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CoMe Book Series

**THE STATUS OF TRAINING PROGRAMS
FOR E2R VALIDATORS AND FACILITATORS
IN EUROPE**

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**The Status of Training Programs for E2R Validators and Facilitators
in Europe** / Daniel Dejica, Oscar García Muñoz, Simona Şimon,
Marcela Fărcaşiu, Anamaria Kilyeni (eds.)

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Lucca: Esedra
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5. Training and employment in Italy. The reverse journey of a streetcar named T2V

Francesca BLEVE, Carlo EUGENI, Florigiana SCIUMBATA

5.1. Introduction

Thanks to international projects like EASIT¹ and Train2Validate² (T2V), and the joint efforts of national associations for the rights of people with disabilities within the European forum of persons with an intellectual disability and their families Inclusion Europe (IE), Easy Language (EL) is slowly getting attention in several European countries, despite a lack of Easy-to-Understand (E2U) access services within the realm of audiovisual translation is all the more evident across the whole world (Bernabé and Orero 2019).

In this context, this paper seeks to analyze the current situation of EL and Easy-to-Read (E2R) texts and knowledge in Italy, thanks to two specific sources: a survey aiming at knowing more about the existing trainings for validators and facilitators of E2R texts in Italy sent to members of Italian organizations and companies that publish and/or use E2R texts; and an interview with one of the major experts of E2R in Italy, Maria Cristina Schiratti, acting as IE Secretary General and ANFFAS³ council member.

To do so, section 5.2 will examine the existing literature related to EL; section 5.3 will try to make an overview of the status of EL in Italy; section 5.4 will illustrate the most significant answers collected with the survey to better understand how facilitators and validators work in Italy; and section 5.5 will try to draw some preliminary conclusions, by following a similar structure to that of X.4, with the aim of discussing the results in the light of the interview with Schiratti⁴. This will provide an interesting perspective of how Italian stakeholders create and validate E2R texts. In particular, results show that the job of validators and facilitators of E2R texts in Italy follows a reverse journey: from the production of training materials to the profession being recognized as such; the opposite of similar Erasmus+ projects, which provide training materials for commonly recognized professions.

¹ See <https://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit/> [last access 30 June 2021]

² See <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/> [last access 30 June 2021]

³ ANFFAS is the Italian National Association of People with Intellectual Disabilities. For more information, see <http://www.anffas.net/> [last access 30 September 2021]

⁴ See https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2021/09/Annex_15_Schiratti.pdf [last access 30 November 2021]

5.2. Literature review

When the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was ratified by the European Union in 2010, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions advocated for academic contributions, by specifying that “Easy-to-read publishing should have a solid scientific foundation and be able to learn from new research findings”⁵. Despite EL is part of the broader concept of Accessibility, where it contributes to many fields like Audiovisual Translation (Perego 2020), Translation Studies (Richart-Marset and Calamita 2020) and Linguistics (Sciumbata 2020), studies in this field are still scarce, especially in Italy.

The lack of research on E2R in Italy derives, among other reasons, from a lack of a clear distinction between Easy Language and Plain Language. According to Perego, “for nonexperts, it is still easy to mix the two language variants because both aim at text understandability and intelligibility, [...] and it is sometimes easier to spot similarities rather than differences between the two modalities” (PEREGO, 2020: 234). As a matter of fact, most of the studies published concern how to simplify legal and administrative language and institutional texts using Plain Language (Lucarelli 2001; Cortelazzo and Pellegrino 1999-2004; Raso 2003; Eugeni, Rotz and Checcarelli 2018; Vellutino 2018) or other simplification forms (De Mauro 1987; Piemontese 1996; Fioritto 1997; De Mauro and Vedovelli 1999; Fortis 2003; Orletti, Dell’Orletta and Iovino 2016). In particular, these techniques are “used mainly in specialized fields, such as the bureaucratic, administrative or legal fields, with the purpose of simplifying sectorial lexicon to make the documents comprehensible to the greatest number of people” (Perego 2020: 236). Because of this ambiguity research and publications specifically on Easy Italian are lacking, except for very recent contributions (Sciumbata 2020). Besides this, “in academia, [...] in terms of implementation, E2U is normally applied to other (under-researched) material, including didactic material” (Perego 2020: 247). Moreover, the importance of examining this field in depth would allow for providing empirical support for guidelines that are designed for end users affected by several kinds of disabilities (*ibidem*).

On the contrary, from a practical point of view, Italy is in fact showing a growing interest in E2R. For instance, ANFFAS, the Italian association of families of people with intellectual and/or relational disabilities, uses the Italian version of IE *Information for all - European standards for making information easy to read and understand*, to produce various types of texts. A collaboration between similar associations and research centres like the partners of international projects like EASIT and T2V will be capable of paving the way to a growing academic involvement and future scientific research.

At an international level, one of the most recent and original publications concerning Easy-to-Read is a doctoral thesis on Easy-to-Read audiovisual content, *Easy audiovisual content for all: Easy-to-Read as an enabler of easy, multimode access services* (BERNABÉ CARO, 2020), which have given rise to similar publications on E2R and E2U in the field of Audiovisual Translation in general, and in particular of subtitling (Bernabé-Caro and Rot 2017; Bernabé-Caro and Cavallo 2021; Bernabé-Caro 2020; Bernabé-Caro, Matamala and Hernández-Garrido 2021).

⁵ See <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/120.pdf> [last access July 2021].

5.3. Linguistic remarks

In Italy, E2R texts in Easy Italian refer to the European guidelines that set the European standards, shared by all the countries who took part in the Pathways projects⁶. These standards are available for several languages and are written in E2R language themselves, in line with what they promote. The *Information for All* booklet (INCLUSION EUROPE, 2011) also stresses the importance of involving people with intellectual disabilities in the planning, writing, and/or proofreading processes⁷.

However, overall, textual and linguistic indications in the European guidelines are vague and limited from both a qualitative and a quantitative point of view, and they may prove insufficient to write a highly readable and standardized text (SCIUMBATA 2021). Indeed, out of the 60 recommendations scattered in the first two sections of *Information for All* (Inclusion Europe 2011), only about half of them⁸ are dedicated to textual, syntactical, or lexical features, the remaining guidelines being dedicated to other features, such as pictures, font choice and size, margins, layout, or format (Sciumbata 2021). Yet, if a text is poorly written from a linguistic point of view, other features might become useless.

Furthermore, these European guidelines often show a lack of objectivity. For example, when they recommend "short sentences" or choosing "easy words", how "short" should a sentence be? How can one identify an easy word and where can easy words be found? The same oddities were reported for most E2R guidelines (Sutherland and Isherwood 2006; Fajardo *et al.* 2014). In particular, in E2R guidelines in general "there is a lack of clarity within the guidelines regarding the hierarchy of recommendations and the impact that following or not following certain recommendations would have on accessibility" (Sutherland and Isherwood 2006). In addition, the European guidelines were designed without a specific language in mind, which implies that specific features of a language might have not been taken into account. For example, although the Italian version of the European guidelines – *Informazioni per tutti* – contains a section called "*Linee guida per la lingua italiana*" (lit. Guidelines for the Italian language), it only mentions Roman numerals (that should be avoided), extended date formats (that should be preferred to shortened ones), and only shortly recommends using certain verb modes and tenses⁹, without providing further guidance based on textual, morphological, syntactical, or lexical traits of the Italian language.

To bridge this gap, a new set of guidelines specifically designed for the Italian language was proposed (Sciumbata 2020)¹⁰. On top of incorporating and expanding the European standards, the new guidelines focus on the linguistic features of writing in Easy

⁶ More information on Pathways is available at <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/> (last access: 17/8/2021).

⁷ See the booklet *Do not write for us without us! Involving people with intellectual disabilities in the writing of easy-to-read texts* (2011) addresses the same topic.

⁸ Some recommendations are repeated twice or quite similar. For example, "Use easy to understand words that people will know well" (Inclusion Europe 2011: §1.10) and "Do not use difficult words" (§2.11; "Always keep your sentences short" (§1.14) and "Keep your sentences short" (2011: §2.19).

⁹ The same indications are shared among the language-specific section of the guidelines for several languages, including English.

¹⁰ A handbook to write E2R texts in Italian according to the new guidelines will be published by the same author at the beginning of 2022.

5. Training and employment in Italy. The reverse journey of a streetcar named T2V

Italian. They are based on the literature regarding Plain Language¹¹, and other models for simple writing; but also on studies on reading comprehension and difficulties caused by specific syntactical structures or morphological features, with a focus on readers with special needs. All new standards are based on three 'golden' principles:

- Make everything as explicit as possible.
 - Always go for the easiest alternative.
 - Put yourself in the readers' shoes.
- Some new recommendations, not mentioned in the European guidelines, include:
- When rewriting a text, use the source text as an 'idea' of the topic rather than as the source text of a faithful 'translation', as not depending on the source text reduces the risk of transferring its flaws in its E2R version.
 - Limit sentence length to 10-15 words by using simple sentences (without subordinate clauses) and linear clauses.
 - Use conjunctions and linkers to make logical connections between ideas clear and to avoid less common syntactical structures.
 - Avoid implicit, ambiguous, or impersonal structures.
 - Do not be afraid of using expressions or syntactical structures that are accepted in the spoken language but might break grammar rules of the written language.
 - Refer to the Basic Vocabulary of Italian¹² (De Mauro 1997; De Mauro 2016) to find easy and commonly used words.¹³

These new guidelines were applied to write five test texts (Sciumbata 2020: 292-363), written by a linguist with an expertise in simplified writing. The texts were then validated by five different groups of people with intellectual disabilities, who only proposed minor corrections, like a synonym, different line breaks, or changing punctuation. The results of this experiment suggest that detailed standards, as well as a strong background in simplification, writing, and linguistics, can help writing effective texts that generally suit an audience with intellectual disabilities (*ibidem*). This is in contrast with what is the ideal scenario envisaged by Schiratti¹⁴, who claims that only people with intellectual disabilities can write E2R texts, as they are the only ones who can understand what better suits them. With the creation of professionally recognized figures in the field of validation and more detailed guidelines like the ones just mentioned, we believe such dispute will be overcome: people without disabilities would, indeed, write texts to be validated by the target readers.

5.4. Data collection and analysis

In this section, a selection of the data obtained from the survey distributed among the Italian stakeholders will be proposed and then analyzed. Before going into detail, it is important to stress that the survey was sent to selected respondents only, mainly those partners that had

¹¹ See Sciumbata (2021) for a comparison between E2R and Plain Language in Italy.

¹² The *Vocabolario di Base della Lingua Italiana* (Basic Vocabulary of Italian) is a list of around 7,500 most used Italian words that are supposed to be familiar to most native speakers.

¹³ Eugeni (2008) proposed a similar approach for the creation of subtitles for the deaf and the hard of hearing in Italian.

¹⁴ See section 5 below.

The status of training programs for E2R validators and facilitators in Europe

already collaborated with the EASIT project, designed to achieve, among others, the goal of creating training materials for writers of E2R texts and E2R translators¹⁵.

This survey consists of 5 sections. The first section of the survey was aimed at gathering information about the demographic profile of the respondents. To begin with, the Italian survey has collected a total of 41 answers. All respondents live in Italy and the mother tongue of 40 of them is Italian, while that of the remaining one is Spanish. Among the participants who completed the survey, 33 are women and 8 are men. Two respondents reported they had a stroke and were left with aphasia, and that they use Easy-to-Read language to access all types of content.

The second section of the survey contained questions about the general education and training of the respondents. The answers obtained in the second section show that all participants have many years of education. Specifically, 26.8% hold an undergraduate academic degree, 31.7% hold a master's degree or similar degree, and 19.5% hold a PhD or similar degree. The remaining 22% of participants have either completed secondary education or have completed vocational courses.

As for the third section, it strictly concerned education and training in E2R. Results show that E2R education is not widespread. Indeed, results show that only 5 respondents received training into E2R language. In particular, 2 attended a course as part of their university studies; 3 had vocational training, as workshops, in-house training, or self-teaching; and only 3 of them received handbooks as training material. Of these 5 respondents who received academic or vocational training into E2R, 2 specified they would have liked to be trained in audio description; and 1 reported they would have liked to learn how to turn digital content into E2R content. In the box dedicated to further information, the participants who reported they had a stroke specified they were not familiar with any kind of E2R content before having the stroke.

The fourth section included questions about the current activity of the participants in the survey and their actual or potential work in E2R. The information collected through this set of answers are diversified. Starting from the section concerning the current work of respondents, they reported to work either at the university, or in a research centre, or in a not-for-profit organization.

However, none of them works full time as an expert in E2R content as 2 work as volunteers and 4 as part-time experts. Concerning payment (see Figure 1), E2R is not the main source of income of any of the respondents (in blue below); only 2 of them are paid, though E2R is not the main source of income as their income mainly comes from another profession (in red below); and the remaining 4 respondents are not paid at all (in yellow below).

The last finding worth a mention in this section concerns 12 participants who reported to collaborate with or work for associations for people with disabilities, be they intellectual, sensory, age-related, or reading-related.

¹⁵ For more details see <https://pagines.uab.cat/easit/en> [last accessed 30 June 2021].

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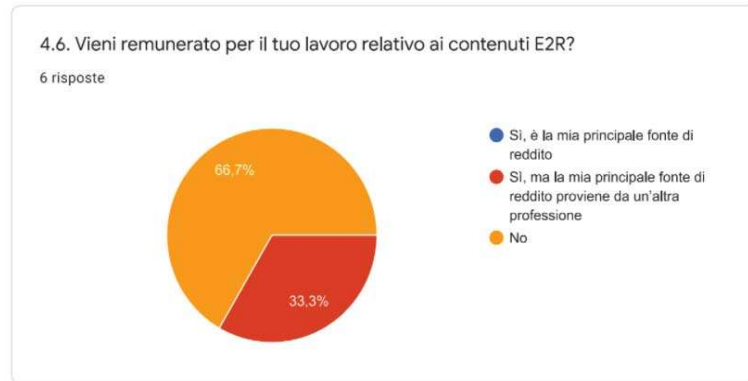


Figure 5.1. Chart related to the income of the participants who work as E2R experts.

Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the survey offered a very insightful perspective on the profession of validators and facilitators respectively: none of the respondents work as a validator of E2R content; and only one participant reported they are a trained facilitator. On top of this, the trained facilitator has designed, written, and translated E2R content and have facilitated between 5 and 10 validation projects, in cooperation with a group of validators. This only facilitator specified that they use dedicated software and reference work during validation sessions, as well as a beamer to show validators the text to work on.

The fifth section of the survey shows that all participants agree on the skills and competences professional validators and facilitators should possess, despite their different backgrounds. These questions gave participants the opportunity to select multiple answers. The questions of this section were related to the following aspects:

- type of knowledge and skills professional validators should possess: 68.3% of participants agree that writing skills, including punctuation and spelling, are the most important skills they should possess; followed by global Easy-to-Read history, guidelines, and target groups (65.9%); Easy-to-Read principles, guidelines, recommendations, and standards (63.4%); reading skills (56.1%), active listening skills (56.1%), vocal and communication skills (51.2%), multimodality, including moving images, pictures, tone of voice, noises, background music, etc. (51.2%); and finally computer skills, including dedicated software and new technologies (51.2%);
- what a validator or facilitator should work on during the validation process: according to participants validators should check, first of all, if the E2R text is grammatically correct, words are properly chosen and spelt, and punctuation is correct (70.7%); then if the E2R text is clear, accurate, natural, and consistent (70.7%); and, finally, if multimodality is well used (63.4%) (see Figure 2).

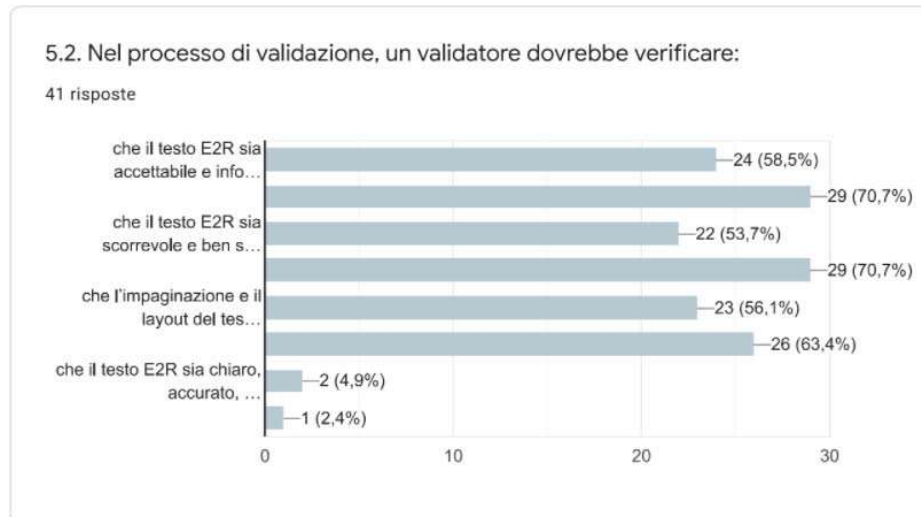


Figure 5.2. Answers related to what a validator should work on during validation.

As for facilitators, the first thing they should do according to participants is getting to know target groups, as well as their disabilities, needs, perception, and cognitive processing (90.2%), followed by a global Easy-to-Read knowledge (68.3%), familiarity with basic communication and mediation principles (63.4%), and basic validation skills and strategies (61%);

- what the key components of a successful training program for validators and facilitators should be: the key components selected by participants were the existence of a basic universally accepted curriculum (80.5%), the existence of experienced validators and facilitators as lecturers (70.7%), the existence of published guidelines, handbooks, and other similar training materials (61%), existence of diversified materials for applications (56.1%), and finally, the existence of some sort of recognition as a certificate or diploma (46.3%);
- how many hours a training program for facilitators and/or validator should consist of: according to participants, a basic training program for validator should consist of 40-60 hours (34.1%), 20-40 hours (34.1%) or less than 20 hours (24.4%), whilst an advanced training program for specialized validators should consist of 40-60 hours (51.2%) or 20-40 hours (29.3%). Similarly, facilitators should follow a training program consisting of 40-60 hours (43.9%) or 20-40 hours (34.1%).

Overall, a training program for validators and facilitators is a topic that participants have particularly as they recognize little is done in this field. However, despite such an interest for a program to train facilitators and validators, data show that 7 would not enroll a program to become a certified validator or facilitator, no matter its nature (academic or professional), though 17 participants would enroll such a program, and 22 would recommend it to their peers.

5.5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper tries to illustrate the status of facilitators and validators in Italy by means of two main sources of information: data collected in Italy in the framework of a survey conducted in several European countries about Easy-to-Read language in general, and, in particular, on the professional figures of the validator and of the facilitator of texts written in Easy Italian; and an interview to one of the main experts of Easy Italian (see below in this section).

Data concerning the demographic profile of participants based in Italy confirm what has also been pointed out by other partners during the first Train2Validate Multiplier Event¹⁶, as reported in the other articles of this book: highly educated women are predominating in the Easy-to-Read world. Specific to Italy is the fact that E2R is not really spread in Italy and that facilitation and validation are not socially recognized professional figures. In fact, none of the respondents to this survey reported to work as full-time paid professional validators or facilitators, and only two of them – the ones respondents who were affected by aphasia – reported to use E2R language to access contents. This is confirmed by answers obtained in sections 4.1 and 4.2 as illustrated above.

What we can derive from the third section of the survey is that training in Easy-to-Read is not common in Italy and is not part of a certified course. Moreover, despite 12 participants collaborate with or work for organizations engaged with people with disabilities, only 2 of them are paid for their work though their main income comes from other professional activities. This confirms what mentioned above: the professions of validators and facilitators are not recognized as fully-fledged professions. The last section of the survey shows that only few participants would enroll a training to become a certified validator or facilitator, despite a general interest in an official training as reported in other answers by some of the participants. Such apparently contradictory feedback is also reported elsewhere in the survey: a participant said they were not likely to enroll or recommend the program to a peer, but nonetheless insisted on the importance of disseminating the topic in universities and creating a basic training program.

The survey failed to provide a thorough picture of validation and facilitation in Italy. For this reason, extra feedback about the profession of validators and facilitators was provided by an interview to Maria Cristina Schiratti, expert in the field, ANFFAS council member, and secretary general of Inclusion Europe. Schiratti explains that the first thing facilitators and validators must do is to learn guidelines, in line with Sciumbata's findings (see §3 above). At the same time, she clearly states that E2R texts can only be written by people with disabilities, who are the only ones capable of writing texts that do not contain the big flaws they normally contain, and which make the validation process tedious. This not only openly contradicts Sciumbata's findings above; it also drastically limits the number of possible E2R writers to those people with intellectual disabilities that also have enough linguistic competence to write or rewrite E2R texts. The T2V project on E2R facilitators and validators can be the solution: with certified trained validators and facilitators and detailed

¹⁶ The first event of the T2V project took place on May 26th, 2021. The title of the event was "*The status of training programs for validators and facilitators in Europe*", and was organized by the Polytechnic University of Timisoara and the other consortium partners. For details see <https://plenainclusionmadrid.org/train2validate/evento1/> (last access, October 2021).

guidelines, there is no longer the need to limit the number of E2R text writers or rewriters to people with intellectual disabilities, who can then concentrate on the validation process. By doing this, professional writers, assisted by a professional validation team, can produce more E2R texts, that Schiratti admits are still too scarce.

Concerning the skills facilitators and validators should possess, Schiratti confirms what has also emerged elsewhere in the survey: facilitators must have the ability to interact with people affected by different types of disability. In particular, Schiratti is convinced that facilitators can only help validators identifying contents, finding information, and eventually structuring or restructuring the final text. This is perfectly in line with the aims of the T2V project and with what is emerging as the possible way forward: linguists writing or rewriting E2R texts and a validation team composed of professional facilitators and validators with an intellectual disability having the last word on the final version of the text. Expanding on this, Schiratti recommends that the validation team should be composed of people with different kinds of intellectual disabilities and with different backgrounds. This allows to tackle another big challenge: text types. Because text types are many, and the number of experts in the field is still limited, a heterogeneous group of validators is needed to be able and validate all types of texts from as many perspectives as possible.

A last interesting aspect to discuss is the notion of translating an existing text. Though this is not strictly related to the T2V project, it provides food for thought when looking at the bigger picture of producing an E2R text, consisting of a (re)writing phase and a validation phase. Translation, today, is no longer considered as the word-for-word rendition of a source text, but rather as communicating the meaning of a text by means of equivalents in a target language (Munday 2012). More recently, a new approach to translation has been spreading, especially thanks to the videogame industry: transcreation. Like any other form of translation, transcreation is aimed at producing a text for a target audience in a target language. However, because the target audience has very specific needs due to the most various reasons (different culture, disability, different use, etc.), the target text can show important differences with the source text, especially if this is multimodal (Pedersen 2019). Because Sciumbata proposes that the text one is translating is only to be seen as “an ‘idea’ on the topic, rather than as a source text of a faithful ‘translation’” – as “not depending on the source text limits the risk of transferring its flaws in its E2R translation” – the more current notion of transcreation, or “adaptational translation” (Gottlieb 2017), can be considered as the approach to follow in the production of E2R texts, thus overcoming the traditional binary opposition between writing and translating E2R texts. This will then lead to a smoother validation phase, which avoids the issues validators reportedly complain about.

To conclude, the answers obtained through the T2V survey and those provided by Schiratti show that, in Italy, the emerging field of Easy-to-Read is still largely unknown. This is due to several factors, the first of which being the lack of a social and professional recognition of the professions producing E2R texts. This entails several consequences, such as people working in this field generally being volunteers, lack of scientific research in the field, and scarce production of E2R texts. We believe that the T2V project can overcome this situation by providing a well-defined workflow in the production of E2R texts, a curriculum for the training of E2R validators and facilitators, and a certification that can further boost the social and professional recognition of all the figures that work to produce E2R texts.

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