

EASY – PLAIN – ACCESSIBLE



Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe

Camilla Lindholm and Ulla Vanhatalo (eds.)

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Silvia Hansen-Schirra / Christiane Maaß (eds.)
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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 regions¹ 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*² 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)³ 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 paralinguistic. 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*)⁴, is given below in back-translation, following the original text layout:

personal copy for Elisa Perego

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.⁵

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 synonyms⁶. 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).

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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*.

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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*⁷, 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 inclusion⁸.

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)⁹. 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.

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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’¹⁰. 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* project¹¹) are also available along with the Easy Language video and the CRPD manual (UNGA 2006), which was translated into Easy Italian in 2011¹². 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 produced¹³ 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 interest¹⁴ 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)¹⁵.

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 information¹⁶. 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 AAC¹⁷.

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)¹⁸, 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 2019¹⁹.

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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.

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 language²⁰. 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'²¹ (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)²², 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**²³ (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!*²⁴ 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)²⁵, 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.

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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.

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.

personal copy for Elisa Perego

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>(https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/opuscolo_RavonA.pdf)</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"> • Ti segue tutto il tempo. • Ti aspetta quando esci da casa o dal lavoro. • Ti manda tutto il tempo messaggi o email. • O ti telefona tutto il tempo. <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>(https://www.donnecontrolaviolenza.org/contents/files/Per_il_mio_bene.pdf)</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"> • He follows you all the time. • He waits for you when you get out of your house or from work. • He sends you text messages or emails all the time. • He phones you all the time. <p>And you do not want him to.]</p>