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The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: a comparative analysis of the Easy English, the Easy German and the Easy Italian versions*

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ABSTRACT

The article explores and compares the intralingual translations into Easy English, Easy German and Easy Italian of the authentic English version of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The analysis, based on a selection of relevant parameters taken from the Easy Language (EL) guidelines of Inclusion Europe (2009) and on a set of quantitative (mainly lexicometric) data, aims to identify similarities and differences in the implementation of text design rules as they are proposed by Inclusion Europe, as well as quantitative and qualitative similarities and differences that can point to the degree of comprehensibility that characterizes the various EL translations. Results show that each language seems to aim at a different type of target user and to serve substantially different communicative purposes, as demonstrated e.g. by the overall different length and structure of each version and by the varied use of pictures and simplification strategies in the EL texts (ranging from several to none) – among other features. They also highlight an unresolved issue, i.e. the fact that the line between intralingual translation and full text rewriting for

* Both authors contributed to the full article, with Elisa Perego dealing specifically with texts written in (Easy) English, and Goranka Rocco dealing specifically with texts written in (Easy) German.

comprehensibility purposes is still too blurred and treated too inconsistently in different EU countries, which might be a problem when dealing with legal texts. This poses the question of whether a systematic structured coordination between EL professionals translating legal texts in different countries should be implemented to ensure an equal transfer of content of the same normative text to the same categories of people in different European countries.

KEYWORDS

Easy English, Easy German, Easy Italian, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, simplification

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing importance attributed to text production in Easy Language (hereafter EL) (Lindholm & Vanhatalo 2021; Maaß 2020) and Plain Language (PL) reflects the heightened awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, as well as the increasing sensitivity to the problems of people with reading and text comprehension difficulties. The general efforts towards linguistic accessibility include the paramount role of *intralingual* translation processes addressed to non-specialist text consumers. In this respect, an important realm of application is legal texts that are increasingly translated into Plain Language and Easy Language (Rink 2020) to enable common citizens to understand very complex yet crucial text types.

Intralingual translation or rewording is one type of translation consisting in the interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language (Jakobson 1959: 233). From an accessibility perspective, it can comprise the translation from a standard or complex language variety to same language varieties that are easier to understand and therefore can grant accessible communication and limit communicative exclusion in several contexts (Perego 2021). These varieties include EL, covering the maximum comprehensibility level, and Plain Language, covering an intermediary level of comprehensibility.

A seminal document that has been translated into several Easy Language versions is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also known as CRPD (United Nations 2006). The CRPD is an international human rights convention which sets out the fundamental human rights of people with disabilities. It is the “first binding international human rights instrument to specifically address disability” (FRA n/a para. 1), and a crucial legal document representing a starting point that has contributed to the generation of a series of regulations, initiatives and monitoring processes and institutions currently in force in several European countries.¹

1 For the application of CRPD in the UK see EHRC (2020), for Germany and Austria see Maaß (2020: 58-64), Maaß & Rink (2020: 17), Fröhlich/Candussi (2021: 31f), Beyerlein

In this article, we will focus specifically on the Easy English, Easy German and Easy Italian versions of the Convention in order to show how such versions differ in terms of (typo)graphic, morphosyntactic, and textual features but also in terms of communicative purpose and intended target audience (2.1.).

We will use the labels Easy English, Easy German and the Easy Italian for consistency reasons, even though each Easy Language variety has its own established or preferred label.

In the UK, for instance, it is quite common to oppose ‘Plain English’ to ‘Easy Read’, which is in fact a widely used British English term to refer specifically to texts and resources adapted for people with intellectual disabilities. Another term used in other English-speaking countries, like Australia or the US, is ‘Easy-to-Read’ (Chinn & Buell 2021: 624).

In Germany, “(t)he field of comprehensibility-enhanced varieties of German is structured by the concepts of ‘Leichte Sprache’ and ‘Einfache Sprache’” (Maaß 2020: 50), but Maaß advances the notion of *Easy Language Plus*, which is “intended to be a highly comprehensible variety that is, at the same time, more acceptable than Easy Language” (Maaß 2020: 166). In Austria, we can also find expressions such as *Leicht Lesen* (Rocco 2022a: 245-246), *leicht verständliche Sprache* and *Klarsprache* (Fröhlich & Candussi 2021: 30). In Switzerland, according to Parpan-Blaser et al. (2021: 579) there is no common comparable terminology to refer to EL due to its multilingualism and different administrative and political structures and standards in policymaking.

In Italy, the terminology used to refer to EL and PL is still very flexible and sometimes ambiguous, and these labels are often used as synonyms – which reflects their under-recognized status in the country. Easy Language is referred to with *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 normally refers to written texts to be read. *Lingua facile* (Easy language) is another variant that can be found in several contexts, while both the borrowing *Plain Language* and the Italian expression *semplificazione linguistica* (language simplification) are used to refer to Plain Language (Perego 2021: 280-281).

In the following paragraphs, first we will give a brief overview of the aims of the Convention, its signatories and ratifications (1.1.), of its translations in standard German and Italian (1.2.), and of its English, German and Italian EL versions (1.3.). Then, we will focus on the latter and analyse them departing from a set of parameters based on the Inclusion Europe Guidelines (2009) in order to

(2020) and “Umsetzung der UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention in Österreich”, <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Themen/Soziales/Menschen-mit-Behinderungen/UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention.html> (accessed 19.10.2022), for Switzerland see Parpan-Blaser et al. (2021: 583ff.) and <https://www.aktionsplan-un-brk.ch/fr/plan-daction-cdph-11.html> (accessed 19.10.2022).

identify the similarities and the differences with respect to the text design rules recommended by Inclusion Europe.²

1.1. THE CONVENTION AND THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL

The CRPD is a multilateral treaty issued by the United Nations with the goal of promoting, protecting and ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention with its Optional Protocol (OP), which establishes procedures aimed at strengthening the implementation and monitoring of the CRPD, was adopted by the UN on 13 December 2006. It was opened for signature on 30 March 2007 and entered into force on 3 May 2008 upon its 20th ratification (United Nations 2022).

Today, the Convention counts 164 signatories (countries or regional integration organisations) and 185 ratifications or accessions, and the Optional Protocol counts 94 signatories and 100 ratifications or accessions (United Nations 2022, Status on 6 May 2022). According to Article 50 of the CRPD, only the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish versions are to be regarded as “equally authentic” texts (United Nations 2006).

Table 1 illustrates the main steps taken in the English, German, and Italian speaking countries. The dates of ratification and of the OP vary from country to country. For instance, Ireland belongs to the countries which signed the CRPS on 30 Mar 2007, which was not ratified until 2018, and it still does not figure in the list of the signatories of the OP (more on this in Flynn 2020). Switzerland acceded in 2014, but it still does not belong to the OP-signatories either.

	Signature of CRPD	Formal confirmation (c), accession (a), ratification	Signature of the Optional Protocol	Formal confirmation (c), accession (a), ratification of the Optional Protocol
EU	30 Mar 2007	23 Dec 2020c	n/a	n/a
UK	30 Mar 2007	8 Jun 2009	26 Feb 2009	7 Aug 2009
Ireland	30 Mar 2007	20 Mar 2018	n/a	n/a
Austria	30 Mar 2007	26 Sep 2008	30 Mar 2007	26 Sep 2008
Germany	30 Mar 2007	24 Feb 2009	30 Mar 2007	24 Feb 2009
Switzerland	n/a	15 Apr 2014a	n/a	n/a
Italy	30 Mar 2007	15 May 2009	30 Mar 2007	15 May 2009

Table 1 – CRPD – signature and ratification in selected countries (United Nations Treaty Collection IV, 15 and IV, 15a)

2 Inclusion Europe is the European Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their families. It counts 78 members in 39 European countries, and its mission is fighting for equal rights and full inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in all aspects of society.

1.2. THE ORIGINAL ENGLISH TEXT AND THE STANDARD GERMAN AND STANDARD ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS

The English version of the CRPD includes a Preamble, 50 Articles, and the Optional Protocol comprising 18 articles. The UK agreed to follow it in 2009, thus agreeing to protect and promote the human rights of disabled people (EHRC 2020). The German CRPD version, entitled *Übereinkommen über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen* and also known as *UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention* exists in more than one translation: the German translation for four German-speaking countries (*Die amtliche, gemeinsame Übersetzung von Deutschland, Österreich, Schweiz und Lichtenstein*) is intended as “an official document with legal character”³

Besides this version, a *Schattenübersetzung*⁴ (or “shadow translation”, NETZWERK ARTIKEL 3 e.V.: 2018) also exists, i.e. an unofficial translation drafted with the participation and contribution of end users (see also Magris 2018). As we read on the website in German dedicated to it,⁵ according to some associations – which did not feel sufficiently taken into consideration in the translation process – the official translations of some expressions do not reflect the original English text of the Convention.⁶ The corrections, visible in the text of the *Schattenübersetzung* itself⁷ and thus drawing attention to the meta-linguistic or meta-discursive level, consist mainly in the substitution of certain expressions by lexical synonyms, showing a tendency towards the use of internationalisms, anglicisms and key terms of the discourse on inclusion and accessibility. The substitutions include for instance *Teilhabe* → *Partizipation*, *Hilfe* → *Assistenz*,

3 Cf. UN-BRK (2018: 4): “Bei der amtlichen deutschen Übersetzung handelt es sich um ein offizielles Dokument mit Rechtscharakter”.

4 According to this source and other sources (<https://www.klagsverband.at/archives/1197>, accessed 5.12.2022), the expression “shadow translation” is used in reference to the shadow reports of non-governmental organisations to the United Nations.

5 Cf. *Schattenübersetzung* in <https://www.behindertenrechtskonvention.info/schattenubersetzung-3678/> (accessed 30.9.2022).

6 In the preface addressed to readers we can read as follows: “Deutschland, Liechtenstein, Österreich und die Schweiz haben 2007/2008 fast ohne Beteiligung behinderter Menschen und ihrer Verbände eine deutsche Übersetzung der UN-Konvention über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen abgestimmt. Alle Bemühungen von Seiten der Behindertenorganisationen in den vier beteiligten Staaten, wenigstens die größten Fehler zu korrigieren, sind gescheitert. Deshalb hat sich das NETZWERK ARTIKEL 3 e.V. 2009 dazu entschlossen, eine sogenannte ‘Schattenübersetzung’ zu veröffentlichen” (*Schattenübersetzung* 2018: 5).

7 For example, the title of the Article 19 (“Living independently and being included in the community”) in the *Schattenübersetzung* reads as follows (visible corrections added): Artikel 19 ~~Unabhängige Lebensführung~~ **Selbstbestimmt Leben** und ~~Einbeziehung in die Inklusion in der Gemeinschaft~~ (*Schattenübersetzung* 2018).

Stärkung der Autonomie → Empowerment, Einbeziehung/Integration → Inklusion, Zugänglichkeit → Barrierefreiheit. Apart from that, some lexical-semantic interventions that distance the *Schattenübersetzung* from the original English text should be mentioned, e.g. the shift from the term *Justiz* to the term *Recht* in the title of Article 13 *Access to justice* (*Zugang zur Justiz* → *Zugang zum Recht*), the translation of the English terms *race* and *ethnic origin* with the same German expression (*ethnische Herkunft*) and the inconsistent replacement of the official variants of gender-sensitive language with a star (*), which is, although common, not one of the officially recommended variants by Deutscher Rechtschreibrat (2021): *Mitarbeiter und Mitarbeiterinnen* is replaced by *Mitarbeiter*innen* in Article 26(2), but not in Article 24(4).

After the publication of the *Schattenübersetzung*, a new, revised Austrian translation changed some elements of the jointly agreed translation, converging with regard to some lexical features (*Inklusion* for *Einbeziehung/Integration*, *Assistenz* for *Hilfe*) with the *Schattenübersetzung*.⁸ As for the Swiss version, the differences with regard to the jointly agreed German text are basically of a formal, orthographic and typographic nature (i.e. *Strassen* instead of *Straßen* in Article 9).

The Italian translation of the Convention (*La convenzione delle Nazioni Unite sui diritti delle persone con disabilità*) can be found on the website of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (United Nations 2009). It was produced by the *Direzione generale della comunicazione e della direzione generale per l'inclusione e i diritti sociali e la responsabilità sociale delle imprese*. The Italian version includes the 50 articles of the Convention as well as the 18 articles of the Optional Protocol (*Protocollo opzionale alla Convenzione sui diritti delle persone con disabilità*). In Switzerland, the Italian translation, as well as the above-mentioned German version, is published on Fedlex, the publication platform for federal law (*La piattaforma di pubblicazione del diritto federale*).⁹ This version does not include the paragraphs of the Optional Protocol, not yet ratified in Switzerland (Table 1).

1.3. THE EASY ENGLISH, EASY GERMAN AND EASY ITALIAN VERSIONS

In this section, we will provide a brief overview of the Easy English, Easy German and Easy Italian versions of the Convention and we will focus on their function. In fact, when dealing with translations into Easy Language of any type of text, considering their function is essential: Easy Language versions are normally intended as texts for informative and inclusive purposes only, and therefore they

8 Cf. <https://broschuerenservice.sozialministerium.at/Home/Download?publicationId=19> (accessed 20.10.2022). The reasons and changes are explained in detail in the *Begleitdokument zu BGBl. III Nr. 105/2016* (Begleitdokument 2016).

9 Cf. <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2014/245/it> and <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2014/245/de> (accessed 5.12.2022).

cannot be regarded as authentic – as we can see in the comment to the Easy Read versions on the official UN website:

These non-official versions of the Convention are provided by other sources and are for informational purposes only; they do not constitute endorsement of, or an approval by, the United Nations of any of the text or products, services, or opinions of the organization or individual. The United Nations bears no responsibility for the accuracy, legality or content of their statements and opinions.”¹⁰

This status is clearly reported on the opening page of the Easy English version (1.3.2.), in all the consulted Easy German versions (1.3.2.), and in the Easy Italian version (1.3.3.) published in Switzerland (p. 2), but no mention of the non-legal status of the translation is made in the Easy Italian version published in Italy.

In the following sections, we will illustrate each EL version in detail. Table 2 provides an overview of the quantitative and structural parameters of all the translations used for the analysis and also of the EL translations consulted in the preliminary explorative stage: the version in Easy English (CRPD_E), four versions in Easy German published in Germany (CRPD_D), Austria (CRPD_A1, CRPD_A2), and Switzerland (CRPD_CH_ger) and two versions in Easy Italian published in Italy (CRPD_I) and Switzerland (CRPD_CH_it).

	Easy English	Easy German				Easy Italian	
	CRPD_E	CRPD_D	CRPD_A1	CRPD_A2	CRPD_CH_ger	CRPD_I	CRPD_CH_it
Length (in pages)	57	71	82	240	54	11	5
Explicit division in Convention and Optional Protocol	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Numbered articles (Art. 1, 2...) ¹¹	+ C	-	-	+ C+OP	-	-	-
Presence of images	+	-	+-	+-	-	-	-
Disclaimer on legal validity	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Glossary explaining words	-	+	+	+	+	-	-

Table 2 – Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – versions in Easy English (CRPD_E), Easy German (CRPD_D, CRPD_A1, CRPD_A2, CRPD_CH_ger) and Easy Italian (CRPD_I, CRPD_CH_it): quantitative and structural parameters

10 See the comment to the “Easy read versions” at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html> (accessed 20.10.2022). The website offers a list with links to five Easy read versions (Dutch, English, Finnish, Hungarian, Portuguese). The German and the Italian Easy versions are not listed.

11 “C” indicates the articles of the Convention (Articles 1-50), “OP” indicates the articles of the Optional Protocol (Articles 1-18).

1.3.1. THE EASY ENGLISH VERSION

The Easy English version of the Convention (re-entitled *International agreement on the rights of disabled people*) was produced in November 2007 for the Department for Work and Pensions¹² by Inspired Services Publishing, the largest supplier of Easy Read in the UK to empower people with learning disabilities worldwide.

As we can read in the document, the *International agreement on the rights of disabled people* is “an Easy Read guide to the full agreement” and has no legal value, which in its opening page points directly to the full agreement via the UN website (Inspired Services 2007).

The name of the full agreement is also provided along with its possible variant: “You may also see or hear it called the United Nations Convention on Disability Rights”, and a list of all the themes discussed is provided at the end of the document. This is a peculiar choice: adding a table of contents at the end of the document does not enable it to function as a pre-relief or preliminary input with respect to the information that is about to be delivered, and such choice does not go in the direction of easification (as in Bhatia 1983).



This paper is an EasyRead guide to the full agreement. It is not a legal paper. You need to look at the full agreement itself if you want to know what exactly the agreement says, or what countries have signed up to.

Figure 1 – Disclaimer on the legal validity in the CRPD_E

Specifically, the 57-page Easy English Convention (vs. the 37 pages of the original version) breaks down the original document into fifty different sections corresponding to the 50 articles of the original CRPD, which enables it to be comprehensive and very informative, especially if compared to the Easy Italian version(s). The translation of the Optional Protocol does not appear in the text.

12 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is a ministerial department, supported by 13 agencies and public bodies. It is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy. As the UK's biggest public service department, it administers the State Pension and a range of working age, disability and ill health benefits to around 20 million claimants and customers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>, accessed 13.12.2022).

1.3.2. THE EASY GERMAN VERSIONS

The intralingual translations in *Leichte Sprache* published in single German-speaking countries show slight differences. In this study, we will analyse the Easy German translation of the officially agreed Standard German translation published in Germany (thereafter CRPD__D). However, before proceeding with the analysis, we will briefly illustrate the main differences between this first version and the versions published in Switzerland (CRPD__CH), in Austria in 2011 (CRPD__A1) and in 2019 (CRPD__A2) – the latter being the more significantly modified version.

As we can see, the second Austrian version (CRPS__A2) differs significantly from the other versions with regard to two features: the length (240 pages) and the fact that it adheres more closely to the structure of the original legal text: it is divided into Convention and OP (*Teil 1 UN-Behindertenrechtsffikonvention* and *Teil 2 Fakultativprotokoll*) and into the Preamble and Articles. In terms of use of images, in the English version content is systematically illustrated (+), while both Austrian versions are characterised by the occasional, non-systematic presence of images with a tendentially explicative function (+-). All the other versions have no images.

Regarding disclaimers, all German versions mention that the translation in EL has no legal validity. However, the disclaimers differ in style and in length. While, for example, CRPD__D and CRPD__A1 condense the message in three lines (Fig. 2), the second Austrian version and the Swiss version contain longer explanations; see, for instance, the eight-line long *Haftungsfiausschluss* (CRPD__A2, p. 8) and the *Wichtiger Hinweis* (CRPD__CH, p. 1) containing similar information in other form.

**In diesem Text erklären wir die wichtigsten Dinge
über das Übereinkommen.
Aber nur das Original Übereinkommen ist gültig.**

Figure 2 – Disclaimer on the legal validity in the CRPD__D

Furthermore, all the German texts contain a *Wörterbuch* (glossary) at the end, but the Austrian version (CRPD__A2) is significantly longer, with 69 entries compared to only 12 entries in the German version and the Swiss version and 16 entries in the first Austrian version. Only in the Swiss version, the table of contents precedes the introduction, and thus might contribute to the reading comprehension thanks to its pre-relieving function.

Lexical differences in the Easy German versions mainly regard the use of some keywords such as “Convention” itself: *Übereinkommen* in the German and in the Austrian versions, *Vereinbarung* in the Swiss version (*Die UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention – Übereinkommen über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen* (CPRD_D), vs. *Vereinbarung über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderungen* (CPRD_CH)).

Some lexical differences between the Austrian Easy version and the other Easy German versions lie in the lexical changes proposed by the *Schattenübersetzung* (1.2.) such as *Inklusion* and *Barrierefreiheit*, as these changes have been adopted not only in the Austrian standard version (1.2.), but also into the Austrian Easy version (D, CH: *Einbeziehung/Integration, Zugänglichkeit*).

Finally, there are, as expected, some slight spelling differences due to the peculiarities of the Swiss spelling (ß ss), and differences with regard to the use of colours and (typo)graphic features: we can observe the use of turquoise, green or blue for difficult words in CPRD_CH and CPRD_D, but underlining in CPRD_A2; we can also observe the use of red for headings (*Einleitung*) in CPRD_CH; underscored sentences and headings in CRPS_A2.

1.3.3. THE EASY ITALIAN VERSIONS

The Easy Italian version of the Convention published in Italy was produced in 2009 by Anffas ONLUS, the National Association of Families of Persons with Intellectual and/or Relational Disabilities, which normally participates in many activities linked to language simplification. The translation process was coordinated by Roberta Speziale, the Anffas national division coordinator, and it is the result of the collaborative work of several local members of Anffas. The work was supported by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (*Ministero del lavoro e delle politiche sociali*) and by Inclusion Europe. The Easy Italian version of the Convention published in Italy is the only EL version that does not contain a disclaimer on legal validity.

The Swiss Easy Italian version, which is based on the Easy Italian version and adapted by Anffas (as mentioned in the document), was edited and supervised by the Federal Office for Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities.¹³ The title is shorter (*La Convenzione sui diritti delle persone con disabilità. Spiegata in linguaggio semplice*), and the whole document is just five pages long including the cover and the back page. This version includes a disclaimer on the lack of legal validity and the link to the “difficult language” official version. It is divided into three numbered macro sections where the most important messages are provided in bulleted lists. The informal form of address *tu* (you) is used.

13 Cf. www.ufpd.ch (accessed 22.10.2022).

Compared to all the other EL versions, those in Easy Italian are by far the shortest (11 and 5 pages including the title page) and they lack several structural features (see Table 2) – for example, they do not contain images or word explanations.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. CRITERIA

Our main reference point for the selection of the parameters used to analyse the Easy Language versions of the CRPD has been the brochure *Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand* published by Inclusion Europe in 2009 (see also IFLA 2010; ILSMH 1998). This contains standards, i.e. “a list of rules which help people to do things in the same way and in the right way” (IE n/a: 5), that are available in 16 languages and are the main outcome of the three-year European project Pathways (2015-2018)¹⁴ on the employability and integration of people with chronic diseases.

The Inclusion Europe standards were created to make information easy to read and to understand for people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities, and to grant them access to information. From a terminological – and therefore conceptual – point of view, they adopt a modern approach and emphasize the broader horizon they cover: their title refers to making information easy to read and *understand*, and not just easy to read, as was the case in the past. They cover the most relevant aspects regarding the implementation of information that must be easy to read and understand. Specifically, the booklet covers general standards and standards for written, electronic, video and audio information. The guide itself is written in large print Easy Language and offers a succinct list of clear and simple recommendations, with plenty of visual aids. The reader is immersed in Easy Language right from the beginning and starts learning incidentally while focusing on the content of the booklet. As specified in their title, these guidelines have the considerable advantage of focusing on accessible communication in general rather than only on easy-to-read language, which has been a limit in this field for a long time. However, language-specific rules are not included, with a few exceptions (IE __D: 23, IE __IT: 23) which makes the guidelines very valuable but at the same time somehow broad when it comes to their implementation in specific languages (for German cf. Bredel & Maaß 2016). The availability of the Inclusion Europe standards in 16 European languages (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Croatian, Czech, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Slovene and Slovak) makes them accessible in several European countries.

14 Cf. <https://www.pathwaysproject.eu/> (accessed 22.10.2022).

Based on the Inclusion Europe guidelines, we selected and compared a series of particularly relevant qualitative and quantitative parameters that could be easily measured and compared also interlinguistically in order to show whether and how these texts differ as well as to assess their general level of comprehensibility.

The qualitative parameters used for the analysis include typographic and graphic aspects, lexical aspects, as well as syntactic and textual aspects. More specifically, the typographic and graphic parameters relate to character type, font size, use of bold, number and type of images (explanatory vs. decorative; black and white vs. colour), position of the images/pictures in the text (e.g. next to words), line spacing, margins, headings, bulleted lists, indentation, columns, justified text, large print, and text colour. The lexical aspects include word frequency, core vocabulary vs. specialized vocabulary, use of metaphors, and loan words. The syntactic and textual aspects include sentence structure, dependence structures, number and type of clauses, topology, connectors, pronominal reference, and anaphoric pronouns.

The general assumption is that the larger the number of Inclusion Europe parameters, the easier and therefore more accessible the text can be. This will be further backed up by the quantitative data. In fact, besides the Inclusion Europe guidelines, we considered some quantitative parameters (i.e. overall number of pages, tokens, number of characters, types, word length, sentence length) that could be helpful to get a picture of the overall extent of the complexity of the text (see, e.g. Johansson 2008). We used the *WordsmithTools 8* and *TextLab*¹⁵ software to measure some quantitative parameters.

2.2. RESULTS

Overall, regarding the structural and lexicometric parameters, the Easy English version CRPD__E counts 57 pages including the introductory indications and the disclaimer (Fig. 1), the 50 articles of the Convention, the *Credits* (p. 49) and the table of contents (*What is in this paper*, pp. 50-55). Each section is organized in very short paragraphs that can include bullet points, and plenty of explanatory pictures complete the verbal messages. Normally, one picture is associated with one idea. The use of wide spaces between sentences, paragraphs or bulleted points, as well as the large font used (16 points) ensure a usable¹⁶ and easy-to-understand layout and contribute to the higher number of pages. This, however, comes with a dramatically smaller number of words: the original convention is 11,321 words long

¹⁵ We thank TextLab for the temporary licence in November 2022.

¹⁶ Usability is the extent to which something is user-oriented, cognitively effective and satisfactory. Text usability is linked to text complexity, which determines its readability and lack of ambiguity (Perego 2020a: 19).

(63,962 characters) and the simplified version is 3,967 words long (19,391 characters). The analysis performed with *WorsmithTools* 8 shows that the words *people* and *disabled* are between the top low-ranking words for frequency with respectively 134 and 126 occurrences (3.32% and 3.12%), and they are preceded only by the definite article *the* (181/4.48%) and the particle *to* (171/4.24). The high frequency of the topic-specific word *disabled* marks its importance in the text. Overall, most of the words used are high-frequency words (e.g. *countries, have, sure, make*) which are processed more efficiently than low-frequency words.

The German version CRPD__D counts 71 pages structured as follows: the title, the disclaimer on the legal validity (Fig. 2) and the gender disclaimer, the indications regarding the use of colours (p. 1-2) and other information on text, the main parts corresponding to the Preamble and the 50 articles of the Convention *Teil 1: Über die Vereinbarung* (pp. 6-11); *Teil 2: Die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung. Was steht in der Vereinbarung?*; *Teil 3: Wie wird geprüft, ob sich Deutschland an die Regeln hält?* The last part (*Teil 3*) also deals with some contents of the Optional Protocol. This is followed by the glossary including 12 entries in Easy German (*Teil 4: Schwierige Wörter in diesem Text*, pp. 64-69) and the indications regarding the production and translation of the text (*Wer hat dieses Heft gemacht; Wer hat das Heft in Leichte Sprache übersetzt?*, p. 70). The analysis of CRPD__D performed with *TextLab* (which also calculates HIX - *Hohenheimerverständlichkeitsindex*) counts 7,607 words and 42,315 characters.¹⁷ It identifies *Mensch* (mostly in plural form *Menschen*), *Behinderung* (294) and *Deutschland* (138) as the most frequent words. The high frequency of the word *Mensch(en)* ('person', 'people') marks its importance in the text, but also a tendency to replace anaphoric personal pronouns with "Menschen" (288 occurrences, 208 of which within the noun phrase *Menschen mit Behinderung* ('persons with disability'), and 67 occurrences of the singular form *Mensch*, 36 of which in *Mensch mit Behinderung*). The use of the noun *Mensch(en)* is so systematic and widespread that we could cautiously speak of an extension of meaning and a grammaticalization-like tendency. The anaphoric pronoun *sie* appears only 75 times.

The Easy Italian version CRPD__I is very short and condenses the 52 pages of the Standard Italian Translation into 11 pages, including the cover page and an empty back page. This can pose the problem of whether we are in front of an intralingual translation or of a document that has no close link with the source text. Most content is missing and only the main message is conveyed (disabled people are entitled to live a comfortable life and they have a series of rights that

17 These are approximate values after the preparation of the txt file to avoid syntactic misinterpretation which would otherwise have influenced the calculations and sentence length values and therefore also the readability index value. The file preparation process included 1) typographical adjustment of the table of contents by elimination of dots between headings and page numbers, 2) addition of full stops after some headings and subheadings to avoid distortions due to a tendency to interpret headings in txt format as parts of sentences.

they can claim). The text is divided into four macro sections, and each relevant point is accompanied by coloured images created specifically by an illustrator.

The Italian title of the Easy Language Convention CRPD__I (*Sai quali sono i tuoi diritti? La Convenzione Onu sui diritti delle persone con disabilità in versione facile da leggere* – ‘Do you know what your rights are? The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in an easy-to-read version’) opens with a question in big capital letters and closes with a small-print subtitle that specifies the language variety used. No mention that the document has no legal value is made, and no reference to the official document is provided. The title anticipates a stylistic choice made by the text adapter: the informal and familiar second person singular *tu + verb* is used to address the reader rather than the polite and formal third person singular *Lei + verb* normally used with superiors and strangers. This might reflect the intention to use a more inclusive and direct style, even though it could be interpreted to have a politically incorrect connotation, to be a form of disrespect and which could contribute to stigmatizing this text. On the other hand, using a formal form of address (*Lei*) would be too marked as a choice in this context. An impersonal structure could have been considered instead. The analysis performed with *WorsmithTools 8* shows that the most frequent word is *diritto* (‘right’), which occurs 15 times in the text of the convention. The triplet *Hai diritto a* (‘You have the right...’) is in fact the opening string of words of most sentences.

The most striking structural differences between the three Easy versions will be summarized in the following.

2.2.1. TEXT LENGTH

In terms of length and content, the English and German versions can be considered interlingual translations of their source text, while the Italian version is closer to a summary or even a very short brochure illustrating the main rationale and scope of the Convention, and it is not at all comprehensive. Also in terms of word and character number, we observed that the German text is about double the length of the English text (7,607 vs. 3,967 words, and 42,315 vs. 19,391 characters), while the Italian version expectedly features the smaller figures (790 words and 4,422 characters).

2.2.2. IMAGES AND COLOURS

Not all the Easy Language versions that we analysed rely on images that help readers to understand the text, as suggested by the Inclusion Europe guidelines (2009: 20). While the English version contains 281 coloured images with an explicative function – and the Italian version 16 – next to each new topic, the German version does not include any. Its only graphic element is the motto

“Demokratie braucht Inklusion” (‘Democracy needs inclusion’) located inside a sketchy blind map of Germany splitting it right in the middle. Both the inscription and the line that delineates the map are multicoloured, with letters made of up to two or three colours each, and its function is definitely not explanatory – it rather suggests the need to grant a clear visual identity through the use of a logo. As for colours, no text colour is used in English and Italian, while the German text behaves differently and deviates from the Inclusion Europe guidelines, using blue for some headings and important word groups, red for headings and green for “schwierige Wörter” (‘difficult words’) (CRPD__D: 2).

2.2.3. HEADINGS

All the versions analysed used headings that are clear and easy to understand and that explain and partly incapsulate the text underneath in order to make sure that readers are given all the information they need (IE 2009: 17). Interestingly, German and Italian tend to formulate these headings as questions (e.g. *Was muss Deutschland machen?* ‘What does Germany have to do?’, *Sai quali sono i tuoi diritti?* ‘Do you know what your rights are?’). This strategy deviates from the IE guidelines (2009, but see also IFLA 2010), which do not recommend using questions in Easy Language texts. However, the focusing, reassuring and facilitating potential of questions can make the text – even a text dealing with legal topics – less intimidating and help the reader to understand what they are reading, as well as to activate previous knowledge and make predictions, thus increasing the likelihood of understanding (Perego 2020b: 218). As for Easy German, the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* guidelines explicitly advise against the use of questions in the body of the text, but seem to accept them in the headings.¹⁸ The only scientifically based guidelines for Easy German by Bredel and Maaß give examples of how to indicate semantic-logic relations such as the conditional relation and how to simplify indirect interrogatives, i.e. in legal texts, by means of direct questions (2016a: 257, 392; 2016b: 103). Rocco found a high frequency of questions in her analyses of *Leichte Sprache* (2022a; 2022b:161, 166ff.), but also some examples in the texts written in the Plain Language variant *einfache Sprache* (2021).

18 *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* formulates it as follows: *Vermeiden Sie Fragen. Manche Menschen fühlen sich dadurch belehrt- (...) Aber: Fragen als Überschrift sind manchmal gut* (BMAS 2013: 49, for critiques cf. Bredel & Maaß 2016: 104, 392ff.).

2.2.4. EXAMPLES

Resorting to examples is crucial in easy language texts. As we illustrated in 2.1., the Inclusion Europe guidelines make this clear quite early in the text (IE 2009: 10).

Browsing through our texts, we observed that English and Italian tend to use them sparingly. We identified respectively five and three cases in the two versions of the Convention, that we exemplify in Figure 3 below:

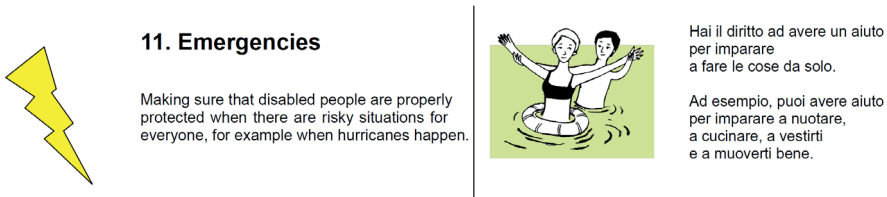


Figure 3 – Examples taken from the CRPD_E (p. 12) on the left, and from the CRPD_I (p. 6) on the right

The Convention in Easy German (CRPD_D), on the contrary, systematically uses examples to illustrate single procedures and especially single rights that the convention addresses. 120 occurrences of *zum Beispiel* ('for example') could be found in the text.

Deutschland muss etwas dagegen machen, wenn ein Mensch mit Behinderung schlecht behandelt wird.

Zum Beispiel soll Deutschland eine Firma bestrafen, wenn die Firma einen Menschen wegen seiner Behinderung schlechter behandelt hat.

Deutschland muss helfen, dass es viele Dinge gibt, die Menschen mit Behinderung benutzen können.

Zum Beispiel:

Deutschland kann Geld geben, damit jemand etwas erfindet,
was Menschen mit Behinderung hilft.

Figure 4 – Examples in CRPD_D (p. 14)

2.2.5. USE OF PRONOUNS

The way pronouns, especially anaphoric, are used in Easy Language texts is crucial. Pronouns can in fact create ambiguity if they are far from their nominal referent and/or if they have more than one nominal antecedent in the preceding text, as often happens, for example, in Easy German (Rocco 2022b: 163) or in other ELs. In pro-drop languages like Italian, the ambiguity problem occurs with the omission of subject elements.

A qualitative analysis of the three versions shows that the Italian text (CRPD_I) has the tendency to repeat the nominal referent (e.g. *Tutte le persone hanno dei diritti/e tutte le persone/devono rispettare/i diritti degli altri*. ‘All people have rights/and all people/must respect/the rights of others’) rather than to use pronominal forms or omissions, even though in line with the Italian grammar it always drops the second person pronoun when addressing the reader (*Hai diritto a viaggiare* ‘You have the right to travel’). However, the relativizer *che* (‘who’/‘that’) is quite frequent (14 occurrences, 1.73%) (e.g. *Non devi fare delle cose/che ti fanno stare male/o ti danno fastidio* ‘You do not have to do things/that make you feel bad/or bother you’).

Also the English version (CRPD_E) is in line with the tendency to limit pronominal forms: it has a frequency of 0.5% in the text, *these* of 0.2%, the personal pronouns *he* and *she* are not used, while *they* is slightly more frequent (1.14%, equalling 46 occurrences) and normally occurs very close to the nominal referent (“Disabled children should be respected for who they are as they grow up”), thus favouring its comprehension (cf. also *them*, with 12 occurrences (0.3%), which behaves similarly: “Giving accessible information to disabled people about the things that will help them”).

As already announced, the German text (CRPD_D) tends to replace anaphoric personal pronouns with *Mensch(en)*. In view of the resulting meaning extension, we could, with the necessary caution, speak of a tendency towards grammaticalization.

When it comes to addressing the reader directly, the English version (CRPD_E) uses a general *you* form of address and the Italian text (CRPD_I) opts for the informal *tu* (you). In CRPD_D, the readers are addressed directly with the deictic courtesy form *Sie* only in the less theoretical, third section of the text, especially regarding the concrete possibility to complain: *Sie haben eine Behinderung und wohnen in Deutschland. Dann können Sie sich beim Ausschuss beschweren*. “You have a disability and live in Germany. Then you can complain with the committee” (p. 60). All the other passages are dominated by the above-mentioned 3rd person plural anaphoric pronoun *sie*.

2.2.6. NEGATIVE CLAUSES

The use of positive rather than negative sentences whenever possible is encouraged (and exemplified) in the guidelines (IE 2009: 11). Compared to the Easy Italian and the Easy English CRPDs, which use a very low number of negators vs. to the overall number of words, the German version tends to express concepts through negative formulations more frequently. For instance, the Italian negator *no* is used three times in a 790-word text, and the English *not* and *don't* are used respectively 29 and 4 times in a 3,967-word text. In German, the *TextLab Report* shows 1.64% of *negative phrasings*, exceeding the maximum limit of 1% set for the *Leichte Sprache* benchmark. In absolute values, we can find 81 occurrences of *nicht* and 26 of *kein*, even occurring together in the syntactically somewhat confusing heading *Keine Gewalt und nicht ausnutzen*.

2.2.7. GLOSSARY AND OTHER EXPLANATORY STRATEGIES

Only the Easy German version of the CRPD includes a glossary explaining 12 expressions in *Leichte Sprache (Teil 4: Schwierige Wörter in diesem Text*, pp. 64-69), among other administrative and legal expressions like *Angemessene Vorkehrungen*, *Ausschuss*, *Staats-Angehörigkeit*, *Meinungs-Freiheit* ('adequate measures', 'committee', 'citizenship', 'freedom of opinion') and keywords such as *Behinderung*, *Vereinbarung*, *Vereinte Nationen*, *Zugänglichkeit*, and *zugänglich* ('disability', 'Convention', 'United Nations', 'accessibility', 'accessible'). This strategy might compensate for possible comprehension problems; on the other hand, it requires the reader to temporarily move away from the main text. This might distract the reader from the meaning of the text and thus make comprehension more difficult.

The English and the Italian versions tend to provide explanations or to use images when it comes to difficult words and concepts within the text itself, as suggested by the Inclusion Europe guidelines. Figure 5 for instance illustrates how the term *committee*, on its first occurrence in Article 34, is exemplified by an image and by a hint to the fact that people belonging to the committee are elected. In the German text (Fig. 6), *Ausschuss* ('committee') is first mentioned in *B: Ausschuss für die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung* ('people with disability'). In the glossary, it is explained as a group which "watches out that the rights of persons with disabilities are respected": *Diese Gruppe passt auf, dass bei den Vereinten Nationen und in den Ländern auf die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung geachtet wird*.

34. Committee on the rights of disabled people



A special committee will be elected by all the countries to make sure this agreement is being followed properly. It will be based at the United Nations.

Figure 5 – Exemplification of the term *committee* in CRPD__E

Ausschuss

Bei den Vereinten Nationen gibt es eine Gruppe.
Diese Gruppe heißt:
Ausschuss für die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung.
Diese Gruppe passt auf,
dass bei den Vereinten Nationen und in den Ländern
auf die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung
geachtet wird.

Figure 6 – Explanation of the term *Ausschuss* ('committee') in CRPD__D

3. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of our analysis, we can emphasise some of the most considerable differences that emerged. These primarily concern the length of the texts, with German featuring the longest version, especially if compared to the Italian versions which summarise and heavily adapt rather than translate (cf. Tronbacke 1997) the standard source text (cf. the German versions in Austria and Germany counting respectively 240 and 71 pages vs. the Italian versions in Italy and Switzerland counting 11 and 5 pages). This is closely linked to the way content is treated and reduced compared to the source text, and the extent of informative compression used in the different EL versions of the CRPD – and in general of any EL version of a source text. The line between intralingual translation and heavy adaptation or full rewriting of a text for comprehensibility purposes is still blurred and could be language- and culture-specific.

A further difference regards the use of images and other graphic and structural aspects (e.g. the systematic use of illustrations in CPRD__E vs. the total absence of images in CPRD__D), including the presence of typical text conventions of the source text (e.g. the presence/absence of numbers of articles, paragraphs, headings such as *preamble* etc.), as well as, in terms of paratextual features, the different approaches of the three EL texts analysed in including or omitting e.g. disclaimers on the legal validity of the document. Moreover, a variety of labels is used in the different languages to refer to EL: *Leichte Sprache* is used in all the German versions; *Versione facile da leggere* ('easy-to-read version' is used in the Italian CRPD published in Italy, *Spiegata in linguaggio semplice* ('explained in simple language') is used in the Italian CRPD published in Switzerland, and *Easy Read* version is used in the Easy English version.

The three main texts we analysed (CPRD__D, CPRD__E, CPRD__I), together with the other EL versions taken into consideration (CPRD published in Austria, German and Italian versions published in Switzerland), thus lead to the conclusion that the EL versions of the same normative text can vary dramatically among languages, and result in very different text types, i.e. texts ranging from actual intralingual translations of the source texts, including minimal changes and variations in terms of content, to full rewriting and heavy summarizations, where the resulting informative summaries in an EL can hardly fall into the intralingual translation category. This poses the question of whether a coordination between EL professionals translating legal texts in different countries should be considered to ensure an equal transfer of content of the same normative source text to the same category of people in different European countries.

In fact, the substantial variations that we could observe might be explained by 1) a lack of coordination between different-language text professionals working on the same normative text, and a missing cross-linguistic and cross-national perspective that would have been necessary to standardize the different EL versions; 2) a poor awareness or competence on the best practices to be implemented in text simplification practices (though some can differ from country to country, especially if we move from general to language-specific strategies; cf. Lindholm & Vanhatalo 2021; Perego 2020c, 2021); 3) a lack of detailed and internationally comparable recommendations or good practices that are specifically designed for the EL translation of normative texts, and that could guide the EL professional in their most relevant decisions, e.g. whether typical text features such as numbers of articles, paragraphs etc. should be omitted in order to simplify the structure and prevent difficulties caused by numeric expressions or, rather, be maintained, in order to permit reference to information contained in source texts.

Deciding officially that each EL version is designed and meant for a specific target audience, which differs in the countries analysed, might be an alternative, but this decision should be made clear. It is only by comparing the outputs

of intralingual translation in different settings and languages that we can see to what extent complexity reduction can vary.

These results lead to some important general considerations. First, the importance of adopting a contrastive, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective whenever comparing the translation of normative texts: our comparative results suggest that EL texts produced in different languages (CPRD_I vs. CPRD_D) and/or in different national contexts (CPRD_IT published in Italy vs. Easy Italian CPRD_CH published in Switzerland) might reflect political decisions on the target groups these texts are simplified for, and they can bring to light problems regarding different aspects of communication in a given context: the heterogeneity of target groups, the level of text standardization with regard to the standardization and conventions of the source text, the respective criteria to be adopted.

Second, the importance of a sound empirical analysis of existing EL texts that derive from the same source text. Our results highlight the need for further textual and linguistic studies of the translations and the adaptations into EL of normative texts (or, in general, of other text types) in order to systematize recurrent behaviours that can be replicated as best practices or ameliorated to improve the general text usability.

Third, the importance of professional training and professional figures in the field. Overall, when dealing with normative texts, the specific training of text professionals that share specific knowledge of the source text, that have the appropriate linguistic competence to analyse it thoroughly, and that can implement the best practices to adapt normative language for users who need to access simplified content is essential. A sound networking and tight negotiations between intralingual translators from different countries could be considered a way to provide texts that are meant for the same groups of end users, thus granting that people living in different countries access a substantially different type and amount of information compared to the original text. This calls for professional figures working in a field where too often they are missing and the intralingual practice of language simplification is assigned to untrained personnel (see Perego 2020a, 2020c, 2021; Rocco 2022a).

The following table incorporates the parameters that we have selected with excerpts taken from the Inclusion Europe (IE) recommendations.

- left alignment: 28. *Align your text to the left of the page. Never justify your text.* (IE, p. 19)
- page numbers: 33. *Where possible, number the pages of your document. In the case of documents for meetings, write “page 2 out of 4”* (IE, p. 19)
- font type, size and colour: 5. *Always use a font that is clear and easy to read. (...) For example Arial or Tahoma (...) Never use serif fonts.* (IE, p. 13) *Never use italics. (...) Never use a special writing design (...)* 6. *You should use writing which is at least the size of Arial 14.* 7. *Do not write whole words in capitals.* (IE, p. 14)
- use of images with explicative character 34. *(..) you should put images next to it to describe what it is about* (IE, p. 20), 37. *Always choose images that are clear, easy to understand and go well with the piece of text they are helping to explain* (IE, p. 21)
- presence of easily understandable headings: 20. *Use headings that are clear and easy to understand. Headings should tell you what the text underneath is about* (IE, p. 17)
- highlighting in bold: 23. *Make sure the important information is easy to find. (...) highlight the important information in bold*
- numbers written in figures: 42. *(...) Write numbers as digits, not as words.* (IE, p. 22)
- bulleted lists: 26. *Use bullet points to list things.* (IE, p. 18)
- use of examples: 8. *Use examples to explain things. Try to use examples that people will know from their everyday lives.* (IE, p. 10)
- sentences starting on new lines and with a maximum length of 1 or 2 lines: 14. *Always keep your sentences short.* (IE, p. 11), 17. *Always start a new sentence on a new line* (IE, p. 16), 19. *Keep your sentences short. (...) Where possible, 1 sentence should fit on 1 line. If you have to write 1 sentence on 2 lines, cut the sentence where people would pause when reading out loud.*
- presence of negative clauses: 16. *Use positive sentences rather than negative ones where possible.*
- presence of passive: 17. *Use active language rather than passive language where possible.* (p. 11)
- use of pronouns
12. *(..) Make sure it is always clear who or what the pronoun is talking about. If it is not clear then use the proper name instead.* (IE, p. 15)
- direct addressing with deictic pronouns indicated in IE recommendations: *you* for English, the courtesy pronoun *Sie* for German and even three pronouns suggested for Italian: *tu, voi, lei*: 15. *Speak to people directly. Use words like “you” to do this.* (IE, p. 11); 15. *Sprechen Sie die Leserinnen und Leser direkt an. Sprechen Sie die Leserinnen und Leser mit “Sie” an.* (IE _ D, p. 11) 15. *Parlate direttamente alle persone. Usate parole come tu, voi o lei.* (IE _ IT, p. 11)

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