismo verde. Taxar o gasóleo de quem não tem transportes públicos aprofundou clivagens sociais. Apelar à responsabilidade da reciclagem não travou o aumento do plástico em circulação. O comércio das licenças de emissões de carbono consolidou o modelo energético. A emissão de gases com efeito de estufa acelerou na última década. É urgente uma nova estratégia. Não podemos esperar mais. A mobilização extraordinária das mais jovens gerações em torno da crise climática não é um simples grito de desespero. É a força para uma transformação radical em nome das nossas vidas. As várias crises que vivemos têm um nome: capitalismo.

Source: Bloco de Esquerda political manifesto, <https://programa2019.bloco.org/images/programa-com-fotos.pdf>

É urgente uma nova **estratégia**. Não podemos esperar mais. As várias crises que vivemos têm um nome: **capitalismo**.

Source: Bloco de Esquerda Political manifesto, <https://programa2019.bloco.org/images/programa-leitura-facil.pdf>

[STRONG CHOICES TO RESPOND TO CRISES

We live in times of great uncertainty and under permanent threat of new crises. The world has not recovered from the international financial crisis of 2007/2008, instability and international conflicts are multiplying and nobody knows how the European Union will be affected by Brexit and the political reconfiguration of recent years.

[STRONG CHOICES TO RESPOND TO CRISES

We live in times of great **uncertainty**. We could have new crises at any time. The world is still suffering from the international **financial crisis** of 2007/2008. In addition, we have more and more international conflicts and we still don't know what the European Union will look like after the

The stability experienced in Portugal does not erase the feeling of insecurity that increases with precariousness as a horizon (green receipts, internships, temporary, outsourcing, uberization) and unemployment as a threat. Low wages become even lower with the explosion in the cost of housing and there is no shortage of projections about demographic decline and the unsustainability of Social Security. To all these crises and threats is added the greatest of all: the climate emergency. Global warming is accelerating and if nothing is done, by 2030 we will have exceeded the 2 °C increase in global temperature, a threshold beyond which the irreversible phenomena of climate chaos will be triggered. In our country, the effects of climate change are already claiming victims: extreme phenomena, such as the fires of 2017, are the most tragic example. There is no negotiating with the climate. The policy of small steps, individual awareness and green capitalism has failed. Taxing diesel for those without access to public transport has deepened social divisions. Appealing to the responsibility for recycling has not stopped the increase of plastic in circulation. The trade in carbon emission licences has consolidated the energy model. The emission of greenhouse gases has accelerated in the last decade. A new strategy is urgently needed. We can wait no longer.

United Kingdom leaves - Brexit.  
The stability that we have in Portugal does not erase the feeling of insecurity that increases with **precariousness** as a horizon (green receipts, internships, temporary work, **outsourcing**, **uberization**) and unemployment as a threat. Low wages become even lower with the rising cost of housing. Fewer and fewer children are being born and Social Security has less money. To all these crises and threats is added the greatest of all: the **climate emergency**.  
In our country, we are already feeling the effects of climate change. The fires of 2017 are an example of these changes. We cannot negotiate with the climate. A new **strategy** is urgently needed. We cannot wait any longer. The various crises we are experiencing have a name: **Capitalism**.]

The extraordinary mobilization of the younger generations around the climate crisis is not a simple cry of despair. It is the force for a radical transformation for the sake of our lives. The various crises we are experiencing have a name: capitalism.]



## Easy Language in Russia

### 1 Introduction

Russia is the largest country in the world in terms of area, with a population of 142 million people. Russia has always been a multilingual and multi-ethnic state. According to the latest population census (Statistics 2010), Russia has representatives of 193 ethnic groups and 277 languages. About 90% of Russia's citizens speak Russian as their native tongue, whereas 80% are ethnic Russians; although the notion of a native speaker is often unclear because of the great number of bilingual people in the country.

Bilingualism in Russia is often asymmetric: Russians do not speak minority languages, but representatives of other languages speak Russian. Among the most spoken languages are several Turkic languages (e.g., Tatar, Chuvash, Bashkir). Ukrainian (East-Slavic language) and Chechen (North-Caucasian language) also have more than one million speakers. The status and position of minority languages have gone through various phases. On the one hand, russification has frequently been both a state action and families' own decision (Pavlenko 2011). On the other hand, during the Soviet time, the state, with the help of an army of linguists, standardized dozens of languages (Comrie 1981, Alpatov 1997). The general language policy supported bilingualism: Russian was one official language, being the lingua franca of the whole state, and the major language (*titulny yazyk* 'title language') of each Soviet republic was their second official language (Mustajoki 2019).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant a decline in the status of Russian in the former Soviet republics. Russian only has the status of a state language in Belarus and is regarded as an official language in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Russian still serves as the lingua franca in many regions of con-

temporary Russia, for example, in Tatarstan and Dagestan. In recent decades, increasing numbers of Russians have emigrated to Western countries (Comrie et al. 1996, Vakhtin et al. 2010, Ryazanova–Clarke 2014, Mustajoki et al. 2019). This new situation has introduced varieties of Russian. According to the traditional view, there is only one standard variety of the language. However, it is obvious that the Russian used in official documents in, for example, Kazakhstan, or as the lingua franca in Dagestan, has gradually diverged from what is known as ‘Moscow Russian’ (Mustajoki 2013, 2016, Moser 2020).

In order to understand the present state and future of Easy Language in Russia, some special features of the country have to be taken into consideration. First, in Russia *gramotnost*, the ability to write correctly according to the norms of the codified standard language, has always had and continues to have a very high status, being one of the most significant characteristics of a cultivated person (Mustajoki 2019). An interesting manifestation of this attitude is the huge popularity of a competition called *totalny diktant* (total dictate) which is an open test for everyone who wants to determine whether they know the subtleties of the orthographic and linguistic norm of the Russian language. The same attitude is shown in the enormous concern over the degeneration of the Russian language. As a rule, the main objects of concern are the unnecessary usage of foreign (usually English) loanwords and the usage of vulgar language. This issue is frequently discussed on TV and radio, as well in social media. The issue of ‘bad language’ is rooted in the Russian tradition of differentiating two categories of native speakers: those who are able to speak the normative standard language (*nositel literaturnogo yazyka*) and those who are not (*nositel prostorechiya*, ‘vernacular speakers’). In this context, a pedantic attitude toward normative rules, including punctuation, overrules the readability of texts and if the issue of clarity and readability of texts arises, people with higher education are used as a benchmark. Problems in understanding texts by other people are passed over by arguing that it is merely the result of poor learning and can be repaired by improving teacher education.

Another possible obstacle to launching the idea of Easy Russian is linked to notions of ‘Russian mentality’ or the ‘national spirit’ of Russians. Social-cultural studies tend to deny the existence of country-specific differences, but on the other hand, a great deal of research evidence confirms diversity in certain

features between people from different cultures. The phenomena cannot be applied to individuals; it is only true on a certain probability level. In practice, all studies of Russians claim that the Russian culture differs from most Western cultures in its priority of the collective or individualistic orientation of people's thoughts and behaviour (see, e.g., Larina et al. 2017). This may affect people's attitudes towards the need for simplified text for certain target groups. The general opinion may reflect the collectivistic world view in assuming that people with problems comprehending official texts always have someone nearby who is able to explain the main information to them. In a country with an individualistic orientation, people tend to think that every single citizen should be able to comprehend all information distributed by authorities. This is seen as one of the bedrocks of equality among people. In a collectivistic country, people rely more on assistance from their social network. This, however, is merely a hypothesis and should be verified by research. However, if it is true, it could explain many aspects in the development of Easy Language in Russia.

A further issue that may influence the development of simplified language forms derives from the specific features of Russian. Russian grammar is rather complex with a rich morphology. Nominal declension involves six cases and verbs have a special aspect category. Standard written Russian traditionally prefers rather complicated syntactic structures. This is a complicated starting point for the simplification of language. Moreover, although Russian has been used as a lingua franca for centuries, scientific or practical interest in 'lingua franca Russian' is much lower than that in English as a lingua franca. Only few studies have researched this issue; for example, works on Dagestan Russian (Daniel and Dobrushina 2013, Daniel et al. 2011), but the overall attitude to non-standard language varieties is disregarding or negative.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The history of Easy Language in Russia (and other countries) has two different lines: the history of the 'Easy Language' concept and the history of the idea of compiling simplified texts for special audiences. The former is only beginning to find ground in Russia, while the latter has a longer tradition.

The *Encyclopedia of the Russian language* has a chapter called *Prostoy yazyk* (Simple language), written by V.M. Zhivov (Encyclopedia 2020). In fact, it does not really resemble the contemporary notion of simple language. In the historical context, 'simple language' has meant attempts to write in a language of the people, which was Russian, as opposed to Church Slavonic, which was widely used in written texts. Elena Vähäkuopus (2020) described the history of simple language in Russia in her presentation in an online Conference on 'Education for children and adults with special education needs: methodology, theory' organized by Belorussian specialists in this field. She referred to famous Russian writers as advocators of a 'simple language'. Leo Tolstoy (1937: 286) wanted to describe life to non-educated people in a simple folkish (*protonarodnyi*) language, and Anton Chekhov (1889) was of the opinion that the language of literature 'should be simple and graceful'.

The other line of history of Easy Language follows languages created for a certain group of people who are unable to use standard verbal language. In Russian, as in many other countries, Sign Language has been one of the earliest forms of this. Russian Sign Language was created already in the 19th century. Today, Russian Sign Language has an official status and is regulated by a norm. It has its own morphology, syntax and vocabulary. About 121 000 people know Russian Sign Language (Statistics 2010). It is used in both personal interaction and official settings. The Law on the *Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* (1955) obliges state offices to also provide information in Russian Sign Language (Law on Invalids). Training in the use of sign language is provided to teachers, social workers, doctors, i.e., those who may work with deaf people (both children and adults). The specialist profession of *surdoperevotšik* (surdotranslators) translate from Russian to Russian Sign Language and vice versa. They receive their education in universities and on special courses. Some TV programmes and films have subtitles or sign translations.

The Law on the *Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the Russian Federation* covers also blind people and people with impaired sight. Several forms of protection and help are provided for them: books in Braille, audio texts, special libraries. Since 2016, the Law has obliged state offices to ensure that all the information on their websites is also accessible to people with impaired sight. The state standard dictates that all illustrations should be accompanied

by descriptions, and should apply a simplified design, large-scale script and modest line width. Today, for example, most university websites also have such a version, denoted by the  symbol.

### 3 Current situation

The concept of Easy Language is still rather unknown in Russia, in terms of both research and practical solutions. General traditional words describing easily readable text are *dostupny* (accessible) and *ponyatny yazyk* (understandable language). For Plain Language, the most used expression is *prostoy (russki) yazyk* whereas for Easy Language, two terms are used: *ljogkyi* and *yasny (russkii) yazyk*. *Ljogky* literally means ‘easy’ and *yasny* ‘clear’. However, this terminology is still unstable. Various activities that aim to distribute Easy Language do not necessarily use these terms.

This description of the current situation of the Easy Language concept in Russia begins at the highest level. Although the main aim of authorities is to improve people’s ability to speak and write according to the norms of the codified standard language, there is also a clear tendency towards measures that will lead administrative language closer to the ideal of Plain Russian.

#### 3.1 Plain Russian at the highest administrative and legal level

Although the Easy Language ideology has gained little attention until now, Plain Russian has obtained resonance and strong support at the highest administrative and legal level. The Presidential Council on the Russian Language, chaired by Vladimir Tolstoy, advisor to President Putin and the President of the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL), has an authoritative position in Russian language policy, and thus plays a decisive role in the development of Plain Russian at the system level. Below is the statement on this issue given by Sergey Kuznetsov, a member of the Council and Vice President of MAPRYAL. It has been shortened and adapted to the goals of the present publication.



Photo 1: Meeting of the Presidential Council on the Russian language (Kremlin.ru, Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International).

‘Consolidation and development of the social status of the Russian language stands at the very centre of attention of the Russian state policy (Law on Languages, Law on Education). The object of the policy is the part of the common national language which is manifested as its fullest in official, administrative, educational, scientific and media texts. At the same time, the Russian language unites Russian society and lays the foundation for Russian culture and statehood. For the outside world, the Russian language is also a symbol of Russia, alongside the coat of arms, flag and anthem.

This variety of Russian can be characterized as a state *makrostil* (macro style or variety) of the Russian language, which builds, together with the language of belles-lettres and the spoken language, the codified nationwide standard language. Dialects, jargons, vernacular and some others are non-codified varieties of the Russian language.

A specific characteristic of the state macro style is its simplicity, which enables its readability among maximally broad layers of the population, and stylistic neutrality. According to the Law on Languages, this variety of the Russian language should be exploited in all relevant spheres of social and administrative life, including education, legislation, the economy, healthcare, culture, sports, and mass communication. It aims to create a joint platform for interaction

between politicians and the public, teachers and students, doctors and patients, and administrators and representatives of civil society.

The research literature has identified some features of this macro style. Texts written in this style should be clear, correct, concrete, precise, and logically structured (Kropatsev et al. 2019). These characteristics make the macro style a ‘simple (or plain) Russian language’ in the same spirit as in President Barack Obama’s Plain English initiative in 2010. The advantages of such a language are obvious. It is understandable to a maximally broad circle of people and reduces the number of communicative failures. In addition to this, it increases the efficiency of social interaction and reduces the expenses of the state to interaction with citizens in such a multinational and multicultural country.

In the age of rapidly increasing digital information, it is more important than ever before that all people are able to collect necessary information and utilize it to solve practical problems. The state level macro style is generally more concrete and exact as a variety of the language of belles-lettres and does not include such associative and personal elements as the codified spoken language.

Until now, research on the Russian language has concentrated on varieties other than the national macro style. More attention should be paid to the wide usage of the national macro style, including interaction with immigrants and the citizens of multilingual Russia. This objective is widely supported in the Council. Tests should be created for assessing the readability of various types of text.

The characteristic features of any texts should be: (1) correctness; (2) logical course; (3) exact use of terms; (4) use of unambiguous structures; (5) avoidance of unnecessary words and pleonasms. These qualities prevent comprehension discrepancies. The ability of the author to take into consideration the future readers of texts plays a crucial role in interaction. Therefore, much attention should be paid to education and training. To write in a simple understandable language is a demanding task because “simple” does not mean “primitive”. The author should master all the norms and rules of the national macro style and be able, within that context, to create texts that fulfil the demands of the particular interactional setting. The texts should be so informative that their readers are able to comprehend them without external assistance.’

As the statement shows, the Council outlines the principles that should be applied when simplifying the language used in the Russian administration. It does not take a concrete stand on the differentiation between Plain Language and Easy Language but refers mainly to Plain Language.

A practical realization of the Plain Russian ideology is the portal of state services<sup>1</sup>. For the purposes of the website, certain rules have been set for the simplification of texts: specific terms and abbreviations, bureaucratic language, complex syntactic constructions, and complicated contents should be avoided. Wordings should be only as complex as is necessary for the solution of the problem at hand. The development of the site is an attempt to solve the readability problem citizens have when they read official information. The outcome is something that could be regarded as a guidebook for Plain Russian.

The idea of a more understandable administrative language has also gained resonance through the systematic work of RANEPА<sup>2</sup> (The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration). This huge state-owned institution organizes courses and compiles tutorial videos for civil servants to train them to be more customer-oriented when dealing with citizens. Among the active users of these services are young governors, who have experience in communicating on social media.

A further aspect of national macro style comes from the Law on Languages of nations in the Russian Federation of 1991. According to this Law, national republics have the right to use their own main languages besides Russian in education and administration. Later Laws have somewhat narrowed the role of local languages (Oding et al. 2019, Law on Education), but on the whole, the republics themselves can decide to develop their languages towards an Easy or Plain Language variety if they consider it useful.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

State-level legislation is a central tool in governing Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, thousands of laws were enacted. From a

.....  
1 Gosuslugi, [gosuslugi.ru](https://gosuslugi.ru)

2 RANEPА, <https://www.ranepa.ru/eng/>

Western perspective, many of them are very modern, reflecting a neoliberal, market-oriented society. This suggests a good legal foundation for the development of language formats for special groups. The Law on education, the Law of invalids and the Law of languages outline the legal basis for practical solutions for these activities. In addition, in April 2020, the national standard (GOSTR 52872-2019) came into force, which maintains that information available in electronic and digital form should be accessible to users with disabilities as part of the general public. The standard also sets a level of comprehensibility for texts: the 'level of basic general education' (nine grades of secondary school) and takes into account a wide range of disorders and related disabilities, including mental illnesses. When understanding a text requires a higher level of education, according to the GOSTR, 'additional explanatory content or a text version accessible to users with disabilities must be provided' (GOST 2019).

However, two things should be borne in mind. First, a new law or order does not change the administrative habits and mindsets of state officials overnight. This is true everywhere, but in a country the size of Russia, it is even more of a cold reality. Second, in comparison to, for example, Scandinavian countries, Russian laws are often very detailed and exact. Russian and Finnish enterprises' reports on their financial status differ greatly. The Russian reports are usually very long and detailed, and finding the main information in them is difficult, whereas the Finnish ones are short but more reader friendly. This is due not only to differences in traditions but also to differences in the demands of legislation.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Many **government agencies** in the Russian Federation (educational institutions, healthcare institutions, etc.) use various sets of guidelines and instructions for creating an accessible environment (see e.g., Medvedeva et al. 2017, Methodical guide 2016, Zhavoronkov et al. 2015, Checklist 2018). Translation into Easy Language (i.e., the easy-to-read format) is also mentioned in the Bank of Russia's working group's road map for improving access to financial services among people with disabilities, people with impaired mobility, and the elderly (Action plan 2020).

Today the question of accessibility, both for visitors with intellectual development issues and people with sensory and motor disorders, is a matter of concern for some Russian **cultural organizations**. Several of the largest Russian museums have cultural programmes that make special provisions for these groups, the most important element of accessibility being texts written in simple or Easy Language. These organizations also lean on experience and approaches from abroad.

Some organizations have concrete plans to provide easy-to-read texts. The **Association of Translation Teachers** is actively co-operating with various partners in order to boost knowledge on this issue. The field of teaching Russian as a foreign language has rich experience in determining the linguistic units that should be acquired at different levels of learning. The ideology behind this procedure is rather similar to that of Easy Language.

#### 4 Target groups

More than ten million near-native Russian-speakers live permanently in Russia. Official and other information is seldom available on a large scale in their native languages. The situation is even worse in terms of the almost equally high number of immigrants, legal and illegal. The number of people at both ends of the age scale, youths and elderly people, is tens of million. There are no official figures on the number of people with intellectual or cognitive disabilities, but it is clear that it reaches tens of thousands. Each of these target groups has its own reading problem profile. In addition, there are also always substantial individual differences. In such a situation, the creators and standardization workers have to content themselves with a certain average reader or a small set of readers.

#### 5 Guidelines

The country does have instructions and guidelines. However, currently it has no generally accepted standards for writing this type of texts, nor compe-

tent specialists who are able to accomplish this task. A number of individual non-profit organizations that specialize in working with people with mental disabilities are basically forced to take action and adapt materials independently, based on personal experience and vision, or on guidelines developed for other languages. For an illustration of the Russian guidelines, see Appendix 1.

From the theoretical point of view, a valuable example of a systematized approach to simplifying language is given in the *minimizatsiya* (theory of minimums) of linguistic units. It was already very popular in Russia (or the Soviet Union) in the 1970s, especially in the sphere of teaching Russian as a foreign language. The general idea of the concept was to determine a certain minimum level of Russian which would provide elementary communicational skills. As pointed out by (Lukasik 2017), the most typical target of learning goals is vocabulary. Russian is no exception. Many lists such as ‘the 1000 most important words in Russian’ are available. However, the principle of *minimizatsiya* can be also applied to other units of language (Mustajoki 1980). Thus, morphological, derivational, syntactical, phonetical, and even cultural *minimums* are formed. The main selection criterion is naturally the frequency of a certain phenomenon in speech, but another central notion is significance for communication (*kommunikativnaya znatšimost*). Another criterion that could also be considered is the ease of the word or other linguistic unit in terms of learning. In grammar, this could mean a preference for productive and systematic features. In vocabulary, a possible application of this principle is learning a loanword known to the student instead of the original Russian word, for example, *week-end* is in Russian *vyhodnye*, but it would be much easier to learn the English loanword which is used in colloquial Russian (with various ways of writing *uik-end, uikend, vikend*).

Any tailoring of texts is a tool that reflects a general principle of human communication (Pierce-Grove 2016). Several terms are used to refer to this phenomenon, for example, *recipient design* (Newman-Norlund et al. 2009, Blokpoel et al. 2012, Mustajoki 2012), *audience design* (Sacks and Schegloff 1979, Bell 1984) or merely *accommodation* (Dragojevic and Giles 2014, Palomares et al. 2016). In practice, tailoring means instinctive translation from one language variety to another. If not concretely, at least in our imagination, we take a certain original as a starting point, to be adapted to the readership.

When writing for children, as a rule, the author translates from the standard language into ‘children’s language’, whereas when writing for the public, a researcher translates from scientific language into standard language.

## 6 Practical outcomes

This section considers various practical outcomes related to the idea of simplified language forms. Texts for educational purposes will be followed by some examples of informative texts. At the end, readability programmes and other technical solutions will be presented.

### 6.1 Literature for educational purposes

Simplified texts for children and foreigners learning Russian have a long tradition. In this context, the term *adaptatsiya* (adaptation) and *adaptirovanny tekst* (adapted text) are used. An adapted text is an authentic or new text that has been adjusted to the language proficiency level of the readership. Adapted texts are regarded as an element of primary education. The idea of adapted texts rests on the assumption that after this phase, children and foreigners acquire standard literary language skills that will free them from the need to read and listen to adapted texts.

The main sphere of adaptation has been books by famous Russian writers (Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, and others). A work of art (a novel or a story) is shortened, some storylines are cut, clarifications and comments are added to the text and, in the case of foreign students, translations of difficult words are provided. In this process of adaptation, the naturalness and authenticity of the Russian language, as well as the style of the author, should be maximally preserved. Russian publishing houses also publish adapted books for personal use outside classroom work.

In addition to literary works, other types of simplified educational texts are also compiled for teaching Russian as a foreign language. They comprise thematic texts or adapted excerpts from newspapers and periodicals compiled especially for this purpose. These texts are read and discussed with the teacher during

classes. They are often classified according to language proficiency level A1 to C2. Adapted texts familiarize students with written Russian and at the same time, offer them some knowledge of Russian society. Some simple texts (short notes, instructions and pieces of news) can also be provided without adaptation.

A further example of simplified language is demonstrated in books that are targeted at a certain age group but are not directly connected to schoolwork. There is a strong tradition in Russia, left over from the Soviet times, to publish well-written and -illustrated books, both fiction and non-fiction, for children and adolescents. A noteworthy example of this is the *Detskaya entsiklopediya* (Encyclopaedia for children) series, the volumes of which cover various fields of science and are often written by famous researchers. The positive attitude to this kind of dissemination of scientific knowledge has encouraged academic people to pay intensive attention to such kind of publishing.

The rich tradition of compiling texts and books for educational purposes in Russia should be utilized in the theory and practice of Easy Language in the future. Although the readership is different, the general idea of the adaptation of language is very similar: the authors of the texts have to think carefully about the needs of people who have problems with texts written in normal standard language.

## 6.2 Informative texts

The battle against COVID-19 has been a real test for societies; not only of their capabilities to exercise quick measures but also their dissemination of reliable information. Because the virus only spreads through people, it is extremely important that people correctly understand the authorities' recommendations and restrictions. Information comes to people through many channels: official documents, mass media, social media, friends, etc. However, the most reliable source of topical information in each country is the website of the Ministry of Health, also in Russia. A quick look at the website gives a positive impression of the accessibility of the required information. The texts on the website<sup>3</sup> are written in fairly simple language and illustrations are used effectively.

.....  
 3 Ministry of Health, <https://covid19.rosminzdrav.ru/>

Another example of an Easy Language text is the educational programme on the Pushkin Museum art collection for children living in orphanages and students of correctional and boarding schools.<sup>4</sup>

Informative texts clearly demonstrate the significance of illustrations. Because the aim of Easy Language is to guarantee the transfer of information to all people, pictures are often a relevant option for reaching a maximum number of readers. Therefore, besides the notion of Easy Language, we should consider the notion of **easy accessibility of information**, which includes all forms of multimodal communication.

### 6.3 Other projects

Russia has several organizations that perform active social work among people with special needs. One of these, the St. Petersburg Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities (GAOORDI), has been among the first in Russia to adapt their texts to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities. Working jointly with international and foreign organizations and supported by foreign grants, the Association has carried out several short-term Easy Language projects, such as the Independent Living manual, intended for people with special developmental needs who are planning to move to an assisted living residence (GAOORDI 2018).

The National Research University 'Higher School of Economics' in Moscow promotes an interesting line of research. It aims to create automated programmes for the simplification of texts for Russian language teaching and learning. One of the projects is linked to an electronic 'Russian as a foreign language' textbook (Sibirtseva and Karpov 2014). The authors of the teaching package used materials presented in the National Corpus of the Russian language in order to keep the topic of the texts as authentic as possible. The authors realized that the texts as such were too complicated for learning purposes, but their simplification by hand was too time-consuming a task. Consequently, the solution was to create an automated device for adapting the texts (Karpov

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4 Pushkin Museum, [https://www.pushkinmuseum.art/visitors/accessible\\_museum/access/index.php](https://www.pushkinmuseum.art/visitors/accessible_museum/access/index.php)

and Sibirtseva 2014). During the process of creating the programme, the authors compared authentic texts with texts simplified by specialists who teach Russian as a foreign language. All the methods of adaptation were systemized and, on this basis, a list of ways to characterize morphological adaptation was established. After this, another list was compiled for forbidden grammatical constructions, which should be adapted or cut. A special device was created for the adaptation of lexical units. In the selection of permitted lexical units, in addition to the frequency criterion, other factors were also used, such as the semantic closeness of the new word with the compensated word.

The results of the project have been utilized to compile the *Leksikator* web application. It is a resource for teachers and students involved in teaching and learning Russian as a foreign language. It enables finding the syntactic constructions that are too complicated for learners, and words that they may not recognize. The selection of the words is based on the lists of lexemes provided for various levels of learning. In addition to this, the programme analyses the text from the perspective of readability indexes. The aim of the programme is to give an objective estimation of the complexity of texts (Baranova and Elipasheva 2014).

A similar project is underway in the Pushkin Institute of the Russian language (Laposhina et al. 2018, Laposhina et al. 2019, Lebedeva et al. 2020), where a research group has produced an internet application called *Tekstometr*<sup>5</sup>, which measures various features of text complexity. The programme has two options: one for learning Russian as a native language, and the other for learning Russian as a foreign language. The application can also be used for measuring the readability of any text. According to *Tekstometr*, the examples given in the Appendix below have the following levels of readability: the original text can be understood by school children aged 13–15, whereas the simplified text can be understood by children aged 9–10. For the sake of comparison, *Tekstometr* was used to analyse a response to a reader's question on coronavirus on the website of the Ministry of Health. The result was that a master's level degree was needed to understand it.

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5 *Tekstometr*, <https://textometr.ru/>

## 7 Education and research

As mentioned above, the concept of Easy Language is in its early stages in Russia. A natural consequence of this is a lack of systemic education in the field. The first research projects are only beginning to emerge. The database of dissertations accepted in Russia does not have a single item on this topic (Committee on Higher Education 2021). The first scientific seminars and conferences on this topic have only recently been held. This is especially significant considering that the Russian language, with all its varieties, is one of the most researched languages in the world. However, some initiatives and aspiring research ideas in line with the Easy Language ideology are beginning to emerge. Many of them are oriented towards also solving practical problems. Below are some examples.

In 2018, an interdisciplinary and international research and practice project named ‘Translation into Easy and Plain Languages in Russia’<sup>6</sup> was launched under the auspices of the Association of Translation Teachers. Its goal is to consolidate and organize the experience, processes, and procedures of writing in and translating into both Easy Language (*yasny yazyk*) and Plain Language (*prostoy yazyk*) (see Nechaeva in press). The project team comprises both association members and external participants, including experts in Easy and Plain Language from Germany Krishna-Sara Helmle (the founder and owner of Textöffner® – Translation Company and Consultancy for Easy-to-Read and Plain Language) and Professor Andreas Baumert (Hochschule Hannover, working group on developing the DIN Standard for Plain Language). The team has developed and refined a set of basic rules for translating into Easy and Plain Russian, and the results of their work have been evaluated by partner organizations, published as scholarly articles, and presented at thematic conventions such as the Inclusive Dialogue conference in January 2020.

On October 13th, 2020, the International Plain Language Day, the ATT project group organized the first International Round Table entitled ‘Translation into Clear and Simple Languages: Foreign Experience and Prospects in Russia’. The event was attended by representatives of the German Institute for Stand-

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6 The Translation into Easy and Plain Languages in Russia project, <http://translation-teachers.ru/ourprojects/plainrussian/>

ardization (DIN), in particular, the new working group on the development of the *Einfache Sprache* (Plain Language) standard, as well as the CEO of the Textöffner® translation agency, experts in Easy Language from the University of Hildesheim, and representatives of Russian government agencies and the press. Speakers from non-profit organizations specializing in assisting people with disabilities shared their experiences and perspectives on the topic. The round table discussion provided new impetus for further developing the project.

Knutov and his colleagues (2020) from the Higher School of Economics studied the complexity of legislative texts from the last 30 years. It appeared that general complexity, for example, the length of sentences and paragraphs, had grown over the course of time. A characteristic feature of legal texts is an exceptionally low number of verbs: only 6.7% of words are verbs (Knutov et al. 2020). In an interview in the *Kommersant* newspaper, one of the authors, Sergey Plaksin, expressed his concern over the complexity of legal texts that should be understandable to people. He said that the language of many laws is more complex than Kant's philosophical texts. He claimed that legal texts are not accessible for ordinary citizens and may even be too difficult for many lawyers (Kommersant 2020).

When investigating the accessibility of Russian texts, it is important to bear in mind the richness of the Russian morphology. This raises the question of whether some morphological forms are more difficult than others for people with an incomplete command of the language. A further question is whether the answer is related to the minimization of linguistic materials used in teaching materials. As regards vocabulary, the frequency of words based on standard texts is a good estimate of their easiness on a large scale. In fact, people's knowledge of words varies greatly depending on their different life experiences. If researchers try to approach this question by referring to their own knowledge, they easily fall into the trap of a cognitive bias called *common ground fallacy*, which makes us to think that other people know the same things as we do (Mustajoki 2012). Therefore, it is important to carry out research on which lexical and grammatical features slow down or hinder people's comprehension.

In 2019, a survey at the Altay State Pedagogical Institute made some interesting findings. The aim of the study was to research the extent to which foreign students comprehend university sites that are addressed to them. First,

native speakers assessed the text from the perspective of potential comprehension problems. According to them, more than 43% of the words belonged to a group of words potentially difficult for foreign students. Next, the foreign students themselves read the texts and assessed their difficulty. It appeared that the most difficult expressions belonged to administrative jargon, a typical feature of such texts.

An essential general question is whether problems in comprehension are caused by an unknown word or an unfamiliar concept. A master's dissertation at Helsinki University (Sammalkorpi 2006) suggested that the misunderstandings that arose between foreign customers and clerks in an employment office, as a rule, derive from an unknown concept connected with the Finnish administration rather than from language proficiency problems. The interaction was between a Finnish clerk and a Russian customer, in Russian. Such results can also be relevant in a Russian environment when a Russian administrator meets a client with non-perfect language proficiency.

## 8 Future perspectives

As has been shown, the concept of Easy Language is not very customary in Russia, but interest in the phenomenon is increasing at the level of decision-makers and among researchers. Russia is a huge country, and it is quite possible that the authors of this chapter are not aware of all the initiatives in the field. The following challenges may hinder the further development of Easy Russian.

First, according to the Russian linguistic tradition, the Russian language has five 'functional styles', to use the Russian term. The spheres of usage are science, administration and business, media, oral interaction, and literature. They differ from each other considerably in their usage of vocabulary and syntactic structures. As noted in Kropatsev et al. (2019), the formal style, (*oficialno-delovoi*, language of administration and business) constitutes the core of the literary (standard) language as a language of the state. It is used in diplomacy, legislation, instructions and other official documents. It should be maximally understandable and neutral.

However, from the point of view of Easy or Plain Language, it is problematic that the norm of the Russian formal style is structurally extremely complex. It is replete with participial and gerund constructions, the passive voice, nouns derived from verbs, clichés, special terminology, and abbreviations. Texts written in such a language often need clarification and comments from experts. The problems in the style of Russian discourse are often brushed over by using the term *kantselarizm* (or *kantselarit*), i.e., ‘bad formal style’. However, the features of the formal style mentioned above are an essential part of it: they derive from the objective to be as unambiguous as possible. At the same time, this results in very complicated language which is far from people’s normal everyday language and therefore inaccessible to those who do not meet such language in their everyday working lives. As early as 1972, Nora Gal published a book called *Slovo zhivoe i mjortvoe* (Living and dead word), which became a bestseller. She wrote that, in most cases, it is better to replace an official word by a colloquial word, a long word by a short word, a complex word by a simple word, and an abstract word by a concrete word (Gal 1972). The book is still relevant today.

Second, an obvious challenge in the development of Easy Language in Russia, as in most countries, is the lack of readability research using experiments with informants of various types. Research conducted in different countries suggests, for example, that active constructions are more understandable than passive ones and short sentences are easier to comprehend than long ones. However, many questions remain unanswered, some of which are universal, others language-related, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Third, a challenge for Easy Language (and Plain Language) work in every country is the heterogeneity of the target group. This is especially true in Russia, as described earlier in this chapter.

To conclude, the general impression is that a great deal of different activities are in progress in many organizations in different parts of the country. This became clear while compiling this chapter. Because a centralized body for the development of simplified languages is lacking, information on the issue has to be collected from different sources. In fact, many of the people and projects mentioned in this chapter were found accidentally through personal networks. In addition, the list of authors shows that they come from five different organizations and have very diverse scientific and practical backgrounds. It is more

than likely that many others exist but were not found by the authors of this chapter. Thus, the situation in Russia is very similar to that in other countries: the future of the development of simplified languages depends on both the enthusiasm of individuals and administrative decisions.

A recent example of the constantly emerging new initiatives around linguistic simplification: 12 research groups took part in a competition for the best programme for syntactic simplification of Russian texts, which was held at the computational linguistics conference *Dialog* in June 2021. On the whole, automated translations to Plain and Easy Language is a field in which Russia has potential.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Russian.

Standard Russian	Easy Russian
<p>Банковская карта</p> <p>Специальный банковский инструмент в виде пластиковой карты с нанесенными на нее идентификационными данными, который позволяет распоряжаться деньгами со своего банковского счета.</p>	<p>Банковская карта</p> <p>Банковская карта это пластиковая карточка, которую может сделать для Вас банк. Банк может сделать для Вас банковскую карту, если Вы откроете в банке счет.</p> <p>Вы сможете оплатить банковской картой покупку в магазине или аптеке.</p> <p>Это значит, что Вам не понадобятся бумажные деньги или монеты.</p> <p>Специальный аппарат на кассе магазина возьмет деньги прямо с Вашего счета в банке через банковскую карту.</p>
<p>[Bank card</p> <p>A special banking instrument in the form of a plastic card with personal identification data printed on it, which allows you to take money from your bank account.]</p>	<p>[Bank card</p> <p>A bankcard is a plastic card, which a bank can make for you, if you open an account at the bank.</p> <p>You can use your bank card to pay for a purchase at a shop or drugstore. This means you do not need paper money or coins.</p> <p>A special machine at the counter takes the money directly from your bank account through your bank card.]</p>

## Easy Language in Slovenia

### 1 Introduction

The Republic of Slovenia is a European country located along the Adriatic Sea. It borders Austria, Italy, Hungary, and Croatia. Throughout history, the country has received important influences from Central European and Apennine cultures. With an area of 20 271 km<sup>2</sup>, Slovenia is ranked a medium-sized European country. Its capital is Ljubljana, which is the country's economic, cultural, and political centre. Slovenia is a parliamentary democracy. It was established on 25th June 1991 and has been a member of the European Union since 2004. The average monthly gross salary in the country is EUR 1812.66 (SURS 2020).

According to the latest data from August 2020, the country has 2.1 million inhabitants (SURS 2020). In the 2002 census, 83.06% of the population of the Republic of Slovenia declared themselves Slovenes. More than 1% of the other ethnic groups declared themselves Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks. For 8.9% of the population this data were unknown, or people did not want to answer (SURS 2002). The largest national official minorities are Hungarians (0.32%), Italians (0.11%) and Roma (0.17%). Almost 8% of the population are foreigners (SURS 2020).

People with disabilities represent approximately 12–13% of the total population. Since there is no official register containing data on people with disabilities, this estimation is based on the number of people with disability decrees and disability organization assessments. Most people with disabilities who do not live at home live in institutions or receive institutional care services. Among these are many people with intellectual disabilities, who still live in segregated institutions, which often provide inadequate community support and services. Studies in this area of research have reported that traditional disability organizations generally focus on biomedical

classifications of the users of their services and not on the individual needs of the person with a disability (Zaviršek et al. 2015). Recent developments in deinstitutionalization, together with increasing human rights awareness and advocacy as well as the ageing of society have, however, increased the need for accessible information and Easy Slovene.

The official and state language in Slovenia is Slovene, but in areas densely populated by Italian and Hungarian national minorities, Italian or Hungarian are also official languages. Slovene, a Slavic language, is spoken by about 2 500 000 people, most of whom live in Slovenia. Some Slovene minorities live in Italy, Austria, Croatia, and Hungary, and emigrants mainly live in Germany, the US and Canada. In addition to literary language, Slovene also has eight dialect groups, which in turn consist of about 50 local dialects. The Slovene language has 25 letters for 29 sounds. The alphabet is *gajica* (belonging to the Latin script). It has three grammatical numbers (singularity, duality, plurality), six declensions, three genders (masculine, feminine and neuter) and four tenses (past, present, future, and the pre-past tense, which is rarely used). Perhaps the most interesting aspects of Slovene are the use of duality and the letters č, š, ž. For people who learn Slovene as a foreign language, these letters are particularly hard to pronounce. They sound very similar and readers and speakers of (Easy) Slovene need to pay special attention to them. Duality, in turn, gives the language a certain aspect of intimacy, especially when discussing interpersonal relationships. This is also a challenging feature for foreigners.

## 2 Historical perspectives

Before 2011, few publications in Easy Language existed. The pioneer in publication was *Varstveno delovni center Tončke Hočevar* (Tončka Hočevar Care and Work Centre). In 2001, they received the Fund for Innovations Award for their magazine *Hanca*<sup>1</sup>. One of the earliest publications in Easy Slovene was the booklet *Preprosto Evro* (Simply Euro), which was published by *Sožitje*, the Slovenian association for people with intellectual disabilities and their families

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1 *Hanca* is a female name.

(*Zveza Sožitje, Zveza društev za pomoč osebam z motnjami v duševnem razvoju Slovenije*, from here on referred to as *Sožitje*) during the Euro Introduction Campaign in 2005–2007. The booklet is all text and contains no pictures.

In 2007, the YHD association (*Društvo YHD*) and the *Modra* publishing house published a book in Easy Language with pictures – *Šolanje in zaposlovanje otrok in odraslih, ki se težko učijo* (Education and employment of children and adults with learning difficulties) by Darja Zaviršek and Katarina Gorenc. In 2008, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities published an Easy Language guide to the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, *Konvencija o pravicah invalidov – Mednarodni sporazum o pravicah invalidov*). Apart from one or two centres for people with intellectual disabilities, before 2011 no data can be found on the production of Easy Language in organizations for users who need accessible information (Haramija and Knapp 2019).

At the beginning of 2011, a non-governmental organization, the RISA institute, Centre for general, functional and cultural literacy (*Zavod RISA, Center za splošno, funkcionalno in kulturno opismenjevanje* from here on referred to as the RISA Institute<sup>2</sup>), was established by Tatjana Knapp and Saša Lesjak. Thus, Slovenia’s very first organization with a structured and systematic approach to accessible communication and information in Easy Slovene was established. From the beginning, the RISA Institute has published a free newspaper in Easy Language called *20 Minut (20 Minutes)*<sup>3</sup>. That same year, at the Črna na Koroškem training, work and care centre (*Center za usposabljanje, delo in varstvo Črna na Koroškem*), an institution for people with intellectual disabilities, the first groups of Easy Language users were formed. Several of these groups would grow to later become groups of Easy Language text validators and self-advocates.

In 2012, in the European Capital of Culture, Maribor, the RISA Institute published the first adaptations of literature into Easy Slovene. In 2012, with the

2 General page for RISA Institute, <http://www.risa.si/>.

3 RISA Institute, 20 Minut, [www.risa.si/Domov/Knji%C5%BEnica/%C4%8Casopis-20-minut](http://www.risa.si/Domov/Knji%C5%BEnica/%C4%8Casopis-20-minut).

help of the Ministry of Health, the RISA Institute launched the first Slovenian website in Easy Language, which provides health-related information<sup>4</sup>.

Between 2011 and 2013, the Pathways to Adult Education for People with Intellectual Disabilities II project, led by Inclusion Europe and co-financed by the EU, brought the European guidelines for Easy Language to Slovenia. The European standards were translated and adapted into Slovene by *Sožitje*. A unique feature of these early guidelines for Easy Slovene was that they suggested that Easy Slovene be written in upper case only. As part of this same project, *Sožitje* prepared the very first training for instructors of Easy Language text writers in Slovenia.

The first National Conference on Easy Language was held in 2013 in the Črna na Koroškem training, work and care centre. In 2014, the RISA Institute and partners submitted successful proposals for amendments to the Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2014–2018. The Resolution now lists people with intellectual disabilities among their speakers with special needs, and suggests Easy Language among its other concepts and tools. On this basis, the Ministry of Culture launched the very first public tender for Easy Language texts in Slovenia. As the beneficiary of the tender, the RISA Institute received permission from the copyright holders to publish an adaptation of another well-known Slovene novel *Pod svobodnim soncem* (Under the free sun) by Fran Saleški Finžgar.

In 2015, the RISA Institute initiated the establishment of the Council for Monitoring and Development of Guidelines for Easy-to-read in Slovene Language, which was officially formed at the second National Conference on Easy-to-read language in Ravne na Koroškem. The Association for Adapted Communication, LABRA (*Društvo za prilagojeno obliko komunikacij LABRA*, from here on referred to as the LABRA Association) was also established. The founding LABRA Association members were users and experts in various fields that concern information and reading (special pedagogues, a social pedagogue, professors of the Slovene Language, academics, social workers, an anthropologist, an economist, speech therapists, end users, and others).

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4 Ministry of Health, [www.ostanizdrav.com](http://www.ostanizdrav.com).

At the end of 2016, the first original novel in Easy Slovene was published. In 2017, the Student Innovative Project for Social Benefit, called simply *Lahko branje* (Easy-to-read) was launched at the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor. The students prepared various texts on different Slovenian towns, specifically 60 Slovenian towns with organizations for people with intellectual disabilities, such as sheltered workshops. The *Occupational Safety* document was also prepared. All texts are available on the website of the Faculty of Education University of Maribor<sup>5</sup>.

The year 2018 was important for Easy Slovene projects. One such project was 'Easy to read: the development of basic guidelines, methods, didactic materials and accompanying tools for Easy-to-read in Slovenia' (*LAHKO JE BRATI: Razvoj temeljnih usmeritev, metod, didaktičnih gradiv in spremljajočih orodij za lahko branje v Sloveniji*), which resulted in a manual and a guidebook in two volumes, a dictionary of synonyms, an archive of free pictures, a training curriculum, and a model of systematization for Easy Language in Slovenia. The project was financed by the European Social Fund and the Republic of Slovenia. That same year, the LABRA Association developed an advocacy plan to directly insert the concept of Easy Language into Slovene legislation.

Also in 2018, the 'Adaptation of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia project of the Student Section of the Association of Special and Rehabilitation Educators of Slovenia' was launched. *Sožitje*, together with Inclusion Czech Republic, carried out a project called 'Partnership for a more active life of young people with intellectual disabilities' (PAL4youth). This project resulted in, for example, seven Easy Language booklets on gender and sexuality. It was co-financed by the EU's Erasmus + programme.

In the academic year 2019/2020, the Faculty of Education, University of Maribor introduced an elective course on Easy Language as part of their Inclusion in Education studies. In 2020, the first three adaptations of acts into Easy Language were published in Slovenia: the Personal Assistance Act, the Social Inclusion of Disabled Persons Act, and the Placement of Children with Special Needs Act.

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5 University of Maribor, <http://pef.um.si/raziskovanje-in-umetnost/zakljuceni-projekti/sipk-lahko-branje/>.

### 3 Current situation

Though *lahko branje* (easy-to-read) may not share the long tradition of Easy Languages in some other European countries, thanks to various stakeholders it has significantly expanded and become recognized in Slovenia during the last decade.

#### 3.1 Definitions

According to the academic perspective, Easy Language is a process and method of communication that promotes the development of literacy and social and psychological integration of people with reading and writing difficulties. Communication is adapted in a way that the content is made readable and understandable. Texts are prepared in a series of procedures according to specific technical/substantive and formal guidelines and criteria. These aimed to communicate information to people who are disadvantaged in terms of literacy in a readable, legible, and understandable way. The goal of the method and the process is to make information easy to read and understand, as well as accessible and useful. Easy Language can be applied to original or adapted texts and recordings, such as words, symbols, illustrations, and audio or video recordings. Easy Language depends on several factors and should not be regarded as merely an adaptation of pre-existing information, but also the creation of information in an easier-to-read and understandable form (Haramija and Knapp 2019). The simpler definition, aimed towards the general public and end users, states that Easy Language is information that is easy to find, easy to read and easy to understand (Knapp et al. 2019).

In this chapter, with the exception of the literal translations of names and titles, we use the terms Easy Slovene or Easy Language to refer to the concept of *lahko branje*, of which the literal translation would be 'easy to read'. For now, the national term has not been changed, though the Slovene concept follows what would be a modern definition of Easy Language. The main reasons for this are the recognition and use of the old term among the end users, comparability of the concept with the original definitions of the international easy-to-read concept and the stance that a proper definition depends more on the charac-

teristics of the definition than on the name, which can rarely include every desired aspect of the definition (Haramija and Knapp 2019).

Slovenia still has no definition of Plain Language. Furthermore, Plain Language is not used nor has it been researched. In 2018, the RISA Institute and the LABRA Association proposed that, as a standard for communication in the field of public services, authorities should use Plain Language (Knapp and Usenik 2019). The initiative was made during the final stage of drafting the Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2019–2023. The one paper on the distinction between Easy Language and Plain Language focuses on developing reading literacy among children – immigrant pupils. Haramija recognizes that upon moving to their destination country, immigrant pupils whose mother tongue is not the local language find themselves at a disadvantage. Previous research had shown that the command of language is an important area for a child's general integration into their new environment. The School Curriculums for Teaching Elementary Level Slovene Language (2020) enable the models of Easy Language and Plain Language to be implemented. Both models must consider the child's chronological age and age-appropriate content which, due to limited command of the language, need morphological, lexicological, and syntactic adjustments, in both literary and informative texts (Haramija, 2021).

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

On the international level, the right to communicate or exchange information in an accessible manner is grounded in several laws, strategies, and policies. The **Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia** (from here on referred to as the Constitution) stipulates in Paragraph 1 of Article 14 that human rights and fundamental freedoms are exercised directly on the basis of the Constitution and may be limited only by the rights of others and in cases determined by the Constitution. Thus, these rights are equal for everyone, regardless of their personal circumstances (Ustava Republike Slovenije 1991).

Furthermore, the **Slovene Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act** (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov 2010) states in Article 3 that the provision of equal opportunities is 'planned activities en-

abling the accessibility of different spheres of society and the environment, such as public services, the built environment, goods and services provided to the public, information, communication etc., to everyone, and particularly to persons with disabilities'. Article 8 addresses access to goods and services: 'the accessibility of information, communication and other services and assistance in cases of emergency'. Article 7 is incomplete, as it mentions only people with sensory disabilities and adaptations for them, but does not mention, for example, people with head injuries or intellectual disabilities, nor does it mention Easy Language. Article 14 is important, as it clearly states that inaccessibility to information is a form of discrimination (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov 2010).

The **Slovene Protection Against Discrimination Act** (Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo 2016) states in Article 7 that any discrimination in accessing goods or services on the grounds of disability is prohibited, emphasizing discrimination in terms of access to goods and services available to the general public and refusal of goods and services that are available to the general public to a person with disabilities, or their provision under different and inferior conditions. Measures to remove barriers to accessing goods and services available to the general public are directed at access to information, communication and other services and emergency assistance, and assurance that public and private entities offering goods and services to the general public also consider all aspects of their accessibility to people with disabilities. According to this Act (Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo 2016), when offering goods and services available to the general public, appropriate necessary support must be provided, in particular the support of another person (readers, Slovene Sign Language interpreters, deafblind interpreters), Braille markings, and information in an easily readable and comprehensible form.

The **Slovene Resolution on the National Program for Language Policy 2014–2018** states that people with special needs must fulfil their communication needs in alternative ways. The programme acknowledges that the Republic of Slovenia is committed to ensuring equal opportunities to all people in various legal documents (Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, the Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol to this Convention, the

Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, Resolution on Sign Language for the deaf, etc.), but an analysis of the actual situation shows that implementation often remains in the domain of NGOs and volunteers. The **Resolution on the National Program for Language Policy 2020–2024** reiterates the current Resolution on the National Program for Language Policy (Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu za jezikovno politiko 2013, 2020).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Since 2011, the most active organization in the field of Easy Language has been the **RISA Institute**, which leads and takes part in research projects, production, publishing and training in the field of Easy Slovene. It continues to work with volunteers and readers/end users, produces publications in Easy Language, and advises individuals and organizations. Easy Language is by default a part of all their projects related to human rights and similar issues. In 2020, the Risa Institute joined two interesting European (Erasmus+) projects, Promoting Easy-to-read Language for Social Inclusion (PERLSI) and Professional training for Easy-to-read facilitators and validators (TRAIN2VALIDATE).

Other stakeholders broadly active in the field, are *Sožitje* (the Slovenian Association for people with intellectual disabilities and their families), the **LABRA Association** and **Public Service Broadcaster RTV Slovenia**. RTV Slovenia and the RISA Institute also participate in the European (Erasmus+) project ‘Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training’ (EASIT), which focuses on audiovisual content and explores the possibilities of interweaving Easy Language and Plain Language with services or accessibility techniques, such as audio description and subtitling. As already discussed in Section 2, the *Tončka Hočever* care and work centre was among the first to publish texts in Easy Slovene in their magazine, *Hanca* (2001). They were followed by *Sožitje*, the YHD Association and publishing house *Modra*.

According to an assessment by the LABRA Association, accessible information and Easy Language fall under the domain of the following ministries and other public bodies: the Ministry of Culture; the Ministry of Work, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities; the Ministry of Education, Science,

and Sports; the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the Book Agency of the Republic of Slovenia, and universities.

From the above list, the **Faculty of Education, University of Maribor** is the most active among academic actors. As for the ministries, mainly the Ministry of Culture, and to some extent the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports; and the Ministry of Work, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal opportunities have so far shown support for Easy Slovene in the form of public calls or limited initiatives.

**Libraries** are also significant Easy Language stakeholders. The ten central regional libraries in Slovenia prepare joint projects for all other libraries. The *Koroška osrednja knjižnica dr. Franca Sušnika Ravne na Koroškem* library (Carinthian Central Library dr. Franc Sušnik Ravne na Koroškem) has accepted the task to develop a central 'physical place' for knowledge and literature in Easy Language in Slovenia. It is thus also the co-ordinator of all other Slovenian libraries. It expands knowledge on and the list of Easy Language literature for adults, children, and youths, as well as expert literature on Easy Language, into the network of all the other central regional libraries. Criteria for and indicators of the accessibility of libraries have also been created, co-operation has been established with various organizations in the community that work with people who need Easy Language, and efforts are being made to promote the Easy Language concept. Based on these starting points, an implementation model for activities, services and co-operation with various organizations in the community has been developed. This model of local co-operation with the library as the central point can be adapted to all public libraries in Slovenia (Haramija and Knapp 2019).

The stakeholders are diverse. In addition to different organizations (including non-governmental organizations) and professionals who work with the end users (e.g., sheltered workshops, libraries, etc.), research and/or project groups; families, relatives, and friends of the end users; the media; the general public; ambassadors of Easy Language, and decision-makers all play their part.

## 4 Target groups

It is estimated that approximately 500 000 people in Slovenia need or would benefit from Easy Language (Knapp and Usenik 2018, PIAAC 2012–2015). End users of Easy Slovene include people with intellectual disabilities, people with dementia, people who have suffered a stroke, people with head injuries, people with hearing problems (deaf and hard of hearing), people with vision problems (visually impaired and blind), deafblind people, people with specific learning difficulties, people with autism spectrum disorders, people with speech and language disabilities, people with psychosocial disorders, the elderly, immigrants, Romani people, and people with poor reading skills (Har-amija and Knapp 2019). The common characteristics of this diverse group are poor literacy, stigmatization, obstructed access to information, barriers to communication, absence of voice, unawareness of their right to information in accessible form and Easy Language.

Thus, the common needs of the end users are awareness of their right to information in an accessible form/Easy Language, production of and access to information in an accessible form/Easy Language, effective communication, and social inclusion.

## 5 Guidelines

We can identify several types of Easy Language material, depending on the criterion we take as a starting point: adjustments according to individual needs, to the medium, or to the type of text or other information.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) proposes two categories of Easy Language texts. The first group includes texts that are only graphically adapted (non-glossy paper, each sentence of the text written on a new line, font type and size, etc.). The second group of texts includes those that can be easily read by people with special needs. In this second group, the accommodations are not only graphical; they also apply to words, morphology, syntax, and layout. All the adaptations relate to the characteristics of the Slovene Language.

The current guidelines on Easy Slovene have been compiled into a guide-book: *Lahko je brati: Pravila 2* (It is easy to read: Guidelines 2, Knapp et al. 2019). Some authors also use guidelines based on the European standards of Inclusion Europe (Information for all) and adapted to Slovene Language.

The Slovene guidelines, which were developed and tested in several reading groups with members with different reading and comprehension abilities, differ from the European standards in some details. Whereas the European Standards, for example, suggest using positive instead of negative sentences wherever possible (Information for all 2009), the Slovene guidelines suggest using negative sentences in cases where the negative form is more commonly used in everyday conversation (Knapp et al. 2019). However, the most prominent characteristic of the Slovene guidelines is their Easy Language level system.

The Easy Slovene levels are based on the analysis and testing of different texts and pictures in different media. For adults, four levels of Easy Language are suggested. Each level must address the reader/end user in an adult manner, and have a name and specific indicators.

The indicators suggest the level of a document. The readers/end users can choose from these levels according to their interest, reading ability and complexity of the document. For easier recognition, each level is assigned a colour and a symbol. Each symbol consists of four books, as shown in Table 1. Easy Language for children follows a similar level logic. However, instead of a book, the symbol is a candy.

Level	Symbol	Level description, indicators
Level 1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no written words, spoken words are used in storytelling</li> <li>• pictures are allowed (occasional use)</li> <li>• use of real-life objects</li> <li>• multisensory stimulations</li> </ul>

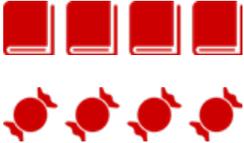
Level	Symbol	Level description, indicators
Level 2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none or very little text</li> <li>• upper case or lower case (A, a)</li> <li>• single sentences (clauses)</li> <li>• each sentence is written on a separate line</li> <li>• up to 5 words in a sentence (line)</li> <li>• numerous pictures</li> <li>• very simplified content</li> <li>• very easy to understand</li> </ul>
Level 3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very simple text</li> <li>• upper or lower case (A, a)</li> <li>• sentences can consist of clauses, but each clause is written on a separate line</li> <li>• from 5 to 7 words in a clause</li> <li>• relevant punctuation is used: full stops, exclamation marks, question marks, commas; the preferred mark is a full stop, other marks are to be avoided</li> <li>• dialogue can be used</li> </ul>
Level 4		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lower case as a rule (a)</li> <li>• longer but clear and understandable sentences are allowed (more than 1 clause)</li> <li>• clauses can have 10 or more words</li> <li>• sentences have up to 20 words</li> <li>• several other punctuation marks are used, e.g., colons</li> </ul>

Table 1: Levels of Easy Slovene (Haramija and Knapp 2019)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages<sup>6</sup> was used as a basis for identifying and suggesting these levels, and the lowest or basic level of language proficiency according to the European Reference Framework was equated with the highest, i.e. the 4th Easy Language level in the Slovene system.

## 6 Practical outcomes

Easy Slovene adopts various media to best suit a particular reader; for example, audio books and recordings for people who have vision problems. Accessible materials on computers and USB sticks are sometimes available so that the user can determine the colour of the screen, size and type of letters. Although early publications, such as the *Hanca* magazine and the first issues of *20 Minutes*, were mainly in printed form, current publications strive to be available in different formats; the newest issues of *20 Minutes* are featured online, and handbooks, such as *It is easy to read: Guidelines 2*, are now in printed and digital form, as well as in the form of an audio book.

### 6.1 Media

Since 2020, the national broadcaster RTV Slovenia had been publishing shorter articles and news in easier language on their website.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of 2021, they launched a web portal called *Enostavno* (Simple)<sup>8</sup>, featuring daily global news, news from Slovenia, sports news, trivia, and practical texts.

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6 The frame of reference identifies three activities: comprehension (auditory, reading), speaking (spoken communication, spoken communication), and writing. The lowest levels of knowledge – A1 and A2 – represent the basic user. For people with disabilities, in many cases this represents the highest level of their reading development, some reach level B1, which suggests an independent user; level A is also the initial level for children and adults (immigrants) who are learning the language and progressing; levels A2 or B1 also cover inexperienced adult readers.

7 Dostopno, [www.dostopno.si](http://www.dostopno.si).

8 Enostavno, [www.rtv slo.si/enostavno](http://www.rtv slo.si/enostavno).

## 6.2 Literature

So far, seven original literary works have been published in Easy Slovene. The first original novel was published in 2016. *Cvetje in ogenj* (Flowers and Fire) is a love story, the first book from the *Julija and Peter* collection, co-written by Aksinja Kermauner and readers with disabilities. The collection is aimed at adult readers. In 2018, another writer, Karolina Kolmanič worked together with readers with disabilities. The result was the *Tu je doma ljubezen* story (Here is love at home). In 2019, the *Center Polž Maribor* care and work organization published *Prepovedana ljubezen* (The forbidden love). In 2020, the *Velenje* centre for education and training (*Center za vzgojo, izobraževanje in usposabljanje Velenje*) published an e-book called *Puran Peter* (Peter the turkey), written and illustrated by Sabina Breznik. This was the first original story in Easy Slovene Language at Level 3. The *Dobrna* training, work and care centre (*Center za usposabljanje, delo in varstvo Dobrna*) also published *Fagurjeva zgodba* (Fagur's story). In the beginning of 2021, two more original stories for adult readers of Easy Language were published: *Moda in neroda* (Fashion and clumsiness) by Aksinja Kermauner et. al and *Dom je tam, kjer je srce* (Home is where the heart is) by students of the *Velenje* centre for education and training.

So far, four works of literature have been adapted to Easy Slovene, all of them listed at Level 4: *Visoška kronika* (The Visoko Chronicles), a historical novel and a love story by Ivan Tavčar, adapted by Saša Fužir (2012); *Romeo in Julija* (Romeo and Juliet), a famous play by William Shakespeare, adapted by Tatjana Knapp (2012); seven stories from different novels about special people by Slovene authors *Naše zgodbe* (Our stories), adapted by Saša Fužir and Tatjana Knapp (2013); and *Pod svobodnim soncem* (Under the free sun), a historical fiction book by Fran Saleški Finžgar, adapted by Tatjana Knapp (2015). All of the books except for *Naše zgodbe* are also available on the RISA Institute's website<sup>9</sup> (pdf, free of charge). The Easy Language version of *Romeo in Julija* was also adapted to Braille by Urška Lah.

Adapted literature is occasionally produced in the context of higher education studies of various orientations. One such example is *Zdravljica* (The

9 RISA Institute, Romani, [www.risa.si/Domov/Knji%C5%BEnica/Romani](http://www.risa.si/Domov/Knji%C5%BEnica/Romani).

Toast) by France Prešeren, adapted by Lucija Matos at the Faculty of Education, University of Koper (2019) to Easy Language and Braille.

### 6.3 Informative texts

Informative material in printed or electronic form is extremely important, as it can, for example, explain the needs and rights of people with disabilities. Example of such publications are the adaptation of the CRPD or the guide to the rights of people with disabilities in Slovenia. This group of texts and other information also includes practical guides and manuals, etc. The reader/end user must understand the content to be able to function in society. As previously mentioned, in 2020, the three national legislation acts were adapted to Easy Slovene for the first time.

### 6.4 Other projects

To enhance public awareness and knowledge, the idea of the **Ambassadors of Easy Language** emerged in 2018, as it was understood that the visibility of selected individuals may reach wider audiences. National and local ambassadors are motivated individuals or organizations that want to 'give back' to the community. The national ambassadors are well-known public persons who are connected in different ways to language, culture, or human rights, some of them even having experienced trouble reading standard information at some point themselves. As of 2018, former Ombudsman and current President's Advisor Vlasta Nussdorfer; actors Jernej Kuntner, Saša Pavček and Gojmir Lešnjak-Gojc; academics Milena Ivanuš Grmek and Boštjan Žekš; and self-advocate and poet Nevenka Kos are some of the names that represent and present Slovene Easy Language. Furthermore, local ambassadors promote the idea of local co-operation and connection. As explained earlier in this text, whereas the model of local co-operation with a library as the central physical point for accessible literature and information puts the library in the role of the carrier of the related activities and services, these local ambassadors are the faces of this integration. National and local ambassadors of Easy Language hold this honorary and voluntary title and perform activities such as spreading the Easy

Language concept on social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Pinterest, etc.) and other media. They participate in conferences, media conferences and other events (on agreement, according to time availability). The goal of the embassy is therefore to gain the attention of the targeted public.

Some initial attempts to develop **software for machine simplification** of texts or for assessing the levels of texts' difficulty have been made at the University of Maribor, the University of Ljubljana and the Jožef Štefan Institute (*Institut Jožef Stefan*, IJS). Recently, one such project<sup>10</sup> produced the first application for assessing Slovene texts' level of difficulty. The developed tool for readability analysis is freely available on the server of the Centre for Language Resources and Technologies of the University of Ljubljana.<sup>11</sup> Texts in Easy Slovene were used in the development of the application.

## 7 Education and research

A few tools for **practical training** of different target groups already exist. In the context of lifelong learning, a curriculum of training for end users with intellectual disabilities and their support persons was developed. It covers six topics, five obligatory and one elective: Conversation without words; Conversation with words; Slovene Language and Easy-to-read; Think and create; The right to information (all obligatory); and Teaching others (elective). The curriculum for the workshops is available on the website<sup>12</sup>.

Workshops for professionals (e.g., andragogues, special pedagogues, etc.) are held at the **Faculty of Education, University of Maribor**. The aim of the training is to recognize reading habits among Easy Language users; to identify high quality literature and other texts in Easy Language; to strengthen communication skills; to select an appropriate approach, methods and medium; and to learn to prepare basic texts in Easy Language.

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10 Project *Za kakovost slovenskih učbenikov* (KaUč), [www.kauc.splet.arnes.si/](http://www.kauc.splet.arnes.si/).

11 Centre for Language Resources and Technologies of the University of Ljubljana, [www.orojda.cjvt.si/berljivost](http://www.orojda.cjvt.si/berljivost).

12 RISA Institute, Curriculum for workshops, [www.lahkojebrati.si/Portals/1/Knjige/Učni%20načrt%20usposabljanja%20LAHKO%20JE%20BRATI\\_april%202019.pdf](http://www.lahkojebrati.si/Portals/1/Knjige/Učni%20načrt%20usposabljanja%20LAHKO%20JE%20BRATI_april%202019.pdf)

The RISA Institute offers seminars and workshops for professionals and end users. A course on Easy Language is offered to students of the Faculty of Pedagogics, University of Maribor.<sup>13</sup> Easy Language topics are also partially covered on the Family literacy course (Preschool education studies).

A few authors have conducted **research** on the topic quite recently. In 2016, Haramija and Batić introduced three aspects of reading material, which is also suitable for people who have difficulty reading and understanding content due to intellectual disabilities: an individualized approach to the selection of reading material, considering the characteristics of the reader's (dis)ability, chronological age, related diverse needs, prior knowledge based on experience, and the right to read according to the abilities and competencies of the individual. These authors present picture books that are suitable for children and adults with or without disabilities. The model of holistic picture book reading is related to the principles of Easy Language; such a model can also be used to ensure quality reading among adults with intellectual disabilities in other genres, not only literary picture books. In 2017, Haramija wrote one of the first scientific papers on Easy Slovene, which covered the basic principles of adapting information.

In 2018, Volčanjk researched learning speech and language among students with intellectual disabilities, providing a case study using texts in Easy Language. The results showed that the students with mild intellectual disabilities in the experimental group better understood texts in Easy Language than those in the control group, which used standard texts. The results also showed that speech, language and communication competencies were statistically significantly higher among the students who read or listened to the texts in Easy Language.

Kuplen (2018) argues in her thesis that lifelong learning is a crucial process in the education of adults with intellectual disabilities. In the empirical part of the study, she reviewed the learning abilities of adults with intellectual disabilities using texts in Easy Language. The result showed a positive effect on the cognitive process, particularly on memory and information retention.

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13 University of Maribor, Faculty of Education, <https://pef.um.si/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/%C5%A0tudijski-program-Inkluzija-2020-21.pdf>.

In 2019, Gašper conducted a four-week sex education course for students with intellectual disabilities using texts in Easy Language from four booklets: *Life of a Woman*; *Life of a Man*; *Love, Sex and Me*; and *Sexual Violence*. Slovene and English versions of the publications are available on the website.<sup>14</sup> She compared the level of the students' knowledge before and after the education process, which used the Easy Language method. During the process she observed and analysed the reading motivation of the readers at various reading levels, some non-readers, and determined whether the Easy Language method increased their knowledge and whether the students remembered the contents of the selected topic. The results of the research show that learning using the Easy Language method is effective, and that the adolescents' knowledge about sexuality has increased. Together, these results provide some crucial early insights into the practical use and usability of Easy Slovene.

In 2019, Haramija and Knapp, together with colleagues, wrote a manual for professionals that sheds light on the different aspects of Easy Slovene and sums up past research in the field. At the university level, within the framework of undergraduates', masters' (and recently also doctoral) works, Easy Language is mainly researched by students. The topics are various and cover, for example, the use of Easy Language in institutions for people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., Perko 2020); working with people with intellectual disabilities in preparing practical information in Easy Languages, such as tourist information (e.g., Ferš 2019); and the preparation of texts in Easy Language (e.g., Šinkovec 2013). There is abundant space for further progress at the academic level.

## 8 Future perspectives

In Slovenia, an integrated approach to regulating the field of accessible information and communication for people who need adaptations should be developed. Appropriate tools to guarantee the population the right to literacy and the right to information in an appropriate form are also needed. Both the active contribution of the individuals (readers/end users training) and the active con-

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 14 Sožitje, [www.zveza-sozitie.si/pal4youth-2018-2020.html](http://www.zveza-sozitie.si/pal4youth-2018-2020.html).

tribution of society (ensuring the right to accessible information and training of stakeholders) is essential. As the systematic provision of rights to only certain groups of people cannot be an effective inclusive solution, the systematization model should include diverse techniques for personalized communication, not just Easy Language, and diverse target populations, not just groups of people who need Easy Language. This kind of strategy goes beyond dividing people according to cognitive, sensory, and other barriers; it focuses on common or cross-cutting needs. Easy Language is a good example of this concept as it is needed and useful not only for isolated groups of people but covers the need for information and communication of a significant part of the population.

The long-term strategic goals should be to make information and literature accessible to all people, regardless of their type of disability (if any); to raise awareness of the importance of information and reading for the development of both the individual and society; to contribute to the creation of conditions for publishing and distributing literature, newspapers, legislation, and policies in an accessible/customized format; to contribute to the development of the accessible media; to research and raise awareness of the barriers to reading; to develop educational programmes, training programmes and licences; to educate and train in the field of accessing information and literature; to provide and stabilize funding; and to develop stable and sustainable services that in the long run can be implemented as a transfer of powers from the public to the non-governmental sector (e.g., an agency).

Regardless of the progress in this area, major problems persist. Currently, the Republic of Slovenia does not guarantee the right to be informed and to communicate to all groups in society, although this warranty is one of the essential elements of the rule of law. As for the development and use of accessible, adapted ways of communication, Slovenia lags behind some northern and western European countries. It lacks systematic regulation of the field. The challenge concerns all levels: local, regional and national. In the European context, the field of access to information is developing rapidly at present and Slovenia could keep pace with this development if a thoughtful and intensive approach was adopted. For this to happen, systemic changes are needed. This speculation concludes by highlighting and exposing some concrete challenges on the national level: Easy Language research at the academic level is lacking;

Plain Language is not researched or promoted; funding is painfully lacking. All the activity is in the domain of NGOs and depends on their resources and resourcefulness. Slovenia lacks organizers, authors, and mentors/facilitators of validators.

To date, there is no consensus on the national level on how to address the challenges outlined above. Furthermore, decision-makers are yet to address them at all. However, the most recent research of the PERLSI and TRAIN-2VALIDATE projects has shown that Easy Slovene is rapidly gaining recognition among the general public and end users, specifically people with cognitive disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities. Moreover, many governmental and non-governmental organizations for people with cognitive or sensory disabilities have started to adopt Easy Language as one of the more important, if not crucial, standards in service provision.

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## Appendix 1.

Standard Slovenian	Easy Slovenian (level 4)
<p>ZAKON O OSEBNI ASISTENCI (8. člen)</p> <p>Ne glede na pogoj iz pete alineje drugega odstavka 6. člena tega zakona, se lahko gluhemu, slepemu ali gluhoslepemu uporabniku, ki potrebuje izmed storitev osebne asistence iz prejšnjega člena samo pomoč pri komunikaciji in spremstvu, tudi če ne izpolnjuje pogoja najvišje starostne meje iz tretje alineje drugega odstavka 6. člena tega zakona, odobri osebna asistenca v obsegu 30 ur na mesec. Uporabnik lahko namesto osebne asistence izbere denarno nadomestilo...</p>	<p>Uporabnik je lahko senzorno oviran. To pomeni, da je na primer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gluh,</li> <li>• slep ali</li> <li>• gluhoslep.</li> </ul> <p>Mogoče potrebuje samo spremstvo in pomoč pri sporazumevanju. Tak uporabnik dobi pravico do osebne asistence 30 ur na mesec. Namesto teh 30 ur na mesec lahko izbere denar. Temu denarju rečemo <b>komunikacijski dodatek</b>. Uporabnik se mora odločiti. Ima 2 možnosti:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dobi osebno asistenco 30 ur na mesec ali</li> <li>• dobi komunikacijski dodatek (denar)...</li> </ul> 

<p>[PERSONAL ASSISTENCE ACT (Article 8)</p> <p>Notwithstanding the condition from the fifth indent of the second paragraph of Article 6 of this Act, a deaf, blind or deafblind user who needs assistance in communication only and escort from the personal assistance services from the previous article, even if he does not meet the condition of the maximum age from the third indents of the second paragraph of Article 6 of this Act, shall be granted personal assistance in the amount of 30 hours per month. Instead of personal assistance, the user can choose a cash benefit...]</p>	<p>[The user can have a sensory disability. This means that he or she is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• deaf,</li><li>• blind or</li><li>• deafblind.</li></ul> <p>Maybe he or she only needs an escort and help in communication. Such a user can get personal assistance for 30 hours a month. Instead of 30 hours a month, he or she can choose money. We call this money communication payment. The user must decide. He or she has 2 options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• to get personal assistance for 30 hours a month or</li><li>• to get the <b>communication payment</b> (money)...]</li></ul>
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## Easy Language in Spain<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction

Spain has a population of 47.3 million inhabitants. The country is divided into 17 autonomous regions (constitutionally denominated *comunidades autónomas*) and 2 autonomous cities. Spanish is the official language of the country, although there are co-official languages in some autonomous regions. Basque is co-official in the Basque Country and Navarre. Galician is co-official in Galicia. Catalan is co-official in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, and Valencian is co-official in the Valencian Community. Catalan and Valencian are different denominations of different geographical variations of the same language. Finally, Aranese is also co-official in Catalonia. Spanish and Catalan Sign Languages reached official status by law in 2007. Spanish is also official in 19 American countries and in Equatorial Guinea in Africa.

With the exception of the Basque language, the origin of which is still under discussion, the other languages in Spain have evolved from Latin. The main characteristics of Spanish are two genders (masculine and feminine); a wide range of verbal inflections, with three modes (indicative, subjunctive and imperative), 17 tenses (ten for the indicative, six for the subjunctive and one for the imperative) – ten of which are simple and seven of which are compound forms; no cases; and a high correlation between writing and phonetics, with some exceptions such as the *h*, which is silent, and the variety *c/s*. In most parts of Spain, the soft *c* is similar to the soft /*th*/ sound in English (/θ/), while in

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1 The term *Easy Language* is used here for consistency with the rest of the chapters in this volume as a synonym for *Easy-to-Read/Easy Read* (*Lectura fácil* in Spanish). However, in translations of bibliographical references, when referring to the name of certain organizations, and when referring to the Spanish standard, we have kept *Easy Read* as a translation of the Spanish *Lectura fácil* to make the authors' terminological choices visible.

Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and America it is pronounced /s/. This causes confusion in the transcription of many words.

Apart from the official languages, some other languages are spoken in Spain, such as Arabic, Romanian, English, German, the Amazigh languages, and Italian. In the first semester of 2020, the highest numbers of foreign residents in Spain were for citizens from Morocco, Rumania, the UK, Colombia, Italy, Venezuela, China, Germany, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Honduras, France, Peru, Ukraine, and Portugal.

Officially, the illiterate population of Spain is near to zero, but official figures reported 13 000 people in 2018<sup>2</sup>. However, the results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>3</sup> showed that the mean literacy score in Spain was 14 points below the OECD average (252 vs 266). The difference was higher with older age. For instance, Spain was 19 points below the OECD average for people aged between 55 and 65. In addition, 27.5% of the Spanish PIAAC participants scored low in literacy.

## 2 Historical perspectives

The beginnings of Easy Language in Spain can be traced back to a report by Mayol and Salvador (1999) on Easy Language materials, which analysed the situation in Catalonia and Europe and made some recommendations on how to implement Easy Language in Catalonia. The report includes a translation into Catalan of the guidelines for Easy Language materials by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). This report preceded the creation of the Easy Read Association (*Associació Lectura Fàcil, ALF*). In 2001, a group of professionals linked to the fields of education and libraries created an Easy Language committee as part of the Official College of Librarians and Documentalists of Catalonia (*Col·legi Oficial de Bibliotecaris-Documentalistes de Catalunya, COBDC*). The Easy Read Association was

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2 UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

3 OECD Education GPS, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/> (Explore Data, PIAAC)

legally founded in 2003, and in 2005 it organized the first international meeting on Easy Language in Spain<sup>4</sup>. Since its beginnings, this association has focused on the adaptation of literary works – reaching over 300 books<sup>5</sup>– as well as informative, administrative and legal content, and has promoted Easy Read Clubs around the country (see Section 6 for further details).

The Easy Read Association has been actively involved in training public administrations, organizations and individuals interested in making information accessible to everyone through Easy Language. Some course participants who share the Easy Read Association's vision have replicated its model and created associations in other areas. In 2012, the Easy Read Basque Country (*Lectura Fácil Euskadi*) was born in the Basque Country, and six more associations were created between 2013 and 2017 in Castile and Leon, Madrid, Aragon, Castile La Mancha, the Balearic Islands, and Extremadura. In 2016, these regional associations created the Easy Read Network (*Red de Lectura Fácil*), which incorporated one association from Colombia and another from Argentina in 2019.

In 2005, the Discourse and Spanish Language Research Group (*Discurso y Lengua Española, DILE*) at the Autonomous University of Madrid adapted *Don Quixote of La Mancha* into Easy Language. The group also published a paper on the procedures and methodology that had been followed for the adaptation (Anula et al. 2006). They not only took into account the writing guidelines, but also checked the comprehensibility of the final document with people with reading difficulties. The project produced some Easy Language criteria on the basis of linguistic and psychological aspects.

The history of Easy Language in Spain is also strongly linked to associations that work with people with intellectual disabilities. The Full Inclusion association (*Plena Inclusión*, known as *FEAPS* until 2015), the main Spanish organization that supports the rights of this group, released its first publication in Easy Language in 2007<sup>6</sup>, namely, its Code of Ethics<sup>7</sup>. In 2010, Full Inclusion attended a training course taught by the Easy Read Association to learn how

4 Cronologia, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/info/1-cronologia/>

5 Llibres de lectura fácil, [http://www.lecturafacil.net/media/Cat%C3%A0leg\\_llibresLF\\_2020\\_web.pdf](http://www.lecturafacil.net/media/Cat%C3%A0leg_llibresLF_2020_web.pdf)

6 Cronología histórica de lectura fácil, [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/cronologia\\_historica\\_de\\_la\\_lectura\\_facil.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/cronologia_historica_de_la_lectura_facil.pdf)

7 FEAPS (2007), [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/codigo\\_etico\\_lf\\_0.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/codigo_etico_lf_0.pdf)

to create its own group of adaptors and trainers, so as to disseminate the use of Easy Language in all organizations federated to Full Inclusion. In 2013, Full Inclusion launched the first company to function as a co-operative dedicated solely to Easy Language and cognitive accessibility in Spain, the Altavoz Cooperative<sup>8</sup>. It was led by people with intellectual disabilities and provided services related to Easy Language publications.

In terms of guidelines and recommendations, the Spanish milestones are the translation of the second edition of the Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials in 2012 (*Directrices para materiales de lectura fácil*)<sup>9</sup>, the translation of the Inclusion Europe guidelines Information for All in 2013<sup>10</sup>, and the publication of the handbook Easy Read: Writing and Assessment Methods (*Lectura fácil: métodos de redacción y evaluación*, García 2012), which contains references on Easy Language up to 2013. More recently, Full Inclusion Madrid (*Plena Inclusión Madrid*) published a handbook on how to evaluate Easy Language using people with reading difficulties (Grupo de Expertos de Lectura Fácil de Plena Inclusión Madrid 2019).

Both the Easy Read Network and Full Inclusion have organized many Easy Language events. Since 2010, the Easy Read Network has held seven conferences which have attracted speakers from different countries<sup>11</sup>. Full Inclusion 'Literacy for all' (*Letras para todos*) meetings took place between 2014 and 2016, and in 2017, Full Inclusion held a conference on cognitive accessibility in Cáceres, Spain<sup>12</sup>.

In terms of professional practice, Full Inclusion regional federations have promoted the creation of business services around Easy Language. The first one was *Adapta*, by Full Inclusion Madrid, founded in 2016 (García 2018). This service began with seven associations that offer full Easy Language publication services and training, in which people with intellectual disabilities actively take

8 Altavoz was closed as a company. Its website does not work anymore.

9 Nomura et al. (2012), <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/120-es.pdf>

10 Inclusion Europe, [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/informacion\\_todos.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/informacion_todos.pdf)

11 7º Encuentro Lectura Fácil: una mirada internacional, <http://www.lecturafacil.net/es/info/jornadas/>

12 Informe de resultados, Congreso estatal de accesibilidad cognitiva, [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/informe\\_congreso\\_ac-dif.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/informe_congreso_ac-dif.pdf)

part. This service was composed of 13 entities in 2020. Private initiatives are currently very limited.

In the field of institutionalization, the region of Extremadura was the first to create a public department specialized in Easy Language and cognitive accessibility in 2017. The Office for Cognitive Accessibility of Extremadura (*Oficina de Accesibilidad Cognitiva de Extremadura, OACEX*)<sup>13</sup> is part of the regional administration, but is managed by Full Inclusion Extremadura (*Plena Inclusión Extremadura*). It employs workers both with and without intellectual disabilities and produces a wide array of Easy Language publications for the region. It also has a committee that supervises private companies and associations providing these services in order to deliver a quality seal acknowledging that their Easy Language productions meet the standard<sup>14</sup>.

Finally, the main milestone in Spain was the approval and publication of the first Easy Read standard in the world: UNE 153101:2018 EX (Delgado and Rodríguez 2018). UNE is the name of the Spanish Association for Standardisation, 153101 refers to the number of the standard, and 2018 indicates the year in which it was published. EX indicates that it is an experimental standard, because it was the first time Easy Read was addressed in standardization. This standard was developed by a task force that brought together producers, universities, and user associations, led by the ONCE Foundation (a foundation that aims, among other endeavours, to promote accessibility projects) and the National Reference Centre for Personal Autonomy and Technical Assistance (*Centro de Referencia Estatal de Autonomía Personal y Ayudas Técnicas, CEAPAT*, a state-owned centre for accessible solutions for the elderly and people with disabilities). This standard, which addresses the creation, adaptation and validation of Easy Read documents, was launched in April 2018.

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13 OACEX (2019), <https://plenainclusionextremadura.org/plenainclusion/que-ofrecemos/accesibilidad/oacex#:~:text=La%20OACEX%20es%20la%20oficina,este%20tipo%20en%20nuestro%20pa%C3%A9s.&text=Se%20present%C3%B3%20oficialmente%20el%2011,de%20la%20Junta%20de%20Extremadura>.

14 Reconocimiento de entidades de lectura fácil, <https://www.plenainclusionextremadura.org/plenainclusion/reconocimiento-de-entidades-de-lectura-facil>

### 3 Current situation

This section describes how Easy Language is understood in Spain, its societal and legal context, and its main stakeholders.

#### 3.1 Definitions

In Spain, the ‘Easy Language’ concept is broadly known as *lectura fácil*, a direct translation of the English term ‘Easy Read’. Before the Spanish standard was published, the term was defined on the basis of external sources such as the second edition of the IFLA guidelines, published in Spanish in 2012. However, the Education and Diversity (*Educación y Diversidad, EDI*) research group from the University of Zaragoza developed a more specific definition for Easy Read, which they translated as both *fácil lectura* – a term no longer used – and *lectura fácil*. Their definition established a direct relationship between Easy Read, accessibility and target groups:

La fácil lectura (o lectura fácil) es un planteamiento general sobre la accesibilidad a la información y a la comprensión de los mensajes escritos de las personas con diversidades intelectuales y de aprendizaje. También la podemos considerar como un método para hacer entornos psicológicamente comprensibles para todos, eliminando las barreras para la comprensión, el aprendizaje y la participación. (Grupo Educación y Diversidad 2009: 4)

[Easy Read is a general approach to accessibility to information and to the understanding of written content by people with intellectual or learning disabilities. We can also consider it a method for creating psychologically understandable environments for all, removing barriers to understanding, learning and participation.]<sup>15</sup>

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15 Translated by the authors.

These definitions were taken into account when the Spanish standardization body (UNE, formerly AENOR) began working on the first Easy Language standard. The approved standard (UNE 153101 EX) defines *lectura fácil* (literally, ‘Easy Read’) as a ‘method that collects a set of guidelines and recommendations related to text composition, design and layout of documents and the assessment of their understandability, targeted to make information accessible for people with reading difficulties’ (UNE 2018: 7). This definition also views it as a cognitive accessibility tool and considers the final materials to be technical support for people with reading difficulties.

The definition lies on three main pillars. First of all, the consideration of Easy Read as a method for publishing documents, in both writing and design aspects. Secondly, the need for the target group to be involved in the process in order to ensure that the final product caters to their needs. Finally, the inclusion of Easy Read as a specific tool for people with reading difficulties, rather than for all citizens.

The Easy Read Association explains that Easy Language publications are generally classified into three levels of difficulty, with most published books being of the highest level. The criteria for assigning levels are mainly based on the relationship between images and text, and on their syntactical and lexical complexity (Salvador 2009: 14). The Spanish standard does not include a proposal on how to create a scale of comprehension levels for Easy Language texts.

Other types of easy-to-understand languages, such as *lenguaje llano* (Plain Language), *lenguaje claro* (clear language), *comunicación clara* (clear communication) or *lenguaje ciudadano* (citizen language) have also been researched and practised (Cassany 2005, Gelpí 2006, Montolío and Tascón 2017, Carretero 2019), with special focus on legal and administrative texts. However, these are beyond the scope of this article.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

Spain has a complex legal structure in terms of accessibility, because although each region has competences, the central government also promotes some reg-

ulations. The Royal Decree 366/2007<sup>16</sup> included the prescription of ‘simple and direct language’ for printed administrative documents. A subsequent ministerial order in 2008<sup>17</sup> added some specifications about the size of the typography, line spacing or writing style, although the text did not mention Easy Language at all. Currently, a bill has been proposed to the Spanish Parliament to revise the existing Act on the Rights of Persons with Disability that includes Easy Language as a solution for cognitive accessibility. It specifies the scope of applicability as including, for instance, the communication and information society, public administration, justice, culture, and employment. It adds a specific provision that sets deadlines for implementation and another provision to create a National Reference Centre for Cognitive Accessibility, with competences in research, training, dissemination, and promotion in the field<sup>18</sup>.

As regards regional legislation, Catalonia was the first region to include Easy Language in its Accessibility Act in 2014, and requires it in public administration, education and companies that offer accessible public services (e.g., transport, energy, or telecommunications)<sup>19</sup>. This law adopts a universal design approach: it considers that Easy Language materials follow the IFLA and Inclusion Europe guidelines but aims to make texts accessible to all citizens, which broadens the field to also include Plain Language approaches. Other regions that also mention Easy Language are the Balearic Islands, Navarre, Andalusia, Murcia, and Galicia. However, although legislation exists and efforts are being made to produce more Easy Language content<sup>20</sup>, publications are still limited and public documents in Easy Language remain an exception.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Spain has no national structure that currently promotes Easy Language. However, the above-mentioned proposed bill includes the creation of a special-

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16 BOE (2007), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2007-6239>

17 BOE (2008), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2008-3528>

18 BOCG (2020), [http://www.congreso.es/public\\_oficiales/L14/CONG/BOCG/B/BOCG-14-B-93-1.PDF](http://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/BOCG/B/BOCG-14-B-93-1.PDF)

19 BOE (2014), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2014/BOE-A-2014-11992-consolidado.pdf>

20 Recursos, <https://repositori.lecturafacil.net/>

ized centre for cognitive accessibility. This centre would also promote Easy Language. However, future development will depend on the regulations that implement the content of the bill and the budget. Only the Office for Cognitive Accessibility of Extremadura has what could be considered an official structure, although it is managed by a non-profit organization.

The main producers of Easy Language in Spain today are non-profit organizations and associations. The two main stakeholders are Full Inclusion (*Plena Inclusión*), a social movement that supports people with intellectual disabilities, and the Easy Read Network (*Red de Lectura Fácil*<sup>21</sup>), a network of associations working on Easy Language led by the Catalan organization, the Easy Read Association (*Associació Lectura Fàcil, ALF*)<sup>22</sup> (ILUNION 2019: 8–9). The main financial resources come from public administrations, and publications depend greatly on tenders or specific projects.

The private sector has no industry related to the production of Easy Language, although a few individual freelance initiatives and a few publishing houses are interested in Easy Language literature. Three publishing houses have long-term Easy Language literary collections: *Castellnou/Almadraba* groups them under the brand *Kalafate*; *La Mar de Fàcil* is specialized in this type of book; and *Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat* has a specific collection in Easy Language in Catalan. Other companies have funded Easy Language publications through foundations or corporate social responsibility actions. For instance, the pharma company Sandoz promotes the use of Easy Language in patient information leaflets in Spanish.

When it comes to funding Easy Language work, members of both Full Inclusion and the Easy Read Network offer Easy Language professional services. They also take part in the few tenders on Easy Language run by local or regional administrations. Full Inclusion obtains public resources from the annual national and regional budgets through a specific grant programme. In recent years this programme has funded several social services offered by Full Inclusion, including Easy Language productions. In addition, some foundations from private companies publish public grant tenders for which non-profit

21 Red Lectura Fàcil, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/es/info/red-lectura-facil>

22 Associació Lectura Fàcil, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/eng>

organizations can apply and obtain resources for their Easy Language services. This was, for instance, the origin of *Adapta*, a professional Easy Language service launched by Full Inclusion Madrid in 2016<sup>23</sup>. The funds obtained by a grant from a banking foundation (Montemadrid Foundation) were also invested in this production line.

#### 4 Target groups

The national Easy Language standard mentioned above (UNE 153101:2018 EX, 2018: 7–8) indicates a list of target groups that benefit from Easy Language. It points out that they are all people with reading difficulties related to intellectual disabilities, mental illness, language disorders, brain damage, learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit disorder (with or without hyperactivity), deafness, deafblindness, ageing, low literacy and non-native language.

People with disabilities make up around 9% (IMSERSO 2020) of the Spanish population, and the elderly aged over 65 account for more than 18% of the total population. The country also has 1.6 million immigrants from non-native Spanish countries and around 700 000 functional illiterate people. If the figures related to these groups are summed up, the potential population that could benefit from Easy Language and accessible communication is a third of the whole country.

Although demand for Easy Language has increased in the last ten years, the general perception is that it is a specific solution for cognitive accessibility. This is because the presence of Full Inclusion at national and regional levels is strong. However, in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where the Easy Read Network is stronger, the perception is that the target is more wide-ranging. They adopt a universal design approach which also includes recent immigrants or the elderly.

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23 Nace Adapta Plena Inclusión Madrid, que ofrece el servicio de lectura fácil como solución accesible, <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/noticias/nace-adapta-plena-inclusion-madrid-que-ofrece-el-servicio-de-lectura-facil-como-solucion-accesible/>

## 5 Guidelines

As mentioned before, Spain had the first Easy Read standard in the world: UNE 153101:2018 EX. It comprises three parts: steps to produce documents (whether originals or adaptations), guidelines for writing and designing documents, and guidelines for checking comprehensibility with groups of people with reading difficulties.

The main recommendations, obtained through consensus, take into account the customary international guidelines (logical structure, short sentences, common words), but they include some specificities related to Spanish as a language. For example, the standard proposes avoiding commas, except for certain uses, and avoiding periods, preferring paragraphs. Quotation marks should also be avoided, and an indirect style should be prioritized. Concerning vocabulary, it recommends a clear contextualization of homophone or homograph words, avoiding certain adverbs (with the suffix *-mente*, equal to the English adverbial suffix ‘-ly’), and superlative forms for adjectives. Nominalization is not recommended. Seven of the guidelines are related to numbers. For instance, the use of figures rather than words is recommended for writing numbers, and avoiding ordinal numbers, percentages, and fractions. This information should be provided by alternative texts. Times should avoid the 24-hour format and Roman numerals are also not recommended. Concerning grammar rules, the standard recommends avoiding the least used tenses, the subjunctive and a specific variation of the passive voice in Spanish called the reflexive passive (*pasiva refleja*). The imperative should be used in clear contexts. The preferred tense is the present indicative. Modal verbs (*perífrasis verbales*) are considered acceptable with certain verbs (must, want, can). Spanish can omit the subject in verbal structures, but in Easy Language it is recommended to always use it.

The production process includes a flowchart which indicates that end-user validation should be repeated until users confirm that the content is understandable. It should be highlighted that the standard includes this validation test as a compulsory step in order to consider the result Easy Read. The standard has an annex with strategies on how to develop and facilitate group sessions

and obtain relevant comments that allow authors to improve the texts and check their comprehensibility.

Before April 2018, when the standard was published, the guidelines followed in Spain were from two traditional sources: the IFLA (Guidelines for Easy-to-read Materials) and Inclusion Europe (Information for all). Furthermore, in 2013, the handbook *Easy Read: Writing and Assessment Methods* (*Lectura fácil: métodos de redacción y evaluación*) proposed a collection of guidelines from several sources to develop Easy Language content.

Another publication to take into account in the development of Easy Language is the Easy Read texts assessment: methodological, social and labour aspects (*Validación de textos en lectura fácil: aspectos metodológicos y sociolaborales*), by Full Inclusion Madrid (Grupo de Expertos de Lectura Fácil de Plena Inclusión Madrid 2019). This book displays a list of definitions, procedures, and strategies to develop Easy Language assessment with groups from a practical point of view, because the authors are all experienced facilitators of Easy Language validation groups.

## 6 Practical outcomes

All the official languages in Spain have Easy Language outcomes. The majority of these are in Spanish and Catalan, but some are also in Basque, Galician and Valencian. The first Easy Language book in Aranese was also published in 2020<sup>24</sup>. The following paragraphs focus on media, literature, information texts, and other projects, to provide a global overview of Easy Language in Spain.

### 6.1 Media

Easy Language in the media is extremely limited in Spain and mainly arises from initiatives put forward by associations of people with disabilities. For example, Easy News (*Noticias Fácil*)<sup>25</sup> was the first website devoted to news in

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24 Presentació novetats Lectura Fácil, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/news/presentacio-novetats-lectura-facil/>

25 Noticias Fácil, <http://www.noticiasfacil.es/ES/Paginas/index.aspx>

Easy Language as a result of research developed by the University of Valencia. Recently, Full Inclusion created a website called Easy Planet (*Planeta Fácil*)<sup>26</sup>, a news bulletin and internet portal in Easy Language. One of the members of staff has an intellectual disability and often writes news in Easy Language. News releases in Easy Language have been a regular practice of Full Inclusion Madrid since 2015.

Regarding corporate media, *El País*<sup>27</sup> published a symbolic report on Easy Language in 2019 and *El Periódico de Aragón*<sup>28</sup>, a regional newspaper, has regularly included a page with Easy Language news since 2017. The most recent project is GN News, which has also offered news in Easy Language since its beginning<sup>29</sup>. Some local journals in Catalan also have Easy Language content, such as *Pallars Digital*<sup>30</sup>.

In the field of audiovisual access services, easy subtitles are generally limited to research environments (Bernabé Caro and Orero 2019, Oncins et al. 2020) and pose some challenges, as the requirements of existing subtitling standards (AENOR 2012) may clash with research results and the needs of users with reading difficulties. The Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training (EASIT) project (Matamala and Orero 2018) has also discussed easy audio descriptions (Bernabé Caro and Orero forthcoming). This is covered in the section on research.

## 6.2 Literature

Publishing houses have led limited initiatives to develop a product line in Easy Language. The most relevant is *Almadraba* (*Castellnou* for the Catalan market), which has a collection of around 30 titles called *Kalafate*<sup>31</sup>, all of which

26 Planeta Fácil, <http://planetafacil.plenainclusion.org/>

27 Barrios & Hinojosa (2019), [https://elpais.com/politica/2019/03/28/actualidad/1553771166\\_007481.html](https://elpais.com/politica/2019/03/28/actualidad/1553771166_007481.html)

28 Periodistas Aragón (2017), <https://periodistasdearagon.org/2017/06/26/el-periodico-de-aragon-lanza-la-primera-seccion-de-noticias-en-lectura-facil-para-personas-con-discapacidad-intelectual/>

29 Navas (2020), <https://www.gndiario.com/gndiario-noticias-accesibles>

30 Les notícies més importants de l'1 al 15 de gener en Lectura Fácil, <https://www.naciodigital.cat/pallarsdigital/femhofacil>

31 Kalafate, <https://www.almadrabaeditorial.com/kalafate-68-es>

are classical titles from both Spanish and international literature, available in Catalan and Spanish. Another relevant publishing house, *Santillana*, launched the *Loqueleo*<sup>32</sup> collection in 2018, addressed to children and teenagers, and has already featured two comic books in an Easy Language format. Other small publishing houses have also published Easy Language literature: *La Mar de Fàcil*<sup>33</sup>, the only publishing house specializing in Easy Language originals, has published around 45 works and has specialized in disseminating contemporary writers since 2008. The main promoter in this field is the Easy Read Network, with a book catalogue including both literary works adapted into Easy Language and new works created using Easy Language guidelines. Full Inclusion has also presented some adapted novels and stories in a project that linked literature and technology. The result was Read it Easy (*Léelo Fàcil*)<sup>34</sup> in 2016, a website containing seven novels with texts in Easy Language and digital effects.

Although production is limited, more than 500 clubs (ILUNION 2019: 8) of people with reading difficulties meet to read Easy Language books in libraries, schools, and other locations (for instance, hospitals or nursing homes). These are co-ordinated by a facilitator and their aim is that participants not only enjoy literature and reading but that also their vocabulary improves and they have the opportunity to socialize (Salvador et al. 2019). An interactive map of all Easy Read Clubs linked to the Easy Read Association is available online<sup>35</sup>.

### 6.3 Informative texts

The majority of Easy Language publications are informative and legal documents, generally commissioned by public authorities. The Constitution<sup>36</sup> has two versions, as do several of the highest regional laws (*estatutos de autonomía*). An Act into Easy Language law has also been published in an official journal.

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32 Loqueleo, <https://www.loqueleo.com/es/>

33 La Mar de Fàcil, <https://lamardefacil.com/index.php/es/>

34 Léelofàcil, <http://www.leelofacil.org/es/>

35 Mapa de la lectura fàcil, <http://mapalf.lecturafacil.net/index.php>

36 La Constitución española version fàcil de leer, [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/la\\_constitucion\\_espanola\\_en\\_lectura\\_facil.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/la_constitucion_espanola_en_lectura_facil.pdf), [http://www.lecturafacil.net/media/resources/CONSTITUCION\\_ESPA%C3%91OLA\\_LECTURA\\_FACIL.pdf](http://www.lecturafacil.net/media/resources/CONSTITUCION_ESPA%C3%91OLA_LECTURA_FACIL.pdf)

Both producers (Full Inclusion and the Easy Read Network) have edited a large collection of documents on public services.

Court verdicts and summonses involving people with disabilities have also been adapted into Easy Language. In 2018, Full Inclusion Asturias won a Zero Project Award for its task in this field (Zero Project 2018: 141). The Zero Project is an initiative promoted by the Austrian ESSL Foundation, which supports the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and awards innovative practices and policies related to accessibility, inclusive education, inclusive employment, and independent living<sup>37</sup>. Full Inclusion Madrid and Full Inclusion Asturias have also published some guides on the legal system<sup>38</sup> and prisons<sup>39</sup>, respectively.

Easy Language publications on rights also represent a wide field. The General Act of Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adapted in 2015<sup>40</sup>, and many guides and leaflets are available on gender violence prevention, the legal protection of people with disabilities, or the right to vote. More than 80 political programmes for different elections in Spain<sup>41</sup> have been published in Easy Language. Finally, the Spanish Association of Tutelary Foundations (*Asociación Española de Fundaciones Tutelares*, an association that federates foundations that legally protect people with disabilities), has created a whole website exclusively in Easy Language to explain its purpose and services, and to publish documents<sup>42</sup>.

Other relevant publications are related to health, such as the guides on general illnesses or sexual health published by Full Inclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an increase in the number of Easy Language publications:

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37 Zero Project, <https://zeroproject.org/about-us/>

38 Guía de acceso a la justicia, <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Guia-de-acceso-a-la-justicia-en-lectura-facil.pdf>

39 Primeros pasos en prisión, <https://www.plenainclusionasturias.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Descargar-documento.pdf>

40 García (2015), [https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/ley\\_general\\_de\\_derechos.pdf](https://www.plenainclusion.org/sites/default/files/ley_general_de_derechos.pdf)

41 Mi voto cuenta, <http://mivotocuenta.es/>

42 Asociación Española de Fundaciones Tutelares, <https://fundacionestutelares.org/accesible/>

from legal aspects to health issues, behaviour recommendations, or protection in workplaces, both in Spanish<sup>43</sup> and in other languages<sup>44</sup>.

## 6.4 Other projects

In recent years, some civil service examinations have been offered to people with intellectual disabilities, as by law a certain percentage of public employment posts are reserved for them<sup>45</sup>. The subjects included in the examinations have been adapted into Easy Language. The first took place in 2016<sup>46</sup>, but between 2019 and 2020 at least five examinations were held, with subjects adapted into Easy Language<sup>47</sup>.

Culture is another area in which the presence of Easy Language is increasing, especially in museums. Museums such as the National Museums<sup>48</sup> (*Museos Estatales*), the Prado Museum<sup>49</sup>, and the Thyssen Museum<sup>50</sup> already have Easy Language leaflets on their masterpieces. In the case of the National Museums and the Prado Museum, these leaflets are complemented by an easy-to-follow map that locates each one of the masterpieces. Some local museums offer Easy Language guides, also available in other languages<sup>51</sup>. For instance, the Provincial Museum Network of Lugo, in the north-west of Spain, has Easy Language leaflets in Galician for each room of the museums as well as for

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43 Coronavirus, <http://planetafacil.plenainclusion.org/coronavirus/>

44 Informatió accessible sobre la Covid-19 i el desconfiament, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/news/informacio-accessible-sobre-la-covid-19-i-el-desco/>

45 Plena Inclusión Extremadura, <https://plenainclusionextremadura.org/plenainclusion/actualidad/noticias/2020/temario-lectura-f%C3%A1cil>

46 Ministerio de Política Territorial y Función Pública, [https://www.mptfp.gob.es/portal/funcionpublica/funcion-publica/ep-pp/empleo\\_publico/procesos-selectivos/laboral\\_fijo/Discapacidad\\_Intelectual\\_2016\\_2017.html](https://www.mptfp.gob.es/portal/funcionpublica/funcion-publica/ep-pp/empleo_publico/procesos-selectivos/laboral_fijo/Discapacidad_Intelectual_2016_2017.html)

47 Oposiciones para auxiliar de información y control, <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/convocatorias/oposiciones-auxiliar-control-informacion-com-madrid/>

48 Guías y planos, <https://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/cultura/areas/museos/mc/nuestros-museos/guias.html>

49 Guía accesible, 10 obras maestras, [https://content3.cdnprado.net/doclinks/pdf/visita/plano/accesible/Guia\\_accesible\\_MNP.pdf](https://content3.cdnprado.net/doclinks/pdf/visita/plano/accesible/Guia_accesible_MNP.pdf)

50 Qurtuba, <https://imagenes.educathyssen.org/sites/default/files/document/2019-06/MUSEO%20F%C3%81CIL.pdf>

51 La lectura fàcil als museus, <https://www.lecturafacil.net/news/la-lectura-facil-als-museus/>

certain pieces<sup>52</sup>, and different museums in Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and Valencia (the Empordà Museum, the Majorca Maritime Museum, the Maricel Museum, the Manacor History Museum, the Ceramics Museum) offer information in Catalan Easy Language. In the scenic arts, since 2015, the Liceu opera house in Barcelona has published Easy Language synopses of the operas<sup>53</sup> it hosts, within the framework of a wider accessibility plan.

The field of work and training has many publications on health and safety at work<sup>54</sup>, as well as adaptations of training handbooks for specific positions, such as conference assistant or office assistant.

Finally, in 2017, Full Inclusion Madrid launched the first Easy Language Dictionary<sup>55</sup>. It already has 3 000 entries and receives millions of visits, mainly from Latin America<sup>56</sup>. The publication of the dictionary was made possible thanks to the co-operation of Easy Language writers, validation from groups of people with intellectual disabilities, and linguists who checked the accuracy of the definitions (Gallardo and García 2018, García 2019: 337–338).

Educational content for schools is still lacking. A postgraduate course in Navarre usually includes a practical activity on Easy Language for future teachers<sup>57</sup>, but the production of handbooks by publishing houses is currently non-existent.

## 7 Education and research

The Easy Read Network and the organizations associated with Full Inclusion regularly offer **training courses** on Easy Language. These mainly focus on writing at different levels (basic or advanced) and Easy Language promotion in

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52 Rede Museística Provincial de Lugo, <http://redemuseisticalugo.org/documentos.asp?mat=186>

53 Liceu de Barcelona, <https://www.liceubarcelona.cat/es/lectura-facil>

54 La Fundación ONCE crea unas guías sobre seguridad en el trabajo, <http://planetafacil.plenainclusion.org/la-fundacion-once-crea-unas-guias-sobre-seguridad-en-el-trabajo/>

55 Diccionario Fácil, <http://diccionariofacil.org/>

56 El Diccionari Fácil alcanza las 3000 palabras publicadas, <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/noticias/el-diccionario-facil-alcanza-las-3-000-palabras-publicadas/>

57 Alumnos del Máster en Intervención Educativa y Psicológica (2015), <https://creena.educacion.navarra.es/web/bvirtual/2018/06/08/el-antiguo-egipto/#more-469>

reading clubs. Full Inclusion has also developed specific training for validators, meaning people with intellectual disabilities who check the comprehensibility of the texts adapted into Easy Language and their compliance with existing guidelines. Full Inclusion and the Easy Read Association also offer a few courses for designers, teachers, supporters of Easy Read Clubs, and facilitators of Easy Language validation groups.

People interested in deepening their knowledge of Easy Language at the **higher education** level have few options. Spain used to have a face-to-face postgraduate degree on accessibility at a private university in Madrid that included a session on Easy Language in its last four versions (from 2012 to 2016). Later, an online postgraduate course promoted by the University of Jaen, which is still ongoing, included a lesson on Easy Language in a subject on Culture and Accessibility. In 2018, the private school High Institute of Linguistic Studies and Translation (*Instituto Superior de Estudios Lingüísticos y Traducción, ISTRAD*) in Seville began offering a postgraduate course in accessible communication that includes a specific course on Easy Language. More recently, the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* (UAB) has included the concept of easy-to-understand language as part of a course on Audiovisual Translation Theory in its MA in Audiovisual Translation. It is also developing a 12-week online specialization course on accessible communication, which includes Easy Language.

Several **research projects** have focused on technology and on the reception of Easy Language texts by end users. Regarding technological development, Simplext<sup>58</sup> (Bott et al. 2012a, Drndarević and Saggion 2012) was a large research project that aimed to develop an Easy Language automated translator. The project, led by Horacio Saggion from the Pompeu Fabra University, produced a translation engine that applies Easy Language guidelines<sup>59</sup> (Saggion et al. 2015, Bott et al. 2012b, Saggion et al. 2011). The project attempted to combine natural language processing and linguistic research in text simplification. It was followed by Able to Include<sup>60</sup>, in which Spanish technological

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58 Proyecto Simplext, <https://www.fundacionprodis.org/catedra-de-patrocinio/investigacion/id/proyecto-simplext/>

59 Simplext, <http://simplext.taln.upf.edu/>

60 Able to Include, <http://able-to-include.com/>

companies took part, and the aim of which was to produce a text simplifier, a text-to-pictogram translator, and a text-to-speech programme.

Another similar research project was the Flexible Interactive Reading Support Tool (FIRST)<sup>61</sup>, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, with the Spanish University of Jaen and the University of Alicante as partners. In this case, the result was an Open Book tool (Barbu et al. 2015), a similar tool to that produced by Simplext.

Finally, the University of Alicante ran another research project linked to text simplification and technology, although their main interest was deaf people. The system recognizes named entities and links them to a definition from Simple Wikipedia and to three images from Google Images. It also automatically detects time expressions and converts them into a specific date or time period (Saquete et al. 2013).

Regarding research that includes end users, the already mentioned Discourse and Spanish Language Research Group (*Discurso y Lengua Española, DILE*) at the Autonomous University of Madrid, with a focus on linguistic accessibility, involved readers with intellectual disabilities in an adaptation of *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, which allowed them to publish not only the adaptation of this literary work but also a report with readability parameters to accurately analyse the Easy Language content (Anula et al. 2006). More recently, Vived and Molina (2012), from the University of Zaragoza, researched the application of Easy Language content with people with Down's syndrome. In addition to this, the Interdisciplinary Research Structure for Reading (ERI-Reading) research group from the University of Valencia also worked on the adaptation of texts into Easy Language and the results from readers with intellectual disabilities (Fajardo et al. 2014, Fajardo et al. 2015). Their conclusions were based on news published by Easy News (*Noticias Fácil*).

One of the first investigations to include end users was led by secondary school teacher Jaume Serra Milà (2008a, 2008b), who adapted a novel and some communications from the school into Easy Language and tested them with

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61 First project, <http://www.first-asd.eu/>

Chinese and Moroccan students. This research allowed Serra Milà to propose some improvements to the existing guidelines.

Between 2017 and 2019, a large research project with users led by José Antonio León (León et al. 2017, 2019) from the Autonomous University of Madrid, studied how people with intellectual disabilities understand what they read and the impact of Easy Language texts. The test materials for this project were organized in adherence with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Finally, at the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, the Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training (EASIT) project (Matamala and Orero 2018), a European Commission-funded Erasmus + Strategic partnership, is researching whether easy-to-understand language in a broad sense, including both Easy Language and Plain Language, could be transferred to audiovisual media. The focus is on access services such as subtitles and audio description, and on audiovisual content such as online news, moving away from printed written text. The project has mapped out the practice and training of easy-to-understand language in Europe through a survey with 128 participants (Perego 2020). It has also organized 3 focus groups and 23 interviews to discuss how easy-to-understand language could be transferred into the audiovisual world. The project has also discussed how to train new professionals in the fields, and has produced skills cards and two curriculum proposals, one for a vocational course and one for an academic course. The EASIT project is currently creating open access educational materials to train experts in easy-to-understand subtitles, experts in easy-to-understand audio description, and experts in easy-to-understand audiovisual journalism. Bernabé Caro and Orero (2019) have also discussed Easy Language as a multimode accessibility service and the concept of easier audio descriptions (Bernabé Caro and Orero forthcoming), and Bernabé Caro and García (2020) and Bernabé et al. (2020) have researched the validation of easy subtitles. Prior to the Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training project, Bernabé Caro (2017) developed a methodological proposal for a user-centric design of Easy Language.

## 8 Future perspectives

The establishment of the Spanish standard was a seminal moment for Easy Language in Spain. The market can now benchmark its performance against a methodology and a series of guidelines which have been developed through the consensus of all the interested stakeholders (ILUNION 2019: 33). However, several issues remain unresolved. First of all, research on the actual reception of the different parameters established in the standard is lacking. Some guidelines have been drafted through a process of reader observation, but scientific investigations that follow established research methodologies are much needed. Special emphasis should be placed on analysing how validation sessions involving end users are performed and how these sessions could be improved in order to obtain more effective results.

Another critical issue concerns certification. The Easy Read Association uses a logo in its adaptations which guarantees that the international Easy Language guidelines of IFLA and Inclusion Europe have been followed. Inclusion Europe also has a copyrighted logo which anyone fulfilling a series of pre-established conditions can use. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no clear external procedure to ensure that the guidelines have actually been followed.

Training is another relevant subject in which further work is needed. Although some non-formal training courses are on offer, currently no formal or certified ones exist. As already mentioned, the EASIT project is working on defining a curriculum that can be applied in both vocational and academic environments. The current Erasmus project, Professional Training for Easy Read Facilitators and Validators (TRAIN2VALIDATE) will also provide a similar solution for validators and facilitators. Another training gap that must be covered concerns designers and illustrators. A multimedia perspective would also be welcome, as this is not included in the Spanish Easy Read standard.

Creating new business models, attracting new audiences, avoiding stigmatization, and increasing awareness of easy content are essential in order to increase the demand for and supply of accessible content for all. Although the potential market is wide, Easy Language in Spain is highly dependent on public administrations and the demand from private companies is scarce. An economy (market, demand, offer) around Easy Language, similar to that devel-

oping in the field of physical, visual, or hearing accessibility, would be needed to spread this service.

Finally, there is also a need to move beyond the written word and start researching and offering other services in a multimodal context. Previous experiences such as simultaneous simplification at the 2019 Eurovision song contest in Israel (Nahón Guillén 2020), the *audiofáciles* (easy audios) offered in some theatre plays in Spanish cultural venues<sup>62</sup>, or Eugeni's (2020) simplified live subtitles could pave the way towards innovation in this field.

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62 Grupo Amás (2017), <https://www.grupoamas.org/amas-facil-adapta-los-audios-explicativos-de-la-obra-la-autora-de-las-menas-que-teatro-accesible-pone-en-escena-el-14-de-mayo-en-barcelona/>

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## Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Spanish.

Easy Spanish
<p><b>¿Cómo debes caminar por una carretera de forma segura?</b>          Debes ir por el arcén de tu izquierda cuando camines por una carretera.          Así verás a los vehículos venir de frente.          En las carreteras sin arcén, colócate lo más cerca del borde de la carretera.          Los grupos de personas deben ir en fila india, es decir, uno detrás de otro sin formar grupos.</p> <p>Ten cuidado cuando cruces una carretera.          Cruza siempre por un lugar sin curvas y sin cuestas.          Cruza por un lugar donde los conductores te puedan ver bien, por ejemplo, una carretera llana y recta.</p> <p>Source: Plena Inclusión Madrid. <i>Guía básica de educación vial</i>. Madrid: Alsa Grupo, 2017. Web. &lt; <a href="https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Guia-Educacion-Vial.pdf">https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Guia-Educacion-Vial.pdf</a>&gt;</p>
<p><b>[How to walk down a road in a safe way?</b>          You must walk on the left-hand side when you walk down a road.          This way, you can see cars coming towards you.          On roads without a pavement, walk as close as you can to the edge of the road.          Groups of people must go in single file, that is, one after another without forming groups.</p> <p>Be careful when you cross a road.          Always cross at a place without curves and without slopes.          Cross at a place where drivers can see you, for example, a flat and straight road.]</p>



## Easy Language in Sweden

### 1 Introduction

Sweden is the largest of the five Nordic countries, in both area and population. It has 10.3 million inhabitants. About 25% of these have foreign backgrounds and the majority of them have a first language other than Swedish. For a long time, the largest immigrant group was from Finland, but today the top five countries in this respect, in order, are Syria, Iraq, Finland, Poland, and Iran.

The official language is Swedish, a North Germanic Indo-European language closely related to Danish and Norwegian. Neighbouring country Finland is partly Swedish speaking, as the two countries have a long joint history. Sweden has also recognized five national minority languages: Finnish, Yiddish, Meänkieli, Romani Chib, and Sami. In the areas of Sweden with a significant minority language-speaking group, the public authorities must provide information and communication in that language. Swedish Sign Language also has an official status. This means that if your first language is Sign Language, you have the right to communicate with public authorities in this language and the right to an interpreter. This has also had a positive impact on the news and various other programmes on TV, which today are interpreted into Sign Language.

In Sweden, the Easy Language movement started more than 50 years ago. Through various political initiatives, legislation, awareness of Human Rights (Kultur åt alla 1964), and significant lobbying work by different non-governmental organizations, Easy Language and the need for it have been accepted by society. The development of Easy Language in Sweden has been a process of learning-by-doing and trial and error, in close contact with the readers (Bror Tronbacke, personal communication September 2020).

Easy Language is called *lättläst* (easy-to-read) in Sweden, abbreviated as LL. Throughout the years, the *lättläst* concept has been understood as both

easy to read and easy to understand. Since the early 2000s, the Centre for Easy-to-Read's slogan has been *Lätt att läsa, lätt att förstå* (Easy to read, easy to understand). In this sense, it has also included spoken language, even if the word itself refers to text. The Easy Language Service (*Lättläst-tjänsten*) of the Centre for Easy-to-Read has been involved in projects to train and coach politicians to speak Easy to Understand<sup>1</sup>.

In Sweden today, there is a general awareness and respect for literature, news and information in Easy Language. In recent years, however, major organizational changes in the field of accessibility have had paradoxical effects on the development of Easy Language in Sweden.

## 2 Historical perspectives

Easy Language has a long history in Sweden. It started already almost six decades ago in the form of several different initiatives and actions, on the levels of both national authority and different stakeholders.

### 2.1 Early development

Easy Language has been promoted in Sweden since the late 1960s and has been closely linked to the Plain Language Movement. The development of Easy Swedish has been promoted and successfully implemented by a number of legislative initiatives over the years, but also by important lobbying work by non-governmental organizations such as the Swedish National Association for People with Intellectual Disability (FUB). But, the interest from the academic world in researching Easy Language has been limited.

The 1960s was in many ways a radical time of change, especially in the western world, where the solidarity movement grew strong. People protested against hierarchies and fought for equal rights and women's liberation. The United Nations' work on human rights started after the Second World War

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1 Information about one of the projects *Mitt val* (My choice) can be found on the *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* website (Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan 2020).

with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In 1966, the continuous work resulted in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was in reflection of this era that the development of Plain Language and Easy Language began in Sweden.

In 1967, the Swedish government produced guidelines for legal/judicial language. This was the first step towards a less bureaucratic language in communication between the authorities and the population. It was a step to strengthen democracy (Riktlinjer för lagspråk 1967). At the same time, a campaign was in motion to promote the use of the word 'du' (you), a direct form of address, instead of the Swedish words for Ms, Mrs or Mr. Using, for instance, German as an example, this would mean addressing a person with 'Du' instead of 'Sie'. At this time, Sweden was also undergoing a transition into a more classless society. All this began with a speech made by the Director General of the Royal Medical Board in 1967, in which he encouraged his staff to address him 'du'. More information about this can be found on the website of the Swedish Language Council (Språkrådet 2021a). Sweden's early participation in the work on Human Rights and the ratification of the two UN Covenants in 1967 also reflects this development. These were all logical steps for Sweden during this period, as it was a society strongly influenced by democratic values and solidarity.

The development of Easy Language also started during this period. In the later part of the 1960s, the Swedish government started a Culture Political Initiative called *Kultur åt alla* (Culture for everyone). It was in this setting that the first disability initiatives on participation were taken and the first Easy Language books were published. About 10 years later, the Easy Language newspaper was introduced. The target group for Easy Language material was people with intellectual disabilities. At the very beginning, it was stated that: 'It is of great importance not to underestimate the readers or believe that they are that different from other readers except for their reading ability' (Johannesson and Qvarsell 1995: 68, Hedin 1989).

Easy Language developed through 'learning-by-doing'. The Centre for Easy-to-Read had contacts with professionals working with the target group, such as teachers and staff in assisted housing. In the early years, there was also some resistance to close contact with the readers: it was not considered to be of any

value, as people did not believe that the target group would be capable of giving constructive feedback.

The development started with literature at the end of the 1960s. During the 1970s, the Easy Language Newspaper project led to the launching of the weekly Easy Language newspaper *8 Sidor* (8 Pages). Already in the 1970s, the first informative Easy Language texts were produced by the adult study organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* (SV), mainly the formal proceedings for board meetings and annual meetings in non-governmental organizations, but also some material about peace. In 1981, *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* produced information in Easy Language about the upcoming referendum on whether Sweden should continue having nuclear power (Kitte Arvidsson, personal communication September 2020). Easy Language information became very popular, and its reception revealed a great need for accessible information on current and urgent matters. However, informative Easy Language texts were not produced more widely until the late 1990s and early 2000s.

## 2.2 Centre for Easy-to-Read

The initiative to form an organization dedicated to Easy Language in Sweden came from the Swedish National Association for People with Intellectual Disability (FUB). The government commissioned the National Committee for Talking Newspapers to examine the possibility of an Easy Language organization (DsU 1985:7). The Committee had been running the Easy Language Newspaper project for a few years at this time.

In 1985, the Ministry of Culture and Education appointed a Committee to start working on a proposal for a national Easy Language organization. The secretary of the Committee was Bror Tronbacke, who later became the Centre for Easy-to-Read's first Director. In 1987, the Swedish Government presented a proposal to Parliament to establish a foundation that would be responsible for the ongoing development of Easy Language in Sweden. The Parliament's decision was unanimous, and the Foundation for Easy-to-Read (*LL-stiftelsen*) was formed (Proposition 1985/86:175). The name was changed to Centre for Easy-to-Read (*Centrum för lättläst, CfLL*) in 1997. The mission of the Foundation was to publish the *8 Sidor* newspaper and from 1988, to

publish literature in Easy Language. The Foundation for Easy-to-Read had no profit motive and was financed partly by government grants and partly from revenues from books and subscriptions. The government funding was allocated via the Swedish Ministry of Culture.

The establishment of the Foundation for Easy-to-Read enabled positive synergies between the publishing of literature and the publishing of news. The development of Easy Language intensified and awareness of the need for literature and news in an easier language increased. With Easy Language production in Sweden under one roof, joint marketing and lobbying work could start in a more organized and strategic form. The Centre for Easy-to-Read increasingly became a centre of excellence to which people from all sectors turned for advice on accessible language.

It became clear to the Centre for Easy-to-Read that more people than the original target group needed and could benefit from Easy Language. People from different fields and backgrounds were approaching the Centre with requests for help. Therefore, the Centre for Easy-to-Read started to reach out to schools and professionals working with, for example, immigrants and elderly people. Co-operation with libraries and non-governmental organizations such as FUB and the adult study organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* was vital.

The Centre for Easy-to-Read set the Easy Language standard for Sweden. The organization was respected for its competence, excellence and ability to conduct successful lobbying nationally. During the Centre for Easy-to-Read era, Sweden was also an Easy Language role model for many other countries. The Centre was highly respected in Finland and Norway (see chapters on Finland and Norway). The Easy-to-Read Association in Spain (*Lectura Fácil*) replicated the Swedish idea of Reading Ambassadors as promoters of Easy Language Literature, providing challenged groups with the opportunity to gain reading experiences. Sweden played a leading role in the global development of Easy Language in many ways. The Centre for Easy-to-Read brought Easy Language to the agenda of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) through the Swedish Easy Language Director Emeritus Bror Tronbacke. He was the initiator of the Easy-to-Read Network, which for several years was an active platform for international Easy Language discussions. This network was dissolved after the closing of the Centre for Easy-to-Read.

### 2.3 Transition from Centre for Easy-to-Read to the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media

In the fall of 2012, the Swedish Minister of Culture, Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth appointed a committee to review the Centre for Easy-to-Read. A final report from the Committee was published in August 2013 (SoU 2013), and was open for comments until the end of 2013. Some of the comments on the report and its conclusions claimed unfair competition between the Easy Language publishing house *LL-förlaget* and commercial publishing houses for government grants. Other comments were that the Centre for Easy-to-Read focused too much on written text, needed to increase its technical focus, and concentrate more on readers with intellectual disabilities.

In March 2014, the Government handed over its proposal to the Parliament. In June 2014, the Swedish Parliament decided to close down the Centre for Easy-to-Read and move the responsibility for Easy Language to the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM (*Lättare att läsa*, prop. 2013/14:134). MTM has a long tradition of finding technical solutions to make literature and newspapers accessible for people with visual impairments and reading difficulties. Several arguments supported the handing over of the Easy Language responsibility to MTM. One was that MTM already worked with accessible reading, which is a related area. It also had technical expertise that could have positive synergies with Easy Language. One proposal was to have one Centre of Excellence that covered all aspects of accessible reading, as having only one administration instead of two would save money. Another opinion was that the country should not have foundations funded by federal grants (*Lättare att läsa*, prop. 2013/14:134).

It was decided that all Centre for Easy-to-Read employees would automatically become part of MTM. In January 2018, the Swedish Government announced that MTM would relocate from Stockholm to Malmö. The move was completed by the end of 2019.

From the perspective of Easy Language, the closing down of the Centre for Easy-to-Read caused a number of challenges. For example, successfully combining decades of Easy Language expertise with the new technical approaches practised in MTM still today requires a great deal of work.

1968	First book in Easy Language is published
1970s	Easy Language Newspaper project
	First study materials and information in Easy Language
1984	Weekly Easy Language newspaper <i>8 Sidor</i> is launched
1987	Easy Language Foundation begins, later named Centre for Easy-to-Read ( <i>Centrum för lättläst, CfLL</i> )
1988	Centre for Easy-to-Read takes over responsibility for Easy Language literature
1991	Easy Language Publishing House ( <i>LL-förlaget</i> ) begins as part of Centre for Easy-to-Read
1992	Reading Ambassadors project begins
1994	Reading Ambassadors become a regular Centre for Easy-to-Read service
1997	Centre for Easy-to-Read produces first informative Easy Language texts
2001	Easy Language Service ( <i>LL-tjänsten</i> ) begins at the Centre for Easy-to-Read
2014	Centre for Easy-to-Read closes down at the end of the year
2015	Swedish Agency for Accessible Media ( <i>MTM</i> ) takes over

Table 1: Summary of Easy Language timeline in Sweden.

### 3 Current situation

From the early 1960s to date, different components have had an impact on both the legal and societal status of Easy Language in Sweden. Development has been gradual, parallel to the acceptance of equal rights for people with disabilities. This is also reflected by who the main stakeholders are. But first, it is important to examine the definitions of Easy Language used in Sweden.

### 3.1 Definitions

The Centre for Easy-to-Read developed and used this definition for *lättläst*:

‘Lättläst, Easy Language is a language for a reader who has challenges with reading and understanding Swedish text. In Easy Language, content, language and layout are easy to read and understand, and focus on the challenged reader and their difficulties.’  
(Bror Tronbacke, personal communication September 2020)

This definition focuses on reading texts, but today the Easy Language concept also includes spoken language. The key words are *easy to understand* and a *challenged target group*. The Centre for Easy-to-Read described producing something in *lättläst* as follows:

‘The process of adapting language, pictures and presentation for one or several target groups, making use of what the writer knows about the target group’s disability, reading difficulties or other challenges.’  
(Kursmaterial – Att skriva lättläst svenska 2011)

Sweden’s National Term Bank (*Rikstermbanken*) is a dictionary of definitions for Swedish concepts in a number of different fields and subjects. It is a Swedish version of the Interactive Terminology for Europe (IATE), which is run by the EU. Sweden’s national term bank is free of charge, and many journalists, interpreters and national agencies use it. Today the Swedish Language Council is responsible for the term bank.

In 2017, MTM worked together with the Swedish Centre of Terminology (TNC) to find a definition for *lättläst*, Easy Language. The Swedish Centre of Terminology has since been terminated, but the result of this work are the definitions below. The definition of a text in *lättläst* is:

‘A text that is adapted to a person with reading difficulties.

Comments:

The text can be adapted or written in different ways depending on

who the reader is. A person who is new to the Swedish language needs a different type of easy text to, for example, a person with an intellectual disability.

In a “*lättläst* text” the language is adapted to the reader’s vocabulary and level of language skills. The content is chosen according to the reader’s previous knowledge of the subject and their needs. A “*lättläst* text” also has an adapted structure and layout<sup>2</sup>.  
(Rikstermbanken 2021a)

How well this definition is known, agreed upon or used by other parties is not clear. As mentioned earlier, many professionals in various fields turn to Sweden’s National Term Bank when definitions are needed.

MTM explains *lättläst* in their FAQ as follows:

‘A *lättläst* text is a text that is adapted to target groups with special reading difficulties due to, for example, intellectual or cognitive disability or dementia. The target group may also be untrained readers or readers who are in the process of learning Swedish. The characteristics of books in Easy Language are, for example, that they are written with common, easy words, with short sentences and a simple and chronological narrative. There are only a few lines on each page and the text is often backed up with pictures’<sup>3</sup>.  
(Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier 2021a)

Although the *lättläst* concept has been widely used in Sweden, it has not always been explicitly defined. In 2008, for example, the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM) published a book called *Vad är lättläst?* ‘What is Easy-to-Read?’ (Lundberg and Reichenberg 2008). The authors focused on children and books used in the school system. They provide a broad background of the different aspects of facilitating accessible reading for pupils.

- .....
- 2 Please note that Sweden’s National Term Bank has these definitions in Swedish – here they have been translated by the author of this chapter and not by Sweden’s national term bank.
  - 3 Please note that this definition has been translated by the author of this chapter and not the MTM.

Although some of their recommendations are valid for Easy Language, they do not offer a definition of the Easy Language concept.

Since Plain Language (*klarspråk*) and Easy Language (*lättläst*) are so closely linked in Sweden, the definition of Plain Language should also be addressed here. The Swedish Language Council's definition of Plain Language is:

'Plain Language is language without bureaucratic words, with simple but correct construction of sentences, but it does not focus specifically on a challenged target group.' (Språkrådet 2021b)

Sweden's National Term Bank's definition of Plain Language from 2013 is:

'A language that is clear and comprehensible for the intended reader.

Comments:

Plain language is to be interpreted as the opposite of unnecessarily complicated language, in which sentence structure is very complicated, the words are old-fashioned, and the conjunctions between the sentences are unclear.

//

The meaning of "plain" does not depend on the reader.

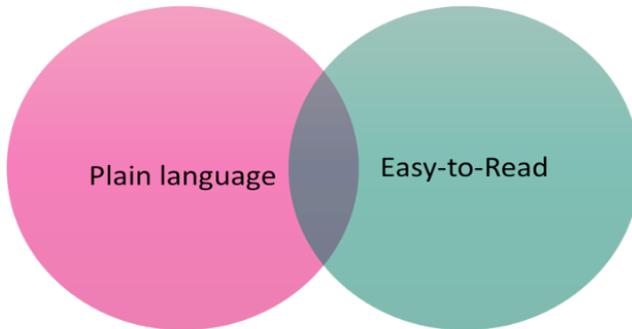
//

Plain Language has been developed within and by national agencies as a step to making communication between agencies and citizens more democratic. But Plain Language is not only for this kind of communication. It can also be used by other types of organizations'<sup>4</sup>. (Rikstermbanken 2021b)

Easy Language should, according to the Centre for Easy-to-Read and the Swedish Language Council, be seen as a complement to Plain Language. Easy Language focuses on a reader with difficulties, whereas Plain Language does

.....  
4 Please note that Sweden's National Term Bank has these definitions in Swedish and that this translation is by the author.

not. It is impossible to say exactly where the line between the two lies. This is something that has been discussed for years in Sweden. Very often these discussions end with the conclusion that the label we place on either is not important. The most important thing is that the text is functional for its intended reader. One way to describe the relation between Easy Language and Plain Language is to use the picture developed by the Centre for Easy-to-Read in 2010, which is now often used by the Swedish Language Council (e.g., Sandström 2021):



Picture 1: This picture has helped many writers of information realize that there is no conflict between Plain Language and Easy Language – both are needed.

When the international work in this field began in Sweden more than 30 years ago, the terminological equivalent for *lättläst* in English was Easy-to-Read. Now various alternative terms are used. It is important that the international stakeholders agree to use the same English word and have the same interpretation of the term and the concept.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

As discussed earlier, the political movements and the United Nations Covenants on Human Rights during the 1960s created an important platform for the development of Easy Language in Sweden. This was followed by different initiatives that led to the start of the Centre for Easy-to-Read (*Centrum för lättläst*). In recent years, several Government Official Reports, political initiatives and new laws have strengthened the right to and the necessity for Easy

Language. The Swedish Government's Official Report *Kultur åt alla* (1964) highlighted the situation of people with handicaps<sup>5</sup>, as did the Official Report on literature (Boken 1974:5). These two official reports had a major impact on the start of Easy Language in Sweden.

Many other significant documents have also affected the development of Easy Language in Sweden. One of great importance is the Standard Rules of the United Nations (1993), which states everyone's right to participate in all aspects of society. This document had a big impact on the Accessibility Movement and on the Centre for Easy-to-Read. *Accessibility for all – From patient to citizen* was adopted as a National Action Plan in Sweden in 2000 after a proposal from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (Proposition 1999/2000:79). The proposal also addressed accessible information and the need for Easy Language. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) was ratified in Sweden in 2008 and implemented in 2009. It was a milestone in stating everyone's right to information in a format that is accessible for the individual. The Centre for Easy-to-Read made Easy Language versions of these important documents: *FN:s standardregler 2017* and *Konventionen om rättigheter för personer med funktionsnedsättning 2020*.

Sweden renewed its Discrimination Act in 2008. The Act states that inadequate accessibility is discrimination. In 2017, an amendment clarified that it is discrimination if information is not accessible to the individual. A citizen who needs information in Easy Language or Braille for example, has the right to obtain it. Information on the Discrimination Act is available in Easy Language (*Diskrimineringslagen 2020*).

Sweden's first Language Act entered into force in 2009. Paragraph 11 of the Act is called *the Plain Language Paragraph*. It states that all authorities are obliged to use Plain Language (*klarspråk*) in their communication with the public and in all informative texts. It clarifies that the authorities are responsible for making information as comprehensible as possible for citizens. The Swedish Language Council has produced a book on how to interpret and implement the Language Act (*Språklagen 2009*, *Språkrådet 2021c*). It is an important guideline for public authorities. The Language Act does not mention Easy Language, but

.....  
5 the term used at that time

it emphasizes everyone's right to communication/information in comprehensible language. The Swedish Language Council, which is the national authority responsible for the control of the Language Act, recognizes that Plain Language is not comprehensible enough for all citizens, and that there is also a need for Easy Language.

To summarize, all these documents together are important arguments for Easy Language in Sweden. To be a citizen with the same and equal rights, literature, news and information should be available in Easy Language. To have access to all of these is essential to be able to be part of the society, to be an advocate for one's own life and to make one's own decisions. Easy Language started as the right of people with intellectual disabilities to have access to culture and news, and has developed into everyone's right to participate in all aspects of society and created respect for fundamental Human Rights.

In the early 2000s, Easy Language had rather a low status in Sweden. The target group for Easy Language was people with intellectual disabilities, who, within the 'disability world' were the ones with the lowest status. This might also be one of the reasons for so little interest in the academic world to research Easy Language. Easy Language was seen as something for 'only' this marginalized group. This view has changed as more people have experienced the benefit of Easy Language books, news and informative texts. School children and adults with Swedish as their second language now appreciate Easy Language material.

When these other groups started to benefit from using Easy Language books and news in the early 2000s, the Centre for Easy-to-Read carried out more strategic marketing and lobbying. It led campaigns, such as a short informative film on national television about Easy Language. Meetings were held with different political officials. Information on how to use Easy Language books and *8 Sidor* in the classroom was developed for teachers. Some teachers initially reacted negatively to Easy Language books. Many considered Easy Language material 'second class' copies/versions of originals. Negative arguments claimed that it limited the vocabulary of pupils and that Easy Language books were not good literature (Bror Tronbacke, personal communication 2020).

As more teachers gained first-hand experience of Easy Language books and *8 Sidor*, Easy Language was accepted and the need for and use of it increased. Today, the majority of Swedish elementary schools use Easy Language books

and have 8 *Sidor* subscriptions. Easy Language material is also frequently used in adult education and in the education of Swedish as a Second Language. The FUB and the Centre for Easy-to-Read's joint project in late 1992 to place Reading Ambassadors for Easy Language in assistive living and later elderly care, also showed the great benefit of Easy Language literature, news and information.

Different political and judicial initiatives have made Easy Language accepted as an alternative format, alongside sign language, Braille, and audio versions. Today many people with good reading skills also enjoy a summary in Easy Language as a quick way to get the overall content of a report, for example. The Easy Language Service has received feedback several times from the Government on how appreciated the Easy Language versions of proposals to the Parliament are among the parliamentarians. Another example is the Guide in Easy Language to the Exhibitions at the Army Museum (*Armémuseum*), which the Easy Language Service produced for the museum in 2007. The original target group for the guide was people with intellectual disabilities, but it was so popular among all visitors that the museum had to print more copies.

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Until December 2014, the **Centre for Easy-to-Read** was the main actor promoting and developing Easy Language in Sweden. It was a centre of excellence, to which people turned whenever they had an Easy Language-related question. Today, MTM is the official stakeholder (see text on the side).

**The Swedish National Association for People with Intellectual Disability (FUB)**, is an advocacy organization working to enable children, young people and adults with intellectual disabilities to live a good life. The vision of the FUB is a society and a world in which people with intellectual disabilities can live their life to the fullest. The FUB has played an important role in Easy Language in Sweden since the very beginning. It has been highly successful in putting Easy Language on the national agenda and has put pressure on the authorities to answer to the need for Easy Language. As a member of the User Advisory Committee of MTM, FUB is crucial for advocating the ongoing work with Easy Language within the Agency (FUB 2021).

Sweden has a long tradition of adult education in the form of study circles, often carried out in the evenings, organized by a study organizations/associations. One of the largest of these is the *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan*. As its key target group is people with intellectual disabilities, *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* has taken a very active role in promoting and also producing Easy Language information and Easy Language learning material. It has also co-operated with the Centre for Easy-to-Read in, for example, training Reading Ambassadors. MTM continues to co-operate to some extent with *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* in this specific training.

Swedish **libraries** have also played an important role in Easy Language. One of their missions is to promote access to literature and information and to stimulate reading, specifically targeting people with reading challenges due to disability or Swedish as a second language. Librarians are responsible for accessibility and alternative formats. Therefore, knowledge about Easy Language publications and Easy Language in libraries is quite good in general. Norway has also been successful in developing good co-operation with libraries on literature in Easy Language (see chapter on Norway). The Centre for Easy-to-Read organized seminars for librarians on Easy Language. MTM also has a tradition of organizing seminars for librarians, and since 2015, has included a presentation on Easy Language in the programmes of these seminars.

Some other actors also promote the use of Easy Language and the production of Easy Language materials. *Klartext* (Sveriges Radio 2021) is Easy Language news broadcasted every weekday on the **Swedish National Radio** (SR). Its reporters have been trained in Easy Language by the Centre for Easy-to-Read. **Swedish Television** (SVT) also broadcasts five minutes of news in Easy Swedish every weekday (Sveriges television 2021).

**The Ministry of Culture** allocates funding every year for *LL-förlaget, 8 Sidor* and for some additional Easy Language work for MTM. **The Swedish Language Council** (*Språkrådet*) promotes Plain Language (*klarspråk*), but also recognizes the need for Easy Language as a complement to Plain Language. One example is how they include Easy Language in their presentations on Plain Language (*Språkrådet* 2021d).

**The Swedish Agency for Participation** (*Myndigheten för delaktighet, MFD*) is an expert agency that addresses disability issues. The tasks of the agency

are to monitor and analyse development; propose methods, guidelines and guidance; disseminate knowledge; initiate research and other development work; provide support; and propose measures to the Government. It promotes Easy Language as an accessible format along with Sign Language, Braille and audio, but has no expertise in hands-on work with Easy Language. The Swedish Agency for Participation has played an important role in ensuring that other agencies follow accessibility standards, including the implementation of different accessible formats (Myndigheten för delaktighet 2021).

In recent years, **non-governmental organizations** have played a more active role in the development of Easy Language. For example, from 2016 to 2019, a three-year project called *Begriplig text* (Comprehensible text) was run by non-governmental organizations together with the private enterprise *Begripsam* (Begriplig text 2021, Begripsam 2021). The collaborating organizations were the FUB, the Aphasia Association (*Afasiförbundet*), the Dyslexia Association (*Dyslexiförbundet*) and the Autism and Asperger Association (*Autism & Aspergerförbundet*), representing intellectual disabilities, aphasia, dyslexia, and autism spectrum disorders. The project was financed by the Swedish Inheritance Fund (*Allmänna arvsfonden*). The aim was to identify factors that make a text (information or news) easy to read and easy to understand. The project resulted in 19 recommendations, the majority of which are related to layout and structure but not to the language itself. The project highlighted the need for comprehensive content several times, but did not describe in much detail how to do this. When the project ended, the private company *Begripsam* continued the work in terms of spreading the conclusions of the project and offering various consultancy services.

A handful of **commercial publishing houses and private consultancy companies** offer adaptation into and the production of Easy Language texts. The extent to which they promote Easy Language is difficult to say. When a consultant receives an assignment to make an organization's communication more accessible, some of them also advocate the need for Easy Language. Some of these private companies are specialized in web accessibility. Sweden adopted a new law regarding digital accessibility in September 2019, called *DOS-lagen* (DOS-lagen 2018). In September 2020, the new Web Accessibility Directive (WCAG 2.0), entered into force. *DOS-lagen* and WCAG2.0 will

have an impact on accessible content and accessible language on websites, including Easy Language.

#### 4 Target groups

When the first Easy Language initiatives were taken, the target group was people with intellectual disabilities. During the existence of the Centre for Easy-to-Read, the target group became much wider and remains so today: people with reading or language difficulties due to dyslexia, ADHD, aphasia, dementia; readers with intellectual or cognitive difficulties; and people with Swedish as a second language (Bror Tronbacke, personal communication September 2020). It is important to note that many immigrants never acquire enough language skills to read ordinary Swedish texts, and may have a lifelong need for Easy Language. The target group also includes untrained readers, both young and old. The exact percentage of the population in Sweden that needs Easy Language is difficult to estimate. Taking into account the high number of immigrants in the country today and the results of the OECD Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies Survey (PIAAC) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) surveys, the estimate is at least 20% of the population, but the actual percentage might be much higher.

The PIAAC 2012 result for Sweden was as follows: 13% of adults can only read very simple text, 40% of adults do not reach the ‘good reader’ level, and 25% of adults cannot use the internet to find information. The definition of adult in this survey is a person aged 16–65. It should be noted that the life expectancy in Sweden today is 81 years for men and 85 years for women, and although the need for Easy Language increases with age in many cases, citizens older than 65 were not included in the survey. The next PIAAC has just been initiated and will be reported in 2022. The PIAAC result indicates that at least 13% of the population needs Easy Language. Many of the 40% not at ‘good reader’ level need Easy Language when the information is about a subject unknown to them (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2012). The most recent PISA survey was in 2018. It showed that 18% of Swedish 15-year-olds had low reading skills – they do not reach Level 2. The corresponding percentage for

only boys was 23%. These youths will grow up to become adults needing Easy Language (Skolverket 2018).

## 5 Guidelines

The first guidelines on how to write Easy Language were developed for the adult study organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* (Arvidsson 1991). In 1994, the Centre for Easy-to-Read put together a package called *Detta är lättläst* (This is Easy to Read) (Kitte Arvidsson, personal communication September 2020), which contained several parts about what Easy Language is, how to read Easy Language books, and how to read *8 Sidor*.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) guidelines for Easy-to-Read Material (IFLA 1997) were based on the experience and hands-on practical work carried out by the Centre for Easy-to-Read in Sweden. These guidelines had three main purposes: to describe the nature of and the need for easy-to-read publications, to identify the main target groups for these publications, and to offer suggestions to publishers regarding easy-to-read materials and the organizations and agencies that serve people with reading disabilities. The IFLA Guidelines were revised in 2010 (IFLA 2010).

Over the years, the Centre for Easy-to-Read produced several guidelines on how to write and read Easy Language material for people with intellectual disabilities. They all had the same basics as reported in the International Federation of Library Associations Guidelines (IFLA 1997). For an illustration of the Swedish guidelines, see Appendix 1.

*Skriv lättläst!* (Write easy-to-read!) is one example of these guidelines. It is a more 'popular' version written by Björn Wiman at the Centre for Easy-to-Read, and focuses on texts in literature (Wiman 2005). Other guidelines were later developed for the different texts produced by the three different units at the Centre for Easy-to-Read. *LL-förlaget* had guidelines for authors of Easy Language literature. A shorter version of these can still be found on the *LL-förlaget* website (LL-förlaget 2021). The *8 Sidor* newspaper has guidelines for journalistic texts (Bengt Fredriksson, personal communication September 2020). In 2011, the Easy Language Service produced material on how to write

Easy Language, which can be seen as guidelines for informative texts (Kursmaterial – Att skriva lättläst svenska 2011).

The three sets of guidelines are slightly different to each other, since the texts they refer to are different. The kind of Easy Language of a novel is different to that in an informative text. One example is that metaphorical descriptions can be used in an Easy Language novel, like ‘her face was white as snow’, which is not the case in news or informative texts. In informative texts on how to apply for childcare, for example, it is crucial that the reader understands every single word in order to fill out the application form correctly. When reading a novel, on the other hand, it may be enough to understand the general idea and not the precise word.

All guidelines stress that Easy Language is not just a language, not merely words and sentences. The writer must also take into consideration content, structure and presentation, including illustrations, and always have the intended challenged reader in mind. This is a perspective that both Finland and Norway also emphasize (see chapters on Finland and Norway).

When working with content, the writer should ask the following questions: What? Why? Who? What is the reader’s interest and previous knowledge of the subject? The language should use common, simple words, be concrete and avoid expressions or metaphors. The subject should be placed before the verb in a sentence and preferably be written in the active voice with a clear sender and receiver (we – you). The sentences should not have interposed attachments or abbreviations. Compound words are acceptable if they are common words and hyphens are to be used only if the word is generally written with a hyphen.

The text should have a clear, simple structure with informative headlines. It should be presented with space between paragraphs, manual line breaks, and familiar typography. The illustrations should help the reader understand the text, support the text and be easy to interpret. When information began to be published (only) on websites, the guidelines of the Centre for Easy-to-Read started to use the keywords ‘*Find! Read! Understand!*’ for Easy Language informative texts.

MTM is presently involved in an international standardization Easy Language project (ISO/IEC WD 23859), together with representatives from China, Japan, Ireland, and Spain (Maria O’Donnell, personal communication September 2020).

Some guidelines can also be found on the websites of non-governmental organizations and language consultants' companies. Two examples are *How to write easy-to-read* (FUB 2021) and *7 steps to make a text easy-to-read* (Språkkonsulterna 2019). These guidelines are in line with those produced by the Centre for Easy-to-Read in 2005–2011.

Easy Language can be more easy or less easy, depending on the targeted reader. In guidelines for informative texts, this is only specified as the writer needing to have knowledge about the reader and their reading difficulties and to adapt the text accordingly. Some publishers of Easy Language literature use different levels of Easy Language. The Easy Language publishing house *Vilja* offers books at five different levels, from X-Small to X-Large. Each higher level offers a greater challenge for the reader (Vilja förlag 2021a).

*LL-förlaget* uses **three different levels of Easy Language** in its publications. Their website has information on the different levels of Easy Language they use in their books. *LL-förlaget's* three levels are as follows<sup>6</sup>:

**Level 3 – Lätt – Easy:** The novels have more pages, use some more uncommon words and the sentences may be longer than those at Levels 1 and 2. Subordinate clauses and metaphorical language may also be used. The narrative does not always follow a chronology in terms of time and place. There may be several characters in the story. Non-fiction books at Level 3 are always illustrated to support the text.

**Level 2 – Lättare – Easier:** The narrative is simple, well-structured and chronological. The words and expressions used are well-known. There may be some subordinate clauses, but the text is mainly written with principal clauses. The story has fewer characters and not as many descriptions of people and the environment as stories at Level 3. Each chapter is short, often between three and eight pages in the printed book. The books are often illustrated, but do not always have as many pictures as in Level 1 books, and the pictures are not as illustrative. Paperback books and short novels at Level 2 usually have no illustrations.

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6 Please note that these definitions have been translated by the author of this chapter and not by the Easy Language publishing house *LL-förlaget*.

**Level 1 – *Lättast* – Easiest:** These books have very little text, often just a few sentences on each page. The vocabulary is simple and the sentences are short. The sentences are also always complete but pronouns and auxiliary verbs are avoided. The novels usually only have one or two main characters. Non-fiction books cover only one specific, concrete topic. The books have many illustrations and/or photos that support and help carry the story. Very often they picture everyday situations that the readers easily recognize.

Only two books have been written about Easy Language in Sweden. *Vad är lättläst?* ‘What is Easy-to-Read?’ (Lundberg and Reichenberg 2008) is a discussion on the concept of Easy Language, the mechanisms of reading, and reading difficulties. Its primary focus is educational books for children. The second book is *Lättläst – så funkar det* by Maria Sundin (2007)<sup>7</sup> – ‘This is how easy language works’, a hands-on guide to Easy Language. It gives detailed guidelines and recommendations of the Centre for Easy-to-Read from over the years. Experts from the Centre for Easy-to-Read were involved in its production.

## 6 Practical outcomes

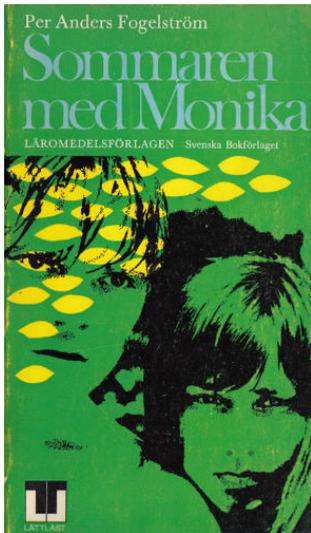
As already mentioned, the emergence and the development of Easy Language in Sweden has been linked to the Human Rights movement and the general development of a society that is equal and accessible to all citizens. These core values have had an impact on literature, news and informative texts.

### 6.1 Literature

The initiative to start making literature in Easy Language came from the National School Board (NSB) and aimed, by using the vocabulary of that era, towards ‘giving some culture to people with handicaps’ (Kultur åt alla 1964). The original target group was people with intellectual disabilities. The NSB

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 7 The author Maria Sundin is a professional language consultant who was trained in Easy Language by the Easy Language Service.

formed the Easy Language group (*LL-gruppen*), with about ten members from the culture and educational sector. The Easy Language group was in charge of publishing Easy Language books throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s. This is how awareness of the need for Easy Language and the work with Easy Language began in Sweden. The political initiative aimed to enable more citizens to have access to their literary heritage. The Easy Language group had many, quite vivid discussions on what should be published or not, and how to reach the intended readers. The first Easy Language books were published by different publishing houses on commission from the NSB. The Easy Language group gave financial and editorial support to production. The books were adaptations of novels for adult readers considered to be 'classic literature' or very popular books of that time.



Picture 2: Cover of first book adapted to Easy Swedish, *Sommaren med Monika* (Summer with Monika). The original book was written by the Swedish author Per Anders Fogelström (1951), and the adaptation was published 1968.

The very first Easy Language book was the 1968 adaptation of *Sommaren med Monika* (Summer with Monika), by the Swedish author Per Anders Fogelström. The original version of the book was published in 1951. Two years later, in 1953,

the Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman turned the book into a controversial movie. The film portrays love between a young couple. The teenage girl is rather sexually liberated, and the film had, for that time period, some shocking nude scenes. It is said that this is the movie that started the international rumours about the 'Swedish Sin'. It is quite interesting that this was chosen as the very first Easy Language book in Sweden. In many ways, it is a reflection of the spirit of the 1960s (Bohman 2017).

In 1988, the year after the Foundation for Easy-to-Read began operations, the Easy Language group left the NSB and became a part of the Foundation. Three years later, in 1991, *LL-förlaget* also joined the Foundation. Books in Easy Language were now published by *LL-förlaget* and not on commission by other publishing houses. During the first years at NSB, the Easy Language group monitored the publishing of a few Easy Language books per year. The number of Easy Language books increased gradually to about 15–20 per year. The majority of were adaptations of already published books.

Since its beginnings, the Easy Language group (*LL-gruppen*) and later *LL-förlaget* has published more than 1000 titles in Easy Language. Gradually, the number of books originally written in Easy Language increased. The first Easy Language books were novels, fiction. Throughout the years, *LL-förlaget* has also published a great number of non-fiction books, on a great variety of subjects such as cooking, space, World Wars, sports, knitting, laws, and sex. The target group has also changed from only adults with intellectual disabilities to also include adults with cognitive and other difficulties, untrained/unexperienced readers, young readers, and people with Swedish as a second language.

For decades, *LL-förlaget* had the leading role in publishing literature for adults in Easy Language in Sweden. After the transfer of the responsibility for Easy Language from the Centre for Easy-to-Read to MTM, *LL-förlaget's* mission was to be a complement to the commercial publishing houses and focus on the target groups they did not address, mainly those with the greatest difficulties. Therefore, the target group for Easy Language literature produced by *LL-förlaget* has somewhat narrowed since MTM took over. According to *LL-förlaget*, their target groups are people with intellectual disabilities, older people with dementia, people with neuropsychiatric disabilities, people with dyslexia, and adults learning Swedish.

During the 2000s, some **new Easy Language publishing houses** have emerged in Sweden. In 2012, the Vilja publishing house, a private-owned Easy Language publishing house targeting adult readers, was established. Vilja focuses mainly on people with Swedish as a second language. Today Vilja has around 450 different Easy Language titles in its catalogue (Vilja förlag 2021b). Approximately 20% of these are offered in different formats such as hardcovers, paperbacks, and audiobooks. Vilja has a sister publishing house called Nypon which produces Easy Language literature for children. Nypon began operations in 2010. Some other private Easy Language publishing houses have also earlier targeted children or teenagers: Hegas started in 1983 and Argasso in 2002. In early 2020, the largest publishing house in Sweden, Bonnier, launched a brand-new publishing house called Hedvig for literature in Easy Language<sup>8</sup>. Hedvig's target group is both children and adults. Over the years, the private publishing houses have criticized *LL-förlaget* for creating unfair competition as it receives financial support from the Government.

None of the commercial publishing houses have produced literature for the target group of people with intellectual disabilities. As the production of literature for this target group is expensive and the volume of each title is small, this leads to no profitability. For this group to have access to a variety of literature, the publishing must be financially supported by government grants. In the case of *LL-förlaget*, the titles produced for a wider target group have helped finance a larger production of literature on the easiest language level.

Recently, *LL-förlaget* has published fewer original titles each year. An original title means a book written in Easy Language as opposed to an adaptation of an already published book. These original titles are written by experienced Easy Language authors or by 'regular authors' who receive thorough editing assistance from *LL-förlaget*. The focus of the publications also seems to be returning to the original target group – the most challenged people. Six titles were published in 2020, all on the easiest level. Of the 241 titles listed on *LL-förlaget*'s website, 41 original titles have been listed since 2016. In 2019 only six original titles were produced.

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8 The publisher in chief is the former publisher of the Easy Language publishing house *LL-förlaget*.

Over the years, plans have been made for more systematic and organized sharing of Easy Language books between countries. Spain, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Japan, and the Netherlands were very interested in co-operation. Japan and the Netherlands showed great interest in buying the easiest Swedish Easy Language books, for a target group with intellectual disabilities. But this co-operation did not develop any further after the Centre for Easy-to-Read closed.

## 6.2 Media

Parallel to the development of Easy Language books, news in Easy Language has been lobbied. The FUB has played an important role in this. An Easy Language newspaper project was initiated in 1976. In 1982, the National Committee for Talking Newspapers, which provided audio newspapers to people with vision impairment, received an assignment from the government which led to the start of the *8 Sidor* newspaper in 1984 (Taltidningskommitténs tilläggsupdrag 1982). The original target group for *8 Sidor* was people with intellectual disabilities.



Picture 3: Cover page of the first issue of the *8 Sidor* newspaper.

In 1986, the Swedish Parliament decided to fund a national newspaper in Easy Language (DsU1985:7). When the Foundation for Easy-to-Read started in 1987, *8 Sidor* was no longer run by the Committee for Talking Newspapers. This was an important decision as it guaranteed long-term sustainability for the newspaper. The *8 Sidor* newspaper, together with the publishing of Easy Language books, became the responsibility of the Foundation.

The *8 Sidor* newspaper was, and still is, a weekly newspaper with eight pages of news in Easy Language. Since 1997, it also has an online version in which news is updated every weekday (*8 Sidor* 2021). It contains a great deal of background information regarding current events. In addition since 2010, the newspaper has run a special website called *Alla väljare* (All voters). The website provides in-depth information about elections, political issues and how the democracy in Sweden is organized. At election time it also has a chat function via which readers can ask political parties questions. The month before the last general election in Sweden, the website had about 10 000 visitors every day (Bengt Fredriksson, personal communication September 2020). When the website started, it was financed by the Centre for Easy-to-Read. But in 2014, it received special funding from the Government. Now, *Alla väljare* is a permanent site run by *8 Sidor* with funding from the Government. The funding is channelled via MTM, but the agency has no influence over the website or *8 Sidor*. Both are run as independent media in accordance with the press ethics of integrity.

Like that of Easy Language books, the target group of *8 Sidor* has slightly changed. The original target group was people with intellectual disabilities. This group is still important, but today the Easy Language newspaper is used in a large number of elementary schools and in Swedish classes for immigrants. It started as a weekly Easy Language newspaper in 1984, with eight pages of national news. Today, it is one of the most accessible newspapers in the world. It can be read as a traditional newspaper on paper, or in PDF or digital version. It has a listening function on its website and the news are recorded in a human voice. There is also a CD audio version, a talking newspaper, and a Braille version. The paper version of *8 Sidor* has about 5 000 subscribers, and each copy is often read by more than one reader. The website has about 40 000 visitors every week.

Two other Easy Language newspaper initiatives have been taken in Sweden. *Invandartidningen På lätt svenska* (shorter name *På lätt Svenska*, The Immigrant Newspaper in Easy Swedish) was a weekly newspaper published from 1971 to 1998. The specific target group was immigrants, which had an impact on the content and language of the newspaper. In 1998, the editor in chief of *På lätt svenska* started the Easy Language newspaper *Sesam*, originally named *Invandartidningen*. The target group was the same – immigrants learning Swedish as a Second Language or people who had not yet mastered the Swedish language. *Sesam* was discontinued in 2017 due to financial problems, i.e., too few subscribers. Both *På lätt svenska* and *Sesam* explained the difficult words of the text in a glossary. The glossary was presented in a separate column in the margin of the page. This can be functional for a reader who has problems with the Swedish language but who is a good reader in his native tongue. For a person with reading difficulties, however, it can be hard to leave the body of text to look up the explanation of a difficult word in a separate column.

During the first decade of 2000, some of the regional magazines published by regional authorities had summaries of articles in Easy Language. The majority of these magazines have now closed down and been replaced by online publications.

Both **Swedish Television** (SVT) and **Swedish National Radio** (SR) broadcast news in Easy Language. The radio news is called *Klartext*. It is easy to understand, reported at a slower pace, and uses commonly known words. According to *Klartext's* website, more than 300 000 people listen to it regularly.

In general, the language used in the media has become easier to understand, partly due to the influence of the Plain Language movement in Sweden and the Language Act (Arponen 2016). The rapid development of the quantity of information might also have had an impact on how the language has become somewhat easier in general. People need to process more information today than before. Regular news broadcasts also use some Easy Language techniques today, such as adding an explanatory word in front of something that might be unknown to a large number of the viewers/listeners: in the *African country* Burkina Faso, the *Russian president* Putin.

### 6.3 Informative texts and the role of Easy Language Service

In 1997, the Centre for Easy-to-Read started the service of rewriting informative texts in Easy Language on commission. Earlier productions had been *ad hoc*, but when people increasingly started turning to the Centre for Easy-to-Read asking for help with information in Easy Language, the Centre decided it was time to start offering this service. One of the first assignments was to make the information on rules for holding a library card easy to understand for people with reading challenges. During these first years, the Centre for Easy-to-Read also produced Easy Language summaries of public inquiries and proposals to the Swedish Parliament.

In 1998, the Centre for Easy-to-Read ran its first workshop on how to write informative texts in Easy Language. The workshop was very popular and was the beginning of a 16-year long period of training producers of information from all sectors of society in how to write Easy Language. One-day workshops were offered twice a year for as long as the Centre for Easy-to-Read existed. During the 2000s, the Easy Language Service tailor-made workshops for individual organizations by commission, held many seminars and gave keynote speeches at several national and international conferences.

The commissions increased and the Centre for Easy-to-Read decided to form a special unit for the Commission Service in 2001, called the **Easy Language Service** (*Lättläst-tjänsten*). Initially, two people worked at the unit and two other people were assigned on a freelance basis. Three out of four had journalist backgrounds. This turned out to be significant throughout the years. The majority of the Easy Language writers at the Easy Language Service were journalists, also the freelancers. Only a handful were language consultants or linguists.

The Easy Language Service became the expert in Easy Language informative texts and Easy Language training in Sweden. The majority of the professionals writing Easy Language today or offering training in Easy Language have been trained by the Easy Language Service. The service adapted and produced informative texts in Easy Language, addressed authorities regarding the need for

accessible information, and for a number of years had Framework Agreements<sup>9</sup> with not only the Swedish Government and Parliament, but also with several Regional Authorities. Assignments also came from national agencies, municipalities, museums, national organizations such as the Red Cross, and from a handful of private companies. The texts were, for example, political platforms at election time or summaries of government proposals to parliament and UN Covenants. They could also be information on websites, traffic rules, reports on xenophobia and intolerance, protocols, and minutes from municipal board meetings, and emergency info.

The Easy Language Service reacted quickly to information from the authorities, advocated the need of Easy Language versions, and kept an eye on the quality of the Easy Language information being published. For example, it regularly checked how many of the municipalities and the national agencies offered Easy Language information on their websites and published the results. It always created quite widespread interest in both the national as well as the local media. The Centre for Easy-to-Read and the Easy Language Service increased awareness of the need for Easy Language and played an important part in making the Easy Language information standard.

The internet boomed in early 2000 in Sweden. Public authorities created websites and started to put their information on the internet for the public. Although information on the internet is open to everyone, it is not automatically accessible to everyone. Thorough lobbying work began, to increase awareness of the fact that finding and reading information on the internet actually requires better reading skills than reading well-structured information on paper. The keywords in this lobbying were *Find! Read! Understand!* Web information must also be easy to find for a challenged reader. Once found, the layout and structure must be easy to read. And when reading it, it must be easy to understand.

The Easy Language Service played a leading role in the development of Easy Language information on internet. The first step was to create a separate Easy Language webroom on websites with a *Lättläst* link on the site's first page. By

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 9 A Framework Agreement was a contract to provide Easy Language services whenever there was a call for it.

2010, the majority of all public entities had information in Easy Language on their websites. The first public website with information in Easy Language in Sweden was Stockholm City's website (Stockholm 2021), which was developed by the Centre for Easy-to-Read's Commission Service in 2000.

When the Centre for Easy-to-Read closed down, the Easy Language Service was the only part of the Centre that did not merge into MTM. The argument was that a national agency could not offer commission services (SoU 2013). It would be unfair competition with the private business sector. The consequence of this decision was that no official entity offered training in Easy Language. This risked different interpretations of Easy Language. Today, some private companies offer training in Easy Language.

Throughout the years, a handful of **private businesses** have started offering Easy Language services, many of them small with just one freelance consultant. Some of the larger translation companies also offer 'translations into Easy Language'. However, these enterprises do not actively advocate or market Easy Language. Another problem is that the agency in charge of Easy Language in Sweden does not control quality. Some public institutions have **inhouse competence** in producing Easy Language informative texts, as many of their employees have been trained by the Easy Language Service. Two examples are the Haninge municipality (Haninge kommun 2021), which offers an Easy Language alternative on their website, and the Swedish Board of Student Finance, which offers various printed information in Easy Language (CSN 2021).

The number of informative texts in Easy Language seems to have decreased in recent years. Fewer government proposals have summaries in Easy Language. Some of the websites that used to have Easy Language informative texts no longer have them. One example is the website of the City of Stockholm. In early 2000, it offered various information in Easy Language and had a link on the first page to the information. Today a search for '*Lättläst*' shows a few PDF-documents in Easy Language but no web texts (Stockholm 2021). Although, in general, the language in public information, both in print and on websites, has become easier to understand, a large group remains that cannot access this information and needs Easy Language. Their needs are not fully looked after.

## 6.4 Other projects

Easy Language literature and the newspaper started as projects in Sweden about 50 years ago. Easy Language Reading Ambassadors also began as projects. All of these have now been permanent activities for many years.

A **Reading Ambassador** is a person who reads to and reads together with people who have reading difficulties. The first Reading Ambassadors project was carried out in 1992. The intention was to reach people with intellectual disabilities. Earlier, the Centre for Easy-to-Read tried, not so successfully, to target more traditional marketing towards this group. One reason for this failure was that neither the professionals working with the target group nor the families of the target group believed there was a need for or any meaning in Easy Language literature or news. The project represented co-operation between the Centre for Easy-to-Read and the Swedish National Association for People with Intellectually Disability, and the working model was created by Centre for Easy-to-Read employee Lotta Rosenström. The model was based on training staff in assistive homes or group housing in how to use Easy Language material and how to read it to and together with the target group. The model also included how to organize these reading sessions as part of regular activities.

In 1994, it was decided that the Centre for Easy-to-Read, in co-operation with the Swedish National Association for People with Intellectually Disability, the adult study organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan*, and regional libraries should try to implement this model in all parts of Sweden. Projects began, one region at a time. Project managers were recruited locally and the projects were financed by regional funds. About the same time, the Centre for Easy-to-Read decided to try to use the same model for elderly people living in nursing homes. It was successful in only a few regions and did not spread as well as the Reading Ambassadors for people with intellectual disabilities. The reason for this was that the staff did not have enough time to become involved in reading activities. So, in 2010 the Centre for Easy-to-Read started a project involving volunteer readers, called *Högläsare* (Narrators). These are people who come to the nursing home and conduct reading sessions. This revised model was much more successful and is still running for this target group.

During the Centre for Easy-to-Read era there were several other projects, many of them linked to **informative texts and the Easy Language Service**. One example is *Comprehensible Medical Journals – how the patient can understand the result of x-rays*, a project run together with Stockholm University and the medical university *Karolinska Institutet*. The language used by medical professionals was sometimes contradictory to the concepts that the general public understood. For example, how ‘the result of the test is negative’ is to be understood in most cases as something positive. Another project was *Comprehensible Court Rulings*. In a report and a proposal, the Government highlighted that the majority of people involved in a court case did not fully understand the process nor the ruling (Project Begripliga domar 2020). A project began within the Swedish Courts and specifically the Court of Appeal in western Sweden. It became clear that the majority of difficult words used in the ruling documents were just old-fashioned or bureaucratic, and not even judicial words (Bohman 2013). Thus, they could easily be changed.

Over the years, interesting co-operation and **exchanges on Easy language issues within the European and the Nordic countries** took place. One example was the *Grundtvig 2-project European Learning Partnership on Easy-to-read and Plain Language* financed by the EU’s Sokrates Program in early 2000 (Bengt Fredriksson, personal communication October 2020). The aim was to increase European co-operation regarding Easy Language news and to see whether it was possible to develop a European Easy Language newspaper with news about Europe and the EU. The participants were the *Plain English Campaign* (United Kingdom), *Pa let dansk* (Denmark), *8 Sidor* (Sweden), *Klartale* (Norway), *Wablieft* (Belgium), *Selkosanomat/LL-bladet* (Finland) and *Eenvoudig communiceren* (the Netherlands). Five to six meetings were held with fruitful exchanges of experiences and ideas, but the project was cancelled when Sokrates did not grant funding for a second phase.

The Nordic Culture Point (*Nordisk kulturkontakt*) funded a programme for Easy Language networking in the Nordic countries in 2013. The programme was called *Lättläst – ett nordiskt nätverk* (Easy-to-Read – a Nordic Network). Organizations who work with easy-to-read in Finland, Norway and Sweden wanted to exchange knowhow with each other and bring this expertise to the general public in the different countries. Via the Nordic Culture Point, the

Finnish Centre for Easy Language (*Selkokeskus*), the Swedish-speaking Centre for Easy to Read in Finland (*LL-Center*), Books for everyone (*Leser søker bok*) in Norway, and the Centre for Easy-to-Read (Sweden) received funding for three meetings to increase co-operation between the countries and to exchange experiences regarding Easy Language. Meetings were held in Stockholm and Helsinki in 2014, and in Oslo in early 2015. These meetings were supposed to be the first steps to much closer Nordic Easy Language co-operation (Nordisk kulturkontakt 2021), but with the closedown of the Centre for Easy-to-Read, the initiative was put on hold.

When the Centre for Easy-to-Read was merged with MTM, an Erasmus+ project called *Puzzle* was just about to start. The aim of the project was to use Easy Language in different ways to increase knowledge about Human Rights for people with intellectual disabilities in European countries. Sweden's role in the project was Easy Language expert. The project ran from 2015 to 2017. One of the former Centre for Easy-to-Read employees worked with the project at MTM (Puzzle Project 2021).

## 7 Education and research

As mentioned above, the development of Easy Language in Sweden has been a process of learning-by-doing. Since the Swedish National Association for People with Intellectual Disability in so many ways initiated the need for Easy Language in Sweden, it has been natural to have a dialogue with representatives of the challenged readers since the very beginning. As already mentioned, the Centre for Easy-to-Read ran regular training on how to write Easy Language and many of today's Easy Language writers were trained there.

The training available today is offered by a few private businesses that also offer Easy Language adaptation services. The adult study organization *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* runs training for their study circle leaders. The Centre for Easy-to-Read and *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* co-operated for a long time on various areas of Easy Language. A handful of *Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan* employees have been trained as Easy Language trainers. Of

course, some informal training takes place between colleagues in organizations with in-house Easy Language competence and experience.

There is no higher education in Easy Language in Sweden. The Universities of Gothenburg, Lund, Stockholm and Umeå offer a Program for Professional Language Consultants (*språkkonsulter*), but this focuses on Plain Language and does not cover Easy Language. For a number of years, the Mälardalen University in Eskilstuna/Västerås has offered a 7.5-point course on Comprehensible Information which allocates Easy Language a thematic day. The course is offered as part of the University's Information Design programme (Mälardalens högskola 2021).

As already mentioned, for many years, Easy Language had a low status in Sweden. It was seen as concerning a very marginalized group, and working with this target group was not considered to require special skills. This may be the main reason for the lack of interest from the academic world in researching this topic. During its last years, the Centre for Easy-to-Read had a Scientific Advisory Committee, the mission of which was to create a closer connection between the Centre and the academies and to inspire research to back up 'learning-by-doing' practice with scientifically proven arguments and further develop Easy Language. However, very little research was conducted as a result.

The studies that have been conducted over the years have mainly been papers produced at bachelor's or master's level. Some have been written by students at the Program for Professional Language Consultants, but linguistic students and students studying information techniques have also produced papers. A list of some of the more recent ones can be found on the MTM website (Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier 2021c). No in-depth research has been carried out on Easy Language, and no Easy Language projects are currently underway, besides the international standardization project mentioned in Section 5 (Maria O'Donnell, personal communication September 2020). The *Begriplig text* project mentioned in Section 3 focused mainly on the presentation aspect of information in Easy Language rather than concept as a whole.

## 8 Future perspectives

As described earlier in this chapter, the development of Easy Language in Sweden has faced multiple challenges over the last five years. The Government's decision to relocate MTM from Stockholm to Malmö led to a major decline in Easy Language competence within the agency. Regaining this competence and putting Easy Language back on the agenda will be a great challenge in the years to come.

Although one of the practical consequences of the recent changes may be variation in the quality of Easy Language informative texts and literature, some experienced trainers and writers of Easy Language are successfully providing the service on a freelance basis. In addition, several national agencies, local municipalities and organizations have staff that produce in-house Easy Language information.

The challenge is to keep up a consensus on the need for Easy Language, on the definition of Easy Language and to maintain the good quality of Easy Language productions. Challenged readers know what is functional and accessible for them. Therefore, the focus should be much more on the readers themselves. Continuous, close co-operation between the producers and the readers is crucial for the development of Easy Language. It is also important to continue the discussion on the relation between Plain Language and Easy Language in a constructive way, and to accept that both are needed. The impact of active advocates for Easy Language should not be underestimated, and Easy Language should be developed by working closely with the academic world.

Sweden has decided that society must be accessible to all citizens. The country has ratified UN Covenants and implemented laws on this. Accessibility also means Easy Language. A fairly large percentage of the population needs Easy Language to be able to read literature, news and informative texts. The mission of MTM is to become a centre of excellence for accessible reading, which includes Easy Language.

To move forward, we all need to learn from history. We have taken many positive steps forward in Sweden and continue to do so, to make our society a society for all. Now we all need to keep walking in the same direction regarding Easy Language.

## Author

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Swedish.

Vad är en demokrati?

Sverige är en demokrati.

Demokrati är ett grekiskt ord  
som betyder att folket bestämmer.

Vi som bor i Sverige  
får vara med och välja  
vilka som ska bestämma i vårt land.

Vi får rösta på det parti och de politiker  
som vi tycker har den klokaste politiken.

Vi väljer representanter, politiker,  
som sedan får bestämma.

Det kallas för representativ demokrati.

I Sverige har vi allmän och lika rösträtt.

Det betyder att alla vuxna får rösta  
och att varje röst är lika mycket värd.

Source: Study material *Mitt val* produced by Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan by Ulla Bohman. Targeted for persons with intellectual disability.

[What is a democracy?

Sweden is a democracy.

The word democracy is a Greek word  
which means people make the decisions.

All adults who live in Sweden  
can participate and elect  
who should make decisions for our country.

We can vote for parties and politicians  
that we think have the best ideas.

We elect representatives, politicians,  
who then make decisions for the country.

This is called representative democracy.

We have a universal and equal right to vote in Sweden.

It means that all adults have the right to vote  
and that all votes are counted equally.]



MARIA O'DONNELL, MARIA RAMDÉN  
(FROM THE SWEDISH AGENCY FOR ACCESSIBLE MEDIA, MTM)

## Addition to *Easy Language in Sweden*

Overview of the Easy Language work  
at the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM)

Since 2015, the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (*Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier, MTM*) has been instructed by the Government to serve as a national knowledge centre for accessible media. MTM should strive to ensure that everyone in Sweden has access to literature and to information about society on their own terms, regardless of their reading skills or any disabilities they may have. To this end, MTM produces and distributes talking newspapers, talking books, Braille books, Easy Language literature and Easy Language news. Its tasks include publishing and distributing Easy Language literature where commercial players do not. MTM also publishes the independent Easy Language newspaper *8 Sidor*. Further, it has been given a special task to support Swedish schools in the field of Easy Language.

MTM focuses on the needs of readers. Having competence in Braille, talking books and Easy Language in a single government agency creates unique opportunities to meet each reader's needs. For example, readers who prefer to alternate between reading Easy Language texts and listening to talking books should be given the opportunity to do so. MTM is also involved in the implementation of the European Accessibility Act, which aims to make it even easier for readers to read on their own terms.

MTM strives not only to promote reading but also to **boost the Easy Language literature market**. More Easy Language books are being published in Sweden today than ever before. Over 200 new titles from several publishers are expected in 2021. MTM's publishing house *LL-förlaget*, is meant to complement commercial publishers. For this reason, it no longer publishes adap-

tations, only original works in Easy Swedish. Its output matches its specific target groups: readers with intellectual or neuropsychiatric disabilities, elderly people with dementia, and learners of Swedish. *LL-förlaget's* website provides not only information on its output but also general information on Easy Language. *8 Sidor* is Sweden's only **newspaper** in Easy Swedish. It is published in printed form once a week and updated online every day. In 2020, the number of visits to its website increased by 50% to 1.2 million. The news published in *8 Sidor* is also available in spoken form, as a talking newspaper, and in Braille.

Swedish publishing houses, libraries, writers, and language consultants all possess solid, in-depth practical knowledge about Easy Language texts, which has been tried and tested. However, as there has been relatively little research on Easy Language, evidence-based knowledge is limited. One way to enhance our understanding of Easy Language texts is to highlight the work processes of the authors and their editors. To this end, Åsa Wengelin, Professor of Swedish at the University of Gothenburg, will study how an Easy Language novel comes into being by interviewing and following the work of its author and editor. In addition, *LL-förlaget* has launched a reader survey to establish which groups find that having line breaks at the end of phrases makes reading easier for them.

MTM also has a **scientific advisory board** (Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier 2021). Its duties are to ensure that MTM monitors and disseminates relevant findings from any of the scarce studies of Easy Language literature and news as well as other accessible media and their target groups. Under a collaboration agreement, MTM works with Mälardalen University to promote research in the field of Easy Language information on society. MTM also works on a regular basis with bachelor's and master's programme students from other universities who study topics related to MTM agency's work and mission. Alongside Ireland, Spain, Japan, and China, MTM is part of an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Easy Language project <sup>1</sup>. The standard is expected to be ready in a year. Recommendations and writing advice for Easy Swedish can be found on the websites of both MTM and *LL-förlaget*. MTM participated in a multi-annual project called Understandable Text (*Begriplig*

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1 ISO/IEC WD 23859-1. Information technology – User interfaces – Part 1: Guidance on making written text easy to read and easy to understand.

*text*). The aim was to work with users to determine what an understandable text might look like. At the request of MTM, Stefan Johansson, PhD at the Royal Institute of Technology, wrote a scientific article on the results of the project (forthcoming). The project also yielded a manual entitled *19 Tips for Writing Understandably* (Begriflig text 2020).

One important aspect of MTM's work is to **provide information** on Easy Language and to promote its use. To this end, it publishes two magazines. One of these, *Läsombudet*, targets 'Reading Ambassadors' (care workers who provide reading support) and 'Readers-aloud' (volunteers who visit residential institutions, adult daycare centres, etc., to read aloud to residents and users). The other magazine, *Läsliv*, is intended for all those who make accessible literature available in one way or another, such as staff at schools and libraries. Both magazines contain information on Easy Language books, lectures, webinars and new research findings in the field of Easy Language. To support the 4000 Reading Ambassadors in elderly care and care for people with intellectual disabilities, MTM provides information on its website, in newsletters and in one of its magazines, and also organizes whole-day inspirational sessions, training courses, workshops, and webinars. As part of its reading-promotion activities aimed at schools, MTM develops study and guidance material for most of the books published by *LL-förlaget*.

Easy Language work is constantly under development. At present, about twenty members of MTM's staff take active part in Easy Language efforts. To ensure further development in the field, MTM also studies the different types of support required by readers with different needs. For example, it recently carried out a comprehensive reader survey to find out how readers with different needs understand and perceive accessible crisis information during the COVID-19 pandemic when Easy Language is one of the various formats available (Begrifsam 2020). Such user surveys provide those of us who work on Easy Language with invaluable information that will help us even better provide our readers with what they need.

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## Easy Language in Switzerland

### 1 Introduction

Since the Middle Ages, Switzerland has developed from a network of alliances of towns and regions into a federal state of 26 cantons. The foundation stone of modern Switzerland is the 1848 constitution, which emphasizes the country's immutable diversity and reflects it in a political system in which federal authorities (based in the capital Bern), cantons and municipalities work together. Among other things, this arrangement determines the financial flow in the public sector. The federal system also results in differences and peculiarities among municipalities, regions and cantons in many fields such as education, social services, and administration. Another special feature of the Swiss political system is its direct democracy, which enables people to express their opinions on federal government decisions and to propose constitutional amendments. The principle of concordance also shapes Swiss politics, as it involves a great number of actors (parties, associations, minorities, social groups) in the political process and leads to slow, consensus-oriented processes to find compromises among actors and different linguistic, social and political-cultural groups. Although the basic infrastructure and public services should in principle be available to all population groups and regions, there are gaps

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1 Until now, the topic of Easy Language in Switzerland has been dealt with in a fragmentary fashion in both theory and practice, in different language regions, and in attitudes and guidelines. In order to obtain the most complete picture possible and to do justice to the Swiss multilingual and federal systems, we decided to form a collective of authors which represented all language regions, practitioners and researchers. The research and writing process was thus also a process of networking and understanding.

in supply in urban centres, rural areas and mountain valleys, some of which are very remote.

Switzerland (surface of 41 285 km<sup>2</sup>) is bordered by Italy to the south, Germany to the north, Austria and Liechtenstein to the east, and France to the west. Although this puts the country at the heart of Europe, it is a member of neither the EU nor the European Monetary Union.

In 2019, the total population of Switzerland was estimated to be 8.5 million. Over two million are foreign nationals. Besides the four national languages, the most widely spoken languages are English and Portuguese. Spanish, Serbian, Croatian, and Albanian are also common (Swiss Confederation 2020). Like many European countries, Switzerland has an ageing population: life expectancy is currently 85.4 years for women and 81.7 years for men and rising. Approximately 1.7 million people with disabilities<sup>2</sup> (physical, mental or sensory impairments, or other) live in Switzerland.

Switzerland is a multilingual country. The language(s) spoken in the cantons varies/vary according to geographical position and proximity to adjacent linguistic regions (see Figure 1). In German-speaking Switzerland, people speak one of the many Alemannic dialects collectively called Swiss German. Standard German (*Standarddeutsch*, *Schriftdeutsch*) is mainly used for written and official communication. Standard German and the Swiss German dialects differ on all linguistic levels, and generally, young children only learn Standard German when they start school. French is spoken in the western part of Switzerland (Romandie), and Italian in Ticino and the southern valleys of Graubünden. The written forms of these languages are mostly the same as the French and Italian used in the neighbouring countries, but the spoken forms have some specific variations (mainly lexical and phonological). Finally, Romansh, a Rhaeto-Romanic language is spoken widely in the canton of Graubünden. Only German, French and Italian are official languages of the Swiss Confederation, and all official federal documents (legislation, reports, websites, brochures and building signage) must be trilingual. Federal authorities only use Romansh when communicating with Romansh speakers.

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2 The FSO defines 'persons with disabilities as under the Disability Discrimination Act' as people with a long-standing health problem whose participation in common activities is limited (severely or not). Thus the FSO uses the WHO definition of disability rather than a medical one.

‘English, though not an official language, is often used to bridge the divides, and a significant proportion of official documentation is available in English’ (Swissinfo 2019). More than a third of the population uses only one language, while another third uses two languages at least once a week, and a quarter regularly uses three or more languages (FSO 2014).

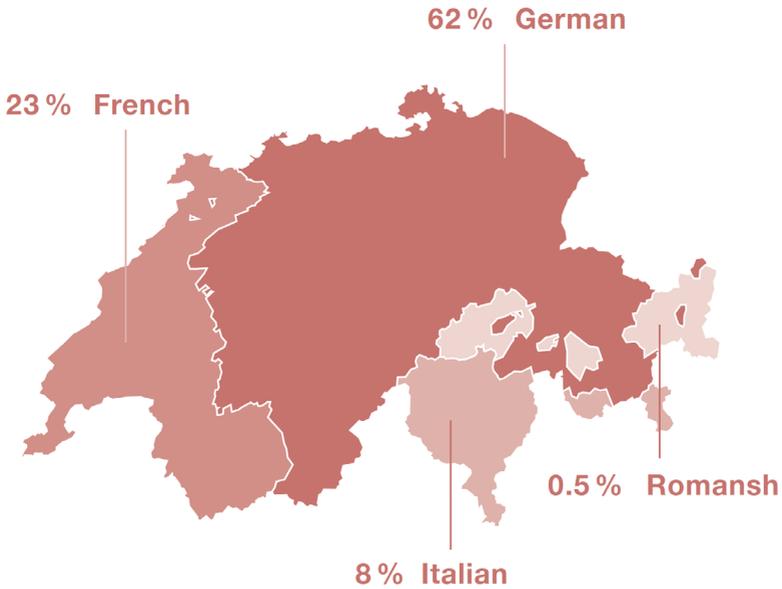


Figure 1: Distribution of national languages in Switzerland (Federal Chancellery 2021: 9)

## 2 Historical perspectives

Easy Language has only recently found some degree of recognition in public, professional and academic discourse in Switzerland. The most significant milestones in its development are listed in Table 1.

2004	Federal Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Disability Discrimination Act, cf. DDA 2002) came into force
2006	A cohort of Swiss advocacy associations and professionals formed the 'Easy Language Network' ( <i>Netzwerk Leichte Sprache</i> ) <sup>3</sup> together with members from Germany, Austria, Italy (South Tyrol), Luxembourg and Holland
2014	Switzerland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
	First translation agency and training initiative in German-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' ( <i>Büro Leichte Sprache, WohnWerk Basel</i> ) <sup>4</sup>
2015	Federal Council's Action Plan on e-Accessibility (IDA BF 2015)
	First research project on Easy Language (Antener et al. 2015)
2016	First conference on Easy Language ( <i>Tagung Leichte Sprache</i> ) <sup>5</sup>
	First training initiative in French-speaking Switzerland ( <i>textoh!</i> ) <sup>6</sup>
2017	First translation agency in French-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' ( <i>Bureau langage simplifié Pro Infirmis Fribourg</i> ) <sup>7</sup>
	First book in Easy German (Krapf 2017)
	First version of an Easy Language fact sheet (FBED 2019, April) issued by the Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities ( <i>Eidgenössisches Büro für die Gleichstellung von Menschen mit Behinderungen, FBED</i> )
	First wide-scope research project on barrier-free communication <sup>8</sup> (Jekat and Massey 2018, Bouillon et al. 2018, Jekat et al. 2021)

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3 Das Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, <https://www.leichte-sprache.org/>. In 2013, the network became the *Verein Netzwerk Leichte Sprache e.V.*

4 WohnWerk, <https://www.leichte-sprache-basel.ch>

5 Tagung Leichte Sprache, <https://www.einfachesprache.ch/blog/tagung-leichte-sprache-impressionen/>

6 Textoh! Cours, <https://www.textoh.ch/cours/>

7 Bureau langage simplifié, <https://www.langage-simplifie.ch/fr.html>

8 Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication, <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/research/barrier-free-communication/>

2019	First translation agency in Italian-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' ( <i>Servizio Lingua facile Pro Infirmis Ticino e Moesano</i> ) <sup>9</sup>
2020	Third version of the eCH-0059 e-Accessibility Standard (e-CH 2020) includes requirements for digital content in Easy Language and sign language

Table 1: Milestones in the development of Easy Language in Switzerland.

As Table 1 shows, Switzerland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2014. In Switzerland, the treaty-making procedure requires widespread consultation among cantons, political parties, national and municipal umbrella associations, and pressure groups before international treaty legislation can be introduced (cf. Federal Council 2012). This procedure aims to assess how the ratification of a treaty will affect Swiss law. It may account for Switzerland's delay in ratifying the CRPD and fulfilling its treaty obligations.

In its 2016 Initial State Report (UN Committee 2018) on the measures taken to implement the CRPD, Switzerland expressed overall satisfaction with the implementation of Article 21:

With regard to access to information for persons with mental disabilities, language that is easy to read and understand is developing increasingly in Switzerland. Various projects to promote it have received support (UN Committee 2018: 28).

In fact, despite considerable progress in recent years, the country still has no comprehensive, coherent strategy for meeting CRPD obligations. In reply to Switzerland's Initial Report, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2019: 5) demanded evidence of laws, policies and programmes at the federal, cantonal and communal levels that ensure that information provided to the public is accessible to people with disabilities and that the use of Easy Language is facilitated in official interactions. Similarly, Inclusion Handicap, the umbrella body of Swiss organizations for people with disabilities, chal-

9 Servizio di Lingua facile, <https://www.servizio-lingua-facile.ch/it.html>

lenged the federal government to provide information about which cantons have fulfilled their duty to ensure accessible communication for people with disabilities in their laws (cf. *alternative or Shadow Report, Inclusion Handicap 2019: 20*).

In a recent report on Switzerland's disability policy, the Federal Council admitted that the commitment to promoting barrier-free access to information and communication services must be strengthened to take into account the challenges of digitalization, and to extend the provision of information in accessible formats, including Easy Language and sign language (Federal Council 2018: 24).

Switzerland's delay in implementing the treaty obligations may help explain why the concept of Easy Language still receives so little recognition among the general public. Nonetheless, as Table 1 shows, the number of translation agencies and training programmes using Easy Language has steadily increased since 2014. The development of Easy Language in the different linguistic regions in Switzerland seems, in fact, to mirror the pace at which initiatives have been progressing in Germany and Austria (see chapters on Austria and Germany) and in France and Italy (see chapter on Italy).

In recent years, Easy Language has also become a focus of academic research and a growing number of interdisciplinary projects (see Section 8). Furthermore, since Switzerland ratified the CRPD, federal initiatives for e-accessibility have gained considerable momentum. The Action Plan on e-Accessibility 2015–2017 (IDA BF 2015) paved the way for improved accessibility to the Confederation's websites, digital documents and applications (see Section 6). In the context of the 2020–2023 eGovernment Strategy Switzerland (Federal Council 2019, November), the third version of the eCH-0059 e-Accessibility Standard (e-CH 2020) introduced Easy Language and sign language as requirements for barrier-free access to the websites and digital applications of public sector bodies. This new standard is based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG 2.1) and inspired by the EU Web Accessibility Directive.

### 3 Current situation

The current Easy Language situation in Switzerland is characterized by the multilingualism of the country on the one hand and its increasing emergence on the other – most recently after the ratification of the CRPD.

#### 3.1 Definitions

Because Switzerland is multilingual and its administrative and political structures result in different methods, rules and standards in policymaking, there is no common terminology to refer to Easy Language. Table 2 presents an overview of related terms.

German-speaking regions	<i>Einfache Sprache</i> (= Plain Language) <i>Leichte Sprache</i> (= Easy Language, Easy German) <i>Leicht verständliche Sprache</i> (= Easily understandable language)*
French-speaking regions	<i>Langage facile à lire et à comprendre</i> (FALC) (= Easy French) <i>Langage simplifié</i> * <i>Langue facile à lire</i> *
Italian-speaking regions	<i>Linguaggio facile da leggere</i> (= Easy Italian) <i>Lingua facile</i> * <i>Linguaggio semplificato</i> *
Rumantch-speaking regions	No information available

\*No distinction between Easy and Plain Language

Table 2: Overview of terminology used in Switzerland

In German-speaking Switzerland, Standard German is used in official correspondence, with some Swiss variants in vocabulary and syntax. The easily understandable form of the written language is therefore largely the same as that used in Germany and Austria. The terms *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language) and *Leicht verständliche Sprache* (Easily understandable language) are the most common when it comes to simplified texts. Both refer to the fact that a text can

be made more comprehensible to inexperienced readers by simplifying both the form and the layout and, depending on the approach, sometimes also the content. The term *Leichte Sprache* is associated with the Network Easy Language, through which representatives from several European countries promote the idea that complex language forms a barrier for people with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion Europe uses the same term and suggests a set of criteria to make texts easy to read. If a text meets these criteria, then it can use the association's 'easy-to-read' logo. The widely used *Regelwerk Duden* (Bredel and Maaß 2016b) also uses the term *Leichte Sprache* and proposes a set of guidelines for simplifying texts. In contrast to Inclusion Europe, the *Regelwerk Duden* (Bredel and Maaß 2016b) explicitly addresses a heterogeneous target group of potential beneficiaries of Easy Language.

*Leicht verständliche Sprache* is also used to designate an adapted language form that aims to enhance the understanding and participation of people with low literacy skills (e.g., the *capito* method, see chapter on Austria). Various principles are applied to render a text accessible to a specific user group and assign it one of three different language levels (A1, A2, B1) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This terminology makes no formal distinction between Easy Language and Plain Language. Thus it appears that although different labels are used, simplified language forms are best understood as being on a continuum (see chapter on Finland).

Easy French and Easy Italian are currently referred to as *Langage facile à lire et à comprendre* (FALC) and *Linguaggio facile da leggere* (cf. Inclusion Europe 2009). Other common terms (see Table 2) are *Langage simplifié*, and *Lingua facile* (cf. Pro Infirmis 2020<sup>10</sup>) and *Langue facile à lire* and *Linguaggio semplificato* (cf. FBED 2019) respectively. While Inclusion Europe has a strict set of guidelines for Easy Language and primarily targets people with intellectual disabilities, the labels used by Pro Infirmis suggest no formal distinction between Easy and Plain Language (see Table 2). *Pro Infirmis* agencies in Fribourg, Ticino and Zurich (Bureau for Easy Language) award translations their own seals of approval (see Figure 2). Depending on clients' communication needs, texts are translated into different levels of comprehension, namely, A1 (very

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10 Pro Infirmis, How we work, <https://www.servizio-lingua-facile.ch/it/come-lavoriamo.html>

easy to understand), A2 (easy to understand) and B1 (intermediate difficulty level), which broadly correspond to the CEFR levels.

At the time of writing, the authors were not aware of any initiatives to develop an Easy Language variant for the standardized written Rumantsch Grischun used in the Romansh-speaking region of Switzerland.



Figure 2: *Pro Infirmis*' seals of approval issued by the Bureau for Easy Language (Fribourg, Ticino, Zurich)

It could be argued that shared terminology might significantly reinforce the concept of Easy Language in Switzerland, as is the case in countries such as France and Italy (see chapter on Italy).

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

At first sight, the Swiss legal system seems not to provide legislation designed to ensure access to information and communication for people with speech impairments and to enable them to participate fully and equally in society. Further investigation, however, and the interpretation of legislation and its abstract terms according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reveal that Switzerland is obliged to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to guarantee that people with disabilities have equal access to the information and communication provided to the general public as a precondition for living independently and fully and equally participating in the democracy that Switzerland claims to be. In implementation, the principle of proportionality, as laid down in the Swiss

**Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)** and the CRPD, may nonetheless allow political and economic interests to restrict this right.

At the federal level, several acts prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities. Article 8 paragraph 2 of the **Federal Constitution** (Bundesverfassung, BV) protects people with disabilities against discrimination both in law and in practice, including against structural discrimination. This protection covers not only explicit discrimination on the grounds of disability, but also neutral acts or regulations that result in people with disabilities being regularly disadvantaged (Schefer and Hess-Klein 2014: 22, Rieder 2003: 232–35). Art. 8 para. 4 BV mandates legislation to protect people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities against actual and structural discrimination, as a supplement to the general prohibition in Art. 8 para. 2 BV. The legislative mandate also addresses the cantons, which must take measures in all areas to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities (Waldmann 2003: 538).

The DDA formulates an unconditional obligation for the state service provider to adapt their services if they cannot be accessed or only accessed with difficulty by people with disabilities (Art. 2 para. 4; Art. 3 lit. e). It is the responsibility of the Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities to take steps to prevent, reduce or eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in service provision (Art. 5). Only addressing the Confederation, however, Art. 14 para. 1 in the DDA stipulates measures to improve access to information on the internet, and Art. 11 of the **Disability Rights Ordinance** (*Behindertengleichstellungsverordnung*, BehiV) requires that access to and adapted communication with state authorities during direct contact are made possible for people with speech and hearing impairments. In accordance with Art. 10 para. 2 of the BehiV and the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)**, federal guidelines for the design of barrier-free internet (P028) have been issued. All federal websites must achieve an AA conformity level. Additional recommendations in an appendix to the P028 guidelines advocate that level AAA conformity is to be reached ‘as far as possible’. The use of sign language videos is expressly recommended for websites. The recommendations do not refer to Easy Language, although the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) also bases its comments in WCAG 2.0 Guideline 3.1.5. (on comprehensibility) on the European Easy-to-Read Guidelines.

Finally, private service providers are not obliged to take active steps to provide services specially adapted to people with disabilities. In cases of discrimination, Art. 11 para. 2 DDA only grants the right to compensation (Schefer and Hess-Klein 2014: 296–303).

The protective provisions are largely formulated in abstract terms and do not go so far as to refer explicitly to Easy Language as a source of help and support for those with speech and hearing impairments. In comparison, CRPD specifications are detailed and far-reaching. In connection with Articles 9 and 21 of the Convention, General Comment No 2 makes explicit reference to the use of ‘easy-to-read’ formats to ensure accessibility to information and communication for people with disabilities.

Having ratified the CRPD, Switzerland is in principle obliged to ensure that all government policy and services conform with its obligations, including people with disabilities having access to information and communication. As a State Party, Switzerland is called upon to make information intended for the general public available ‘in a timely manner and without additional cost’, in accessible formats suitable for various types of disabilities. It must promote appropriate forms of assistance and support to ensure access to information and communication (Art. 21 CRPD).

However, the way in which a provision of international law or its partial content is applied is ultimately decided by the national constitutional law. In the case of economic, social and cultural rights, Switzerland rejects their enforceability and considers those rights merely an interpretative aid in the application of relevant constitutional law (Federal Council 2013; FCD 130 I 113). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has repeatedly criticized Switzerland because in general, individuals in Switzerland cannot invoke economic, social and cultural rights before the authorities or courts (CESCR Concluding observations Switzerland 1998 or 2010, Künzli et al. 2014).

In addition, measures to prevent, eliminate or reduce the disadvantages of people with disabilities are generally subject to the principle of proportionality, which is the basis of both the DDA and the CRPD. The obligation to adapt services to the needs of those with disabilities either does not exist, or no claim can be made for the elimination or omission of service accessibility disadvantages

if the economic effort and the expected benefit for the disabled person are not in balance (Art. 11 para. 1 DDA). The legislator has not yet defined the criteria for assessing proportionality. On the one hand, quantitative, qualitative and temporal factors can play a role in measuring the benefit of adjustments. The yardstick to be considered is the respective collective of people with disabilities and not individual cases (Tschannen and Elser 2012: 28). On the other hand, if the elimination or omission of a disadvantage in the use of a service is economically unreasonable, then the state authority is obliged to offer an alternative solution, tailored to the specific circumstances. Disadvantages that cannot be eliminated at reasonable cost must be compensated, to the greatest extent possible (Art. 12 para. 3 DDA).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

At the federal level, the **Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities** (FBED) plays a leading role in advocating Easy Language implementation. The FBED issued the first online factsheet on Easy Language, regularly provides public interest texts in Easy Language, and provides funding for accessibility projects (among others).

One of the pioneer providers of Easy Language courses in further education in Switzerland is *WohnWerk Basel*, a partially private foundation that works for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Further important stakeholders can be found among **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). The most active of these are *Insieme*, a pool of over fifty parents' associations representing the interests of people with intellectual disabilities, and *Pro Infirmis*, Switzerland's largest professional organization for people with disabilities. *Pro Infirmis* runs several translation agencies that offer Easy Language services throughout Switzerland (see Table 1). *INSOS Switzerland*, a Swiss umbrella organization of service providers for people with disabilities, is also making considerable efforts to motivate social institutions to consistently use Easy Language. Furthermore, *capito Zürich*, the only Swiss partner in the *capito* network, has been offering translations and training in easy-to-understand language since 2018. An ever-growing number of **independent translators** now provide Easy

Language services across Switzerland, and several **communication agencies** promote and offer simplified text editing<sup>11</sup>.

Several **higher education institutions** play a stakeholder role by implementing Easy Language in their study programmes (see more details in Section 7), by researching Easy Language or by providing Easy Language services and training. Notable examples are the School for Special Needs Education in Zurich (HfH), the Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg, the School of Applied Linguistics at the Zurich University for Applied Sciences (ZHAW), the School for Social Work at the University for Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) and the Institute for Computational Linguistics at the University of Zurich.

In addition, most recently, **Swiss national media** have echoed the progressive development of Easy Language in the linguistic regions (cf. Bloch 2019, Visetti 2019, Gasser 2019, Jeitziner and Cornehl 2020, among others), thereby raising awareness of and interest in the potential benefits of Easy Language for the target populations.

Nonetheless, Easy Language (more than Plain Language) is frequently associated with stigmatized groups or conditions in Switzerland. Jekat et al. (2020) argue that the central function of Easy Language as a gateway to improving reading skills in a first or a second language for specific target groups is still scarcely acknowledged in Swiss public discourse. Moreover, Switzerland did not take part in Inclusion Europe's 'Pathways' projects<sup>12</sup>, which played a crucial role in raising awareness of the potential of Easy Language in most European countries.

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11 E.g., Textoh! <https://www.textoh.ch/>, Simpletext, <https://www.simpletext.ch/>; Supertext, <https://www.supertext.ch/>

12 Cf. Inclusion Europe Pathways, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/> and Easy to Read, <https://easy-to-read.eu/projects/>

## 4 Target groups

Table 3<sup>13</sup> shows the estimated figures per primary target group for Easy Language services in Switzerland. It should be stressed, however, that not all members of the target population necessarily need Easy Language:

	Group size (estimate)	Source
Intellectual disability	50 000	FBED (n.d.)
Deafness	10 000	SGB-FSS (n.d.)
Aphasia	5000 new patients every year	Koenig-Bruhin et al. (2013)
Dementia (including Alzheimer's disease)	110 000	FOPH and CMPH (2018)
Functional illiteracy	800 000 – 1 000 000 aged 16 or over	OECD and Statistics Canada (2005); Guggisberg et al. (2007)
Immigrant background and no national language in one's linguistic repertoire	> 200 000 aged 15 or over	FSO (2018a)

Table 3: Estimates of primary target populations in Switzerland

The collective primary target population for Easy Language services in Switzerland includes an estimated 50 000 people with an intellectual disability (FBED n.d.), as well as people with specific learning difficulties<sup>14</sup> such as dyslexia<sup>15</sup>. Easy Language is essential for self-advocates with intellectual disabilities to be active citizens (cf. Anffas Nazionale 2016); it can also facilitate the develop-

13 The table structure is freely adapted from Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 31).

14 To avoid terminological ambiguity, and in line with current professional and academic discourse, 'intellectual disability' and 'specific learning difficulty' are understood as two clearly demarcated concepts here.

15 There are no current official statistics for the incidence of dyslexia in Switzerland, but it is estimated that, in Europe, 3% to 4% of the population has a reading, spelling, or combined reading-spelling disorder (cf. European Dyslexia Association, <https://www.eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia/>).

ment of basic reading skills for people with dyslexia (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 33). Recent studies show that considerable numbers of people in Switzerland have low levels of literacy and numeracy. According to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) of 2003–2007 (OECD and Statistics Canada 2005), around 16%<sup>16</sup> of the Swiss population aged between 16 and 65 (approximately 800 000, or one in six adults) lacks functional literacy skills. Notably, the figures in Italian-speaking Switzerland are significantly lower than the Swiss average in both prose and document literacy (FSO 2005). This means that low-skilled adults in Switzerland struggle to understand written communication in standard German, French or Italian. New data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) will be available in the next three to four years. Considering the growing diversity of the Swiss population, ongoing digitalization, and the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Konsortium PISA.ch 2019) which indicated below-average reading scores among Swiss 15-year-olds, we can expect the new data to reveal a challenging scenario nationwide. Easy Language has the potential to address this issue.

A good command of at least one national language might be seen as an essential requirement for successful integration into Swiss society. Between 2014 and 2016, among the population aged 15 and over with a first-generation immigration background<sup>17</sup>, almost one in ten people (over 200 000) had no national language in their linguistic repertoire (this repertoire involves the main language, the language usually spoken at home/with relatives and the language usually spoken at work/in school) (FSO 2018a). Furthermore, according to the 2017 Swiss Labour Force Survey, among economically inactive and unemployed people (as defined by the International Labour Organization), 42% declared that they needed to improve their skills in an official language in order to find suitable work (FSO 2018b). First-generation immigrants expressed the greatest need for improvement (57%) (FSO 2018b). As of 1st Janu-

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16 Percentage of adults aged 16–65 assessed as being at Level 1 (on a prose literacy scale from 1 to 5, in which 5 is the highest measured level of literacy) (FSO 2005). This share of the Swiss population may include people from other target groups, e.g. people with a poor command of a national language.

17 The first-generation migrant population includes all foreign nationals born abroad, as well foreign-born naturalized Swiss citizens (FSO and SAKE 2019)

ary 2019, the revised Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA 2020, April) stipulates a certain level of integration in Switzerland (including proof of official language skills) as a prerequisite for obtaining and retaining a Swiss residency permit. First-generation immigrants could greatly benefit from Easy Language to develop or improve their independent reading skills, second language acquisition and, ultimately, labour market integration (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 39–40).

Another significant demographic trend in Switzerland is the ageing population. In 2019, the number of people aged 65 or older increased by nearly 2% and now make up just under one fifth of the total. This entails urgent and unmet health care needs related to chronic diseases, including cognitive decline and dementia, aphasia, eye disease and hearing loss, and multi-morbidity. Approximately 110 000 people are estimated to be living with dementia in Switzerland, a figure that increases by an estimated 25 000 annually. Over the age of 65, prevalence rates of dementia rise sharply (FOPH and CMPH 2018: 7). Age-related communication problems affect important functions such as access to health care and the maintenance of social roles. Easy Language policies could reduce barriers to comprehension, and not least, facilitate communication between patients and health professionals.

Furthermore, according to the Swiss Federation of the Deaf (SGB-FSS n.d.), almost 10 000 people in Switzerland are prelingually deaf or profoundly hard of hearing, and approximately one million have some hearing loss (of the latter, half are working-age adults). The prelingually deaf regularly encounter difficulties in acquiring spoken and written language, which can seriously affect their social participation. A recent study (Hille et al. 2020) revealed that the unemployment rate among deaf and hearing-impaired people is about three times higher than the average. Hille et al. (2020: 21) cite evidence that good communication skills (spoken or sign language), literacy, and a willingness to engage in lifelong learning are prerequisites for professional success. Easy Language can play a crucial role in helping prelingually deaf people acquire these skills (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 35–36).

## 5 Guidelines

In September 2020, an online survey<sup>18</sup> among Easy Language service providers in Switzerland collected information on their professional activities. This survey has provided valuable information that offers insights into current issues in Easy Language translation practices in Switzerland. Swiss practitioners reported adhering to specific guidelines when writing and translating into Easy Language; for instance, the majority of Swiss German respondents followed Bredel and Maaß (2016b). Swiss French respondents stated that they sometimes followed several guidelines at the same time (e.g., Ruel and Allaire 2018, Inclusion Europe 2009), including those for *Leichte Sprache*. This suggests that translators may need additional orientation materials to tackle translation problems and to develop effective translation strategies. For an illustration of the Easy Language guidelines used in Switzerland, see Appendix 1.

According to our survey data, translations from Standard into Easy Language are the most common. However, whereas Swiss German respondents provide few interlingual translations (e.g., from *Lingua facile* to *Leichte Sprache*), the situation is quite different in the French and Italian-speaking regions. Particularly in the latter, interlingual translation is the most common service, suggesting that texts are first drafted in Easy German and later translated into Easy Italian or Easy French. As translating into Easy Language normally involves both an intralingual (involving diastratic variation), and an intracultural process (Bredel and Maaß 2016b: 185), this raises the question as to whether interlingual translations of Easy Language texts are functionally appropriate for target readers' own linguistic and cultural settings (discussed in Section 6).

As our survey suggests, the number of Easy Language service providers is growing in all language regions, but the type of service and the client groups differ from one region to the other. Thus, a more professional exchange among

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 18 Seventeen respondents participated, i.e., three each from the Italian- and French-speaking regions, and eleven from the German-speaking regions. The survey consisted of 20 questions on the following areas: experience, Easy Language services provided, workload, clients, Easy Language training, Easy Language guidelines, quality control and participation of target groups, and remuneration. The survey was available in German, French and Italian. It was launched on 28th August 2020 and was accessible for 10 days via a commercial online survey tool.

providers and, ideally, a stronger interplay between practice and research, are urgently needed.

## 6 Practical outcomes

A great deal has happened since the introduction of Easy Language in Switzerland and the start of the first Easy Language services agency. Not only are social institutions and disability associations increasingly using Easy Language more consciously, but information in Easy Language is being increasingly published by public authorities as well as by social and cultural institutions. This applies to all linguistic regions. Yet commitment to offering information in Easy Language varies greatly, especially in public administration, and therefore, the supply of information in Easy Language is still selective and far from homogeneous. As a further result, information in Easy Language is not easily found and target groups are often not aware that it exists (see Section 8 for more details).

### 6.1 Media

Easy Language is not yet provided in public broadcasting. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) must provide subtitling, sign language and audio description<sup>19</sup>. According to the Radio and Television Ordinance (RTVO 2007 Art. 7), the SRG SSR and the main community associations concerned have to determine the services to be provided in an agreement (in particular, subtitled content). The agreement concluded in 2017 and covering the period 2018–2022 stipulates that the proportion of subtitled content gradually be increased to 80%, and that the time devoted to broadcasts with audio description be increased from the current 450 to 900 hours by 2022 (cf. Federal Council 2018, UN Committee 2018)<sup>20</sup>. It would be highly desirable to integrate Easy Language principles into the existing provisions and use them to produce

19 The SRG SSR has a 35% to 40% market share in each language region. The other 60% belong to foreign television stations, which are not obliged to comply with RTVA regulations (Bundesrat 2018, UN Committee 2018).

20 SWISS TXT (cf. <https://www.swisstxt.ch/en/>; retrieved 15/09/2020) acts as a subsidiary and multimedia competence centre of the SRG SSR and fully implements the RTVO mandate for

easy-to-understand audiovisual content (e.g., news) and access services (e.g., subtitles and audio descriptions) for people with the widest range of cognitive capabilities (cf. SDI München 2020).

An important contribution since 2020 is the online magazine [www.infoeasy-news.ch](http://www.infoeasy-news.ch), which translates current affairs and topics published by other media sources. On the website, readers can use a button to rate the accessibility of texts and suggest other topics of interest to them.

Concerning **literature**, many public libraries in Switzerland have books in Easy Language or in simplified language, but these are not designated as such (e.g., see Ethique 2019). In addition, INSOS has co-edited **teaching material** in simplified language for general education classes in vocational training schools<sup>21</sup>.

## 6.2 Informative texts

One year after Switzerland ratified the CRPD, the FBED published the CRPD text and the Disability Discrimination Act in Easy French, Easy Italian and Easy German on its website. In October 2019, the federal parliament website was also translated into Easy Language French, Italian and German. So far, there is little official information in Easy Language on federal referenda, although two websites ([www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch) and [easyvote.ch](http://easyvote.ch)) talk about topics related to politics, elections, and popular votes in simplified language (which is not, however, Easy Language). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) began to publish information and instructions regarding the pandemic in Easy Language.

Fewer than half of the 26 cantons provide any information in Easy Language. St. Gallen was the first canton to translate an official document into Easy Language, namely the cantonal report on the 'Act on Social Security and Integration of People with Disabilities' (*Gesetz über die soziale Sicherung und Integration von Menschen mit Behinderung*). Today, St. Gallen also presents a portrait of the canton in Easy Language and selected documents (including a

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audio description. Since 2016, the Ticino-based TV channel RSI has broadcast audio descriptions produced by SWISS TXT.

21 INSOS teaching resources, <https://insos.ch/ausbildung-pra/pra-lehrmittel-und-ausweise/>

report on services available for adults with disabilities in the canton, cantonal planning for the period 2018–2020, and a report on the effectiveness of the canton's disability policy). Another lighthouse project was launched in the Solothurn canton, where since 2016, the child and adult protection authority (*Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutzbehörde*, KESB) has developed letter templates and an information brochure on the protection of adults<sup>22</sup> (in the 'Just easy to understand' *Einfach leicht verständlich*<sup>23</sup> project, HSA FHNW). Later, the brochure was extended to child protection and adapted for the cantons of Berne and Zurich<sup>24</sup>. In the French-speaking part of Switzerland in 2019, the 'Office of Migrant Integration and Racism Prevention' of the Fribourg canton (*Bureau de l'intégration des migrant-e-s et de la prévention du racisme*), in collaboration with the 'Bureau for Easy Language' (*Pro Infirmis* Fribourg), published the 'The Canton of Fribourg Welcomes You!' brochure in Easy Language.

Easy language is also gaining importance in the **public health sector**. In 2019, the 'Alliance for Health Competence' (*Allianz Gesundheitskompetenz*), in close co-operation with the FBED, published a practical guide aiming to improve the communication skills of health care professionals. This is particularly important when the language of the workplace is not an employee's first language and they may have learned it 'on the job'. One major Easy Language project is the brochure on the electronic patient file system issued by *eHealth Suisse*<sup>25</sup>. Further informative texts have been written in Easy Language on, for example, balanced diets, breast cancer, or sex education for children.

- .....
- 22 Brochure on adult protection, [https://www.jgk.be.ch/jgk/de/index/direktion/organisation/kesb/publikationen/kindes--und-erwachsenenschutz-in-leicht-verstaendlicher-sprache-assetref/dam/documents/JGK/KESB/de/KESB\\_ES\\_in%20leichter%20Sprache.pdf](https://www.jgk.be.ch/jgk/de/index/direktion/organisation/kesb/publikationen/kindes--und-erwachsenenschutz-in-leicht-verstaendlicher-sprache-assetref/dam/documents/JGK/KESB/de/KESB_ES_in%20leichter%20Sprache.pdf)
  - 23 Just easy to understand, <https://irf.fhnw.ch/handle/11654/28147>
  - 24 Brochure on child protection, [https://www.kokes.ch/application/files/5115/5946/4492/Informationen\\_zum\\_Kindesschutz\\_in\\_leicht\\_verstaendlicher\\_Sprache\\_ZH.pdf](https://www.kokes.ch/application/files/5115/5946/4492/Informationen_zum_Kindesschutz_in_leicht_verstaendlicher_Sprache_ZH.pdf)
  - 25 eHealth Suisse, [https://www.dossierpatient.ch/sites/default/files/2020-12/Bev\\_Leichte\\_Sprache\\_DE.pdf](https://www.dossierpatient.ch/sites/default/files/2020-12/Bev_Leichte_Sprache_DE.pdf)

Disability organizations in Switzerland (e.g., *Pro Infirmis*<sup>26</sup>, *INSOS*<sup>27</sup>, *Insieme*) continue to increase information in Easy language, especially when addressing target groups directly on websites as voters<sup>28</sup> or as internet users.

### 6.3 Other projects

Investment in Easy Language in the cultural sector is promoted by the ‘Special Office for Inclusive Culture’ (*Fachstelle Kultur inklusiv*) of *Pro Infirmis*. This office is the skills centre for inclusive culture in Switzerland, which also awards a label for sustainable projects. On its website, it provides information on the label as well as the Charter for inclusive culture in Easy Language. Several other cultural institutions throughout the country also provide information in Easy language, for example, information on museums and their exhibitions (*Laténium*<sup>29</sup>, *Creaviva* at the Zentrum Paul Klee<sup>30</sup>, St. Gallen *Museum im Lagerhaus*<sup>31</sup>), as well as workshops and guided visits with educational material (the *Croque-Musées* project by *Atelier 1001 feuilles* and *ASA-Handicap Mental*). What all these examples have in common is that the Easy Language content is promoted on their websites.

## 7 Education and research

In-depth research on Easy Language began relatively late in Switzerland, and one of the results of this is that, while some European countries now have a long tradition of Easy Language training courses, in Switzerland these remain relatively rudimentary, unstructured and fragmentary. Still, recently, a substantial supply of opportunities for Easy Language training has been developed in quite a short time.

26 Pro Infirmis Easy Language, <https://www.proinfirmis.ch/leichte-sprache.html>

27 Action plan CRPD, <https://www.aktionsplan-un-brk.ch>

28 Insieme Electoral Assistance, [https://insieme.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Wahlhilfe\\_insieme\\_A4\\_DE-2.pdf](https://insieme.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Wahlhilfe_insieme_A4_DE-2.pdf)

29 Laténium, <https://latenium.ch/product/le-latenium-en-langue-facile/>

30 Creaviva, <https://www.creaviva-zpk.org/de/creaviva-inklusive/leichte-sprache>

31 St. Gallen Museum im Lagerhaus, <https://www.museumimlagerhaus.ch/service/leichtesprache/>

## 7.1 Practical training

At the time of the CRPD ratification in 2014, Switzerland lacked knowledge of and experience in Easy Language. Consequently, interested people had to travel abroad to acquire expert knowledge in the subject matter (see Antener et al. 2014, Studer and Parpan-Blaser 2014, INSOS 2016) and attend training courses such as the ones offered by the KI-I (*Kompetenznetzwerk Informationstechnologie*) in Austria, the Research Centre for Easy Language at the University of Hildesheim, Germany, or the *capito* network in Austria and Germany.

In the long term, however, recourse to training opportunities in neighboring countries cannot be effective because the diverse regional-dialectal particularities of Switzerland cannot be sufficiently taken into account in training programmes designed and offered abroad. Moreover, technical terms, such as those used in the legal field, differ considerably among German-speaking countries. Easy Language can only develop to its full potential if those involved in producing Easy Language texts (including copywriters and translators) are familiar with specific political and regional contexts and thus with the immediate world knowledge of target groups (see also Parpan-Blaser et al. 2018).

To remedy this shortcoming, several training programmes have been developed in Switzerland since 2014 by different providers, offering more or less differentiated introductions to Easy Language. However, the existence of appropriate training courses depends on the commitment and expertise of individuals. This highlights the problem that Easy Language teaching skills can vary greatly, depending on individual understandings of the subject matter and, not least, on the principles and rules used by the trainers. In recent years, the great demand for specialist knowledge in a variety of professions has also led to private providers offering courses. Training opportunities have developed at different speeds in different parts of Switzerland (cf. Section 2).

As mentioned in Section 3, *WohnWerk Basel* was one of the pioneer providers of further education courses on Easy Language. Their programme developed from the identified need for easily understandable texts in the residential area around the institution (Debelle 2015). Since 2014, *WohnWerk's* 'Bureau for Easy Language' has offered practice-oriented two- to three-day courses in Easy Language and customized training courses for companies and other

institutions. The target groups for this further training have largely been professionals working in institutions and organizations for people with disabilities.

Occasionally, professional associations also offer Easy Language training. For example, since 2019, the Swiss Association of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters has been developing further training initiatives in accessible communication, including Easy Language. In the field of speech therapy, the topic was very quickly taken up in presentations at professional meetings, which has increased interest and demand for training. Such inputs and training are essential because, for example, teachers and speech therapists who are already practising special education and speech therapy have seldom come into contact with Easy Language during their education.

In the French-speaking region, the first systematic training courses in Easy Language, specifically based on *Langage facile à lire et à comprendre* (FALC), were established in 2016. The Faculty of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Geneva (FTI UNIGE) offered a pre-existing Easy Language programme in 2016, but this was only run in German (Zaugg 2018). The private agency *Textoh!*, the *Atelier1001feuilles* and the Department of Special Education of the University of Fribourg co-operate to offer several Easy Language training courses, including a two- or three-day introductory course and advanced modules. These courses are designed for managers and employees of institutions, organizations and public services that are responsible for creating information for the general public and those who have reading and comprehension difficulties.

The Italian-speaking region currently has no Easy Language courses at all, so all training still takes place in Italy. Easy Language training in Easy Italian for *Pro Infirmis* translators, for example, is provided in collaboration with Inclusion Europe partner *Associazione Nazionale Famiglie di Persone con Disabilità Intellettiva e/o Relazionale* (ANFFAS Nazionale Italia) (see the chapter on Italy).

Based on the Easy Language research project for adult protection discussed below (Section 7.3) (Antener et al. 2014), the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (HSA FHNW) developed a one-day course in co-operation with the ‘Conference for Child and Adult Protection’ (KOKES, *Konferenz für Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutz*), which is an inter-canton conference of experts and directors in the field of child

and adult protection. This course was specifically designed for professionals in the field, with the aim of raising their awareness of Easy Language. In connection with projects on child and adult protection, the HSA FHNW also offers services to organizations involved in child and adult protection, ranging from a short input to a whole-day course.

The further education courses aimed directly at users of Easy Language texts are also immensely important. Here, the goal is to increase users' opportunities to participate, as well to train them as validators. In the French-speaking region, *ASA handicap mental* proposes an Easy Language awareness course and a course to train people with intellectual disabilities to validate texts in Easy Language. In Switzerland, people with intellectual disabilities can join specific groups, for instance, the *Pro Infirmis* 'Education Club' (*Bildungsklub*). A course on self-advocacy has been available there for a few years now, in which the target groups not only learn about their rights, but also learn to represent themselves. The participants also get to know the concept of Easy Language on this course.

In sum, it can be observed that the linguistic, regional and political diversity of Switzerland influences the development of Easy Language training courses. As mentioned earlier, the language regions look to their respective neighbouring countries in their approach to Easy Language. Accordingly, the development of expert knowledge is based on German, Austrian, French, or Italian approaches. This not only makes it more difficult to bundle resources and exchange expertise at the national level, but also reduces the number of people who can be reached by training programmes. It can also have a financial impact on the implementation of training courses.

## 7.2 Higher education

In recent years, Easy Language teaching has found its way into the education programmes of some Swiss universities. Initially, tertiary courses were offered in the German-speaking region, but they are now also available, though to a lesser extent, in the French-speaking part. As already mentioned, none are offered in the Italian-speaking region. Easy Language learning is offered in both regular bachelor's and master's degree courses as well as in non-degree contin-

uing education courses. The largely unsystematic and fragmented nature of the Easy Language training courses that the higher education sector offers makes it difficult to obtain an overview of what courses exist and might previously have existed. As far as can be ascertained from discussions with experts and an online review of degree programmes, Easy Language training in this sector still largely depends on the interest and commitment of individual teachers, and the courses are rarely part of a fixed curriculum.

Easy Language training and further education courses are offered within different disciplines, usually in social and education sciences: as part of social work and special education, speech therapy, linguistics, and translation sciences. The following subsection presents an overview of current Easy Language training initiatives, and refers largely to Switzerland's German-speaking region. It discusses a number of examples, but makes no claim to offer a complete picture, because much is still under development and subject to change.

Training courses in the **education disciplines** are playing a pioneering role in Easy Language teaching. **Special education** and **speech therapy**, in particular, took up Easy Language at a relatively early stage. Experts at the University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education (HfH<sup>32</sup>), which specializes in special education, point out that Easy Language has been discussed in individual training courses via a few selective thematic inputs there for around 15 years – not in the form of in-depth examinations of the concept, but in the form of awareness-raising introductions to Easy Language and its objectives. Easy Language has appeared as a topic in special education, speech therapy and social pedagogy courses, in connection with discourses on participation, empowerment, accessibility and inclusion, which are central to these fields. Since the introduction of these courses, master's theses have been written on, for example, the simplification of texts in already-existing teaching materials and children's and young adults' books.

Currently, the HfH is the only university of teacher education that has relatively broadly incorporated Easy Language knowledge development into

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 32 HfH Institute for Disabilities and Participation, <https://www.hfh.ch/de/institute/institut-fuer-behinderung-und-partizipation>, HfH Institute for Language and Communication Special Needs, <https://www.hfh.ch/de/institute/institut-fuer-sprache-und-kommunikation-untererschweren-bedingungen>

its bachelor's and master's degrees (Arn and Baumann 2019). This is in part because those teaching Easy Language at this institution were involved in the discussions on it in Switzerland in the very early stages. The HfH trains special needs teachers and speech therapists, for example. By including Easy Language in regular degree courses, this institution is trying to provide one of the tools to fulfil this pedagogical mission.

In the speech therapy curriculum at the HfH, Easy Language appears in individual courses in linguistics speech therapy in a special education context – central speech disorders, and counselling. Ideally, Easy Language should be incorporated as a core part of a curriculum and thus prevent possible fluctuations in study programmes depending on the faculty's turnover. In speech therapy, efforts are underway to include Easy Language as a compulsory subject in the next curriculum review.

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, smaller introductory courses have recently been offered in the master's programs in the French section at the Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg (UNIFR)<sup>33</sup>. The aim is to familiarize future special education professionals with the concept of Easy Language. The students are introduced to Easy Language and its methods over three hours, during which the origins of Easy Language, its target groups, and the steps involved in translating texts into Easy Language are discussed. They are also provided with information about the Inclusion Europe guidelines<sup>34</sup> and Public Health France's guidelines (Ruel and Allaire 2018).

Capacity building in Easy Language is also being promoted in **social work disciplines**. Individual discussions on Easy Language in social work courses were taking place before 2014 but remained an exception. Since then, expertise in Easy Language in social work courses has somewhat improved, but until now, it has not really been part of degree programmes in German-speaking Switzerland.

In the French-speaking region, the anchoring of Easy Language in social work degrees is a little further advanced. Since 2017, at the School of Social

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33 UNIFR Special Education, <https://www3.unifr.ch/spedu/fr/>

34 Inclusion Europe Guidelines, <https://www.unapei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/L'informaion-pour-tous-Règles-européennes-pour-une-information-facile-à-lire-et-à-comprendre.pdf>

Work Fribourg (HETS-FR)<sup>35</sup>, students in the bachelor's programme receive at least a three-hour introduction to the topic. This is the same input as that offered to master's students in the French section of the Department of Special Education at UNIFR (discussed above).

The first further education programme on Easy Language in the Swiss tertiary sector was developed in 2014, in social work, by the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (HSA FHNW), which offers a specialist seminar on Easy Language that lasts several days. As mentioned above, this offer was introduced in connection with the first Swiss research project on Easy Language (Antener et al. 2014), triggered by the lack of Easy Language training opportunities in Switzerland at the time. Since 2019, the HSA FHNW has offered a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Accessible Communication, of which the 'Easy Language Seminar' (*Fachseminar Leichte Sprache*) is an optional module<sup>36</sup>. Here, the Easy Language training is conceived of and integrated into a larger communication framework. The participants of the 'Easy Language Seminar' have changed significantly in recent years: initially, they were mainly staff of institutions for people with disabilities, who needed Easy Language knowledge in their daily work. Increasingly, different specialist areas have become represented on the course, including social educators; social workers; special-education teachers; speech therapists; communication managers; translators; lawyers; professionals from schools, health care and insurance; and people from the cultural sector, for example, theatres and museums. This can be taken as an indication that Easy Language in Switzerland is no longer mainly discussed in the context of disability; it is being seen as a tool for a range of addressee-oriented interactions.

Swiss universities seem to offer very few inputs for Easy Language in **linguistic science** degree courses. However, some notable examples are worth mentioning. In the MA (Master of Arts) programme in linguistics at the University of Zurich, for instance, Easy Language is part of the 'Digital Linguistics' module in the Department of Computational Linguistics (CL UZH)<sup>37</sup>, where

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35 HETS Fribourg, <https://www.hets-fr.ch/fr/ecole/accueil>

36 CAS Accessible Communication, <https://www.fhnw.ch/de/weiterbildung/soziale-arbeit/9270392>

37 UZH Digital Linguistics, <https://www.cl.uzh.ch/en/studies.html>

it is discussed in relation to systems for automatic text simplification in the area of Language Technology for Accessibility.

Easy Language is also incorporated into professional translation courses. In 2020, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)<sup>38</sup> launched a new specialization in Barrier-free Communication and Audiovisual Translation in its MA in Applied Linguistics. Students are encouraged to investigate the theoretical aspects of intralingual translation into Easy Language, familiarize themselves with the relevant literature and carry out translations. Bachelor students of Applied Languages are also introduced to the basic concepts of Easy Language and can explore the subject further in their final research paper.

Furthermore, after its first training course in 2016 (Zaugg 2018, section 7), the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the German Department at the University of Geneva (FTI) included *Leichte Sprache* in its 'Text Analysis' bachelor's course in 2020. The master's programme at the FTI also offers individual units on Easy Language, as it is a possible professional field for future translators.

These examples show that, today, Easy Language training is not yet systematically implemented in Switzerland. However, a promising range of educational options are already in place.

### 7.3 Research

In Switzerland, research on Easy Language has only recently begun. This section summarizes the different approaches to Easy Language research, the various disciplinary perspectives and the financing of the work.

Regarding research financing, in addition to the research institutions themselves, the following state institutions have been important contributors to funding: a) the Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities, which co-finances up to 50% of research and development (R&D) projects that increase equality for people with disabilities in certain areas such as accessibil-

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38 ZHAW Institute of Translation and Interpreting, <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/institutes-centres/iued-institute-of-translation-and-interpreting/>

ity of information and participation in official procedures, but does not fund ‘pure’ research proposals; b) the federally-funded ‘Swiss Innovation Agency’ (*Innosuisse*), which promotes science-based innovations (products, services) deemed to be in the general interest of the Swiss economy and society; and c) the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (*Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation*).

For international projects with Swiss participation, research institutions in the relevant states and the EU can be important funding sources. To a lesser extent, Easy Language R&D is supported by private foundations that sometimes sponsor pilot projects or prepare project applications, especially when these benefit disadvantaged groups. Contract research is of secondary importance; indeed, so far, very little has been done in the field of Easy Language. The scientific discourse on Easy Language is promoted by conferences that either deal exclusively with Easy Language or include a focus on it; for example within the framework of the three Swiss Conferences on Barrier-free Communication, in Winterthur and Geneva in 2017, 2018 and 2020, and the second KLAARA conference, which is in Olten at the School of Social Work (HSA FHNW) in 2021.

In the **social sciences**, Easy Language research has emerged from the increasing use of Easy Language in research projects over the past decade. Easy Language is crucial to understanding the situation of socially marginalized groups (such as people with disabilities, immigrants, children, the elderly) because it enables their involvement, whether this be in recruiting participants for a study, obtaining their consent to participate, conducting interviews and questionnaires, or discussing the findings of the study. So, as Easy Language was used as a means to conduct research, and researchers’ awareness of its importance was growing, Easy Language also became a topic of research itself (see Petitpierre et al. 2013 on declarations of consent and Hedderich et al. 2014 on the use of Easy Language in participatory research).

Producing and making Easy Language accessible to people with disabilities involves selecting, writing, reviewing, and applying texts. In the first social science Easy Language R&D project in German-speaking Switzerland in 2015 to 2018, ‘Just easy to understand’ (Antener et al. 2017), the School for Social Work FHNW investigated the production of Easy Language texts for an adult protection authority and made recommendations for good practice

(Parpan-Blaser et al. 2019, Girard-Groeber et al. 2021). The Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg has had a similar focus in the French-speaking region since 2017, and has evaluated not only the procedures (translation, validation) but also the documents translated by the Bureau for Easy Language Fribourg. At the time of writing, a PhD candidate is also working on a thesis on how people with intellectual disabilities can participate in translating a questionnaire into Easy Language and whether such a version is more accessible than the standard language one (Diacquenod 2018).

Since 2017, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting at Zurich University of Applied Sciences has been working with the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Geneva to create the foundation for a Swiss Research Centre for Barrier-free Communication<sup>39</sup>. The project investigates how access to information and education in Switzerland can be facilitated for people with hearing, visual or intellectual disabilities. Easy Language is one of the project's ten research areas. Several corpus analyses have been conducted to understand translation strategies and information loss in texts in German Easy Language (Jekat et al. 2020, Nüssli 2018, Jekat et al. 2017, among others) and Italian Easy Language (Carrer 2021), and to investigate how Easy Language is portrayed in the Swiss German press (Jekat et al. 2020, D'Agostino 2018). Experimental studies have also evaluated the impact of Easy Language texts on the comprehension of health-related issues among people with intellectual disabilities (Carrer 2021, Nüssli 2018). Interim project outcomes include exploratory studies of a) the potential of French Easy Language in inclusive classroom settings (Casalegno et al. 2019), b) the impact of neural machine translation (NMT) on the usability of Easy Language texts by people with intellectual disabilities (Kaplan 2021, Rodríguez Vázquez et al. forth., Rodríguez Vázquez and Bouillon forth.), and c) the use of NMT for rendering speech output into a simplified form in a medical speech-to-speech translation system (Mutal et al. 2019). The results of some of these investigations were disseminated at three international conferences held as part of the project in 2017, 2018 and 2020.

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39 The project is funded by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation and is supported by the Swiss University Conference. See Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication (<https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/research/barrier-free-communication/>; retrieved 14/09/2020) and Proposal and Implementation of a Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication (<https://bfc.unige.ch/en/>; retrieved 14/09/2020).

The Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies, TRANSIUS, at the University of Geneva has recently conducted comparative studies of Swiss administrative language, using participatory research methods. They systematically analysed insurance leaflets in three languages (French, German and Italian) and assessed their readability and comprehensibility according to Plain Language principles (Griebel and Felici 2021, Felici and Griebel 2019, Griebel and Felici 2018).

**Computational Linguistics (CL)** research at the University of Zurich focuses on the contribution of linguistics and language technology to accessibility for people with disabilities and special educational needs. The research topics related to Easy Language are semi-automatic and automatic text simplification, the automatic sentence alignment of standard and simplified texts, and the automatic assessment of text readability. The ‘*Capito automatisiert: Automatic text simplification for German*’ project runs from 2020 to 2021. A system is also being developed for AI<sup>40</sup>-based automatic simplification of German texts. A novel approach at the University of Zurich has enabled such an AI-based system, developed and ‘trained’ on the basis of existing *capito* texts, to be used to turn complicated texts (C1/C2) into simple language (A1 to B1) (Säuberli et al. 2020, Battisti et al. 2019). The Living Lab Handicap<sup>41</sup> at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO Valais-Wallis) is currently developing the ‘FALC-Assistant’<sup>42</sup>. Available on the internet, the FALC Assistant is a software programme for creating and translating documents into FALC. It is designed to assist people by automatically checking the application of the rules. Groups of validators may be contacted via this platform.

Within the framework of **web-accessibility studies**, Easy Language has been examined by academics at the University of Fribourg Department of Psychology. A study of Easy Language used on disability-friendly websites (Schmutz et al. 2019) has shown that Easy Language has both advantages and disadvantages compared with standard languages: Easy Language makes content recognition easier, but also prolongs reading time, decreases the general appreciation of the

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40 Artificial Intelligence

41 Living Lab Handicap, <https://livinglabhandicap.ch/en/living-lab-handicap/>

42 Langage facile à lire et à comprendre (= Easy French)

text and leads to reduced intentions to visit the website again. Note that these are results of tests of non-disabled users (students); no evidence was collected of the views of users with disabilities.

## 8 Future perspectives

Although much has been achieved in a few years in the field of Easy Language in Switzerland, a great deal of questions remain unanswered. As has been shown here, Switzerland's multilingualism and federal structure impact on Easy Language in many ways. Its prospects and its problems, therefore, are not the same in all regions. Yet, in order to move forward, it would be helpful to agree on a substantial common ground in order to network in a continuous exchange and to advance in the development of knowledge and practice.

A co-ordinated approach to the interplay of practice, research and politics would be valuable. To address such questions and others about the future systematically, however, a determined political will is needed at all levels: Switzerland's federalist democratic political system, based on compromise and consensus, entails both difficulties and opportunities in all areas of policy, and the implementation of Easy Language is no exception. Constructing an overarching strategy is not easy. The resulting patchwork makes it more difficult to define binding principles and standards for Easy Language for the whole country. Switzerland's multilingualism adds to the challenge and raises issues not only of process (should the original text be translated or the one that has already been transposed to Easy Language?), but also of finances.

Collaboration among Easy Language service providers, researchers, community organizations and target groups should be closer. Only through effective collaboration among these various actors can Easy Language services be implemented systematically and in time be regarded as professional services in their own right, like other communication services such as translation and copywriting. Perhaps Easy Language service providers should consider organizing themselves into a professional association. Validators of Easy Language texts should ideally be recruited from the intended target groups. Furthermore,

only appropriate remuneration for providers and validators can guarantee the provision of quality.

Besides collaboration, awareness of the potential of Easy Language should increase. The use of Easy Language and the amount of information available in Easy Language currently still depends too much on the commitment of individuals. Social institutions are aware of its potential but there is no consistency in how they see Easy Language fitting into their communication strategies. Providers of information in Easy Language, such as public authorities, associations, and institutions face the question not only of how to use Easy Language as a means of communication but also of how to integrate it into an overall concept of accessible communication. This entails making information in Easy Language visible in such a way that the target groups can find it without additional effort.

Ultimately, awareness of Easy Language should increase not only in the general population but also among the target groups, especially beyond self-advocates and institutions. They need to know the opportunities and to be made aware of their rights and possibilities, so that they themselves can demand and lobby for more Easy Language. In summary, there is still a long way to go before accessible, comprehensible information and communication can be taken for granted and experienced as part of an inclusive society. An important step towards this goal would be to regard Easy Language as a service to the general public rather than as a special service for individual groups. Nevertheless, it is important, for advocacy purposes, to have up-to-date figures on the different Easy Language target groups (see UN CRPD 2019: 7, Inclusion Handicap 2019: 27).

Our vision for Easy Language in Switzerland is that experts – especially in the social, administrative and communication fields – are sensitized to Easy Language and that all information relevant to active citizenship is available in Easy Language. In addition, efforts should be made to raise users' awareness: end users have the right to know that texts in Easy Language exist and where to find them. This places them in a position to advocate for their own best interests. Disability organizations set a good example and show how Easy Language is used in a meaningful way (e.g., on their websites). Easy Language should eventually become a natural part of communication concepts and be

considered one of the many different means of appropriate communication that must be budgeted for from the outset.

Approaching this vision in a typically Swiss manner means tackling the difficulties enumerated in this chapter with perseverance and making the effort, step by step, to achieve a common ground. For compromises to be viable, they will have to be in keeping with Swiss tradition: once reached, they will be supported by a majority of the population, regardless of their region or national language.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy German, Easy French and Easy Italian in Switzerland.

Standard German	Easy German
<p>Source: <a href="https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/parlamentsportraet/aufgaben-der-bundesversammlung">https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/parlamentsportraet/aufgaben-der-bundesversammlung</a></p>	<p><b>WAS TUT DAS PARLAMENT?</b></p>  <p>Das sind die <b>wichtigsten Aufgaben</b> vom Parlament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Die Gesetze prüfen</li> <li>• Entscheiden, ob ein Gesetz geändert werden muss</li> <li>• Einen Vorschlag schreiben, wie ein Gesetz geändert werden muss</li> <li>• Neue Gesetze vorschlagen</li> </ul> <p>Das sind die <b>anderen Aufgaben</b> vom Parlament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Die <b>7 Bundesräte</b> und <b>Bundesrätinnen</b> wählen</li> <li>• Die <b>Richter</b> und <b>Richterinnen</b> für die Bundesgerichte wählen</li> <li>• Den <b>Bundeschkanzler</b> oder die <b>Bundeschkanzlerin</b> wählen</li> <li>• Die Arbeit vom Bundesrat überwachen</li> <li>• Die Arbeit von den Bundesgerichten überwachen</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/leichte-sprache">https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/leichte-sprache</a></p>

Standard French	Easy French
<p>Source: <a href="https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/portrait-du-parlement/attributions-assemblée-federale">https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/portrait-du-parlement/attributions-assemblée-federale</a></p>	<p><b>QUE FAIT LE PARLEMENT?</b></p>  <p>Au Parlement, on <b>parle</b>.</p> <p>Au Parlement, les <b>tâches principales</b> des députés sont:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• examiner les lois</li> <li>• voir s'il faut changer les lois</li> <li>• écrire des propositions pour changer les lois</li> <li>• écrire peut-être de nouvelles lois</li> </ul> <p>Les autres tâches du Parlement sont :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• élire (ou choisir) les 7 personnes du Conseil fédéral:</li> <li>• les 7 <b>conseillères et conseillers fédéraux</b></li> <li>• élire les juges fédéraux des Tribunaux fédéraux</li> <li>• élire <b>la chancelière ou le chancelier</b> de la Confédération</li> <li>• contrôler le travail du Conseil fédéral</li> <li>• contrôler le travail des tribunaux fédéraux</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/langage-simplifie">https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/langage-simplifie</a></p>

Standard Italian	Easy Italian
<p>Source: <a href="https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/ritratto-del-parlamento/compiti-assemblya-federale">https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/ritratto-del-parlamento/compiti-assemblya-federale</a></p>	<p><b>COSA FA IL PARLAMENTO?</b></p>  <p>In Parlamento, i <b>compiti principali</b> dei deputati sono:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• esaminare le leggi</li> <li>• decidere se occorre cambiare le leggi</li> <li>• scrivere delle proposte per cambiare le leggi</li> <li>• eventualmente scrivere delle nuove leggi.</li> </ul> <p>Gli <b>altri compiti</b> dei deputati in Parlamento sono:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eleggere le 7 persone che formano il Consiglio federale. Queste persone si chiamano <b>consigliere e consiglieri federali</b></li> <li>• eleggere le <b>giudici</b> o i <b>giudici federali</b> dei <b>Tribunali federali</b></li> <li>• eleggere la <b>cancelliera</b> o il <b>cancelliere</b> della Confederazione</li> <li>• controllare il lavoro del Consiglio federale</li> <li>• controllare il lavoro dei Tribunali federali.</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/lingua-facile">https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/lingua-facile</a></p>

Standard English	Easy English (author's translation)
<p>Source: Portrait of Parliament – The Federal Assembly is the parliament of the Swiss Confederation on: <a href="http://www.parlament.ch">www.parlament.ch</a></p>	<p>[WHAT DOES THE PARLIAMENT DO?</p>  <p>These are the most <b>important tasks</b> of the Parliament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examining bills</li><li>• Deciding whether laws need to be changed</li><li>• Writing proposals to change the laws</li><li>• Proposing new laws</li></ul> <p>These are <b>other tasks</b> of the Parliament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Electing 7 <b>Federal Councillors</b></li><li>• Electing <b>judges</b> for the federal courts</li><li>• Electing the <b>Federal Chancellor</b></li><li>• Supervising the work of the Federal Council</li><li>• Supervising the work of the federal courts].</li></ul>

## Easy Language in the UK

### 1 Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) is made up of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It is densely populated: the total population at the last census in 2011 was 63 million. Over the last 50 years, the UK's population has become increasingly diverse and multicultural. In 2018, around 13.8% of the population were from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME). Compared to other European countries, the UK population has higher levels of wealth inequality (European Union 2018), with the richest 10% of households holding 44% of the country's wealth (The Equality Trust 2019). There is also an unequal distribution of wealth across the UK, with median total household wealth in the south-east of the country being twice that in the north-west.

It is estimated that in the UK, 14.1 million people have a disability, defined as a health problem or impairment that is associated with restrictions to everyday activities (Department of Work and Pensions 2019). This includes 19% of working-age adults and 44% of adults over 65. Around 8% of children are reported to have a disability. Rates of disability across the UK vary, with higher rates reported in areas of local deprivation (Office for National Statistics 2015).

The UK Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy has calculated that nearly 20% of the population experience communication difficulties at some point in their lives. This might include individuals with cerebral palsy, intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, autism spectrum conditions<sup>1</sup>, hearing impairments, stroke, brain injuries, head and neck cancers, Parkinson's disease, motor neuron disease, or dementia. Within this group, individual abilities to

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1 We use this term in preference to 'autism spectrum disorder' in recognition of the preferences of people with autism and their supporters to frame autism as a neurodiverse condition rather than as a medically defined 'disorder'.

speak, understand, read, and write vary greatly, some people are minimally affected but others require considerable support and reasonable adjustments of written material to be able to adequately understand the content. Around 1.5 million people in the UK have intellectual disabilities (Emerson et al. 2012) and it is likely that 80–90% of these individuals have significant difficulties with reading, although there is little reliable information on this.

Apart from the national language of English, spoken by around 98% of the population, other indigenous UK languages are Welsh (1.1 million speakers), Scots (1.5 million), Irish (95 000), and Scottish Gaelic (66 000). At least another three hundred other languages are also spoken by settled and recent immigrants.

The basis of English is a variety of West Germanic language, brought to Britain by Anglo-Saxon migrants between 450 and 600 AD. Contemporary English has borrowed a large number of words from many other languages, which means that nearly every sound in a word can be spelled in multiple ways, and that many letters are pronounced differently. Consequently, even native speakers make spelling mistakes from time to time. English grammar has very few word endings inflections, a comparatively regular subject-verb-object word order, and a complex syntax.

English has spread internationally as a lingua franca to many parts of the globe and in many professional settings, including those of science, academia and law. It is the most widely learned second language in the world.

‘Easy English’ and ‘Easy Language’ are not terms that are commonly used in the UK to describe varieties of English that are adapted for individuals that need support in communication. The terms that are likely to be used in a range of institutional settings are ‘**Plain English**’ (relating to the general population) and ‘**Easy Read**’<sup>2</sup> (more specifically designed for people with intellectual disabilities). Our own expertise is in the ‘Easy Read’ area of research and practice. Nevertheless we include an overview of ‘Plain English’ that has been greatly aided by input from specialists in UK government departments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We also note an increasing emphasis on the

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2 ‘Easy Read’ is the widely used and recognized national term in the UK to refer to texts and resources adapted for people with intellectual disabilities rather than terms used in other countries, such as ‘Easy-to-Read’ (Australia or the US).

concept of ‘accessibility’, which provides an overarching framework for both Plain English and Easy Read initiatives.

## 2 Historical perspectives

Historically, the discourse on the English language advocating for clarity and simplicity in written communication is long, with repeated calls over the centuries for a plain and unadorned style. Bennett (2019) identifies such arguments with a suspicion of obfuscation associated with verbal complexity, and with discourses that imply that a plain prose style is intrinsically more transparent and authentic and promotes honesty in public life and active citizenship. George Orwell’s famous 1946 essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ launched an attack against ‘the inflated style’ in discourse that he claimed inevitably contributed to the decline he noted in intellectual and civic life (Orwell 1946).

Whereas Orwell and his predecessors were primarily concerned with public discourse in general, the **UK Plain English Campaign (PEC)**, launched in 1979 by Christine Maher and Martin Cutts, emerged as an organization advocating for consumers and service users by holding to account unnecessarily complex and misleading public information (Maher et al. 1986). The founders of the PEC had backgrounds in journalism, community work, adult education, and adult literacy. Their first act was to ritually shred government and local authority forms in front of the Houses of Parliament. Their emphasis was on making the forms and information distributed by public and private bodies readable and useable by the general public.

Funded by commercial activities, including text editing and training, the PEC continued its activities in the 1980s and 1990s, successfully putting Plain English writing on the agenda of the government and policy circles as part of a wider policy priority to advance governmental efficiency and individual rights and freedoms within neo-liberal free market ideology (Ager 1995). The PEC established the ‘Inside Write’ awards for best practice in writing internal government communications in 1987. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher promoted their agenda in her foreword to a 1988 leaflet sent to civil servants. She stated that ‘Plain English must be the aim of all who work in Government’

(Plain, 1988 quoted in Ager 1995: 133). In 1990, the PEC launched the Crystal Mark, their seal of approval of clarity in a document.

The Plain English movement has continued to advance through the efforts of the PEC and other organizations and pressure groups such as the Plain Language Commission and Clarity, which since 1983 has campaigned for plain language in legal documents and the courts (Perry 2014). These organizations are increasingly active at an international level, through the International Plain Language Federation, which spearheads the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) project to develop an international plain language standard.

Plain English has become the language of the digital government in the UK. The government website, GOV.UK, was launched in 2012, providing a single point of access to all government services, with the goal that users would interact with the government online in a 'simpler, clearer and faster' manner. Fundamental design principles emphasize accessible design, making all content as 'inclusive, legible and readable as possible' (Government Digital Service 2012). In 2014, the Government Digital Service announced official guidelines for writing in plain English on the government web pages, stating 'Plain English is mandatory for all of GOV.UK'.

**Easy Read** practices in the UK developed in the context of the reimagining of services for people with intellectual disabilities in the 1980s and 1990s, which was influenced by an expanding disability rights movements and concerns about the poor standards and high costs of institutional care. Large mental handicap hospitals that had housed many thousands of disabled people closed down and a new model of care influenced by the ideology of normalization and an Ordinary Life framework promoted person-centred planning practices based on individual preferences and choices. This developed in tandem with an expanding self-advocacy movement for people with intellectual disabilities and the establishment of national and local People First groups that aimed to give them a voice in society.

These developments created a need for written texts that could be easily comprehended by people with intellectual disabilities so that they could be more directly involved in personal life planning, service development and self-organization. However, until the late 1980s, the responsibility for reading

and interpreting information was largely placed on the people with intellectual disabilities themselves. For Jan Walmsley, an intellectual disability academic and expert in accessible information, a watershed moment came in 1986. This was the year advocacy organizations for people with intellectual disabilities challenged her team at the Open University to adapt a package of learning materials to improve communication between service providers and family members so that people with intellectual disabilities could use them. The outcome, 'Patterns for Living: Working Together', claimed to be the first University course of study designed for people with intellectual disabilities (Walmsley 2009) and illustrated a shift in the creation of accessible information to the producers rather than the consumers of information.

As Walmsley (2009) and others have pointed out, the development and promotion of Easy Read in the UK has been closely linked to the goals of disability rights movements, underpinned by the social model of disability. This model distinguishes impairment from disability, in which barriers to social opportunities, which arise due to discrimination and exclusion, create the lived experience of disability. Removing these barriers opens up access to opportunities, and Easy Read is therefore understood as part of making texts and information more accessible; not just as an end in its own right, but part of a wider social movement to promote the inclusion, autonomy, self-determination, and active citizenship of disabled people (Baxter et al. 2008).

With these goals in mind, the 2001 Government White Paper (policy document) on services for people with intellectual disabilities, *Valuing People* (Department of Health 2001) repeatedly stressed the importance of using accessible formats for producing and disseminating information to service users. The document itself was produced in a separate accessible format with an accompanying audio tape (Walmsley 2009).

Since the publication of *Valuing People* and the further strengthening of the rights of people with disabilities to accessible information communicated through legislation (see Section 3), Easy Read resources for people with intellectual disabilities have expanded exponentially (Chinn and Homeyard 2016) in the areas of health and social care and public services. However, commercial organizations and business are less likely to offer Easy Read information to customers with intellectual disabilities.

### 3 Current Situation

Both Plain Language and Easy Read are frequently used concepts in the UK, though until fairly recently, there has been relatively little communication and interaction between practitioners with expertise in these different formats.

#### 3.1 Definitions

**Plain English** has several definitions, but most of them encompass the principles in the PLAIN (Plain Language Association International) definition.

‘A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.’ (Cutts 2020: 3)

Common features of Plain English are short sentences (15–20 words), the use of the active rather than the passive voice, avoidance of abstract nouns (nominalization), and the use of common everyday words rather than specialist jargon.

**Easy Read** can be understood as a general approach or set of principles that makes information more accessible for people with intellectual disabilities, as a recognizable format, and as a set of tools for creating accessible texts. As a general approach, Easy Read should involve people with intellectual disabilities in creating texts from the beginning, offer information through a range of modalities and channels, be of interest to end users, and meet their needs (Department of Health 2009a).

Written information in an Easy Read format uses ‘straightforward words and phrases...supported by pictures, diagrams, symbols and/or photographs to aid understanding and to illustrate the text’ (NHS 2016: 7). Resources and tools for creating accessible texts include specially created picture banks of photographs, most commonly those created by Photosymbols<sup>3</sup>, which feature

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3 Photosymbols, <http://www.photosymbols.com>.

models with intellectual disabilities and are constantly updated to keep the featured topics current. Other image banks contain drawings or symbols; for example the Bonnington Symbol System<sup>4</sup> and Widget symbols<sup>5</sup>. The Widget symbol system is often used in educational settings to augment the written word and to some extent in healthcare settings. The reader must be familiar with the symbols.

### 3.2 Societal and legal context

The **Equality Act (2010)** unified and consolidated previous legal instruments that had been introduced and amended over the years to address issues relating to discrimination and equality. The Act brought together previous national legislation, such as the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)**, EU legislation and case law (Butler 2016). It attempted to go beyond the removal of direct discrimination to enact the principle of ‘transformative equality’, requiring public institutions to remove access barriers encountered by historically disadvantaged groups and provide appropriate resources to redress inequalities. The Act included a list of nine protected characteristics that provide grounds for determining that discrimination is unlawful (age, disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, race, pregnancy and maternity, sex, and sexual orientation). An important aspect of the Act is the requirement that all public services make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to make sure that people with disabilities are not substantially disadvantaged (Equality Act 2010 s20:1-5).

The provision of information in accessible formats is regarded as a reasonable adjustment. Since the duty to provide reasonable adjustments is anticipatory, service providers are required to consider in advance what sort of adjustments to the presentation of texts and information are required, either collectively or individually, by disabled people (Heslop et al. 2019).

Inevitably, what counts as reasonable is open to interpretation and involves consideration of the practicability of making adaptations, their costs and the

4 Bonnington Symbol System, <http://www.tomorraccessibility.co.uk/bss.htm>.

5 Widget, <https://www.widget.com/index.htm>.

resources available to the organization. Thus, the Act can be accused of reinforcing historically engrained conceptualizations of disability as a ‘problem’, with adjustments as inconvenient add-ons to ‘normal service’ (Roulstone and Prideaux 2009).

Moreover, the Equality Act enshrines a categorical and medical definition of disability as referring to a defined set of characteristics, rather than recognizing that many citizens have a range of informational access needs, due to unfamiliarity with English, limited educational experiences, or more transitory emotional states. These would not count as ‘protected characteristics’ under the Act.

The commitment to providing ‘accessible information’ stated in **Valuing People** (Department of Health 2001) was reinforced in the follow-on policy document, **Valuing People Now** (Department of Health 2009b). This document stated that:

‘Providing accessible information is essential if people are to have choice and control over their lives and is an implicit expectation of the Disability Discrimination Act. The Government will work to improve its performance in this area and expects all other public, voluntary and private bodies to do the same – in particular by employing self-advocacy organisations to advise on and develop materials.’ (Department of Health 2009b: 57)

The **Mental Capacity Act** (2005) outlines the responsibility of all health and social care providers to support the decision-making of adults who might lack the capacity to make decisions on their own. Care providers are required to provide these individuals with information in a format they can understand to support their decision-making. This might include the provision of Easy Read information for people with intellectual disabilities.

The **Care Act** of 2014 detailed specific duties for local authorities with regards to the provision of advice and information for users of services, including the requirement that ‘Information and advice provided under this section must be accessible to, and proportionate to the needs of, those for whom it is being provided’ (Care Act 2014 c23: 4).

The **Accessible information standard (AIS)** came into force in 2016 and required that all organizations that provide National Health Service (NHS) care and/or publicly funded social care adopt a consistent approach to ‘identifying, recording, flagging, sharing and meeting information and communication support needs of patients, service users, carers and parents, where those needs relate to a disability, impairment of sensory loss’ (NHS 2017: 11).

The obligation of service providers to comply with the AIS was given added force in 2017, when the Care Quality Commission, which registers and regulates providers of health and social care stated that all inspection reports would include an evaluation of how providers apply the standard and offer information to service users in formats they can understand.

Compared to the US, where Barack Obama mandated the use of Plain Language by federal agencies in the Plain Writing Act (2010), progress in the legal enforcement of the use of Plain English for public documents has been relatively slow in the UK. The 2015 **Consumer Rights Act** consolidated existing consumer legislation and required that consumer contracts and notices be expressed in ‘plain and intelligible language’. If businesses fail to meet this standard, they may be vulnerable to legal challenge by consumers.

**Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations** (2018) state that websites or mobile apps created by organizations providing public services should meet accessibility standards that require digital media to be ‘perceivable, operable, understandable and robust’ so that they can be used by ‘as many people as possible’, including those with sensory or intellectual impairments or motor difficulties. The new legal requirements correspond to the international WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) 2.1 AA accessibility standard. All public sector bodies are also required to include and update an accessibility statement on their websites.

This legislation indicates a move from making ‘reasonable adjustments’ specifically for disabled people to coming closer to the principles of **universal design**, since the definition of accessibility provided has ‘content and design clear and simple enough so that most people can use it without needing to adapt it’ (Government Digital Service 2020).

### 3.3 Stakeholders

Numerous UK-based **commercial organizations**, including general translation agencies, offer services covering text editing, auditing, user testing and translation of texts into Plain English and Easy Read formats. Some organizations also offer training on using Plain English or Easy Read. These businesses tend to orient towards particular types of clients; public service organizations that are concerned about legal compliance with disability and accessibility legislation, digital content providers, or legal services. The **UK Association for Accessible Formats** is an association that sets national standards regarding the adaptation of print formats. Although it mentions Easy Read on its website, its focus is more on the accessibility of public information for those with visual impairments. There is no overall recognized body that oversees or regulates Plain English or Easy Read services.

The **Plain English Campaign (PEC)** and the **Plain Language Commission** are two commercial organizations that confer a certificate of document accreditation (Crystal Mark and Clear English Standard respectively) to confirm that a document or organization has met their standards for Plain English, although fees for this service are not modest (upwards of EUR 500 per document or EUR 500 –12 000 for different levels of corporate membership).

Accessibility has become a cornerstone of the provision of government information to the public through the GOV.UK website. The **Government Digital Service (GDS)** is the civil service office in charge of setting accessibility standards for all GOV.UK content posted by different government departments. GDS supports a cross-governmental accessibility community, has established an Accessibility Leaders Network, and provides accessibility training for civil servants. It is also the monitoring body for the Web Accessibility regulations and is obligated to check websites, documents and mobile apps for accessibility, and to enforce the requirement that providers of public services publish accessibility statements on their websites.

Guidance on creating Easy Read texts for people with intellectual disabilities emphasizes the importance of involving these end users in the creation of Easy Read texts (see section on Guidelines). Consequently, a number of **third sector organizations** for and of people with intellectual disabilities, including

self-advocacy groups under the **People First**<sup>6</sup> umbrella, are engaged in the design and distribution of Easy Read information. This can be an income source for these organizations (Chinn 2019a) and for individuals with intellectual disabilities, some of whom have become experts in the creation of Easy Read information (Goodwin et al. 2015). Some of these groups are employed by public sector and commercial businesses to check their Easy Read outputs.

In July 2020, **Learning Disability England**, a charity that represents, campaigns for and researches the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, launched an Accessible Information Campaign<sup>7</sup>. The campaign group came together as a result of the coronavirus epidemic, in dismay at what they perceived as the government's delay in making sure people with intellectual disabilities received accessible information about the epidemic, and support to understand and act on it.

In the last 20 years in the UK, **healthcare providers'** acceptance of the idea that limited health literacy should be considered a significant social determinant of poor health outcomes has been growing (Patient Information Forum 2013). Health literacy is defined as '...the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health' (WHO, cited in Public Health England 2015). Personal characteristics include literacy skills and the ability to read and decode health information, or 'functional health literacy' (Nutbeam 2008).

Various National Health Service (NHS) bodies have devoted resources to awareness raising and staff training on health literacy (see for example NHS n.d.) and disseminating messages about making health information accessible using Plain English and other accessibility design principles (Health Education England 2018). Health information providers are advised to make sure that information is available to all, including an estimated 42% of working adults who are unable to understand or make use of everyday health information (Rowlands et al. 2015). This work is also promoted through the **Patient Information**

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6 People First, <https://peoplefirstltd.com/>.

7 Accessible Information Campaign, <https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/news/accessible-information-campaign/>.

**Forum** (PIF), a not-for-profit, UK membership organization and network for people working in and involved with healthcare information and support<sup>8</sup>.

Government funded **UK Research Councils** require that funding applicants provide Plain English summaries of research proposals in order to make research accessible to the general public. The **UK National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)** established the national advisory body **INVOLVE** in 1996 to support active public involvement in health and social care research. This body has promoted a 'Make it Clear' campaign to improve the quality of these Plain English summaries, distributing guidance for researchers underpinned by Plain English principles. However, evidence of the accessibility and impact of these Plain English summaries is sparse, with one study concluding that the Plain English summaries provided by the researchers were no more comprehensible to lay readers than standard research abstracts (Kirkpatrick et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) in research has become a requisite for UK Research Council funding, and this extends to research involving people with intellectual disabilities. Involving people with intellectual disabilities as collaborators and partners in research predates the rolling out of the PPI agenda, and inclusive and participatory research with people with intellectual disabilities is a well-established tradition in the UK (Walmsley 2001). Easy Read research materials are used to support co-researchers with intellectual disabilities (Walmsley 2004) and are also created to involve people with intellectual disabilities as research participants using Easy Read participant information and consent documents (Hamilton et al. 2017). Since the 1990s, researchers have also been concerned about sharing information about research on people with intellectual disabilities with this group (Bashford et al. 1995). The *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*<sup>9</sup> requires that all articles be accompanied by an accessible summary. The journal also commissions self-advocates with intellectual disabilities to select an article of interest in each issue and produce an Easy Read commentary (see for example Sunderland People First 2021).

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8 Patient Information Forum, <https://pifonline.org.uk/about-us/our-story/>.

9 *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14683156>. In the UK, 'Learning Disabilities' is used as an alternative term to 'Intellectual Disabilities'.

### 3.4 General attitude

Bennett (2019) argues that cultural straightforwardness and clarity are valued in written texts in English, as these qualities are associated with authenticity and trustworthiness. The adoption of **Plain English** principles in government communication has generally been well received and in 2013, the GOV.UK website won the prestigious Design of the Year award. There has been some resistance to the simplification of legal documents by members of the legal profession, who claim that removing technical legal language removes important concepts and alters the meaning and function of these texts (Bhatia 2010, Waller 2011). Progress in promoting clarity in legal and legislative documents has been relatively slow.

**Easy Read** has become embedded in the culture of intellectual disability services, and the creation of Easy Read texts has grown exponentially, particularly in the wake of the Equality Act (2010) and the Accessible Information Standard (2016). Undoubtedly, people with intellectual disabilities appreciate having access to Easy Read texts (Waight and Oldreive 2020) and have explained that access to these resources supports their autonomy and decision-making (Chinn 2019b, Goodwin et al. 2015). Nevertheless, some voices have been more critical and concerned about the proliferation of Easy Read in a social context in which many more entrenched access barriers to education, employment and relationships for disabled people are proving resistant to dismantling. Producing Easy Read texts can be seen as a way of 'doing inclusion' and a relatively low-cost way to make reasonable adjustments to mainstream services (Chinn and Homeyard 2016). Moreover, disseminating a 'special' version of a document for people with intellectual disabilities, rather than attempting to make sure that the standard version is designed to be accessible to the widest possible audience may reinforce perceptions of difference and dependency relating to people with intellectual disabilities (Chinn 2017).

## 4 Target groups

**Plain English** is seen as benefitting all citizens and is targeted at the general population, with claims that even very competent readers prefer Plain Lan-

guage texts for public information (Cutts 2020). GOV.UK also refers on its websites to the usefulness of Plain English communication for people who struggle with reading, citing the finding that one in six adults in England (7.1 million people) have been identified as having ‘very low’ literacy skills as defined by the UK National Literacy Trust. **Easy Read** texts are targeted squarely at people with intellectual disabilities. The Photosymbols library that is often used in Easy Read materials uses people with intellectual disabilities in its photos, thus signalling that this is the group being addressed (Chinn 2017). This may mean that other adults with cognitive disabilities caused by stroke, injury or dementia are not offered Easy Read information created for people with intellectual disabilities, even though it may also cover areas of interest for them. The Alzheimer Society website, for instance, publishes Easy Read information on its website, but these documents are targeted towards people with intellectual disabilities rather than people with dementia. Adapted written information is also targeted towards **adults with aphasia**, though this is usually not referred to as Easy Read; but as ‘accessible information’ instead, though there is little to distinguish these formats.

People from diverse ethnic groups in the UK who do not speak English confidently are not legally entitled to receive reasonable adjustments in information provision under the terms of the Equality Act (2010), as they do not constitute one of the groups with protected characteristics as defined by the Act.

## 5 Guidelines

Individuals and organizations who create **Plain English** texts are often directed to Martin Cutts’ book on this subject, *The Oxford Guide to Plain English* (first published as *The Plain English Guide* in 1995), which has been regularly updated (Cutts 2020). The author emphasizes that he is offering guidance, rather than rules for writing in Plain English. The book refers to research, but is geared more towards a general rather than an academic audience.

Writers of content for government websites are obliged to follow guidance compiled in style and content guides. GOV.UK provides fairly extensive guid-

ance for those writing website content, including using accessible language, effective layout (fonts, headings, numbered or bulleted lists), structuring content, and using summaries. In terms of language, the style guide requires the use of language at a nine-year-old's reading level (Government Digital Service 2016).

The creators of the style guide state that their principles are based on research, and have published a commissioned survey of the relevant evidence base to support their guidance (Walker et al. 2013). This document reiterates the Plain English writing advice contained in the GOV.UK writing guide, namely using short sentences and paragraphs; avoiding jargon; using simple, everyday words; being specific rather than general; using active verbs; and thinking of what the audience needs (Walker et al. 2013: 11). Advice to GOV.UK content writers extends to writing about gender, ethnicity and disability in ways that avoid discriminatory or offensive language.

As a devolved nation, the Scottish government hosts its own website, and has published named content standards for the mygov.scot website (Dowle 2018). In contrast to the GOV.UK content guidance, these standards refer extensively to readability and suggest using instruments such as the Learning and Work Institute's SMOG tool (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education 2009) or the Hemingway app<sup>10</sup> (to check reading level and readability, with the proviso that all such literacy tools require interpretation and context).

Similar guidance is available for the National Health Service's (NHS) digital content, which emphasizes that content must be factual, neutral and unambiguous. The NHS style guide also mentions reading ages and advises that NHS content writers should aim for a reading age of 9 to 11 years (NHS 2019). The guide advises using short words, sentences of up to 20 words, and short paragraphs with up to three sentences. Medical terminology is unavoidable on the NHS website, but writers are required to use the plain English term first, and then the medical term.

There is no shortage of guidance available for creating **Easy Read** information for people with intellectual disabilities, dating back to the 1990s (Bashford et al. 1995). Guidelines for creating accessible texts have been disseminated by

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 10 Hemingway app, <http://www.hemingwayapp.com/>.

intellectual disability (ID) charities, (Mencap<sup>11</sup> 2000, 2008, Change 2015) academics (Norah Fry 2004), local authorities (North Yorkshire County Council n.d.) and the Disability Rights Commission (Disability Rights Commission 2006). To complement their guidance, Learning Disability Wales have created a toolkit for checking and rating Easy Read information (Learning Disability Wales 2012).

In 2009, the Department of Health created guidelines that were intended for use across the government and to introduce a minimum standard for the production of Easy Read materials. For an illustration of these guidelines, see Appendix 1.

<b>Words and Pictures</b>	
Rule 1	Each idea needs both words and pictures
Rule 2	Pictures and words go next to each other
Rule 3	Make sure that it is clear which pictures support which bits of text
<b>Pictures</b>	
Rule 4	Pictures must be easy to understand
Rule 5	Pictures should go on the left
Rule 6	Pictures can be drawings, photographs or other images
Rule 7	Make sure that pictures are as big as possible
<b>Words</b>	
Rule 8	Words must be easy to understand
Rule 9	If you use difficult words, say what they mean using easy words
Rule 10	Words go on the right
Rule 11	Words must be written clearly – a font like Arial is good
Rule 12	Words must be big

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 11 Mencap is the largest charity for people with intellectual disabilities in the UK.

Length	
Rule 13	Each sentence must be as short as possible – more than 15 words is harder to read
Rule 14	Each document must be short – more than 20 pages is too long.

Table 1: Easy Read Principles (Department of Health 2009).

The revised set of guidelines offers more detailed advice on the use of layout, punctuation and numbers (Department of Health 2010). With the exception of the Norah Fry guidance, the guidance documents for creating Easy Read resources generally make little reference to research on readability or expert opinion. Common themes in various guides are the use of images, the need to think carefully about the potential audience for an Easy Read text, and the need to convey specific information relevant to the reader. In addition, all guidance emphasizes the importance of involving people with intellectual disabilities in the planning, design and testing of Easy Read texts, though with an acknowledgement that this may be unrealistic in some instances (Department of Health 2010).

Guidance has also been developed to create accessible information for people with aphasia (Stroke Association 2012). Despite a great deal of overlap with the Easy Read guidance described above, a few differences are also noticeable (apart from avoidance of the term ‘Easy Read’). Specific guidance includes avoiding personal pronouns, which can present difficulties for people with aphasia, and putting pictures under, rather than to the left of written text.

## 6 Practical outcomes

The majority of texts published in Plain English and Easy Read formats for UK citizens are informative texts. As English is an international lingua franca, the UK has a large publishing industry that distributes adapted literature texts for learners of English as a second or other language (ESOL).

## 6.1 Media

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) UK public service broadcaster is a widely trusted (Ipsos Mori 2020) source of news in English for UK and overseas citizens and is the largest broadcaster in the world. The BBC does not specifically offer written or broadcast news in either Plain English or Easy Read formats.

United Response, a support agency for people with intellectual disabilities, conducted a survey of 133 service users and reported that 38% felt the news in existing newspapers was irrelevant to them, whereas 56% said they would read a paper if it was made easier to understand. The organization launched **Easy News**, an online Easy Read news magazine in 2013<sup>12</sup>. United Response Easy News stories are selected and rewritten in an Easy Read format by a group of people with learning disabilities and autism spectrum conditions. According to its website, Easy News has a regular readership of around 4600 people; 80% of its readers say this is their primary source of news. News bulletins are also published in **Widget symbols** on the SymbolWorld website<sup>13</sup>.

## 6.2 Literature

The publishing genre that comes closest to **Plain English** comprises the many texts that are distributed for ESOL students. Graded readers, many of them re-workings of well-known texts in English literature, are available in collections distributed through a range of publishers, including Penguin Readers, Oxford Bookworms, and Cambridge Readers, with an eye on more of a foreign than a domestic audience. The English Easy Bible, which uses only 1200 common English words to convey the meaning of all the books of the bible in Plain English, is similarly targeted towards people outside the UK who do not speak English as a first language<sup>14</sup>.

Aimed more at a UK-based audience, Gatehouse Books, a small publishing company, publishes and distributes original titles that support literacy develop-

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12 Easy News, <https://www.unitedresponse.org.uk/resource/easy-news/>.

13 SymbolWorld, <https://symbolworld.org/articles/latest>.

14 EasyEnglish Bible, <https://www.easyenglish.bible/bible/easy/>.

ment for adult learners in the UK, both those learning to read for the first time and ESOL students. They publish books using a variety of formats, including comic strips, illustrated stories and non-fiction books, and dual language texts. Since 2006, the UK Reading Agency's project Quick Reads has published over 4.8 million copies of more than 100 titles that are 'short and engaging', though they do not, strictly-speaking, adhere to Plain or Easy Language guidelines.

Books *Beyond Words* are stories for people with intellectual disabilities that use only picture illustrations to explore many issues, mainly relating to physical and emotional wellbeing, through short narratives featuring people with intellectual disabilities. These wordless stories go further than *Easy Read* in assuming that the audience has no reading skills, though the books are accompanied by guidance notes for supporters to encourage reflection and discussion with the reader with intellectual disabilities (Tuffrey-Wijne and Bernal 2003).

### 6.3 Informative texts

As mentioned in Section 1, all government website content is required to be written using **Plain English** principles. However, little evaluation of the adherence to the Government Digital Service (GDS) guidelines has been published. Visible Thread, a commercial organization concerned with content quality management, released a readability report on 26 Central and 12 Local Government websites. They found that 92% of websites failed to achieve the target readability score (Visible Thread 2016).

**Central government departments and local authorities** publish versions of key documents in *Easy Read* formats. The usual practice is to outsource this work to commercial communication and translation companies or self-advocacy groups. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is exceptional in that it has a dedicated *Easy Read* team that has been working with Mencap and other charities to produce *Easy Read* versions of their documents (Railton 2019). *Easy Read* health information is created and disseminated by the **NHS Health Trusts** (National Health Service Health Trusts) and **healthcare charities** through their websites. Because NHS trusts are autonomous self-governing bodies, if anything, there is an over-expenditure of resources on the duplication of health information by different healthcare providers, particularly relating to

common procedures such as blood tests (Chinn 2017). **EasyHealth**<sup>15</sup>, a website hosted by a London charity for people with intellectual disabilities, has helpfully compiled these sources of information on their website as well as video and audio resources that can be downloaded free of charge.

Individual healthcare practitioners also create individually tailored Easy Read resources for their own clients using the resources described in Section 3. Skills in creating Easy Read resources are regarded as part of the everyday skill set of specialist intellectual disability healthcare staff, though few are likely to have received specific training in creating these resources.

## 7 Education and research

Little accredited training or education in either Plain English or Easy Read that is hosted by higher or further education institutions is available in the UK. A well-developed academic interest in literacy more generally involves researchers with backgrounds in linguistics, sociolinguistics, education, and ethnography. However, it seems that interaction is scarce between these academic communities and those concerned with Plain English or Easy Read communication as a practical matter in everyday life, apart from researchers concerned with health literacy. A small group of intellectual disability researchers and practitioners have undertaken research on Easy Read. We ourselves have developed links with researchers outside the UK with these same interests through interaction at conferences hosted by the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSID) (Chinn et al. 2019).

### 7.1 Education and training

As mentioned above, commercial organizations offer training in ‘clear communication’, using **Plain English** and text design principles. Little is on offer in the way of university-based training in easy language modification, though Read-

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<sup>15</sup> Easy Health, <https://www.easyhealth.org.uk/>.

ing University<sup>16</sup> does offer a module in Information Design as part of a master's degree in Communication, which looks at Plain English content design. The Simplification Centre led by Dr Rob Waller<sup>17</sup> runs an annual interdisciplinary summer school in language simplification attended by practitioners working in health, technical writing, psychology, education, law and government.

Accredited training is available for **Language Modifiers**, individuals who provide language support as a reasonable adjustment in examinations for candidates who 'require a level of support beyond that provided by a reader' (Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors 2020a). These candidates may be deaf, or have a specific reading comprehension or language difficulty, including autism spectrum conditions. Language modification specialists may advise examination boards to make sure that the language they use is suitable for all candidates, including those with the aforementioned communication needs. Language modifiers may also give support during examinations at the request of a candidate needing explanations and rephrasing of questions. Guidance for language modifiers covers operations such as breaking down and simplifying complex sentences, substituting common words for unfamiliar ones, changing the passive to the active voice, replacing phrasal verbs and abstract nouns, and removing ambiguities and metaphorical expressions (Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors 2020b).

Training in designing **Easy Read** texts is widely offered by commercial companies and self-advocacy groups. This training is not regulated and has no agreed standards. As no evaluations of such training seems to have been published, its impact is difficult to estimate.

## 7.2 Research

The creation and evaluation of Plain English and Easy Read texts is mainly seen in the UK as a practical matter for practitioners and end users, rather than as a topic for academic research. Moreover, UK research on clear communication, Plain English and Easy Read is very cross-disciplinary. The researchers come

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 16 Reading is a town in south-east England.

17 The Simplification Centre, [www.simplificationcentre.org.uk](http://www.simplificationcentre.org.uk).

from backgrounds in literacy, psychology, design, education, speech and language therapy, linguistics, and health and social care.

One inter-disciplinary community of researchers in **Information Design** draws from expertise in graphic design, writing and typography (Waller 2011). The University of Reading Centre for Information Design Research<sup>18</sup> brings together researchers interested in the design of clear and accessible information. Recent projects have analysed that ‘tone of voice’ is conveyed by document design and pain assessment for people with dementia. Another example of a cross disciplinary Information Design project is Information Design and Architecture in Persuasive Pharmacy Space: Combatting Anti-Microbial Resistance (IDAPPS n.d.), which aims to use information design principles to improve knowledge and understanding of anti-microbial resistance in community pharmacies.

The impact of health literacy concepts in medical research is evident from an expanding literature, largely authored by medical researchers, evaluating and improving health information and patient information leaflets. Health Literacy UK is a special interest group that supports researchers who are intent on building the evidence base of health literacy<sup>19</sup>, organizing seminars and conferences, and advising healthcare providers.

Research in the UK on the design, production, use, impact and features of Easy Read material for people with intellectual disabilities has been limited but is now represented by a small body of published literature. Poncelas and Murphy (2007) and Jones et al. (2007) explored the contribution of images to readers’ understanding of Easy Read information and addressed questions on whether images actually hinder understanding or contribute to idiosyncratic interpretations. Later work by Mander (2015) and Walmsley (2013) identified some of the tensions that can arise in the process of language simplification, including the risk of losing essential concepts or fostering an overly directive tone of voice (Buell et al. 2014), which may undermine rather than promote self-determination and autonomy.

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18 Centre for Information Design Research, <https://www.reading.ac.uk/cidr/>.

19 Health Literacy UK, [www.healthliteracy.org.uk](http://www.healthliteracy.org.uk).

Two reviews of available research on Easy Read material for people with intellectual disabilities have also been carried out (Chinn and Homeyard 2016, Sutherland and Isherwood 2016). Both of these outlined the lack of hard evidence for the impact of adapted information for helping people with intellectual disabilities understand content, but underlined the importance of Easy Read material as a positive societal and cultural factor in the everyday lives of this population, a finding that has been reiterated by people with intellectual disabilities themselves (Waight and Oldreive 2020). Some research has also been conducted on the accessibility of digital information for people with intellectual disabilities. A survey of Easy Read digital design features was undertaken by Waight and Oldreive (2016) and showed wide variation in the application of guidelines across a number of websites.

Hurtado et al. (2014) and Buell et al. (2020) focused more on the cognitive processes involved in accessing information from Easy Read material. Both studies concluded that grammatical constructions can often have complex and unintended domino effects on the reading and comprehension processes of people with intellectual disabilities, some of which were not in line with expected outcomes. The combined impact of images, the repetition of words and textual demands could lead to cognitive overload (Hurtado et al. 2013). The interplay between a reader's skill sets (e.g., their vocabulary level and world knowledge) could in fact have more influence on their understanding than the simplification of the text (Buell et al. 2020).

Other researchers have written accounts of how Easy Read resources have been created, often with the participation of people with intellectual disabilities (Turnpenny et al. 2015, Wyre Forest Self Advocacy and Tarleton 2005). Chinn (Chinn 2017, 2019b, 2019a) has taken a further in-depth sociological approach by examining the social and interactional contexts in which Easy Read information is presented in health checks with general practitioners in the UK (generalist doctors) and has investigated the complexities of power plays in the processes of the co-production of Easy Read material (Chinn and Pelletier 2020).

A distinct body of research exists on the information accessible to people with aphasia. Researchers have explored the readability and acceptability of adapted materials for people with aphasia (Nguyen et al. 2020, Rose et al. 2011,

Wilson and Read 2016) and have collaborated with people with dementia to create guidance and accessible resources (Herbert et al. 2019, Pearl and Cruice 2017).

## 8 Future perspectives

In the UK, the debate is ongoing on the use of parallel simplification systems – one for the general public and one specifically for people with intellectual disabilities – and even an additional system for people with aphasia. Whether this creates further divides and discourages the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in the wider circulation of accessible information, by isolating them in what Le Grys has called an ‘information ghetto’ (Le Grys 2004) is a moot point. In some ways, as a society we have encultured people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters to expect their own Easy Read versions of information without providing assurances that these texts will indeed meet their communication needs.

This last point refers to the further tension between the effort and resources expended on working on texts and documents to simplify and clarify them and the paucity of evidence regarding how much any of these measures effectively improves anyone’s access to the information contained in them (for both Plain English documents and Easy Read). The translation into plain English of a long document explaining credit card terms and conditions will still be very lengthy and unlikely to be read by the average credit card holder. On the other hand, a short summary of a long document intended to convey the general gist runs the risk of omitting or over-simplifying key concepts (Walmsley 2009).

People with intellectual disabilities constitute a highly diverse group, and it is likely that many will need very individualized texts tailored to their particular communication requirements rather than a publicly available text designed for the group as a whole. For many, a simplified text or added images will be less helpful than access to a video or audio recording (Waight and Oldreive 2020).

The communicative aspects of images are often overlooked. Chinn (2017) used a multimodal social semiotic methodology to explore implicit messages in Easy Read health leaflets for people with intellectual disabilities and noted

the social positionings of people with intellectual disabilities that these communicated. Images can support understanding of written information, but can also signal that a specific audience is being addressed. This point can, to some extent, explain why separate accessible resources are developed for people with aphasia following condition-specific guidance that specifies that older adults should be represented in images (Stroke Association 2012). The Department of Work and Pensions uses stock images rather than Photosymbols in their Easy Read resources, which may go some way towards explaining why these texts have proven popular with a wider audience than only people with intellectual disabilities, such as people from ethnic minorities who do not read English confidently (Railton 2020).

Another research gap concerns evidence that illustrates how people actually use simplified texts in their everyday lives, rather than how they describe their attitudes to adapted texts, or how they perform under experimental conditions in reading tests. Many individuals involve friends, families and supporters in making sense of texts (Papen and Walters 2008). However, little guidance is available on how to effectively help people with communication needs make use of simplified texts (Chinn 2019a, Terras et al. 2017).

There is a growing interest in researching the affordances and principles of different forms of simplified information and the literacy practices of people with a range of literacy skills. Opportunities are therefore arising to work towards an understanding of Plain English and Easy Read material as an underpinning element for accessing information within a much wider context of social communication and interaction, individual skills, interests, and motivation. Communities of practice such as GOV.UK promote principles of universal design (Story et al. 1998), endeavouring to produce written content that is accessible to the widest possible readership, without requiring separate resources for people with communication support needs. In the future we hope that capitalizing on the growing expertise in simplifying and developing accessible information, particularly in digital environments, will mean that 'plain', 'easy' language will increasingly be the norm for public information.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy Read. The extracts relate to UK government information about ‘Universal Credit’. This is a payment that the government offers to people on low incomes or who are out of work to help with living costs. The rules about who is eligible for this payment are available on the gov.uk website. The texts below are taken from the part of the guidance that explains eligibility for adults who are training or studying.

Standard language	Easy Read
<p><b>If you're 18 or over and in training or studying full-time</b></p> <p>You can make a new claim for Universal Credit if any of the following apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• you live with your partner and they're eligible for Universal Credit</li> <li>• you're responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple</li> <li>• you're in further education, are 21 or under and do not have parental support, for example you're estranged from your parents and you're not under local authority care</li> </ul> <p>Source: <a href="https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility">https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/eligibility</a></p>	<p>Created by the same government department, full text available at <a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955636/who-can-claim-universal-credit-easy-read.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955636/who-can-claim-universal-credit-easy-read.pdf</a></p> <div> <p><b>6 If you are training or study full-time</b></p> </div> <p>You may be able to claim Universal Credit when training or studying full-time if you:</p> <div>  <p><b>18-21 years old</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are between 18 and 21 years old</li> </ul> </div> <div>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have parental support and you are not under the care of a local authority</li> </ul> </div> <div>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are studying a course in further education.</li> </ul> <p>For more information, go to <a href="http://www.gov.uk/further-education-courses">www.gov.uk/further-education-courses</a></p> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">Page 14</p>

Standard language	Easy Read
	<p><b>Other reasons you may be able to get Universal Credit when training or studying full-time</b></p> <div><p>You live with a partner who can get Universal Credit.</p></div> <div><p>You are the main carer of a child.</p></div> <div><p>You have a child with a partner who can get Universal Credit.</p></div> <p>Page 15</p>

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