



Angewandte Linguistik

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Translating into Easy Italian

An analysis of health related texts and their impact on comprehension by people with intellectual disabilities

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Das Departement Angewandte Linguistik der ZHAW betreibt Angewandte Linguistik als transdisziplinär orientierte Sprachwissenschaft. Diese befasst sich mit den Problemen der realen Welt, in denen Sprache eine zentrale Rolle spielt. Sie identifiziert, analysiert und löst diese Probleme einerseits durch die Anwendung linguistischer Theorien, Methoden und Resultate, andererseits durch die Entwicklung neuer theoretischer und methodischer Ansätze.

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Abstract

Recent studies show that low literacy affects large segments of the adult population, both in Switzerland and Italy. Easy Language is an essential instrument of inclusion for people who would otherwise be excluded from access to written information and full participation in society. In Italy, high readability and comprehensibility of texts of public interest have been the focus of academic research since as early as the mid-1970s. Nonetheless, in recent years, little experimental research has addressed the impact of Easy Italian on text comprehension by people with intellectual disabilities (ID). This thesis aims to fill this gap. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to address the following research questions: (1) What strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian?, and (2) Do translators' strategies facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with ID? Three health-related texts in Easy Italian are analysed in the context of their adherence to the European standards for Easy Language. A reading comprehension test is then conducted to assess the degree of readability and comprehensibility of the texts. The test is administered to 26 participants with mild to moderate ID. The analysis shows that all texts contravene several European guidelines. Furthermore, the test results suggest that non-compliance with guidelines hinders respondents' comprehension of the texts. It is concluded that, on the one hand, standards for Easy Language are essential to guide the translator's work. On the other hand, high comprehensibility can only be achieved through a careful consideration of the target communicative situation.

Recenti studi dimostrano che bassi livelli di competenze alfabetiche funzionali interessano ampie fasce della popolazione sia in Svizzera sia in Italia. La Lingua facile è uno strumento essenziale di inclusione che può garantire l'accesso universale all'informazione scritta e, dunque, la piena partecipazione alla società. In Italia, l'alta leggibilità e comprensibilità dei testi di pubblica utilità sono state oggetto di ricerca accademica sin dalla metà degli anni Settanta. Tuttavia, negli ultimi anni, non si riscontrano attività di sperimentazione sulla reale comprensibilità dei testi in Lingua facile da parte di persone con disabilità intellettiva. Il presente lavoro si propone di colmare questa lacuna. Utilizzando metodi sia quantitativi sia qualitativi, la tesi mira a rispondere alle seguenti domande di ricerca: (1) Quali strategie vengono adottate dai traduttori nel processo di traduzione da Italiano Standard a Lingua facile? e (2) Le strategie adottate dai traduttori hanno un impatto sulla reale comprensione dei testi da parte di persone con disabilità intellettiva? Si analizzano tre testi inerenti alla salute e se ne verifica il grado di adesione agli standard europei per la Lingua facile. Successivamente, si conduce un test di comprensione scritta per valutare il reale livello di leggibilità e comprensibilità dei testi stessi. Il test viene somministrato a 26 partecipanti con lieve o moderata disabilità intellettiva. L'analisi dimostra che tutti i testi in esame disattendono, in maggior o minor grado, le linee guida europee sulla Lingua facile. Inoltre, i risultati del test suggeriscono che la non conformità alle linee guida influisce

negativamente sulla comprensione dei testi da parte dei partecipanti. Si conclude che, da un lato, gli standard per la Lingua facile sono essenziali per guidare il lavoro dell'autore o del traduttore. Dall'altro lato, un'alta comprensibilità del testo può essere raggiunta solo attraverso un'attenta considerazione della situazione comunicativa di ricezione.

1 Introduction

Recent studies show that low literacy affects large segments of the adult population, both in Switzerland and Italy. According to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) of 2003–2007 (OECD/Statistics Canada 2005), just under 16% of the Swiss population aged between 16 and 65 is lacking functional literacy skills. More recent OECD-PIAAC data (OECD 2018) indicates that approximately 39% of 25–65 year-olds (i.e. 13.1 million adults) in Italy score at the bottom of the PIAAC ranking measuring (cf. Section 2.6.2). These figures suggest that low-skilled adults both in Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy struggle to understand written communication in Standard Italian.

Barrier-free communication is a prerequisite to guarantee everyone universal accessibility to information. Against the background of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter, UN-CRPD; cf. UN-CRPD 2006), Easy Language is an essential instrument of inclusion for people who would otherwise be excluded from access to written information and full participation in society (cf. Section 2.2).

In Northern Europe, inclusive communication has been at the core of government policies for decades, as well as, more recently, the focus of academic research. A notable example is Sweden, where the first easy-to-read books were commissioned by the National School Board as early as 1968 (cf. Bohman 2017). In Germany, since the 1980s, the claims of the disability rights movements have been the propeller for a new legislative framework in the country (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 48–50). In the last ten years, prolific research on *Leichte Sprache* (or Easy German) confirms how well established the concept has become in the German-speaking world (cf. Section 2.3).

In Italy, high readability and comprehensibility of texts of public interest have been the focus of academic research since as early as the mid-1970s (cf. Section 2.4). Nonetheless, in recent years, no experimental research has addressed the impact of Easy Italian on text comprehension by people with intellectual disabilities (ID). This thesis aims to fill this gap by combining insights from translation studies and accessibility studies. The following research questions will be addressed: (1) What strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian?, and (2) Do translators' strategies facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with intellectual disabilities? To address the first research question, a small-scale corpus was compiled, including two health-related texts in Standard Italian and their translations into Easy Italian, as well as one health-related text originally written in Easy Italian. In Section 6, the corpus texts will be described in detail and analysed at different linguistic levels using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The extent to which the target texts adhere to European guidelines for Easy Language (Inclusion Europe 2009a) will be a prominent object of discussion.

The second research question will be explored using both quantitative and (albeit marginally) qualitative methods. Data was collected through a reading comprehension test, which was administered to 26 participants with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. The aim of the test was to assess the degree of readability and comprehensibility of the corpus texts. In order to obtain richer data, a self-report questionnaire was also administered. Furthermore, post-test focus group interviews were conducted in order to elicit respondents' perception of the corpus texts. In Section 7, comprehensive information about sampling strategy, test design and data collection will be provided. In Sections 8 and 9, collected data will be presented and discussed respectively. Finally, concluding remarks will be offered in Section 10.

2 Theoretical background

In this section, a conceptual framework for both my text analysis and my empirical study will be provided. Firstly, a definition will be given of communication barrier (Section 2.1) and Easy Language (Section 2.2). An overview of the most significant initiatives for text simplification in Northern Europe and in Italy will then follow in Sections 2.3 and 2.4 respectively. Furthermore, Section 2.5 will look into accessibility legislation both in Italy and Switzerland. Finally, before focusing on some principles of Easy Language translation (Section 2.7), the primary target population of Easy Language will be described (Section 2.6).

2.1 Communication barriers

Schubert (2016: 15) argues that communication is a constitutive feature of human action, and that communication barriers can significantly hinder the communication process. A communication barrier can therefore be defined as “[ein] Umstand, der es Menschen unmöglich macht, an der Kommunikation in derselben Weise teilzunehmen, wie andere Menschen” (Schubert 2016: 17). According to Schubert (2016, 2018) and Rink (2019), communication barriers include barriers of perception (i.e. *sensory barriers*, when one or more of the receiver’s sensory channels are considerably impaired, thus hindering successful perception of the message) and barriers of comprehension (i.e. when a recipient cannot understand the message). More specifically, the latter comprise:

- *Language barriers*, hindering the recipient who has no or little command of the language of the message (e.g. L2 speakers/learners).
- *Domain-specific barriers*, hindering the recipient who does not have the domain knowledge required to understand the message. Domain-specific communication generally assumes that the reader has specialist knowledge and a considerable world knowledge (Schubert 2016: 18).
- *Technical language barriers*, hindering the recipient who does not have the specialist language knowledge required to understand the message. Schubert (2016: 19) underlines that domain-specific and technical language barriers may or may not occur together.
- *Cultural barriers*, hindering the recipient who does not have the cultural knowledge or experience required to understand the message. Vermeer (1990: 36, cited in Rink 2019: 31) defines culture as “die Menge aller Konventionen einer Gesamtgesellschaft”. Social conventions include conventional approaches to macro and microtypography according to text type.
- *Cognitive barriers*, hindering the recipient who does not have the cognitive ability to understand the message. Cognitive barriers occur when the complexity of the message – either language or content-wise – is beyond the recipient’s processing ability.

From the recipient's perspective, barriers of comprehension can be overcome through learning and experience; from the sender's perspective, barriers can be reduced through text optimisation (Schubert 2016: 20). By the term "Kommunikationsoptimierung", Schubert (2009, cited in Schubert 2016: 16) understands a "bewusstes Eingreifen in das kommunikative Handeln, das mit dem Ziel vorgenommen wird, die Kommunikation im Hinblick auf bestimmte Merkmale zu verbessern". The "Kompliziertheit" of a communication act (i.e. difficulty at the textual level) can be minimised, while its "Komplexität" (i.e. content complexity) can be optimised (Lutz 2019: 157–158; cf. also Schubert 2018).

Rink (2019: 60–61) identifies three optimisation strategies aimed at reducing communication barriers. Firstly, language strategies may facilitate comprehensibility at the word, sentence and textual levels. Language strategies act on word and sentence length, sentence structure, and introduction and explanation of complex, abstract or specialist concepts. Language strategies also concern "die Adressierung, die Situierung sowie die Handlungsorientierung" (Rink 2019: 60). Secondly, medial strategies aim to have an impact on the recipient's perception of the text surface. Several macro-typographical and layout features (e.g. indentation, text emphasis or contrast tools, reduced punctuation, paragraphing etc.) can be implemented to effectively promote a text's perceptibility and thus improve information reception (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 500–504). Thirdly, Rink (2019: 61) defines conceptual strategies as those measures aimed at reducing content complexity. The latter objective can be achieved through language or medial strategies or, alternatively, through "strukturelle Eingriffe" (e.g. metacommunicative text) that can positively affect content presentation.

Through successful implementation of the above-mentioned strategies, Easy Language – as a language variety with maximally enhanced comprehensibility (Maaß 2020: 53) – aims to optimise content complexity, minimise text difficulty and thus reduce all barriers of comprehension (cf. Schubert 2016: 23, 2018). In the following section, a definition of Easy Language will be provided.

2.2 Easy Language: A definition

Maaß (2020: 53) defines Easy Language as the variety "with maximally enhanced comprehensibility of any national language". This form of language is primarily used in written communication, although it can occasionally be used also in oral interaction (Schubert 2014: 211). Texts can be originally produced in Easy Language or, more often, they can be a result of an intralingual translation process (Maaß et al. 2014: 55). According to Schubert (2014: 210–211, 2016), on a continuum line between natural (*natürlich, un gelenkt*) and artificial (*künstlich, gelenkt*) forms of language, Easy Language (or *Leichte Sprache* in German) is strongly controlled, either intuitively or based on strict sets of rules (e.g. Inclusion Europe 2009a; BITV 2.0 2011; BMAS 2014; Bredel/Maaß 2016a). By contrast, Plain Language (or *Einfache Sprache* in German) involves a higher degree of complexity both language and content-wise. Plain Language is a dynamic variety which

adapts to the needs of specific user groups in the target situation. As such, it does not have to adhere to a strict rule system. It follows that the assumed language skills and content knowledge of the target recipients are also much broader (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016b).

Easy Language is an essential instrument of inclusion for people who would otherwise be excluded from access to written information and full participation in society. To fulfil their “Partizipationsfunktion” (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 41), texts in Easy Language should contain as much of the original information as possible. Furthermore, Easy Language can have a “Lernfunktion” (2016a: 42–43). By providing low-threshold access to written materials, it actually gives recipients the chance to improve their reading skills and paves the way to Standard Language for at least a part of the readership. Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 42–43) stress that, in order for this learning effect to be achieved, Easy Language texts should only contain authentic (as opposed to artificial) language structures. Finally, Easy Language may also carry out a “Brückenfunktion” (2016a: 43) between source and target texts. Provided that the macrostructure of source and target text remain comparable, texts in Easy Language may assist in solving occasional comprehension problems with the corresponding source texts. It follows that a text in Easy Language does not replace an offer in Standard Language; rather, it complements that offer.

The following section will provide some insights into the development of the Easy Language concept in Europe.

2.3 Easy Language in Europe

The *Leichte Sprache* concept was developed in Germany in the 2000s. Since the 1980s, the claims of the disability rights movements have become firmly anchored in Germany’s social discourse and, most importantly, have been the propeller for a new legislative framework in the country. Both aspects were key to determine the level of success that the concept has achieved today (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 46–47). This is amply confirmed by recent linguistic research on *Leichte Sprache*, which in the past few years has been particularly prolific (cf. Bock 2014; Maaß et al. 2014; Maaß 2015; Jekat et al. 2015; Bredel/Maaß 2016a, Bock et al. 2017; Bock 2018; Maaß/Rink 2019; Jekat et al. 2020, among others).

The Plain Language movement – and, in particular, the Plain English Campaign¹ (PEC), founded in London in 1979 – was the forerunner of today’s efforts to promote communication inclusion in Germany, as well as across Europe (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 48–50). For the past forty years, the PEC has campaigned against jargon, legalise and misleading public information, emphasising the social benefits of comprehensible legal communication. Building on the plain language cause, recent efforts in Europe have been devoted to text simplification specifically for the benefit of people with reading impairments,

¹ Cf. <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

including people with intellectual disabilities and sensory impairments (cf. Section 2.6 for a note on terminology). The most prominent example is Inclusion Europe², a European network of 78 organisations from 39 EU countries representing people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Since 1988, Inclusion Europe has been running inclusive campaigns, supporting self-advocacy and influencing European policies in different areas pertaining to disability rights. In 1998, Inclusion Europe published the first European Easy-to-Read guidelines in 11 languages (Freyhoff et al. 1998). In 2002, it created the easy-to-read logo³. Today, the European standards for easy-to-read information are available in 16 European languages, including Italian (Inclusion Europe 2009a). In addition, from 2007 to 2013, Inclusion Europe's "Pathways" projects⁴ committed to making lifelong learning programmes more accessible to people with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, in 1997, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) developed its own translingual *Guidelines for easy-to-read materials* (IFLA 2010), aiming to "offer suggestions to publishers of easy-to-read materials and those organizations and agencies that serve persons with reading disabilities" (IFLA 2010: 2).

In this context, it should be emphasised that the Scandinavian countries have been concerned with issues of inclusive communication for decades (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 67). In Sweden, for instance, the publication of easy-to-read (EtR) literature has a long tradition. The first EtR books were commissioned by the National School Board as early as 1968 (cf. Bohman 2017: 447). In 1985, the first issue of the newspaper *8 Sidor. Lättlästa Nyheter* ("8 Pages. Easy-to-Read News") was published on the initiative of the Swedish Government (cf. Piemontese 1996; Bohman 2017). The original target readership of *8 Sidor* were adults with mild to moderate ID. However, addressees with aphasia, hearing impairments or other learning difficulties, as well as students and immigrants, progressively joined that initial target group. *8 Sidor* has since been regularly published. Today, it is released once a week in print and five times a week on the internet⁵. Furthermore, in 1987, the *LL-stiftelsen* ("Easy-to-Read Foundation")⁶ was established with the purpose of publishing materials in Easy Swedish. The Foundation's activities were directed by the Swedish Government and the Swedish Parliament. However, the Foundation was under no political control and was not influenced by the interests of any particular target group (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 52). The foundation of *LL-förlaget*, Sweden's Easy Language publishing house, followed in 1991.

The Finnish scenario looks equally dynamic (cf. Leskelä 2017; Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 51–52; Uotila 2019). In 1983, the Easy Finnish magazine *Leija* issued its first number and has since

² Cf. <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

³ Cf. <https://easy-to-read.eu/european-logo/> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

⁴ Cf. <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/>; <https://easy-to-read.eu/projects/> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

⁵ Cf. <https://8sidor.se> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

⁶ The Easy-to-Read Foundation changed its name to *Centrum för Lättläst* ("Centre for Easy-to-Read") in the mid-1990s. In 2015, the Centre became part of the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media (MTM, cf. <https://www.mtm.se/english/>) (cf. Bohman 2017) [retrieved 01/02/2021].

been regularly published (i.e. six times a year)⁷. *Selkosanomat*⁸, another well-established fortnightly newspaper (and its Swedish version *LL-Bladet*⁹) started in 1990. *Selkosanomat* has a broad readership from all target groups. The Finnish Centre for Easy-to-Read¹⁰ (*Selkokeskus*), which was founded in 2000, estimates that up to 750,000 people in Finland need Easy Finnish (Uotila 2019). The Centre is part of the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, which is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. In 2018, the Klaara research network¹¹ was also established, promoting linguistic research on Easy Languages at international level.

Maaß and Rink (2019: 252) report recent developments concerning other Easy Languages (e.g. Easy Spanish both in Europe and America, and Easy French in Canada). It cannot be overlooked that no initiative related to Easy Italian is reported in the German-speaking academic studies cited in this work. In the following section, I will give an overview of significant initiatives for text simplification in Italy. Accessibility legislation and primary target addressees of Easy Language will be discussed in Sections 2.5 and 2.6 respectively.

2.4 Initiatives for text simplification in Italy

In Italy, practical initiatives for text simplification have only started around 1990. However, since the mid-1970s, significant steps had been taken “in a new direction” (Piemontese 2008: n.p.), seeking to establish a principle traditionally ignored by Italy’s intellectual and political class. As Piemontese points out,

si tratta del principio della **trasparenza**, della **chiarezza** e della **semplicità linguistica** nella comunicazione ordinaria tra chi governa, amministra, informa o forma e chi è governato, amministrato, informato, formato. Parliamo del **diritto di tutti ad accedere a un’informazione/comunicazione di interesse pubblico**, a capire cioè i testi che, per la loro portata e per i loro effetti, condizionano, in un modo o nell’altro, la nostra vita quotidiana, individuale e collettiva. **Sotto l’etichetta “di interesse pubblico” includiamo, quindi, i diversi tipi di testo che, in un modo o nell’altro, attengono alla nostra vita di cittadini, ai nostri diritti e ai nostri doveri.** (Piemontese 2008: n.p.; my emphasis)

Based on the principles of “semplicità linguistica” and equal rights of access to information, since as early as the mid-1970s, seminal works published by De Mauro and his collaborators from the Sapienza University of Rome (cf. De Mauro 1974, 1980; De Mauro et al. 1986; De Mauro et al. 1988, among others) addressed the growing “communicative asymmetry” between those who write and those who read a text of public interest. The cited works emphasise that the broader the difference between the author (who is by definition the expert) and the recipient (who is by definition less expert), the higher the risk that the recipient is disadvantaged. This asymmetry of communication varies according to the recipient’s educational background and his or her own reading habits. Crucially, in 1991,

⁷ Cf. <https://issuu.com/jaanateravainen/docs> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

⁸ Cf. <https://selkosanomat.fi> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

⁹ Cf. <https://ll-bladet.fi> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

¹⁰ Cf. <https://selkokeskus.fi/in-english/the-finnish-centre-for-easy-to-read/> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

¹¹ Cf. <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/projects/klaara-network> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

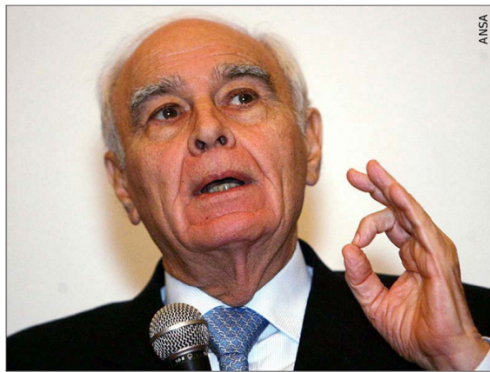
46.8% of Italy's population had not fulfilled the first eight years of compulsory schooling (Piemontese 2008: n.d.). According to most recent census data, the proportion of Italian residents who did not hold a middle school diploma in 2001 and 2011 was 33.2% and 28.8% respectively (cf. Piemontese 2008: n.d.; ISTAT 2011). This means that just under one-third of Italy's population is today in a condition of communicative asymmetry (cf. Section 2.6.2).

At the legislative level, Law 241 of August 1990 ("New provisions on administrative procedure and right to access to administrative documents"; cf. Legge 214/1990) marked a turning point in the history of Italian administrative procedures. Under this law, the simplification of bureaucratic language was prioritised, and public administration was urged to be transparent. As a result, further institutional initiatives were implemented in Italy. Two initiatives are the most notable: in 1993, the then Minister for Public Administration, Sabino Cassese, commissioned a pool of linguists and legal experts (including researchers from Sapienza) to publish the *Codice di stile delle comunicazioni scritte a uso delle amministrazioni pubbliche* (PCM 1993), which can be considered as the first "institutional" step towards the simplification of administrative language in Italy (Piemontese 2008: n.d.); in 1997, the same pool of experts produced the *Manuale di stile* (Fioritto 1997), a style manual for public administration addressing issues of text readability.

In its intent to rebalance the asymmetry of communication, the Sapienza school aimed to address all forms of social and cultural disadvantage, including mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. The periodical *Due parole. Mensile di facile lettura*¹² was targeted precisely on this readership. The first issue of *Due parole* was published in 1989 (cf. Piemontese 1996: 213–240). The periodical was printed in tabloid format and comprised eight pages. Particular attention was given to its graphic and typography design, which was aimed at reaching optimum readability. *Due parole* featured the most important news items of the month on the front page; the other seven pages contained news on national and international politics, sports, culture and entertainment. One page was also dedicated to giving practical advice on independent living and consumer rights.

The most distinctive feature of the periodical's articles was their shortness. Articles were between 30 and 60 lines long, each line containing no more than 36 characters with spaces (13-point font). In the first five years of publication, the average article length of *Due parole* was approximately 185 words.

¹² Cf. <http://www.dueparole.it> [retrieved 01/02/2021].



Il Ministro della Salute, Girolamo Sirchia

“Pensiamo alla salute”

- Il Ministro della Salute, Girolamo Sirchia, ha deciso di mandare per posta a tutte le famiglie italiane un piccolo libretto. Il libretto è intitolato *Pensiamo alla salute*.

- Il libretto *Pensiamo alla salute* contiene alcuni suggerimenti per usare le medicine in modo corretto. Con questo libretto, il Ministro della salute vuole raggiungere due obiettivi.

- Il secondo obiettivo del Ministro della salute è spiegare ai cittadini italiani i vantaggi e gli svantaggi delle medicine.

- Infatti le medicine contribuiscono a migliorare e ad allungare la nostra vita. Però, in alcuni casi, le medicine possono procurare anche alcuni svantaggi. Perciò, secondo il Ministro della salute, dobbiamo usare le medicine con attenzione. E dobbiamo prendere le medicine solo quando

La legge contro il fumo

- Dal 10 gennaio 2005, i fumatori, cioè le persone che hanno l'abitudine di fumare, non possono più fumare nei locali pubblici chiusi. Infatti, dal 10 gennaio 2005, è entrata in vigore una norma che serve a tutelare, cioè a proteggere la salute dei non fumatori, cioè delle persone che non hanno l'abitudine di fumare. Questa norma fa parte della Legge n. 3 del 16 gennaio 2003, intitolata "Tutela della salute dei non fumatori".

- Secondo questa norma i fumatori non devono fumare nei posti di lavoro e di svago, pubblici e privati. In pratica i fumatori non possono più fumare nelle scuole, negli uffici, nelle biblioteche, negli ospedali, sui treni e sui taxi, nelle metropolitane, nelle sale di attesa degli aeroporti e delle stazioni ferroviarie, nei bar, nei ristoranti, nei negozi, nelle discoteche, nelle sale da gioco, nei cinema, nei teatri eccetera.

- I fumatori potranno fumare solo in locali chiusi riservati apposta per loro. Però questi locali devono rispettare precise norme previste dalla legge. Finora pochi locali pubblici hanno i locali attrezzati per i fumatori, cioè con sistemi

Figure 1: From “Due parole”, IV(1), Jan-Feb 2005 (p. 5)

As can be noticed in Figure 1, texts were organised into coherent and self-contained units, which in turn were introduced by a red bullet point. Articles were complemented by information boxes on terminology or additional background information. The editorial team aimed to achieve extreme language simplification (Piemontese 1996: 9), requiring hardly any pre-knowledge and inferential abilities from the readers. At the lexical level (Piemontese 1996: 141–143), the Basic Vocabulary of Italian (VdB, De Mauro 1980¹³) was the main reference resource. Texts were almost entirely written using *fundamental* and *high usage vocabularies*¹⁴. Whenever low-frequency, specialist or foreign words had to be introduced, these were explained either inside or outside the text. Furthermore, short (e.g. *partire*), concrete (e.g. *soldi*) and direct (e.g. *morire*) words were consistently preferred to long (e.g. *allontanarsi*) and abstract (e.g. *liquidità*) words or paraphrases (e.g. *venire a mancare*), respectively. The use of figurative language (e.g. metaphors, metonyms and synecdoche), as well as stereotypical formulas (e.g. *stretto riserbo*, *male incurabile*) and opaque expressions originating from politics and journalism (e.g. *buonismo*) were systematically avoided. Text shortness and clarity were also achieved by avoiding redundancy.

¹³ In 2016, a revised edition of VdB was published in *Internazionale* (De Mauro 2016). The New Basic Vocabulary of Italian (NVdB; De Mauro 2019) was based on an updated and expanded corpus (i.e. 18,000,000 words). Lemmatisation procedures and principles were conducted using GRADIT (De Mauro 1999) as the main reference tool (cf. Chiari/De Mauro 2014).

¹⁴ NVdB describes about 7,400 lexemes: about 2,000 fundamental lexemes (i.e. the highest frequency words that cover about 90% of all written and spoken text occurrences), about 3,000 high usage lexemes (i.e. covering about 6% of the subsequent high frequency words) and about 2,400 high availability lexemes, which occur less in writing and speech but are perceived as common by native speakers. Importantly, both VdB and NVdB integrate high frequency vocabulary ranges with high availability vocabulary, thus providing “a full picture of not only written and spoken usages, but also purely mental usages of word” (Chiari/De Mauro 2014: 114).

At the syntactic level (Piemontese 1996: 143–146, 256), distinctive criteria included:

- Use of short sentences (i.e. average number of words per sentence: 10–15 words) to ensure maximum readability.
- Preference for coordination vs. subordination to reduce text complexity.
- When appropriate, use of subordinate clauses reflecting spoken language.
- Controlled and appropriate use of connectives to reduce inferencing requirements.
- Repetition of subjects and objects whenever their absence could cause ambiguity.
- Preference for active (vs. passive) and personal (vs. impersonal) forms to allow for clear identification of the subject of the action.
- Preference for affirmative vs. negative forms (or litotes) to reduce linguistic and mental processing requirements.
- Appropriate use of punctuation marks to provide important comprehension and interpretation clues to the reader.

At the textual level, articles were structured according to an accurate, logical and chronological organisation. A set of mandatory design criteria had to be fulfilled. For instance, sentences had to be broken up into units of meaning, that is, each line had to include one unit of meaning only. At the same time, the maximum allowed number of lines and characters per line (see above) could not be exceeded¹⁵.

Based on the features discussed so far, it can be remarked that *Due parole* had striking similarities with its Swedish counterpart *8 Sidor* (cf. Section 2.3). Despite being two completely autonomous editorial projects, they shared objectives, contents, original target readership and graphic design. Most importantly,

due gruppi di studio e di lavoro (*8 Sidor* e *Due parole*) sono giunti, [...] a distanza, negli stessi anni e in piena autonomia, a individuare un vuoto nella gestione (e nella democrazia) dell'informazione del proprio Paese. Entrambi hanno tentato le stesse vie per colmare tale vuoto con la produzione di testi ad hoc, straordinariamente simili sul piano delle scelte linguistiche, degli argomenti e dell'impostazione generale, nonostante le risorse umane ed economiche incomparabilmente diverse. (Piemontese 1996: 235)

This means that, in the late 1980s, Italy was at the forefront of efforts to ensure equal access to information for all, along with the Scandinavian countries. There was, however, a substantial difference between the Swedish and the Italian projects. *8 Sidor* had been launched on the initiative of the Swedish Government and had received institutional, cultural and financial backing from its very onset; furthermore, it was led by three (almost full-time) professional journalists. By contrast, *Due parole* was “il prodotto delle applicazioni derivanti da studi e da ricerche svolte in ambito accademico” (Piemontese 1996: 231) and was owned by the University of Rome. *Due parole* received hardly any formal acknowledgement by Italian public institutions and therefore never gained widespread visibility. After eight

¹⁵ For the full style manual of *Due parole*, see Piemontese (1996: 241–269).

years of print publications, *Due parole* ceased publication in 1997 due to high printing and shipping costs. From 2001 to 2006, further 20 issues were published online¹⁶. Lack of human and financial resources, however, led the editorial board to permanently suspend publication in June 2006. In a 2012 interview, former editorial director M. Emanuela Piemontese gave the following response when asked about the future of *Due Parole*:

In Italia, chi ha bisogno del giornale ce lo chiede, chi dovrebbe farsi carico di farlo circolare, vivere e non soltanto sopravvivere grazie alle nostre buone volontà, invece, da quell'orecchio non ci sente. (Piemontese 2012)

In the same interview, Piemontese admitted that, in the previous fifteen years, significant progress had been made in Italy towards the simplification of bureaucratic language and that public administrators' awareness of what makes communication effective had certainly increased¹⁷. Nonetheless,

l'eccessiva frammentazione, casualità, disomogeneità, in una parola l'assenza di ogni sistematicità nelle esperienze italiane, per quanto eccellenti, non riescono ancora a imprimere un'accelerazione finale verso il processo di semplificazione del linguaggio istituzionale, burocratico e amministrativo italiano. (Piemontese 2008: n.p.)

Piemontese concluded claiming that it is the ethical responsibility of Italian politicians and intellectuals to accelerate change towards effective communication and linguistic transparency in the country.

2.5 Accessibility legislation

The UN-CRPD (UN-CRPD 2006) was adopted in 2006 and entered into force in 2008. The Convention marked a fundamental paradigm shift in attitudes and approaches to people with disabilities, that is, from viewing them as objects of medical treatment and social protection towards viewing them as subjects with rights. It adopts a broad categorisation of people with disabilities, affirming that “disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (UN-CRPD 2006: Preamble). Communication is one of the key principles of the UN-CRPD. Article 2 of the Convention (“Definitions”) introduces the concepts of communication and accessibility, and explicitly defines “plain language” as a form of communication:

¹⁶ Cf. <http://www.dueparole.it/precedenti.asp> [retrieved 01/02/2021].

¹⁷ For a comprehensive overview of initiatives and publications concerning the simplification of bureaucratic language in Italy, see Piemontese (2008) and Cortellazzo/Viale (2008).

“Communication” includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, **plain-language**, human-reader and augmentative and alternative **modes, means and formats of communication**, including **accessible information and communication technology**. (UN-CRPD 2006: Art. 2; my emphasis)

As Bredel and Maaß (2015: 59) highlight, in the official German version of the Convention “plain language” is translated as “einfache Sprache”¹⁸. As mentioned in Section 2.2, Plain Language aims to promote greater clarity and comprehensibility of texts; however, it does not specifically target people with disabilities. It can be assumed that “das Konzept der Leichten Sprache zum Zeitpunkt der Verabschiedung der UN-BRK [...] zwar bereits vorhanden, aber noch nicht hinreichend etabliert war” (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 59).

Article 9 (“Accessibility”) sets out an obligation for state parties to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, as well as to information and communication. Similarly, Article 21 (“Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information”) binds State Parties in taking all appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities can exercise “the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication with others” (UN-CRPD 2006: Art. 21). The UN-CRPD also identifies areas that play an essential role in transforming the social stigma attached to people with disabilities (e.g. Art. 8 – “Awareness raising”).

Italy signed the UN-CRPD in 2007 and ratified it by Law 18/2009 (cf. Legge 18/2009). It has to be observed that

la Convenzione non si inserisce in un contesto di vuoto normativo¹⁹, in quanto l’ordinamento giuridico italiano è già conforme alla maggior parte dei principi in essa contenuti, a cominciare dalla Costituzione che all’art. 3 stabilisce i principi di eguaglianza e non discriminazione. Anzi, la Legge n. 104/1992, Legge-quadro per l’assistenza, l’integrazione sociale e i diritti delle persone handicappate, ha in parte anticipato i contenuti della Convenzione, avendo come principi ispiratori la promozione dell’autonomia e la realizzazione dell’integrazione sociale dei disabili. (Cera 2009: n.p.)

Nonetheless, the Convention played a key role “in the dialectic between the gaps of the welfare state and activism associations and the third sector” (Croce et al. 2017: 90) and triggered a “new integrative perspective” (2017: 91) on disability rights in Italy. The National Observatory on the Status of Persons with Disabilities²⁰ was in fact established by Law 18/2009 (Art. 3, para. 1) and has since been serving as an advisory body on the development of national policies on disability. In Italy’s initial report on the measures taken

¹⁸ The official Italian version of the UN-CRPD (ONU-CDPD 2006: Art. 2) translates “plain language” as “linguaggio semplice”.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive chronology of Italy’s normative framework on disability, see Croce et al. (2018). For more information about current laws, see <http://www.osservatoriodisabilita.gov.it> and <http://handylex.org> [retrieved 30/03/2021].

²⁰ Cf. <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/disabilita-e-non-autosufficienza/focus-on/Osservatorio/Pagine/default.aspx> [retrieved 01/04/2021].

to give effect to its obligations under the UN-CRPD, the following statement was made in relation to Art. 9 of the Convention:

Since 2004, Italian law 4/04 recognizes and protects the right of all citizens to access all information sources and related services, in particular the right to access computer and IT services of the public administration and public utility services by persons with disabilities. [...] The Code of digital Administration (CAD) defines accessibility as a prerequisite for public administrations' websites and establishes that institutional websites shall be created with the highest usability and accessibility standards, for people with disabilities as well, along with completeness of information, **clarity of language**, reliability, quality, homogeneity and interoperability. Article 5 of law 4/04 states that these rules shall also apply to training and didactic materials. (UN-CRPD 2016: 7; my emphasis)

The report suggested that, in the previous fifteen years, Italy had been particularly active in ensuring that people with disabilities can exercise their rights to digital citizenship on an equal basis with others. Interestingly, the report mentioned “clarity of language” as one of the prerequisites to be met by Italy’s public administration websites. What this means exactly in practical terms, however, is not clarified in the report, nor does the Digital Administration Code – adopted as a Legislative Decree (LD) on 07/03/2005 and successively modified and integrated through LD 179/2016 and LD 217/2017 – provide further elaboration on the concept of “clear language” (cf. DL 82/2005).

As regards Italy’s compliance with and implementation of Art. 21 of the Convention, the report stated:

The freedom to express thoughts, through oral words, written texts or any other instrument, is recognized by article 21 of the Constitution. The same constitutional principle also guarantees the right to information, which includes both the right to inform (that is, to share information) and the right to be informed (the right to a **full access to documents** is part of this). [...]

As to the editorial field, decree 18/12/07 of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture establishes funds for publishing houses that invest on the transformation of existing products in accessible formats **in favour of visually impaired people**, the creation and reproduction of new editorial products, as well as the classification, conservation and distribution of newly created or transformed products. (UN-CRPD 2016: 20; my emphasis)

The report reaffirmed the right to inform and be informed and mentions Braille, tactile communication, sign language, audio description and subtitling as forms of alternative communication to be acknowledged and promoted (UN-CRPD 2016: 21). However, no reference was made as to how barriers of comprehension (as opposed to sensory barriers) could be effectively reduced.

Most recently, the LD 66 of 13 April 2017 (further updated in May 2019) stated that “lo Stato, le Regioni e gli Enti locali **garantiscono l’accessibilità e la fruibilità** dei sussidi didattici e degli strumenti tecnologici e digitali necessari per l’inclusione scolastica” (DL 66/2017: Art. 3; my emphasis). This is a promising step forward in acknowledging that accessibility to

learning materials and digital resources is key to guarantee an inclusive education for pupils with disabilities²¹.

In Switzerland, the Federal Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Disability Discrimination Act, cf. DDA 2002) has been in force since 2004. The primary objective of the DDA is to prevent, reduce or eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. The Act “lays down general conditions that make it easier for people with disabilities to participate in society and in particular to cultivate social contacts independently, and to have access to basic and advanced education and training and to employment” (DDA 2002: Art. 1). Article 14 of the DDA indicates the measures which should be promoted for the benefit of people with speech, hearing and visual disabilities, and states that the Confederation may

- support cantonal measures to promote the academic and professional education and training of persons with speech or hearing disabilities **in sign and spoken language** and to **promote the language skills** of persons with visual disabilities;
- support non-profit organisations and institutions of national importance that address the **problems of language and understanding** faced by persons with speech, hearing or visual disabilities.

The Confederation may promote measures to make television programmes accessible to persons with hearing or visual disabilities. (DDA 2002: Art. 14; my emphasis).

Article 14 of the DDA does not explicitly mention Plain or Easy Language as measures to be taken to reduce communication barriers²².

Switzerland ratified the UN-CRPD in 2014. Since then, the number of translation agencies and training programmes focusing on Easy Language has steadily increased in the country (cf. Parpan et al. 2021, forthcoming; cf. also Section 2.7.1). Recent years have also seen a growing number of federal initiatives for e-accessibility. Most recently, for instance, the third version of the eCH-0059 e-Accessibility Standard (e-CH 2020) introduced Easy Language and sign language as requirements for barrier-free access to the websites and digital applications of public sector bodies. Nonetheless, despite considerable progress lately, Switzerland still has “no comprehensive, coherent strategy for meeting CRPD obligations” (cf. Parpan et al. 2021, forthcoming). In reply to Switzerland’s initial report, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2019: 5) demanded evidence of laws and policies at the federal, cantonal and communal levels that ensure that the use of Easy Language is facilitated in official interactions. Parpan et al. (2021, forthcoming) continue arguing that “Switzerland’s delay in implementing the treaty obligations may help explain why the concept of Easy Language still receives little recognition among the Swiss general public”. Jekat et al. (2020) claim that Easy Language (more than Plain Language) is in fact

²¹ For statistics on pupils with disabilities in Italy, see CENSIS (2014).

²² For recent studies on administrative language within Switzerland’s multilingual context, see Felici and Griebel (2019) and Griebel and Felici (2018).

frequently associated with stigmatised groups in Switzerland, and its central function as a gateway to improving reading skills in a first or a second language for specific target groups is still scarcely acknowledged in Swiss public discourse.

2.6 Primary target population

According to Maaß, texts in *Leichte Sprache* are aimed at “all diejenigen Menschen, denen standardsprachliche oder fachsprachliche Texte Probleme bereiten” (Maaß 2015: 14). This suggests that the target population for Easy Language services is extremely heterogeneous. Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 132) emphasise that, to date, there is no systematic evidence on the socio-demographic profile and the reception needs of the target readership. Therefore, it can be assumed that “die Adressatenschaft sehr unterschiedliche Vorerfahrungen mit Sprache und mit Texten mitbringt und folglich auch unterschiedliche Anforderungen an eine sprachliche Aufbereitung der Texte hat” (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 132).

The 2018 Ageing Report (European Commission 2017) shows that the demographic old-age dependency ratio (people aged 65 or above relative to those aged 15–64) is projected to rise up to 51.2% in 2070²³. Ageing populations involve urgent and unmet healthcare needs related to chronic disease – including cognitive decline and dementia, aphasia, eye diseases and hearing loss – and multi-morbidity. It has been estimated that one-third of people older than 65 years have inadequate or marginal health literacy (cf. Yorkston et al. 2010). This proportion is no doubt much higher in those with communication disabilities. It is important to stress that age-related communication disorders affect important functions such as access to health care and maintenance of social roles. Hoffman and Worrall (2004, cited in Yorkston et al. 2010) recommend that effective written materials should be provided for people with communication disorders. Intervention efforts might include Easy Language among the strategies to reduce overall disability. It follows that people with dementia and people with aphasia are among the primary addressees of Easy Language. Primary target groups also include prelingually deaf people, people with learning disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities (cf. Section 2.6.1). Finally, functional illiterates and L2 speakers (mainly with a migrant background) are also considered to be primary addressees of Easy Language.

For a comprehensive description of each target group, see Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 131–163). In the following subsections, two target groups will be described in more details: people with intellectual disabilities (i.e. the sample population of my empirical study, cf. Section 7) and functional illiterates.

²³ According to the 2018 Annual Report (European Commission 2017), the total population in the EU is projected to increase from 511 million in 2016 to 520 million in 2070. However, the working-age population (i.e. people aged between 15 and 64) will decrease significantly from 333 million in 2016 to 292 million in 2070.

2.6.1 People with intellectual disabilities (ID)

A terminological clarification needs to be made. In 2013, the US Social Security Administration replaced the term “mental retardation” with “intellectual disability” (SSA 2013). Similarly, in the UK, the term “intellectual disability” is increasingly used in replacement of or synonymously with “learning disability” and is now gradually more visible in UK professional discourse (Cluley 2018). As Cluley (2018: 26) points out, however, “when speaking with self-advocates in England, the term ‘learning difficulty’ may be preferred. In contrast, when speaking to mainstream teachers in England, the term ‘learning difficulty’ could mean something different entirely, such as what is known as a ‘specific learning difficulty’, like dyslexia or dyspraxia”. A similar scenario can be observed in German-speaking contexts. The concepts of *geistige Behinderung* and *Lernschwierigkeiten* are well defined in research. If the former is a neurodevelopmental disorder and is typically defined by an IQ under 70, the latter are processing problems that can interfere with learning basic skills. Most people with learning difficulties have an IQ above 70 (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 138). In Italian-speaking professional contexts, the terms *disabilità intellettiva* and *disturbi specifici dell’apprendimento* (or DSA) are also very clearly demarcated. It has to be stressed, however, that German-speaking self-advocates reject the label *geistig behindert* and ask to be referred to as *Menschen mit Lernschwierigkeiten* (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 138–139; cf. also Jekat et al. 2020). Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 139) argue that, if a debate over terminology and its implications may be legitimate at the political level, no terminological ambiguity is allowed in academic writing. Therefore, hereafter I will follow current academic and professional discourse and accept a clear distinction between the two concepts.

According to ANFFAS Onlus (2016), over two million people in Italy have an intellectual disability. In Switzerland, it is estimated that the figure is around 50,000 people (FBED: n.d.). The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* (DSM-5) defines ID as neurodevelopmental disorders that begin in childhood and are characterised by intellectual difficulties, as well as difficulties in conceptual, social, and practical areas of living (APA 2013). The APA (2013) classifies severity of ID according to the level of support needed to achieve an individual’s optimal personal functioning. The DSM-5 diagnosis of ID (APA 2013) requires the satisfaction of three criteria:

1. Deficits in intellectual functioning – i.e. “reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and learning from experience” (APA 2013: 33) – confirmed by clinical evaluation and individualised standard IQ testing.
2. Deficits in adaptive functioning that significantly impact on the individual’s practical skills (i.e. activities of daily living and personal care), conceptual skills (i.e. related to skills in *language, reading* and *writing* and skills in money, time and number concepts) and social skills (i.e. interpersonal skills, social responsibility, self-esteem, following rules, social problem solving) (cf. also Mitchell 2018).
3. The onset of these deficits in the developmental period.

The DSM-5 (APA 2013) assigns the diagnosis of ID according to specifiers (i.e. mild, moderate, severe, and profound) which are based on level of adaptive functioning. The majority of people with ID are classified as having mild ID. Boat and Wu clarify that

individuals with mild ID are slower in all areas of conceptual development and social and daily living skills. These individuals can learn practical life skills, which allows them to function in ordinary life with minimal levels of support. Individuals with moderate ID can take care of themselves, travel to familiar places in their community, and learn basic skills related to safety and health. Their self-care requires moderate support. (Boat/Wu 2015: n.p)

Genetic factors play a major role in ID. Down's Syndrome (DS), also known as Trisomy 21, is the most common genetic cause of ID worldwide, occurring approximately once every 1,000 live births (UN n.d.: n.p.). In Italy, there are approximately 48,000 people with DS. The largest age group is from 15 to 44 years old (i.e. 66%) and 13% are over 44 years old. Life expectancy at birth has increased dramatically in recent decades, reaching 61.6 years for males and 57.8 years for females (CENSIS 2014). Environmental factors, nutritional or social deprivation, maternal diseases, traumatic brain injury, prenatal and postnatal complications can also lead to ID. Appropriate education, skills training and supportive environments generally optimise functioning (cf. Boat/Wu 2015).

Language and communicative skills of people with ID differ greatly. Potentially, all areas of language competence may be affected by ID, that is, phonological processing, productive and receptive vocabulary, as well as difficulties at the morphological, syntactic and pragmatic levels (Schuppener/Bock 2019). More specifically, the cognitive profile of individuals with DS is characterised by impairment of oral language skills (including vocabulary, syntax, and comprehension), phonological memory and phonological awareness. These abilities have been demonstrated to play an important role to support reading, at least in typically developing children (cf. Abbeduto et al. 2007; Verucci et al. 2006). This means that learning to read is likely to be particularly challenging for this population. Verucci et al. (2006) confirm that text comprehension seems to be generally impaired in children with DS and report that, contrary to what occurs in typically developing children, reading abilities continue to develop in children with DS, whereas text comprehension skills change very little over time. As reported in literature (cf. Christmann/Groeben 2019; Piemontese 1996), "compared to decoding, the ability to comprehend a text requires a greater cognitive load" (Verucci et al. 2006: 485). It follows that "the degree of text comprehension is strongly conditioned by the global cognitive level of participants" (Verucci et al. 2006: 485). Nonetheless, Saletta and Winberg (2019: 118) report that adults with DS may attain literacy skills that were unachievable in earlier years and that the "optimal time to educate individuals with IDD [=intellectual or developmental disability] may occur during the adolescent to adult years". The literature agrees (cf. Abbeduto et al. 2007; Verucci et al. 2006; Schuppener/Bock 2019) that more studies of reading in people with ID are needed.

2.6.2 Functional illiterates

Functional illiteracy means that “a person cannot use reading, writing, and calculation skills for his/her own and the community’s development” (Vágvölgyi et al. 2016: 1). Adults with low levels of functional literacy are more likely to report poor health, to perceive themselves as objects rather than actors in political processes, and to have worse outcomes in the labour market than their more-proficient peers (OECD 2016). As Coulmas (2013: 65) puts it, “the critical threshold of competence in the knowledge society keeps rising, as does the risk of social exclusion for those with below-standard functional literacy”.

Recent studies show that low levels of literacy and/or numeracy proficiency affect large segments of the population both in Switzerland and Italy. According to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) of 2003–2007 (OECD/Statistics Canada 2005), just under 16%²⁴ of the Swiss population aged between 16 and 65 is lacking functional literacy skills. It should be stressed the figures in Italian-speaking Switzerland are significantly lower than the Swiss average in both prose and document literacy (FSO 2005: 15). New data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) will be available in the next three to four years. Parpan et al. (2021, forthcoming) emphasise that, considering the growing diversity of the Swiss population, ongoing digitalisation, and the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Konsortium PISA.ch 2019) which indicated below-average reading scores among Swiss 15-year-olds, it can be expected that the new data will reveal a highly challenging scenario nationwide.

The situation in Italy looks more dramatic. Italy ranks first in functional illiteracy with 47% of the population between 16–65 having poor reading and numeracy skills (OECD/Statistics Canada 2005). More recent OECD-PIAAC data (OECD 2018) confirms that approximately 39% of 25–65 year-olds (i.e. 13.1 million adults) in Italy score at the bottom of the PIAAC ranking. These adults²⁵ can successfully complete only reading tasks that involve short and simple texts. These figures suggest that low-skilled adults both in Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy struggle to understand written communication in Standard Italian. Easy Language has the potential to address this issue.

2.7 Translating into Easy Language

According to Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 172), the production of texts in *Leichte Sprache* can be described as a translation process, “sofern ein wie auch immer gearteter Ausgangstext vorliegt und mithin ein Transfer in Leichte Sprache stattgefunden hat”. However, translating from Standard Language into Easy Language does not involve cross-language transfer of meaning; it rather implies moving between two varieties of the same language

²⁴ Percentage of adults aged 16–65 being assessed at level 1 (on a prose literacy scale from 1 to 5, whereby level 5 indicates the highest measured level of literacy) (cf. FSO 2005).

²⁵ This share of the population may include people from other target groups, e.g. people with a migrant background, as well as people with ID.

(Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 173). It follows that translating into Easy Language involves an intralingual translation process, which implies diastatic variation. Whenever the structure and the layout of the target text (TT) are formatted according to a set of EtR guidelines, this intralingual translation process also includes an intersemiotic perspective. Finally, translation into Easy Language is generally intracultural, “weil Ausgangs- und primäre Zieltextleser derselben Parakultur angehören, wenn auch häufig unterschiedlichen diakulturellen Gruppen” (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 176).

In the last ten years, several sets of practice-based guidelines for *Leichte Sprache* have been developed to support authors, editors, information providers, translators and other practitioners in making information services and documentation accessible to everyone (e.g. BITV 2.0 2011; BMAS 2014). As mentioned above, in 2009, Inclusion Europe published the European standards for Easy Language, which are now available in 16 languages, including Italian (Inclusion Europe 2009a). Importantly, this indicates that text comprehensibility has a strong supra-language component (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 71–72). The European guidelines include 20 general standards, approximately 40 standards for written information (4–5 of which are language-specific), 29 standards for electronic information, 22 standards for video information and 17 standards for audio information. Table 1 presents a selection of 19 European standards for written information which are particularly relevant to my qualitative text analysis (cf. Section 6).

European Standards for Easy Language (selection, Inclusion Europe 2009b)	
Design and format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always use a font that is clear and easy to read. • Always start a new sentence on a new line. • Never split 1 word over 2 lines. • Align your text to the left of the page.
Morphology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid using initials. Use the word in full where possible. • Avoid all abbreviations. • Use active rather than passive language where possible.
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use easy to understand words that people know well. • Do not use difficult words. If you need to use difficult words, make sure you always explain them clearly. • Use examples to explain things. • Use the same word to describe the same thing throughout your document.
Syntax	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your sentences short.
Semantics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use positive sentences rather than negative ones where possible.
Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure the important information is easy to find. • Always make sure you give people all the information they need. • Do not give people more information than they need to understand your point. • Leave space between paragraphs. • Speak to people directly. Use words like “you” to do this. • Always choose images that are clear, easy to understand and go well with the piece of text they are helping to explain.

Table 1: A selection of European standards for Easy Language (Inclusion Europe 2009b; adapted from Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 73)

The standards in Table 1 seem intuition-based, reasonable recommendations for text simplification. However, for professional text production, it could be argued that these standards do not provide a satisfactory account of how they should be implemented (cf.

Bredel/Maaß 2019: 253). For instance, how “short” should a sentence be in order to be easy to read? Or how can the “difficulty” of a word be measured? Inclusion Europe language-specific guidelines (2009a: 23) are, in turn, not comprehensive enough to satisfactorily guide the author or translator through the specificities of the Italian language. By contrast, Piemontese’s (1996) principles of ‘controlled writing’ (cf. Section 2.4) provided a research-informed, all-embracing and language-specific pool of guidelines as far back as in the early 1990s. It should be emphasised that those principles anticipated Inclusion Europe standards by well over ten years and remain unique to this day.

Practice-based sets of guidelines imply that a thorough implementation of rules will automatically lead to optimum text comprehensibility. The literature (cf. Balling 2013; Bredel/Maaß 2019; Bock 2015, 2018) in fact argues that this is not necessarily the case. Guidelines can certainly “orientate” authors or translators during text production; however, their claim to universal validity is indeed problematic, as the extent to which a language construction is functional varies depending on the communicative context (Bock 2015: 92). Bock (2015: 88) concludes that “Leichte Sprache in einer Vielzahl von Kontexten eingesetzt wird, was klar gegen einfache Regellisten und strikte Normierung spricht. Dennoch können solche Regeln [...] ein Orientierungsraster sein”. Piemontese (1996: 90) supports this perspective and argues that “se non c’è limite alla migliorabilità dei testi, non può esserci limite alla migliorabilità delle regole e, soprattutto, delle modalità di applicazione delle medesime”. Overall, the literature agrees (cf. Balling 2013; Fajardo et al. 2014; Bock 2015, 2018; Bredel/Maaß 2019, among others) that further research is needed to provide empirical support for the mentioned sets of guidelines, especially in the case of addressees with ID.

The theoretical scenario described above opens the ground for individually tailored translation solutions based on text function and target situation. In this context, professional translators need to be aware of the key properties that make written communication accessible, as represented in Figure 2.

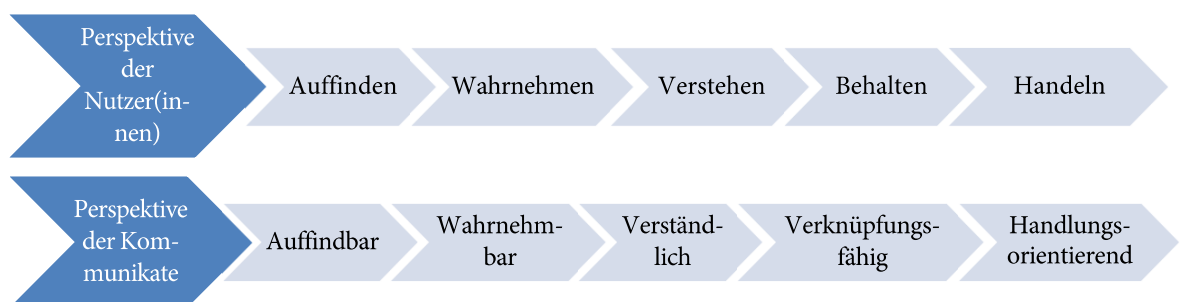


Figure 2: The way to communication accessibility according to Maaß and Rink (2019: 24)

Maaß and Rink (2019; cf. also Maaß 2019a) propose a twofold classification of the key features that make communication accessible. As can be inferred from Figure 2, taking into

consideration the recipient's perspective is crucial to determine what features the TT should have in order to be fully accessible. Maaß and Rink (2019) argue that a text must be retrievable in order to be retrieved by target recipients. Where and how a text is to be accessed has important implications on how that text is conceived and produced. Texts must also be perceptible to the addressee, this being the prerequisite for further information processing. Perceived information must then be comprehended and semantically and syntactically integrated with pre-existing knowledge. Provided that this process does not overstrain the recipient's cognitive resources, s/he will be enabled to act and, ultimately, participate in society.

2.7.1 Experiences from Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy

In the last few years, both Germany and Switzerland have gained considerable practical experience in Easy Language translation. The Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities (FBED 2019) lists seven translation agencies based in German-speaking Switzerland which regularly translate into *Leichte Sprache*. Two further translation agencies are active in French-speaking Switzerland and offer translations in *Langage simplifié*. Finally, Pro Infirmis' recently open *Servizio di Lingua Facile*²⁶ is based in Ticino and has been translating into *Lingua facile* since early 2019. The opening of Pro Infirmis' *Servizio di Lingua Facile* had a significant echo in the Swiss Italian-speaking media (Visetti 2019, among others). It is expected that the work of the agency will contribute to raising awareness of and interest in the potential benefits of Easy Italian for the target population. On the agency's website, Pro Infirmis' approach to translating in *Lingua Facile* is presented as follows (cf. Figure 3):

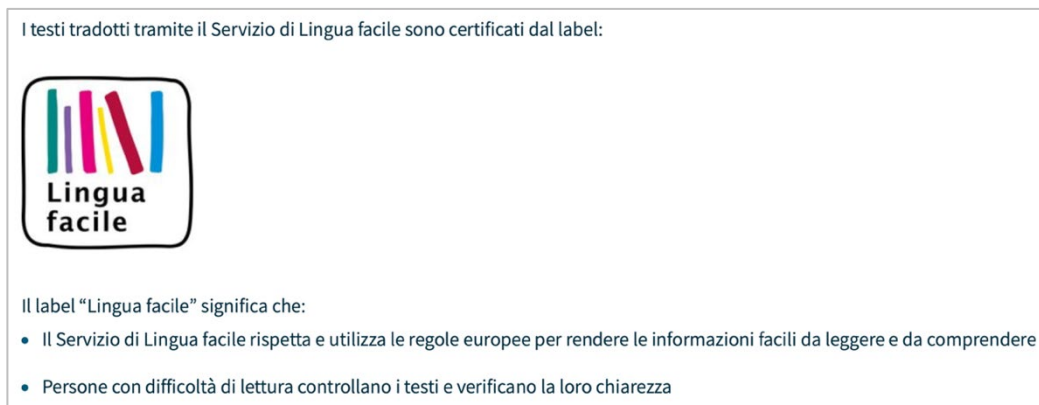


Figure 3: Pro Infirmis' Servizio di Lingua facile – Seal of approval (Pro Infirmis 2020: n.p.)

The agency follows the European standards for Easy Language (Inclusion Europe 2009a) and is supported by self-advocates who act as EtR consultants in the revision process. Translations are certified by Pro Infirmis' own seal of approval (see Figure 3). Depending on clients' communication needs, texts are translated at different levels of comprehension,

²⁶ Cf. <https://www.servizio-lingua-facile.ch/it.html> [retrieved 30/03/2021].

namely, A1 (“comprensione molto facile”), A2 (“comprensione facile”) and B1 (“comprensione media”), which, supposedly, are broadly equivalent to the corresponding CEFR²⁷ levels.

In Italy, the availability of reading materials in Easy Italian is extremely limited. ANFFAS Onlus²⁸ (National Association of Families of Mentally Handicapped Children) is the only association in Italy currently promoting the use of Easy Italian (or *Linguaggio facile da leggere*). It is a non-profit organisation which supports and represents over 30,000 people with ID and their families in Italy. The association has been advocating the need for Easy Italian for the past ten years. In 2010, ANFFAS Onlus translated the UN-CRPD into Easy Italian (ANFFAS Onlus 2010) and created an accessible video introduction to the Convention (ANFFAS Onlus 2011). These initiatives triggered a series of projects and events aimed at raising awareness of Easy Italian among ANFFAS Onlus associate organisations and promoting a cultural change both inside and outside the association (cf. Speziale 2017: 3). From 2011 to 2013, ANFFAS Onlus was one of the “Pathways II” project members (cf. Section 2.3). As a result of the involvement with Inclusion Europe, the first group of Easy Italian trainers and self-advocates from ANFFAS Onlus was established. Since then, Easy Italian has been a regular feature of all routine activities of the association, including online and print publications, motions and internal and external communications concerning projects and initiatives²⁹. Most notably, in 2016 the ANFFAS Onlus “Io, Cittadino!” project led to the creation of the first Italian self-advocacy movement (“Io cittadino! Piattaforma Italiana Autorappresentanti In Movimento”³⁰), whose main objective is to ensure that people with ID perform active citizenship. Easy Italian was essential for self-advocates to be active participants in the project.

To conclude this section, a brief observation on terminology has to be made. Easy Italian is currently being referred to as *Lingua facile* (Pro Infirmis 2020), *Linguaggio facile da leggere (e da capire)* (ANFFAS Onlus, Inclusion Europe 2009a) and *Linguaggio semplificato* (FBED 2019) (cf. also Parpan et al. 2021, forthcoming). In the 1990s, Piemontese (1996: 123, 125) advocated a “scrittura controllata” to produce “testi di facile lettura”. It could be argued that a shared view on terminology could contribute to reinforcing the concept of Easy Language both in Italy and Italian-speaking Switzerland.

²⁷ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (hereafter CEFR; cf. Council of Europe 2001).

²⁸ Cf. <http://www.anffas.net> [retrieved 01/04/2021].

²⁹ For an overview of currently available materials in Easy Italian, see <http://www.anffas.net/it/linguaggio-facile-da-leggere/documenti-facili-da-leggere/> [retrieved 01/04/2021].

³⁰ Cf. <http://www.anffas.net/it/chi-siamo/la-nostra-organizzazione/piattaforma-nazionale-degli-autorappresentanti/> [retrieved 01/04/2021].

3 Relevance

Translation into Easy Italian is still under-researched. According to Bredel and Maaß (2016: 177–178), translation into *Leichte Sprache* – and, by extension, into any Easy Language – “bedarf insgesamt einer Professionalisierung und Akademisierung, damit es den Anforderungen insbesondere an die Fachübersetzung gerecht werden kann”. This work aims to shed some light on the concept of Easy Italian and advocates for greater attention from the academic community. Furthermore, it is intended that research findings will promote dialogue between existing and future studies on *Leichte Sprache* and Easy Italian. This is particularly desirable within Switzerland’s multilingual context. Finally, this work sets out to address the challenges currently faced by Swiss and Italian public authorities in reaching out to low-skilled segments of the population.

4 Research purpose

In recent years, no experimental research has addressed the impact of Easy Italian on text comprehension by people with ID. This work aims to fill this research gap by combining insights from translation studies and accessibility studies. Drawing on Nüssli's (2018) methodological insights, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. What strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian?
2. Do translators' strategies facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with ID?

The concept of 'translation strategy' needs to be briefly clarified here. In my analysis, a strategy is understood as a "tool to tackle the possible problems that emerge during the translation process" (Gambier 2011: n.p.). Strategy in a translation event (which includes what happens before and after the translation) is achieved through tactics or solutions in a translation act (i.e. translation in a narrow meaning; cf. Section 6).

An overview of the methods used in my empirical study is provided in the following section.

5 Methods

The empirical part of this study was broadly based on the sequential exploratory design (cf. Creswell 2003: 213–216) involving qualitative and quantitative research methods. It was conducted in four phases: (1) an initial phase of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis (i.e. corpus compilation and text analysis); (2) a phase of quantitative data collection (i.e. questionnaire and reading comprehension test); (3) a phase of data analysis, and (4) a final phase of data integration and interpretation. Concurrent with and nested within Phase 2 was a further qualitative data collection element (i.e. post-test focus group interview), to which less priority was given (cf. Creswell 2003: 218).

As mentioned above, this study aimed to address two questions (cf. Section 4), which were: (1) What strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian?, and (2) Do translators' strategies facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with ID? Figure 4 illustrates the research strategy adopted to address both questions.

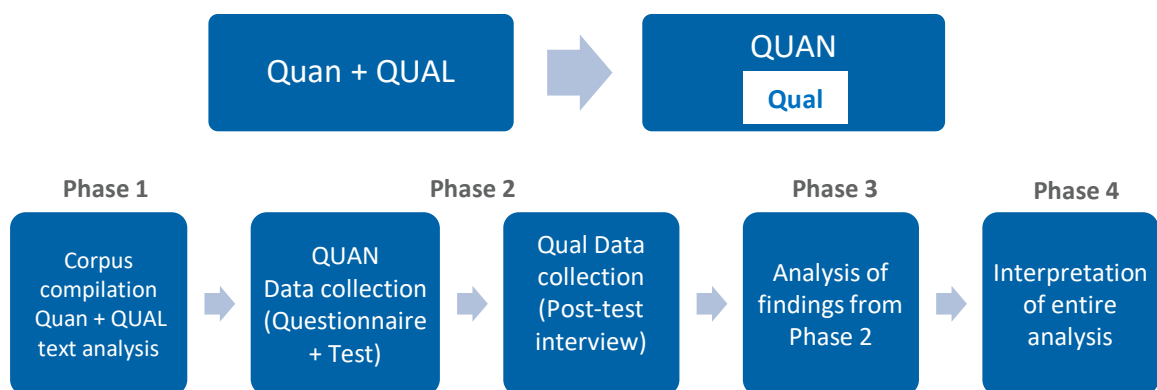


Figure 4: Visual model of research strategy (adapted from Creswell 2003: 213)

In Phase 1, the first question was explored. A small-scale corpus was compiled, including two health-related texts in Standard Italian and their translations into Easy Italian, as well as one health-related text originally written in Easy Italian. Texts were compared and analysed at different linguistic levels. The text analysis was based on two main concepts: *translation problem* and *translation solution* (cf. Toury 2011) and drew on Nüssli (2018), Maaß et al. (2014), Jekat (2014), Jekat and Dutoit (2014) and Piemontese (1996) (cf. Section 6).

The second research question was addressed in Phase 2. Based on findings from the text analysis, a reading comprehension (RC) test was designed and administered to measure the sample group's understanding of the corpus texts. Particular attention was paid to those passages in the target texts that did not comply with the European standards for Easy Italian (Inclusion Europe 2009a). In this phase, a questionnaire was also administered to collect

data on sociodemographic characteristics and reading habits of the sample participants. Finally, a post-test focus group interview was conducted in an attempt to gain insights into the respondents' perception of the corpus texts' readability level, and thus cross-validate findings (cf. Section 7).

As Figure 4 further shows, in the last two phases of the study (i.e. Phase 3 and 4), the data collected in Phase 2 was organised and analysed (cf. Section 8) and then interpreted and discussed (cf. Section 9). It is important to state that this exploratory study incorporated one element of participatory research, involving independent self-advocacy consultants from ANFFAS Onlus Udine in the test validation process.

6 Text analysis

In this section, I will outline the steps involved in my text analysis. For each corpus text, I first carried out a quantitative analysis to measure text *readability*. This meant assessing “superficial obstacles” (Piemontese 1996: 105) at the lexical and syntactic levels. Each text was evaluated through the READ-IT readability assessment tool (demo version; cf. Dell’Orletta et al. 2011), a state-of-the-art software for the automatic processing of the Italian language³¹. READ-IT implements an advanced readability index that combines traditional raw text features (i.e. sentence length, calculated as the average number of words per sentence, and word length, calculated as the average number of characters per word) with lexical, morphosyntactic and syntactic information. READ-IT was developed “with a specific application in mind, i.e. text simplification” (Dell’Orletta et al. 2011: 75). More specifically, Dell’Orletta et al. approached readability assessment as a binary classification task, aimed at “discerning easy-to-read textual objects from difficult-to-read ones” (Dell’Orletta et al. 2011: 75). READ-IT was tested using two different corpora: a corpus of ‘difficult’ journalistic texts from the Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* (Baroni et al. 2004), and a corpus of ‘easy’ articles from *Due Parole* (cf. Section 2.4). Since it classifies readability at both document *and* sentence levels, READ-IT allowed me to identify lexical or grammatical items in the corpus texts that needed revision or further simplification.

Secondly, I carried out a manual qualitative analysis to measure text *comprehensibility*. This meant making a close examination of the formal features of the corpus texts (i.e. syntax and lexicon), as well as assessing “deeper obstacles” (Piemontese 1996: 105) related to text organisation and information structure. Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018) were compared with their source texts in Standard Italian. Following Maaß et al. (2014), translation problems were retrospectively identified and analysed at different linguistic levels, that is, at the lexical, syntactic, textual and discourse levels. Each translation problem was associated with the performance of a single translation act – situated in a particular point in time and space – and, therefore, with a corresponding translation solution. As a result, target texts were approached as “reservoirs of *realized* solutions”, giving clues to actual processes of translational decision-making (Toury 2011: n.d.). The extent to which those solutions adhered to Inclusion Europe guidelines (2009a) was a prominent object of discussion.

Being originally written in Easy Italian, Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.) was only analysed in the context of its adherence to Inclusion Europe guidelines (2009a).

³¹ Previous readability formulas included (a) an adaptation of the Flesh-Kincaid measure to Italian, known as the Flesch-Vacca formula (Franchina/Vacca 1986), which employed the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence to assess readability; and (b) the GulpEase index (Lucisano/Piemontese 1988), calculating readability based on the average number of characters per word and the average number of words per sentence.

Finally, Jekat's (2014) Qualified Information Transfer (QIT) method was used to gain a richer description of the intralingual translation processes examined in Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018). The QIT method evaluates the quality of live subtitles obtained through respeaking and is employed to describe changes occurring during the transfer process from spoken to written language. The method's analytical categories (i.e. *reduction*, *addition* and *variation*) were applied to my analysis of translation pairs at different linguistic levels (i.e. syntactic, morphological, lexical) (cf. Jekat 2014: 96–98).

In Section 6.1, a detailed description of the corpus will be provided. A thorough analysis of the corpus texts will follow in Sections 6.2 to 6.4.

6.1 Corpus description

Three extracts from three freely-available texts in Easy Italian were selected to compile a 346-word corpus. As mentioned, Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018) were translations from Standard Italian, whereas Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.) was originally written in Easy Italian. The latter inclusion was justified, on the one hand, by the lack of (freely-available) Standard-Easy text pairs in Italian; on the other hand, it was expected that respondents' reading comprehension performance on Text 3 vs. the two translated texts might add to data richness (cf. Section 8.2 for test results). All corpus texts were labelled either with Pro Infirmis' "Lingua facile" seal of approval (Text 1) or with the European easy-to-read logo (Text 2 and 3). A detailed description of the corpus texts is provided in the following two subsections.

6.1.1 Description of Text 1 and Text 2

In this subsection, Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018) will be described in detail. Table 2 below introduces some factual data on both Text 1 and Text 2 and the full texts they were extracted from. Bibliographical information and text volumes are indicated for both the Easy Italian and Standard Italian version of the texts.

		Text 1	Text 2
Easy Italian	Extract title	<i>Cos'è la CIP?</i>	<i>Guida ai Servizi per la Salute</i>
	Extract volume	127 words	107 words
	Full text title	<i>La cartella informatizzata del paziente (CIP). Le mie informazioni sulla salute al momento giusto al posto giusto.</i> (eHealth Suisse 2019a)	<i>Carta dei Servizi dell'Azienda per l'Assistenza Sanitaria Sanitaria 2 Bassa Friulana, Isontina. Guida ai Servizi per la Salute</i> (SSN 2018)
	Full text volume	480 words	10,569 words
Standard Italian	Extract volume	94 words	185 words
	Full text title	<i>Informazioni in breve per la popolazione. Le mie informazioni sulla salute. Al momento giusto al posto giusto.</i> (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	<i>Carta dei Servizi</i> (SSN 2019)
	Full text volume	427 words	7,898 words

Table 2: Corpus description: Text 1 and Text 2 (I)

What stands out in this table is that Text 2 (107 words) is much smaller in volume than its original version in Standard Italian (185 words). This may be considered as atypical of Easy Language texts, which normally tend to be longer – if not considerably longer – than their source texts (Maaß et al. 2014: 68) and suggests that reduction techniques were consistently applied during the translation process of this specific text portion. Furthermore, both Text 1 (127 words) and its full version in Easy Italian (480 words) are only slightly larger in volume than their original versions in Standard Italian, which contained 94 and 427 words respectively. This may indicate that variation techniques were preferred to substantial additions or reductions.

Following Jekat et al.'s (2020) recommendations for quality management of texts translated into Easy Language, further descriptive categories were defined for Text 1 and Text 2. These categories are illustrated in Table 3. Based on information obtained through telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence with EtR experts from ANFFAS Onlus Udine and Pro Infirmis, Table 3 provides details on who commissioned the translations, as well as who and when undertook them. In addition, Table 3 includes information on the guidelines for Easy Italian followed by the translators and, finally, the target group representatives who were involved in the translation and revision process.

Category	Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a)	Text 2 (extract from SNN 2018)
Commissioner/client	eHealth Suisse	Italian National Health Service (SSN), upon suggestion by ANFFAS Gorizia and ANFFAS Onlus Udine
Translator	Pro Infirmis Ticino e Moesano, "Servizio di Lingua facile"	ANFFAS Onlus Gorizia and ANFFAS Onlus Udine
Time of translation	2019	2018
Source text in Standard Italian	<i>Informazioni in breve per la popolazione. Le mie informazioni sulla salute. Al momento giusto al posto giusto.</i> (eHealth Suisse 2019b) [427 words] → The Easy German translation (eHealth Suisse 2019c) was also used as a reference source text	<i>Carta dei Servizi</i> (SSN 2019) [7,898 words]
Targeted degree of text simplification	CEFR A2-B1 level	Highest degree of simplification (i.e. broadly equivalent to CEFR A1 level)
Reference guidelines for Easy Italian	Inclusion Europe (2009a)	Inclusion Europe (2009a)
Involvement of target group representatives	Self-advocates/EtR consultants from Fondazione Diamante (Manno, Ticino)	Self-advocates/EtR consultants from ANFFAS Onlus Gorizia and ANFFAS Onlus Udine

Table 3: Corpus description: Text 1 and Text 2 (II) (adapted from Jekat et al. 2020)

As can be seen in Table 3, both Pro Infirmis and ANFFAS translators adopted Inclusion Europe guidelines and involved representatives of the target groups in the translation and review and quality control process. Table 3 also shows that Pro Infirmis based their work on a previously translated version of Text 1 in Easy German (eHealth Suisse 2019c). It should also be emphasised that ANFFAS translators aimed to achieve a very high degree

of text simplification (i.e. broadly equivalent to CEFR A1 or PIAAC level 2³²), whereas Pro Infirmis translators were briefed to target a relatively lower degree of text simplification (i.e. equivalent to CEFR A2–B1 or PIAAC level 4). This seems to be justified by a closer examination of the two translations briefs. Table 4 below shows that SSN/ANFFAS specifically included people with ID in their target readers. By contrast, eHealth Suisse targeted wider low-proficiency population segments.

	Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a)	Text 2 (extract from SNN 2018)
Intended text function (both ST and TT)	Informative and, to some extent, operative function	Informative function
Addressees (ST)	Italian-speaking Swiss general public (i.e. non experts)	Residents of South-East Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy
Addressees (TT)	Italian-speaking Swiss residents with low literacy skills (both native and foreign speakers)	Residents of South-East Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) with ID and/or low literacy skills (both native and foreign speakers)
Medium (both ST and TT)	Electronic and printed publication. Downloadable as a PDF file from the electronic patient record (EPR) official information platform by eHealth Suisse, the Confederation and the cantons	Electronic and printed publication. Downloadable as a PDF file from the official website of one of the Friuli Venezia Giulia local health authorities
Motive (both ST and TT)	To inform the general public about the new electronic patient record (EPR), which would be available in Switzerland in spring 2020; to elicit an active response from the readers, i.e. expressing interest in opening an EPR	To inform the general public about the health services available in the region and their mission

Table 4: Corpus description: Text 1 and Text 2 (III) (adapted from Nord 1997)

Drawing on Nord (1997), Table 4 provides further information as regards the intended text function and publication channels of the two target texts. It is worth highlighting that both texts have an informative function. However, Text 1 aims not only to inform the readers about the Federal Act on the Electronic Patient Record (LCIP 2015), which came into force in April 2017 and forms the legal basis for the EPR. It also aims to elicit an active response from the target readers, encouraging them to open an EPR as soon as it becomes available.

Finally, both Text 1 and Text 2 are disseminated electronically on the EPR online information platform and the local SSN website respectively; in addition, they can be downloaded as PDF files and printed out for the readers' own use.

6.1.2 Description of Text 3

As mentioned at the beginning of Section 6, my corpus included a text originally written in Easy Italian. The lack of (freely-available) translations into Easy Italian was certainly the main reason for this choice. At the same time, it was expected that including a text written solely by representatives of the target population could contribute to data richness. More specifically, it was assumed that (a) the analysis of Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.) would lend some insights into how the target population writes in Easy Italian (cf. Jekat et

³² Cf. OECD (n.d.).

al. 2020); and (b) a comparison of the sample population's comprehension performance on Text 3 vs. the two translated texts in my corpus would add an interesting perspective to Phase 3 and 4 of my empirical study.

Text 3 was written by six residents of "Villa Olimpia" – a residential care facility for people with ID based in Genova – and was cross-proofread by the authors themselves. Table 5 summarises available bibliographical information for the text in question.

Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.)	
Extract title	<i>Cosa devi fare per mantenerti in buona salute?</i>
Extract volume	112 words
Full text title	<i>Manuale per la cura della salute</i> (Villa Olimpia n.d.)
Full text volume	3,029 words
Authors	Residents of "Villa Olimpia" and ANFFAS Onlus Genova
First publication date	Unknown
Reference guidelines for Easy Italian	Inclusion Europe (2009a)
Involvement of target group representatives	Self-advocates/EtR consultants from Villa Olimpia and ANFFAS Onlus Genova

Table 5: Corpus description: Text 3

As shown in Table 5, the selected extract is of comparable length to the other two corpus texts (i.e. 112 words). On page 2 of the text's full version, the authors declared that their text was written following the European standards for Easy Italian (Inclusion Europe 2009a). The text's motive was also clearly indicated, that is, giving information on some of the most widely used medicines (informative function). At the same time, the text aims to elicit an active response from the target readers, i.e. that they take medications correctly and make choices for a healthier lifestyle (operative function). Text 3 addresses Italian residents with ID and/or low literacy skills. The guide is downloadable as a PDF file from ANFFAS Nazionale and ANFFAS Onlus Genova websites.

In the next three sections, the most relevant data drawn from my text analysis (see Appendix A) will be presented for each corpus text.

6.2 Analysis of Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a)

Text 1 was assessed through the READ-IT readability assessment tool, which measured a global level of difficulty of 23.8% (see Figure 5). This percentage refers to the probability that the text in question is a difficult-to-read text.





indice di leggibilità	livello di difficoltà	
READ-IT Base	1,2%	
READ-IT Lessicale	0,2%	
READ-IT Sintattico	18,5%	
READ-IT Globale	23,8%	

Figure 5. READ-IT readability indexes for Text 1 (eHealth Suisse 2019a)

The indexes shown in Figure 5 are associated with different models of readability analysis. More specifically, the READ-IT basic index (“READ-IT Base”) is based on textual features traditionally used in readability metrics, which are the average number of characters per word (N=5.5 in Text 1) and the average number of tokens per sentence (N=8.8 in Text 1). The former value is higher than the average calculated for the READ-IT reference corpora, thus suggesting that words tend to be relatively long, and that further simplification may be necessary; the latter value is lower than the average calculated for both reference corpora, thus indicating acceptable average sentence length. However, it should be emphasised that Text 1 contains two bulleted lists, one comprising four and the other three items (cf. Appendix E). Each item in the list is treated by READ-IT as an independent sentence; this increases the total number of sentences (N=17) and thus reduces the average number of tokens per sentence.

The second index shown in Figure 5 is the READ-IT lexical index (“READ-IT Lessicale”). This measure focuses on lexical features, which include both vocabulary composition and lexical richness. Text 1 scores a low percentage on the READ-IT lexical assessment (i.e. 0.2%), thus hinting that this text has a high probability to be easy to read at the lexical level. Detailed lexical parameters show that 76.6% of the text’s lexical items are contained in VdB (De Mauro 1980), 85.7% of which being included in De Mauro’s (1980) basic vocabulary (cf. Section 2.4 above). In addition, a type/token ratio (TTR) of 0.540³³ further confirms that the lexical variety in this text is within average levels as compared to the average TTR obtained from the easy-to-read reference corpus.

On the other hand, a higher syntactic level of difficulty (i.e. 18.5%; see “READ-IT Sintattico” in Figure 5) suggests that Text 1 may need further revision in this respect. Particularly striking are values of clause-internal structure, revealing an average of 11.538 words per clause – that is, greater than the average calculated for both reference corpora. However, it should be noticed that just under one third of the total number of words in this text (i.e. 40 out of 127 words) are organised in bulleted lists. As mentioned above, each item in these lists is treated by READ-IT as an independent sentence; this may have a negative impact on how READ-IT assesses readability at the syntactic level.

³³ READ-IT calculates the type/token ratio (TTR) by dividing the types (i.e. total number of unique words) occurring in the first 100 words of a text by its tokens (i.e. the total number of words). The range falls between 0 and 1, where a TTR of 1 indicates the highest possible degree of lexical variation (cf. Dell’Orletta et al. 2011).

My qualitative text analysis (see Appendix A) revealed a less balanced scenario, particularly at the lexical level. In the following paragraphs, six select examples from Text 1 will be discussed. Example 1 shows that the original document heading was transferred unaltered into the TT.

Example 1

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
Cos'è la CIP?	Cos'è la CIP?

The example above clearly indicates that no explicit reference to the topic and function of the document is provided in the TT. In addition, the heading contains an abbreviation (i.e. *CIP*). Abbreviations or acronyms in headings may pose a barrier to readability and contravene rules no. 12 and 20 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 10 and 17 respectively).

A tentative explanation of the abbreviation *CIP* occurs in Example 2. The full subject (i.e. *cartella informatizzata del paziente*) is emphasised in bold type (in accordance with rule no. 23, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 17) and the addition of the adverbial expression *in breve* aims to make clearer what the abbreviation stands for. However, the initials 'c', 'i' and 'p' are not capitalised (arguably contravening rule no. 12, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10). As can be seen in Example 2, associating the abbreviation *CIP* with the full expression it stands for may still pose a challenge for the reader.

Example 2

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
La cartella informatizzata del paziente (CIP) è una raccolta personale di documenti riguardanti la salute.	La cartella informatizzata del paziente , <i>in breve</i> CIP, è una raccolta di documenti elettronici <i>che riguardano la vostra salute. Potete vedere questi documenti sul vostro computer o sul vostro telefonino.</i>

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation]

Furthermore, the variation from *riguardanti* in the ST to *che riguardano* in the TT simplifies syntax by replacing the rather formal present participle – here fulfilling the syntactic function of a relative clause – with the relative pronoun *che* + present indicative. Nonetheless, the resulting sentence is long and contains at least three ideas: (1) CIP stands for *Cartella Informatizzata del Paziente*, (2) the CIP is a collection of electronic documents, (3) the electronic documents in the CIP are related to one's health. This contravenes rule no. 19 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 17).

Further examples of lexical complexity can be seen in Examples 3 to 5 below. The term *valore* in Example 3 is a polysemic (and, to some extent, a specialist) word. I would argue that no sufficient context is provided to disambiguate this lexical item, especially considering that the following qualifier *arteriosa* is a low-frequency word (i.e. not contained in NVdB; De

Mauro 2019) and that no explanation is provided for the noun-adjective sequence *pressione arteriosa* (against rule no. 7 and 11, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).

Example 3

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
[...] o i valori della pressione arteriosa.	i valori della vostra pressione arteriosa

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation]

Similarly, in the following example, the term *radiografia* is not explained despite being a low-frequency word (i.e. not contained in NVdB, De Mauro 2019). This may hinder comprehension and contravenes rules no. 7 and 11 (Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).

Example 4

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
Può trattarsi, ad esempio, di una radiografia, del certificato di vaccinazione [...]	Questi documenti sono ad esempio: il vostro certificato di vaccinazione una radiografia del vostro ginocchio

[Note: green marks addition]

The key predicative *facoltativa* in Example 5 is also a low-frequency word (i.e. not contained in NVdB; De Mauro 2019). Although it is emphasised in bold type (in accordance with rule no. 23, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 17), no clear explanation is given for this adjective (against rule no. 7 and 11, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). The first sentence in this example, which anticipates the semantic value of *facoltativa*, contains two potential barriers: on the one hand, a negative sentence (against rule no. 16, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 11); on the other hand, the verb *aprire*, which in this segment is used with abstract meaning. Arguably, the verb *avere* in the ST represents a more effective alternative.

Example 5

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
Non siete comunque obbligati ad avere una CIP, che per i pazienti è facoltativa.	Non siete obbligati ad aprire una CIP. La CIP è facoltativa.

[Note: red marks reduction; blue marks variation]

In addition, lexical inconsistency can be noticed in the following subsequent sentences (see Example 6), where the TT presents two different verbs (i.e. *registrare* vs. *aggiungere*) and two different nouns (i.e. *documenti* vs. *informazioni*) to refer to the same referents.

Example 6

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b: n.p.)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a: n.p.)
I professionisti della salute depositano questi documenti nella vostra CIP. Anche voi potete depositare documenti personali nella CIP [...].	I professionisti della salute, ad esempio il vostro medico di famiglia , registrano questi documenti nella vostra CIP. Anche voi potete aggiungere delle informazioni nella CIP.

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation]

By contrast, rule no. 9 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 10) recommends that the same word should be used to describe the same thing throughout any given document. Once again, and somewhat paradoxically, the ST displays better consistency (*depositano/depositare* and *documenti/documenti*).

At the textual level, it should be noticed that Text 1 does not adhere to a number of European guidelines for accessible typography. Most notably, one recurring issue seems to be the typographical microstructure of the text – that is, “die Strukturierung von Zeilen” (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 259). Examples 2, 5 and 6 above suggest that rules no. 17 and 19 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 16–17) were not complied with. All three examples contain two sentences, none of which starts on a new line. In addition, any two or three-line sentence in Text 1 was not cut where readers would pause when reading out loud (cf. Appendix E for the typographical microstructure of Text 1).

It may also be suggested that a glossary at the end of the document containing the above-mentioned low-frequency terms might have compensated for some readers’ lack of language and world knowledge and thus provided them with necessary prerequisites for text comprehension (cf. rule no. 11, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 15; Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 261–263).

Finally, I would argue that the image inserted next to the text (see Appendix E) fails to serve as an effective “multikodale[r] Ressource der Verständnissicherung” (Maaß et al. 2014: 73). This image is identical to the one originally published in the ST (eHealth Suisse 2019a) and shows a young woman holding a *physical* folder called “CIP” while being in an open-air space in the mountains. Furthermore, four *paper* documents showing non easily decodable health-related symbols are flying all around the woman. No clear reference is made to what an *electronic* record is, what sort of information it contains or how it can be accessed (i.e. via computer or smartphone). Ideally, illustrations should have an impact on the macrostructure of the text and thus on the perception of its content (cf. Wünsche 2017; Alexander 2019; cf. also rules no. 34, 37 and 39, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 20–21). In this case, the interplay of verbal and non-verbal information does not necessarily promote understanding, inferencing and retention of Text 1’s central concepts.

Overall, the above examples show that Text 1 does not adhere to key Inclusion Europe guidelines at both lexical and syntactic levels, thus potentially compromising readability for

the primary target population. On a continuum line between Easy Language and Plain Language, it may be argued that this translation lies close to the Plain Language pole. Although eHealth Suisse intentionally targeted a broad low-proficiency readership in this case, it should be stressed that no ‘easier’ version of Text 1 is available on the EPR information platform. People with mild to moderate ID or a command of Italian at CEFR A1 level may find this text particularly challenging and thus be precluded from understanding the information it contains.

A presentation of the most relevant data drawn from the analysis of Text 2 will follow in Section 6.3 below.

6.3 Analysis of Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018)

Text 2 was assessed through the READ-IT readability assessment tool, which measured a global level of difficulty of 5.5% (see Figure 6). As mentioned above, this percentage refers to the probability that the text in question is a difficult-to-read text.

indice di leggibilità	livello di difficoltà	
READ-IT Base	8,0%	
READ-IT Lessicale	1,0%	
READ-IT Sintattico	9,0%	
READ-IT Globale	5,5%	

Figure 6: READ-IT readability indexes for Text 2 (SSN 2018)

As can be observed in Figure 6, the READ-IT basic profile of Text 2 indicates a higher level of difficulty as compared to Text 1 (i.e. 8.0% vs. 1.2% respectively). This can be justified by a higher average number of tokens per sentence (i.e. 14.3 in Text 2 vs. 8.8 in Text 1); nonetheless, this value is still lower than the average calculated for the READ-IT easy-to-read reference corpus.

The READ-IT lexical measure shown in Figure 6 (i.e. 1.0%) suggests that Text 2 has a high probability to be easy to read at the lexical level. Detailed lexical parameters actually show that 76.2% of Text 2’s words are contained in VdB (De Mauro 1980), 83.3% of which being included in De Mauro’s (1980) fundamental vocabulary (cf. Section 2.4 above). In addition, a type/token ratio of 0.600 further confirms that Text 2’s lexical variety is within average levels. Finally, a relatively low syntactic level of difficulty (i.e. 9.0%) suggests no critical parameters at the syntactic level.

My qualitative text analysis (see Appendix A) generally confirmed this scenario. However, it also highlighted a few issues regarding a relative lack of exemplification techniques and heavily reduced information transfer from ST to TT. A clear example of the former issue is illustrated in the following example, which shows the opening sentence of Text 2. This sentence was added by the translator(s) to introduce the *Azienda*’s mission.

Example 7

ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
---	L'Azienda per l'Assistenza Sanitaria 2 Bassa Friulana – Isontina si occupa dei servizi per la salute.

[Note: green marks addition]

This addition crucially fails to provide an explanation of what an “Azienda per l'Assistenza Sanitaria” is or does in practical terms. Equally, the key concept “servizi per la salute” is not at all exemplified – nor was it explained in previous sections of the document (cf. SSN 2018). The term *servizi* has a subject function in four out of nine sentences in this text – used alone or paired with *dell'azienda/per la salute* (cf. Appendix E). Understanding its meaning is obviously pivotal to text comprehension. Furthermore, the term *servizio* is a polysemic word. I would argue that no sufficient context is provided to disambiguate this lexical item, which may pose a significant barrier for the target reader (against rules no. 8 and 21, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 17 respectively).

As regards information transfer from ST to TT, Text 2 features substantial reduction and variation in order to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the ST's essential message (in accordance with rules no. 21 and 22, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 17). Example 8 illustrates this strategy very clearly.

Example 8

ST (SSN 2019: 6)	TT (SSN 2018: 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eguaglianza: i servizi sono erogati secondo regole uguali per tutti a prescindere da sesso, razza, etnia, lingua, religione, opinioni politiche, condizione sociale, condizione fisica o psichica in conformità al dispositivo fondamentale dell'art. 3 della Costituzione; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. L'eguaglianza: i servizi sono dati a tutti nello stesso modo;

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation; red marks reduction]

As can be deduced from the above example, the TT was reduced by almost 75%. It is questionable whether the TT succeeds in conveying the original message despite this substantial reduction. Let us consider the central term *eguaglianza*. This term is not contained in NVdB (De Mauro 2019) and might hinder comprehension if not explicitly clarified (against rule no. 7 and 11, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). It may be argued that this abstract concept could have been described more extensively, making use of paraphrase to evoke the equal rights frame and thus compensate for some readers' lack of language or world knowledge (Maaß et al. 2014: 71). Making explicit reference to patients' right to equal health treatment would seem particularly relevant, if EtR texts are to promote self-advocacy for recipients with ID. Furthermore, it should be noticed that the translator kept this segment in the passive voice (against rule no. 17, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 11), which contributes to making the text impersonal and ultimately distances the

reader from it (i.e. ‘services are given’ vs. ‘patients/you have the right to’ etc.). Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 504–505) highlight the strong “Orientierungsfunktion” of Easy Language texts and claim that “idealerweise werden in Leichte-Sprache-Texten stets die Handlungsträger benannt”. In fact, Inclusion Europe (cf. rule no. 15, 2009a: 11) recommends that the target readership should be addressed directly as “you”, as do other sets of guidelines for Easy German (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 504–505).

Equally to Example 8, the following target segment displays a high degree of reduction. Although the term *continuità* is included in De Mauro’s (2019) high usage vocabulary, it is nonetheless an abstract noun that might pose a barrier for the target reader. At the same time, the adverb *sempre*, which solely translates the notion of “continuity” in the TT, fails to fully convey both the temporal (*senza interruzione*) and the spatial extension (*in maniera continuativa nei vari presidi territoriali*) of the concept.

Example 9

ST (SSN 2019: 6)	TT (SSN 2018: 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuità: i servizi sono erogati in maniera continuativa nei vari presidi territoriali e senza interruzione, nell’ambito delle modalità di funzionamento definite da norme e regolamenti nazionali e regionali; 	3. La continuità: i servizi sono dati sempre;

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation; red marks addition]

Further examples of reduction can be found in the following two segments. As can be seen in Example 10, the information contained in the ST’s last clause (*e ne facilita l’accesso*) was not transferred into the TT. I would argue that transferring this information would have provided a more accurate description of the principle in question – that is, not only do patients have the right to choose where to be treated, but also local health authorities have the legal obligation to support patients’ decisions.

Example 10

ST (SSN 2019: 6)	TT (SSN 2018: 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diritto di scelta: l’Azienda rispetta il diritto dell’utente di scegliere liberamente la struttura sanitaria cui desidera accedere e ne facilita l’accesso; 	4. Il diritto di scelta: le persone possono scegliere di curarsi dove vogliono [---];

[Note: green marks addition; red marks reduction]

Similarly, Example 11 shows that the source segment’s first sentence, which concerns the key right to active citizenship in health care (*il cittadino è parte attiva nei processi di cura e di promozione della salute*), was completely omitted from the TT.

Example 11

ST (SSN 2019: 6)	TT (SSN 2018: 9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partecipazione: il cittadino è parte attiva nei processi di cura e di promozione della salute. L'Azienda considera suo compito, non solo informarlo su temi sanitari, ma anche ascoltarlo, [...]. 	<p>5. La partecipazione: [---] l'azienda deve coinvolgere, informare e ascoltare i cittadini.</p>

[Note: green marks addition; blue marks variation; red marks reduction]

Overall, it might be argued that Text 2 is a good illustration of how crucial it is for any Easy Language translator to find the right balance between rules no. 21 and 22 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 17), which may appear contradictory: always to make sure that readers are given all the information they need, on the one hand, and on the other, to give readers no more information than they need to understand the point. This requires “erhebliche Expertise und ein verantwortungsbewusstes Vorgehen” (Maaß 2016: 5) on the translator’s side. Two observations emerging from the analysis of Text 2 may assist in addressing this dilemma.

Firstly, it can be argued that paraphrasing should be used to explain and exemplify abstract and specialist nouns and low-frequency terms whenever the Easy Language translator “entscheidet, dass die AdressatInnen den Diskurs möglicherweise nicht genügend beherrschen, um einen Terminus zu verstehen bzw. sein Nichtverstehen zu kompensieren” (Maaß et al. 2014: 71). What typographical solution is best suited for paraphrasing – e.g. parentheses, indentation, info boxes, glossaries etc. (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 259–263) – may vary according to the translation strategy adopted and would be a matter of discussion between the commissioner and the translator.

Secondly, considering that Easy Language’s ultimate goal is to enable as many people as possible to participate in society (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 42; cf. also Section 2.2) and “damit einer Diskriminierung dieser [Ziel]Gruppen entgegenzuwirken” (Linz 2017: 151), it could be claimed that any opportunity a translation job might offer to promote (or reinforce) awareness of equal rights and self-advocacy for the target groups should indeed be taken. In defining a translation strategy, how to introduce and, whenever appropriate, emphasise such issues in the TT might therefore be taken into due consideration.

In the following section, the third and last corpus text will be analysed in detail.

6.4 Analysis of Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.)

Text 3 was assessed through the READ-IT readability assessment tool, which measured a global level of difficulty of 12.1% (see Figure 7). This percentage suggests that Text 3 is easier to read than Text 1 (level of difficulty of 23.8%; cf. Section 6.2) and more difficult to read than Text 2 (level of difficulty of 5.5%; cf. Section 6.3).

indice di leggibilità	livello di difficoltà	
READ-IT Base	4,5%	
READ-IT Lessicale	56,7%	
READ-IT Sintattico	38,1%	
READ-IT Globale	12,1%	

Figure 7: READ-IT readability indexes for Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.)

As can be seen in Figure 7, the READ-IT basic profile reveals a low level of difficulty for Text 3 (i.e. 4.5%), indicating that both the average number of characters per word (N=5.0) and the average number of tokens per sentence (N=12.3) are within acceptable levels as compared to the READ-IT reference corpora. What stands out in this figure are the lexical (i.e. 56.7%) and syntactic (i.e. 38.1%) measures, which are significantly higher than the ones observed in Text 1 and Text 2 (cf. Sections 6.2 and 6.3 respectively). The high percentage of lexical difficulty can be explained by two parameters (cf. Figure 8).

[-] Profilo lessicale	
<i>Composizione del vocabolario</i>	
Percentuale di lemmi appartenente al Vocabolario di Base (VdB):	88,7%
Ripartizione dei lemmi riconducibili al VdB rispetto ai repertori d'uso:	
Fondamentale:	77,8%
Alto uso:	15,9%
Alta disponibilità:	6,3%
Rapporto tipo/unità (calcolato rispetto alle prime 100 parole del testo):	0,680

Figure 8: READ-IT lexical profile of Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.)³⁴

Firstly, although 88.7% of the text's lexical items are contained in VdB (De Mauro 1980), the percentage of lemmas included in De Mauro's (1980) fundamental vocabulary (i.e. 77.8%, cf. blue bar) is lower than the average calculated for the READ-IT easy-to-read reference corpus (cf. green horizontal bar). The yellow vertical rectangle on the right of Figure 8 indicates a potential threat to readability. Secondly, a TTR of 0.680 (see bottom of Figure 8) suggests that the lexical variety in this text is above average levels as compared to the average TTR obtained from the easy-to-read reference corpus. The orange vertical rectangle on the right of Figure 8 indicates an even higher threat to readability.

At the syntactic level, problematic aspects of sentence and clause-internal structure contribute to raising the overall level of difficulty of Text 3. Dependent clauses are 40% of the total number of clauses, well above the average calculated for both reference corpora.

³⁴ Green and red horizontal bars graphically represent average measures obtained from the easy-to-read (green) and "difficult" (red) reference corpora. The blue horizontal bar shows values relevant to Text 3. The vertical rectangles on the right indicate the potential threat to readability, ranging from low threat (light green) to high threat (red) (cf. ILC-CNR n.d.).

Furthermore, parameters of clause-internal structure reveal an average of 10.385 words per clause – once again, greater than the average calculated for both reference corpora.

My qualitative text analysis confirms that Text 3 may need further simplification at both lexical and syntactic levels, as will be illustrated in the following four examples. The heading and the opening sentence of Text 3 are shown in Example 12 below.

Example 12

Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.: 6)

Cosa devi fare per mantenerti in buona salute?

Per rimanere in buona salute, puoi seguire alcune semplici indicazioni che riguardano **l'alimentazione, l'attività fisica e le abitudini di vita.**

The example above demonstrates some degree of lexical inconsistency. The modal verb *dovere* in the question heading (i.e. *cosa devi fare...?*) was replaced by *potere* in the opening sentence, which addresses that question (i.e. *puoi seguire*); similarly, the reflexive verb *mantenersi* was also replaced by *rimanere* in combination with the same indirect object *in buona salute*. Such variations fail to maintain lexical consistency and contravene rule no. 9 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 10; cf. also Piemontese 1996: 151). In addition, as evident from Example 12, the opening sentence of Text 3 contains three clauses (i.e. final clause, main clause + relative clause) and at least as many ideas (i.e. keeping healthy is important; there are easy steps anyone can take to stay healthy; these steps concern one's diet, exercise and lifestyle). Sentences containing more than one idea do not comply with rule no. 19 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 17) and may pose a comprehension problem for the target reader.

The following example focuses on lexical choices and a lack of exemplification.

Example 13

Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.: 7)

Per mangiare cibi sani devi:

- limitare il consumo di cibi troppo grassi, come i salumi o i formaggi.
- limitare il consumo di zuccheri.

The terms *consumo*, *grassi* and *zuccheri* are specialist vocabulary which – unless the reader has prior knowledge of the subject – need to be explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). I would also argue that the high-register verb *limitare*, despite being included in De Mauro's (2019) fundamental vocabulary, may pose a barrier to readability in combination with its direct object *il consumo*. Furthermore, the term *salume*, which belongs to De Mauro's (2019) high availability

vocabulary (cf. Section 2.4), might also need to be exemplified (e.g. *prosciutto*, *salame* etc.) for the target readership (cf. rule no. 8, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10).

The following segment offers another example of lexical inconsistency. After three occurrences of the term *cibi* in the first 76 words of the text, the noun is replaced with the more formal *alimenti* (against rule no. 9, Inclusion Europe 2009a: 10; cf. also Piemontese 1996: 151).

Example 14

Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.: 7)

Gli zuccheri sono contenuti nei dolci, ma anche in altri
alimenti come il pane, la pasta e le patate.

Example 14 explains to the reader that sugar is contained in sweets, as well as in other foods, like bread, pasta and potatoes. If, as recommended in Example 13, one should cut down on sugar, it can then be concluded that sweets, bread, pasta and potatoes should not be eaten in large quantities. On the other hand, in the following segment (see Example 15) it is recommended to eat large quantities of fish and wholemeal food products, such as bread and pasta.

Example 15

Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.: 8)

-mangiare tanto pesce e preferire alimenti integrali.
Gli alimenti integrali sono cibi come il pane e la pasta.

This recommendation may be perceived as contradictory to previous information (cf. Example 14) and might fail to convey the right message (that is, wholemeal food products contain a lot of fibre; fibre is good for you; therefore, always prefer wholemeal to white bread and pasta). As a consequence, textual coherence may be compromised. For a correct interpretation of the text, target readers would need to resort to extra-textual devices (i.e. background knowledge) which are not necessarily available to them.

At the textual level, Examples 12 and 14 above suggest that rule no. 19 of Inclusion Europe (2009a: 16–17) was not complied with. More specifically, both examples contain two-line sentences which were not cut where readers would pause when reading out loud (cf. Appendix E for the typographical microstructure of Text 3). In addition, I would argue that the typographical macrostructure of Text 3 might not facilitate the reader's orientation. As Examples 13 to 15 show, the text includes a bulleted list. Immediately after the second item, the list was interrupted to insert an example of food products containing sugars. The following two bullet items (cf. Appendix E) may look disconnected from the head list and, therefore, textual coherence may be compromised. Inserting Example 14 in parentheses or

indenting the segment in question might have been helped to organise information more effectively (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 500–504).

Overall, it should be emphasised once again that Text 3 was originally written in Easy Italian by representatives of the target population. Interestingly, both the READ-IT measures and my text analysis revealed that Text 3 presents problematic aspects that may pose a barrier to comprehensibility. It is plausible to assume that the authors of the text were advanced EtR consultants and proofreaders who had considerably improved their reading (and writing) skills over time. As a matter of fact, “erhebliche Teile der Zielgruppe können, sofern ihnen leichte Texte angeboten werden, nach einer Weile ihre Lesefähigkeit verbessern und auf schwierigere Texte oder sogar den Standard überwechseln” (Maaß 2016: 4). This may imply that, after extensive experience in proofreading Easy Language texts, EtR consultants “nicht mehr repräsentativ für die Zielgruppe sind, weil sie ihre Sprachkompetenz in Bezug auf die Standardsprache deutlich verbessert haben” (Jekat et al. 2020). I believe this might be the case for the authors of Text 3. Arguably, had external EtR consultants (i.e. not from the authorial group) been involved in the proofreading process, some of the syntactic, lexical and textual issues discussed in this section might have been identified and addressed accordingly.

In the following section, I will attempt to draw some conclusions from my analysis of the corpus texts.

6.5 Conclusions from text analysis

Phase 1 of this study set out to address the first research question – that is, what strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian? Based on the text analysis carried out in the previous sections, some preliminary results can be discussed for Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 2 (extract from SNN 2018).

As far as Text 1 is concerned, my analysis revealed a relatively ‘conservative’ translation strategy. Apart from a moderate reorganisation of contents at the macro-typographical level (e.g. addition of bold type emphasis, bulleted lists), the overall TT structure and its illustrations remained substantially identical to the ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b). In addition, it could be observed that variation techniques were preferred to substantial additions or reductions, thus suggesting a moderate implementation of paraphrasing and exemplification techniques. In my description of Text 1, it was indicated that translators’ targeted degree of text simplification was the CEFR A2–B1 level (cf. Table 3 above). Nonetheless, there is no metacommunicative information in Text 1 specifying the assumed literacy level of the target recipients. Pro Infirmis’ seal of approval (“Lingua *facile*”) could create false expectations in readers. In the empirical part of this work, performance by a sample group of people with mild to moderate ID on a reading comprehension test will shed some light on the actual level of comprehensibility of Text 1.

As for Text 2, my qualitative text analysis suggested a less conservative translation strategy. Substantial reduction was consistently emphasised, with a debatable impact on the overall information transfer from the ST (SNN 2019). As in Text 1, the low number of additions to the TT had also an impact on paraphrasing and exemplification, which in fact were kept to a minimum. Comprehension measures will help me to assess the effectiveness of this translation strategy.

In the following four subsections, more detailed concluding observations on all three corpus texts will be presented. Three of Groeben's (1972, cited in Christmann/Groeben 2019) comprehensibility dimensions – i.e. simplicity, concision and structure/layout – will provide me with a guiding framework.

6.5.1 Simplicity

Christmann and Groeben (2019: 129–130) define the dimension of “sprachlich-stilistischen Einfachheit und Konkretheit” as comprising “alle Merkmale der Textoberfläche”, that is, aspects relating to lexical choice, sentence syntax and sentence style, which are crucial “für eine unaufwändige und reibungslose Verarbeitung des Textes an der Oberfläche”. My qualitative analysis often emphasised complex syntax, as well as insufficient paraphrasing and exemplification of low-frequency, abstract or specialist vocabulary in all three corpus texts. These are questionable translation solutions that might compromise readability for the target population.

6.5.2 Concision

In relation to a text's ideal degree of concision, Christmann and Groeben (2019: 131) further argue that “die Anreicherung eines Textes durch Wiederholung wichtiger Begriffe, Erläuterungen und Erklärungen die Verständlichkeit erhöhen dürfte. Die Wirksamkeit hängt dabei allerdings von der Textsorte [...] und dem Vorwissen der Leser(innen) ab”. My analysis revealed that translators' strategies in fact included substantial reductions or, at times, questionable additions to the TT. It emerges that a painstaking translation strategy that takes into account text type, text function and addressees' prior knowledge of any given topic is crucial in order to plan carefully for an appropriate degree of semantic redundancy in the TT (cf. also Göpferich 2009: 41).

6.5.3 Structure/Layout

My analysis showed inconsistencies at both macro and micro-typographical levels, ranging from layout issues at the sentence and textual levels to ineffective text-image relationship. Groeben's (1972, cited in Christmann/Groeben 2019) dimension of structure/layout relates text structure to the addressee's cognitive system. This means that the reader's understanding, inferencing and retention can be greatly facilitated by several “Strukturierungshinweise” (Christmann/Groeben 2019: 133) that help to build bridges

between what is known already and what has to be acquired. Examples of “Strukturierungshinweise” are metacommunicative information, sequential text organisation moving from abstract to more concrete concepts or consolidation of concepts through interim overviews. Whenever such clues are missing or not perceptible to the reader, lack of coherence may occur. Although translators and authors of the corpus texts effectively employed some layout measures (e.g. bold type emphasis, reorganisation of paragraphs or bulleted lists, as mentioned above), it could be argued that an effective Standard-Easy translation strategy would need to consider – depending on text type, text function and target readership – a wider and more consistent spectrum of tactics, so as to coherently organise information at the macro-textual level and make it fully accessible at the micro-textual level.

6.5.4 Final remarks

Two further translation challenges clearly emerged from my analysis of the corpus texts: 1) making the TT function perceptible to the addressees, and 2) making the TT’s level of difficulty transparent to the addressees. In this subsection, translators’ chosen strategies in addressing – or not addressing – these challenges will be commented upon.

The first challenge concerns the extent to which translators made the corpus texts’ function perceptible to the target population. As my analysis showed, only the full version of Text 3 – that is, the only corpus text originally written by representatives of the target groups – explicitly stated the text’s motive, whereas no explicit indication of text function was provided for Text 1 and Text 2. Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 507) argue that readers of Easy Language texts have limited “Intertextualitätserfahrung”. This may hinder their ability to acknowledge the function of a text and, ultimately, interpret the text successfully. Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 507) add that “die Sprachfunktion muss darum für diese Leserschaft deutlich herausgearbeitet werden”. Similarly, Bock (2018: 67) advocates making explicit reference to text type and text function in Easy Language materials, so as to give readers “einen Verstehensrahmen, in den sie alles Folgende [...] einordnen können”. My analysis also demonstrated that Text 2 does not address its target readers directly as “you”. A translation strategy that employs direct “Adressierungsverfahren” may indeed give “eine erklärende und orientierende Instanz” to the TT (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 504), thus making the text function fully accessible for the target recipients.

Secondly, based on my text analysis, it can be hypothesised that target recipients of Text 1 and, to some extent, Text 3 would particularly benefit from a transparent indication of the texts’ level of difficulty. How to achieve a systematic and evidence-based text classification

according to degree of simplification is a key question, though³⁵. As Bock points out (2014: 21), “eine eindeutige Abgrenzung [zwischen verschiedenen Schwierigkeitsausprägungen] [...] mangels umfassender Forschung [ist] derzeit schwierig”. Further research is also needed to properly assess the impact that a classification of texts according to ‘difficulty’ could have on the target readership. More discussion will follow in the conclusive sections of this work (cf. Section 9).

³⁵ The Capito method (Capito n.d.a) addresses this issue. Depending on the target readership, the social franchise network Capito translates into a “Leicht Lesen” (LL) format according to three CEFR levels: A1 (i.e. short and simple texts containing only key information), A2 (i.e. easy-to-understand texts promoting low-threshold knowledge transfer) and B1 (i.e. texts in colloquial Standard German containing detailed information). The Capito quality label logos (Capito n.d.b) specify the level of difficulty of any publication produced by the network partners. This method, however, has its own limitations (cf. Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 137).

7 Empirical study

In Sections 7 to 9, the empirical contribution of this work will be presented. It is worth emphasising that, to the best of my knowledge, no experimental research in recent years has addressed the impact of Easy Italian on text comprehension by people with ID. Therefore, this study attempts to bring a renewed focus on Easy Language research in Italian-speaking Switzerland and Italy. The sampling strategy and the demographic profile of the surveyed population will be described in Section 7.1 and 7.2 respectively. In addition, particular consideration will be given to ethical issues in the handling and administration of instruments (cf. Section 7.3). Finally, the test instruments will be illustrated, including how the test was administered and the data collected (cf. Section 7.4). The limitations of this empirical study will be discussed in Section 9.

7.1 Sampling strategy

Purposive sampling was used (a) to find instances that are representative or typical of a broader group of cases (i.e. people with ID), and (b) to set up comparisons among different types of cases (i.e. different types or levels of ID, as well as different reading expertise) (cf. Creswell 2003; Teddlie/Yu 2007).

One non-profit association based in Italy was purposefully selected for the proposed empirical study. The mission of this association is to promote the self-determination of people with DS and other ID. In particular, this association fosters models for increased independent living, by offering residential training and care in suitably equipped apartments and group homes. It was expected that this kind of residential setting would facilitate both recruitment rates of prospective participants and test administration. Three non-profit associations based in Ticino were also identified. Similarly, these Swiss associations aim to represent and support people with DS and other ID, by improving their health, education and training, and ultimate inclusion in society.

All organisations were contacted via e-mail and/or telephone in early October 2019. A covering letter presenting the study and its author was attached to all introductory e-mails. This letter identified the procedure, the extent of time, the potential impact and expected outcomes of the experimental study. The Italian association expressed an interest towards this research. The association's educational coordinator confirmed that s/he would investigate how many resident or external members would be willing to participate in the survey. An interest was also expressed by the director of one of the Swiss associations originally contacted, who forwarded the covering letter to nine families that included an adult with DS. Of those nine, three families mailed me direct and gave me their availability to participate in the test.

7.2 Sample description

The sample included 26 participants, with 13 females (50%) and 13 males (50%). The mean age of this sample was 35 years 8 months (range 19-55 years), with a standard deviation of 10 years 1 month (see Appendix B). The population group was of working-age and had the right to active citizenship and public participation; 22 out of 26 participants were formally employed. Furthermore, Italian was the first language of all participants. Participant (P) 1 to P23 were based in Italy; P24 to P26 were based in Ticino. The demographic profile of the surveyed population is summarised in Table 6.

	Male	Female
Gender	13	13
Age (years)		
19-35	7	6
36-50	4	7
51+	2	-
Employment status		
Employed	11	11
Non-employed	2	2
ID/Etiology		
Down's Syndrome	9	7
Other	4	6
Severity of ID		
Mild	2	4
Moderate	10	8
Not assessed	1	1
Independent living in group homes		
Yes	9	9
No	1	-
In training	3	4

Table 6: Demographic profile of surveyed population

As can be seen in Table 6, the sample included 16 people (61.5%) with Down's syndrome and 10 people (38.5%) with ID of other etiologies. All 26 participants had a disability onset before the age of 18. Twenty-two respondents had been previously formally or informally assessed³⁶ as having an intellectual disability in the mild or moderate range. Furthermore, in previous formal assessments³⁷ another two respondents had obtained average (IQ=95) and low average (IQ=82) IQ scores respectively, exhibiting below average levels of adaptive and social functioning. Considering that literacy skills fall under adaptive functioning (cf. Section 2.6.1), it was decided not to exclude the latter two cases from the sample and to classify them as having mild ID. The ID severity of the remaining two participants had never

³⁶ The following formal assessment tools were used: AC-MT 6-11 (Cornoldi et al. 2002); BIA (Marzocchi et al. 2010); BVN 5-11 (Bisiacchi et al. 2005); BVN 12-18 (Gugliotta et al. 2009); Prove MT (Cornoldi/Colpo 2011); Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM; Raven et al. 2003); TINV (Hammill et al. 1998); Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales (VABS; Sparrow et al. 2016).

³⁷ See above.

been formally assessed. Finally, 25 out of 26 participants were either living independently in group homes (N=18) or were in training to become independent (N=7).

7.3 Ethical issues

All participants gave informed consent. Prior to the planned test dates, the electronic version of an informed consent form (see Appendix C) was sent by e-mail to the Italian educational operators and to all next of kin based in Ticino. It was agreed that the recipients would download the form, print an appropriate number of copies of it and distribute it to all prospective test participants. In addition, it was agreed that both the Italian educational operators and the Swiss next of kin would introduce the agreement to the prospective respondents, as well as clarify any questions they might have.

The form had been previously proofread by ANFFAS Nazionale's EtR experts and self-advocates. It stated the purpose and potential benefits of the study, so that prospective participants could appreciate the nature of the research and its likely impact on them. Furthermore, it assured complete confidentiality to the respondents and clarified participants' right to ask questions and withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, it specified that all respondents would receive a gift card in recognition of the time and effort.

On the day of each on-site survey, the test was preceded by a succinct oral presentation of this thesis and its author. Furthermore, a step-by-step explanation of what the participants might expect during the test was followed by a reiterated understanding that participants could ask questions and leave the test at any time.

The next of kin of P24 to 26 were instructed via e-mail that, on the test day, they should reiterate the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the test results, as well as emphasise that participants could ask questions and leave the test at any time. This aimed to guarantee equal treatment of population groups in both on-site and off-site testing.

A summary report of the main findings was sent to all educational operators and next of kin who requested one when asked, with the option of a telephone discussion in addition to this.

7.4 Instruments

In this section, the instruments used in the study will be introduced, starting with the self-report questionnaire (cf. Section 7.4.1), following with the reading comprehension test (Section 7.4.2) and concluding with the post-test focus group interview (cf. Section 7.4.3).

7.4.1 Self-report questionnaire

The first measure (see Appendix D) was a 6-question self-report, written questionnaire. It aimed to yield demographic data about the respondents (i.e. gender, age and professional

status, Questions 1 to 3), as well as to elicit participants' private behaviours and subjective perspectives as regards their own reading habits (Questions 4 to 6). The questionnaire's rationale was broadly based on Valtasalmi (2019), who designed a background questionnaire to gather preliminary data on the reading preferences of a group of Finnish-speaking adults with ID.

Difficulties in using self-report questionnaires with the target population are widely reported in the literature (cf. Finlay/Lyons 2001). Careful consideration was therefore given to techniques countering such difficulties. Question (Q) 4 was an attitudinal question intended to find out the respondent's appreciation of and interest in reading (i.e. "Ti piace leggere?"). It required the respondent to make an evaluative judgement of the target interest on a Likert-type scale. Levine (1985, cited in Prosser/Bromley 2012: 117) argues that people with ID tend to get the two middle points of Likert scales confused and recommends 3 or 5-point scales. A 5-point scale was therefore opted for. The possible responses ranged from "No" to "Sì, molto" and were associated to a corresponding emoticon. Hartley and MacLean (2006: 818) suggest that Likert-type scales "have adequate reliability and validity among adolescents and adults with ID", especially when they include pictorial representations of response alternatives. Hence, a smilegram was used to offer informants a concrete reference tool and make the question more tangible (cf. Hollomotz 2018; Hartley/MacLean 2006).

Question 5 was a behavioural multiple-choice question enquiring about the respondents' reading frequency (i.e. "Leggi spesso?"). Response options had a natural order – that is, from the most frequent ("Leggo ogni giorno") to the least frequent behaviour ("Non leggo"). Limitations in adaptive functioning impact on people's conceptual skills (including money, time and number concepts) and thus result in a "strong present orientation" (Booth/Booth 1996: 57). As a consequence, questions that require a judgement of frequency are problematic for many people with ID (cf. Finlay/Lyons 2001: 320). In order to facilitate the respondent's estimation of time, each response option was accompanied by a graphical representation of the rate of a recurring reading event over time – that is, daily, weekly or monthly rate.

A final yes-no attitudinal question (Q6: "Vorresti leggere testi in italiano facile?") investigated the respondent's interest in reading texts in Easy Italian. Affirmative answers required respondents to elaborate by providing examples of EtR publications they would like to read.

Questions 4 to 6 asked for information about the participants in a non-evaluative manner, without gauging their performance against the performance of a norm group (cf. Dörnyei 2003: 7). Principles of simple item wording, appropriate density and orderly layout (cf. Dörnyei 2003; Inclusion Europe 2009a) were adhered to in order to increase instrument accessibility and respondent motivation. To avoid text overload, instructions were given through clip art icons representing, respectively, a pen drawing a cross for election (closed questions) and a hand holding a pen (open questions).

The questionnaire was face validated by one EtR expert and a group of self-advocates from ANFFAS Onlus Udine. In addition, it was reviewed and content validated by one EtR expert from Pro Infirmis Ticino and Moesano. This validation resulted in the modification of a limited number of items. Finally, reliability was checked through small-scale pilot testing involving one ZHAW student with no ID and with a B1 knowledge of Italian, and one ZHAW bilingual (Italian-German) colleague with no ID. In this phase, valuable feedback was gathered to feed the revision process.

7.4.2 Reading comprehension (RC) test

A multiple-choice comprehension test (see Appendix E) was designed to gain insights into the quality of respondents' mental representation of the corpus texts. More specifically, the aim of the test was to examine the respondents' reading comprehension level of those constructions in each text which did not comply with the European standards for Easy Language (Inclusion Europe 2009a) (cf. Sections 6.2 to 6.4). In addition, the test sought to measure whether those inconsistencies had an impact on respondents' reading comprehension performance at both literal and inferential levels (cf. Kintsch 1988; Piemontese 1996: 70; Fajardo et al. 2014).

The test comprised 12 comprehension questions. Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) was divided into two parts, each comprising three questions (i.e. Q1–Q3 and Q4–Q6 respectively). Similarly, Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018) and Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d) were followed by three questions each (i.e. Q7–Q9 and Q10–Q12 respectively). To answer Q2, Q7, Q10 and Q11, respondents would need to extract inferential meanings by integrating one text segment with other text segments, or text with prior knowledge. On the other hand, in order to answer all remaining questions, respondents would need to comprehend the actual meaning of single propositions. It was hypothesised that inferential questions would require higher reading comprehension skills than literal questions.

Furthermore, the test included four control items (i.e. Q3, Q4, Q5, Q9) and eight experimental (or test) items. The latter aimed to measure informants' comprehension levels of "problem constructions" (Balling 2013: 2) in each corpus text. Problem constructions are defined as those text passages which do not comply with Inclusion Europe guidelines. No hypothesis was made on respondents' performance on experimental questions as opposed to control answers. This non-hypothesis was based on the understanding that adherence to guidelines does not automatically produce 'easy' texts (cf. Section 2.7).

7.4.2.1 Aspects of test design

The multiple-choice testing format has often attracted criticism for measuring test-taking skills more than it measures receptive language ability (cf. Stevenson 2010: 183). Administering multiple-choice formats may be even more problematic for people with ID

(Finlay/Lyons 2001: 325). Furthermore, several types of response bias might contaminate reliability. These include acquiescence – that is, the tendency to agree with or answer ‘yes’, regardless of the content of the question, or to give an affirmative reply to contradictory prompts (cf. Sigelman et al. 1981; Prosser/Bromley 2012). Acquiescence mostly occurs “when the question is not understood or when respondents do not know how to answer the question” (Prosser/Bromley 2012: 108). It is significant that Finlay and Lyons (2002) add that acquiescence should also be seen as a response to inappropriate questioning, that is, when questions are either too long, or their structure is too complex.

Particular questioning techniques – mainly drawn from clinical practice – can be adopted to minimise acquiescence and optimise response validity from people with ID. In the test design phase, the following techniques were applied with regard to question phrasing and response formats (cf. Finlay/Lyons 2001; Dörnyei 2003; Prosser/Bromley 2012; cf. also Piemontese 1996: 141–143 and Inclusion Europe 2009a):

- questionnaire items were kept short, not exceeding 12 words;
- negative constructions or negatively worded phrasing (i.e. Italian negation *non* or adverb *mai*) were avoided, allowing for less complex syntactic constructions;
- active phrasing was preferred to passive voice;
- personal constructions were preferred to impersonal constructions;
- since open-ended questions can produce low levels of responsiveness, only one such question was included (i.e. Q1);
- when using yes/no questions (i.e. Q5, Q6, Q9, Q12), a “don’t know” (“Non so”) option was always offered, and in three (i.e. Q5, Q6, Q9) out of four cases the right answer was negative, thus countering the problem of yea-saying;
- when response options could be represented in pictorial form (i.e. Q2, Q3, Q7, Q10), pictures were used to increase responsiveness and understanding, accompanied by caption text in all cases but one (i.e. Q2, where explicative text would have revealed the right answer).

Nonetheless, in contrast to recommendations in the literature (cf. Finlay/Lyons 2001: 323; Dörnyei 2003: 52–56; Prosser/Bromley 2012: 114–115, as well as Piemontese 1996: 141–143; Inclusion Europe 2009a), test items included long and/or low-frequency words not contained in NVdB (De Mauro 2019) (i.e. *informatizzata*, *crocetta*), elements of specialist vocabulary (i.e. *mantenersi*, *limitare*, *prevenire*, *consumare*), non-specific adjectives (i.e. *poco*, *molto*), modifying words (*solo*), universals (i.e. *tutti*) and words having more than one meaning (i.e. *sigla*, *ricetta*, *paziente*). Since the test aimed precisely to measure comprehension of problem vocabulary or grammatical items, such choices seemed justified. To counterbalance their impact on test readability, however, oral accommodations were offered during test administration (cf. Section 7.5).

Finally, principles of appropriate density and orderly layout (cf. Dörnyei 2003; Inclusion Europe 2009a) were adhered to in order to increase test accessibility and respondent motivation. To avoid text overload, instructions were given through clip art icons whenever appropriate (cf. Section 7.4.1).

7.4.2.2 Test validation

The RC test was face validated by one EtR expert and a group of self-advocates from ANFFAS Onlus Udine. In addition, it was reviewed and content validated by one EtR expert from Pro Infirmis Ticino and Moesano. As in the case of the self-report questionnaire (cf. Section 7.4.1), this validation resulted in the modification of a limited number of test items. Reliability was checked through small-scale pilot testing involving one ZHAW student with no ID and with a B1 knowledge of Italian, and one bilingual (Italian-German) colleague from the ZHAW with no ID. A relatively fast test administration during pilot testing let predict that questionnaire, RC test and interview could be conducted in under 45 minutes, including any necessary breaks. In case fatigue set in sooner, it was planned that only Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and 2 (extract from SSN 2018) would be administered.

7.4.3 Post-test focus group interview

This empirical study included a post-test focus group interview. The interview was semi-structured – that is, employing a blend of closed and open-ended questions – and covered two to four broad areas of inquiry. In each broad area, one question was intended to elicit the respondent's perception of Texts 1 to 3 (see Table 7).

Area of inquiry	Interview question	Notes on interviewing techniques
How comprehensible texts in Easy Italian are for the target group (cf. Bock 2018) (<i>Lexical/syntactic level</i>)	1. <i>Secondo voi, questo testo è facile o difficile?</i>	Additional probing or cross-questioning techniques can be used to counter recency bias (i.e. consistently choosing the last alternative in closed questions, cf. Sigelman et al. 1981; Prosser/Bromley 2012)
What words or syntactic items respondents find difficult to understand (<i>Lexical/syntactic level</i>)	2. <i>Ci sono parole difficili in questo testo?</i>	When one or more respondents answer 'yes' to Q1, this question elicits concrete examples of difficult words
Whether respondents identify text function (cf. Bock 2018) (<i>Textual level</i>)	3. <i>Secondo voi, questo testo è utile?</i>	Interviewer to provide clarification or re-phrasing of Q3 if not clear
Whether respondents identify text function and addressees (<i>Textual level</i>)	4. <i>Per chi è utile questo testo?</i>	When one or more respondents answer 'yes' to Q3, this question can elicit elaboration

Table 7: Semi-structured interview design

As suggested in Table 7, questions no. 1 and 2 were aimed at investigating how easy or difficult the corpus texts were perceived to be at the lexical and syntactic levels. On the other hand, questions no. 3 and 4 aimed to explore whether respondents could identify the corpus texts' functions and target addressees. In case of time restrictions or participants'

fatigue during test administration, the first two questions had to be given priority. In the right column of Table 7, some guiding interviewing techniques are noted. An interview protocol was designed (cf. Creswell 2003: 190; see Appendix F) and data was recorded using handwritten notes.

In Section 7.5, on-site and off-site data collection will be illustrated in detail.

7.5 Data collection

Data from on-site testing was collected at four sites on three different days. I was invited to meet the participants in their own home settings; this helped to build a natural, relaxed and informal interaction between myself and the participants. Respondents either lived on site or joined friends from neighbouring group homes. Participants (P) were grouped as follows:

Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4
P1 to P4	P5 to P8	P9 to P14	P15 to P23

Table 8: On-site testing: distribution of participants (P) per test site

On-site data collection included six stages, as summarised in Table 9 below.

Stage	Procedure
Stage 1 Opening	Tried to establish a good rapport with participants, using incidental conversation to break the ice. Tried to put them at their ease, build trust and enhance their confidence. Introduced myself and the testing session, explaining what the participants might expect and emphasised the bounds of confidentiality. Reiterated that participants could ask questions and leave the test at any time.
Stage 2 Self-report questionnaire	Administered first instrument (cf. Section 7.4.1 and Appendix D). Read aloud each question and verified participants' understanding. Waited for participants to answer before proceeding to next question, without setting a fixed time limit.
Stage 3 RC Test (Text 1 – Part 1)	Handed out Text 1 – Part 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a). Read aloud the instructions. Waited for all participants to finish reading without setting a fixed time limit.
Stage 4 Focus group interview	Asked group participants Q1 and Q2 (cf. Section 7.4.3) and, whenever possible, Q3 and Q4.
Stage 5 RC Test (Q1 to Q3)	Administered Q1 to Q3 (cf. Section 7.4.2 and Appendix E). Read aloud instructions and each question and verified participants' understanding. Waited for participants to answer before proceeding to next stage, without setting a fixed time limit.
	Stages 3 to 5 were replicated for Text 1 – Part 2 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a), Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018) and Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.). A 5-min break was allowed whenever requested or necessary.
Stage 6 Closing	Thanked participants for their time and collaboration. Presented gift cards.

Table 9: Data collection procedure

Overall, the testing procedure (i.e. Stages 1 to 6, with Stages 3 to 5 being repeated four times) took 50 to 60 minutes to complete. With larger groups (i.e. site 3 and 4) the procedure

required up to 75 minutes to complete. In all but one case³⁸, P1 to P23 answered all questionnaire and test items. This means that no respondent withdrew from the test, showing participants' dedication, commitment and ultimate generosity.

Despite reported limitations associated with multiple-choice testing formats (cf. Section 7.4.2), Prosser and Bromley (2012: 112) argue that multiple-choice questions may still be used appropriately, if the researcher "takes time to explore whether the person can understand the question". Therefore, read-aloud accommodations were offered. Test accommodations (or modifications) are those changes intended to "remove construct-irrelevant barriers" (Sireci et al. 2005: 457), enable people with ID "to better demonstrate knowledge and skills" (Thurlow et al. 2005: 235) and consequently "lead to more valid interpretations of their test scores" (Sireci et al. 2005: 460). In this empirical study, read-aloud accommodations involved the oral presentation of all questionnaire and test items, including instructions.

As regards off-site data collection, the next of kin of P24 to P26 were sent both the questionnaire and the RC test via e-mail. In the same way as P1 to P23, the three Swiss participants took the test in their own home settings. The next of kin were provided with detailed instructions on data collection via e-mail. Instructions included read-aloud accommodations. This aimed to guarantee equal treatment of population groups in both on-site and off-site testing. P24 to 26 were not interviewed.

³⁸ P19 joined the testing session at site 4 later than scheduled. S/he did not read Text 1 and therefore did not answer Q1 to Q6.

8 Results

In this section, results from data collection will be presented and analysed. Based on my analysis of questionnaire data, reader profiles will be constructed and discussed in Section 8.1, whereas Section 8.2 will focus on RC test results. Finally, some observations on data collected during focus group interviews will be provided in Section 8.3. Further discussion and interpretation of results will follow in Section 9.

8.1 Reader profiles

Based on my analysis of questionnaire data and drawing on Valtasalmi's (2019) classification and terminology, three reader profiles were identified: (1) *experienced readers*, who read daily, (2) *accustomed readers*, who read weekly, and (3) *inexperienced readers*, who read monthly or never read. Figure 9 illustrates reader profiles for this population sample.

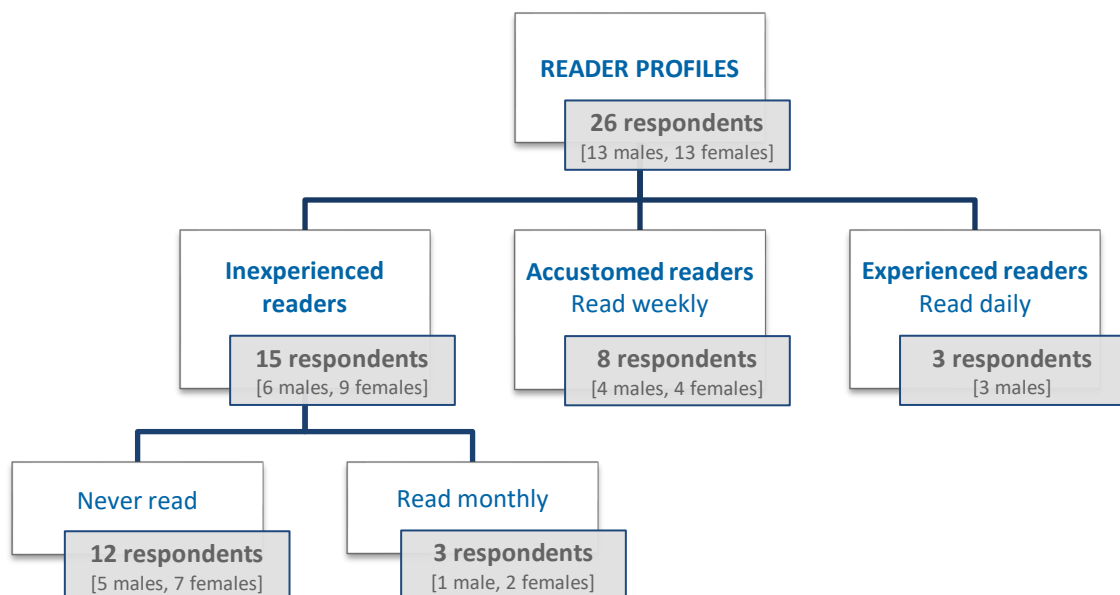


Figure 9: Reader profiles (adapted from Valtasalmi 2019)

What can be observed in this figure is that more than half of the respondents (57.7%) are inexperienced readers, with 12 respondents reporting that they never read (46.1%). On the other hand, 11 respondents (42.3%) fall under the profile of accustomed or experienced readers, with only a small minority (11.5%) reporting that they read every day. Male respondents stand out as being more experienced readers than their female counterparts.

Question 3 of the questionnaire (cf. Section 7.4.1 and Appendix D) asked the sample to indicate the extent to which they liked or disliked reading. The respondents' answers are shown in Figure 10.

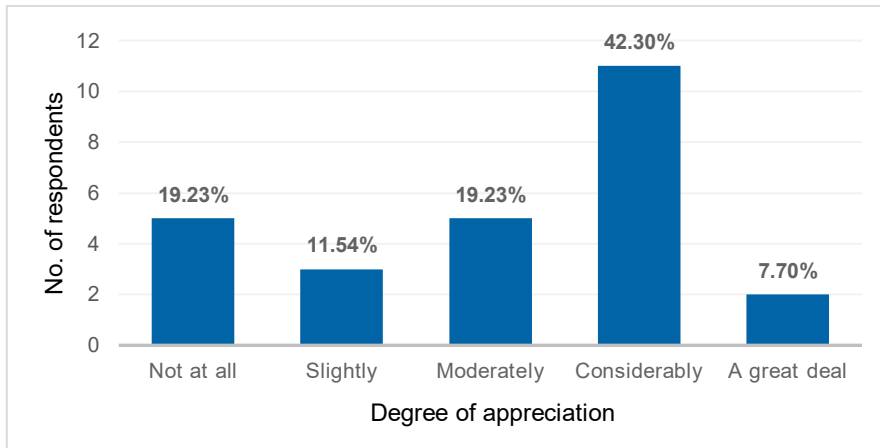


Figure 10: Respondents' degree of reading appreciation [Q: Do you like reading?]

The bar graph clearly indicates that half of respondents (50%) find considerable or greater pleasure in reading, with a further 19.2% who like to read 'moderately'. In contrast, just over 30% of respondents (N=8) report that they like reading 'slightly' or 'don't like reading at all'. The trend line in Figure 11 suggests a correlation between degrees of reading appreciation (i.e. ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'a great deal') and reading frequency (i.e. ranging from 1 = 'never read' to 4 = 'read daily').

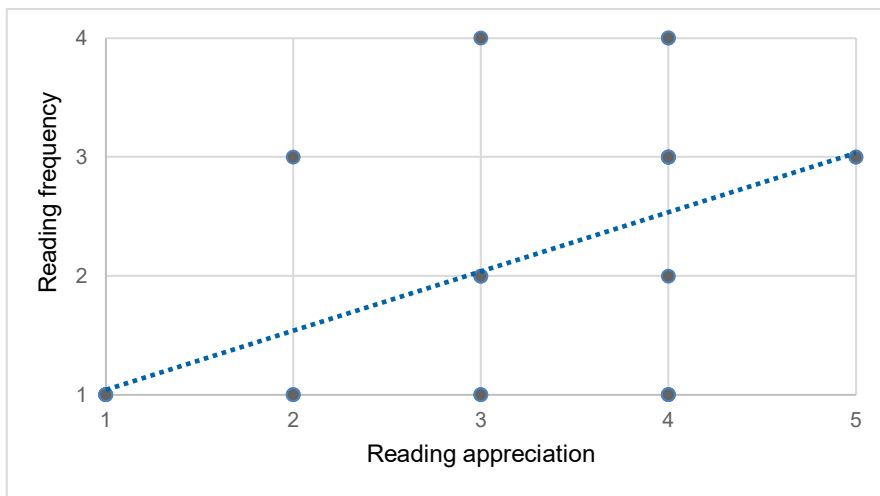


Figure 11: Correlation between reading appreciation and reading frequency

There are exceptions to the above trend, that is, respondents reporting that they enjoy reading 'considerably' and yet only read 'monthly' (N=1) or 'never read' (N=3). These might be explained by two main factors. On the one hand, from informal conversations during questionnaire administration, it emerged that people in this population group live very busy lives (84.6% of participants are employed, see Table 6 above). Therefore, they may have limited free time for reading or related activities. On the other hand, the availability of simplified texts in Italy is simply extremely limited and recipients with ID may be discouraged from reading texts in Standard language. In fact, just under 70% of respondents (N=18) answered affirmatively when asked if they would be interested in reading texts in Easy

Italian. Table 10 shows what kind of simplified reading materials these respondents would like to have available.

Respondents' reading preferences (Easy Italian)	No. of respondents
Books (incl. novels, Disney books, biographies and history, geography, music and detective books)	7
Sport (<i>La Gazzetta dello Sport</i>)	4
Patient information leaflets	3
News, Newspapers (<i>Il Gazzettino</i>), Politics	2
Bus timetable	2
Instruction manuals	2
Fashion magazines	1
Comics	1
Likes everything. It makes no difference whether texts are easy or difficult	1
Likes to look through without reading	1

Table 10: Respondents' reading preferences (Easy Italian)

As can be observed in Table 10, seven participants reported that they would enjoy reading both fictional and non-fictional books in Easy Italian; in addition, four of them indicated that sports magazines or newspapers (i.e. *La Gazzetta dello Sport*) would be among their favourite types of publications. It is also worth noticing that patient information leaflets, bus timetables and instruction manuals were mentioned seven times overall. This suggests that almost 70% of the sample population have the wish or the need to access simplified versions of fictional books as well as texts of daily use.

Interestingly, despite expressing their interest in having access to Easy Italian texts, eight respondents reported that they only read 'monthly' or 'don't read at all'. McQuillan and Au (2001) provide evidence that convenient access to reading material, regardless of a person's reading ability, is associated with more frequent reading and increased motivation to read. Very little or no availability of reading materials in Easy Italian may impede this virtuous process. Further discussion on this issue will follow in the conclusive sections of this work (cf. Sections 9 and 10).

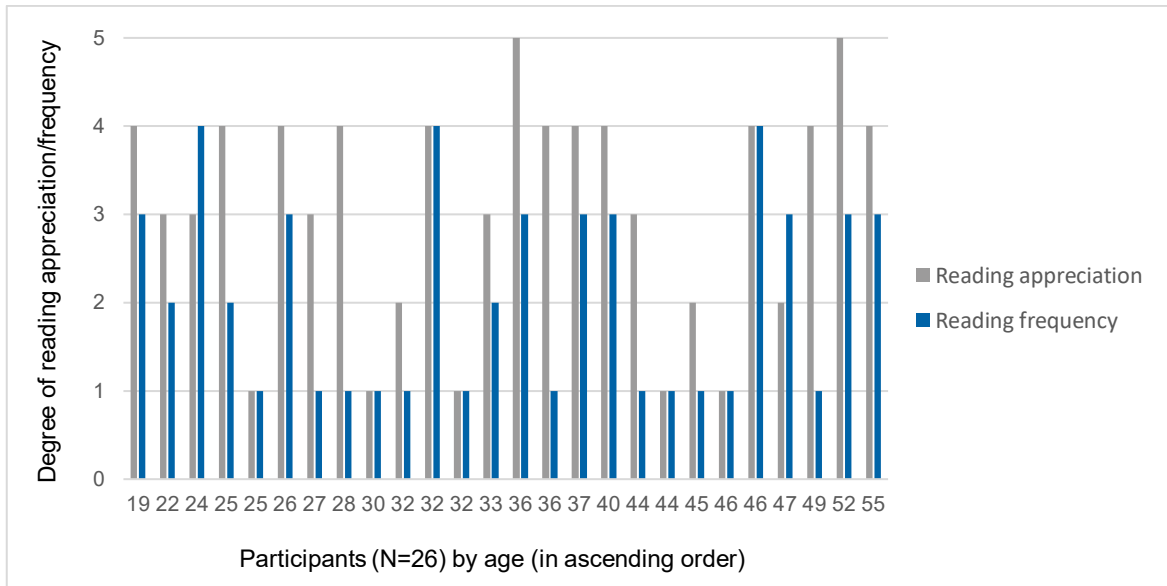


Figure 12: Correlation between participants' age, reading appreciation and reading frequency

Finally, as shown in Figure 12, no significant correlation was observed between participants' age and degrees of reading appreciation (i.e. ranging from 1 = 'not at all' to 5 = 'a great deal') and reading frequency (i.e. ranging from 1 = 'never read' to 4 = 'read daily'). This seems to contradict Valtasalmi's (2019) preliminary findings, which suggest that younger representatives of the target population read more frequently than their older peers.

8.2 RC test results

This section will provide a descriptive illustration of the respondents' performance on the RC test. Correlational statistical techniques (i.e. analysis of variance, or ANOVA) were used to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between specific parameters (i.e. age, gender, reading frequency, type and level of ID) and reading comprehension results. It should be specified that (a) answers to Q3, Q7, Q10 and Q11 (i.e. multiple-choice questions having more than one correct answer) were deemed to be wrong if any of the correct options were chosen in combination with any of the incorrect options; (b) P19 did not answer Q1 to Q6 and, therefore, was excluded from any statistical analysis pertaining to Text 1.

As clearly described in Figure 13, respondents' performance on comprehension questions 1 to 12 corroborates data from my text analysis (cf. Section 6). With 56% and 58% of incorrect answers respectively, Text 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a) and Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.) prove to be the least readable (or most 'difficult') of the corpus texts for the sample population. By contrast, respondents correctly answered 53% of Text 2 (extract from SNN 2018) comprehension questions. This data confirms that Text 2 is the 'easiest' to read for the sample group.

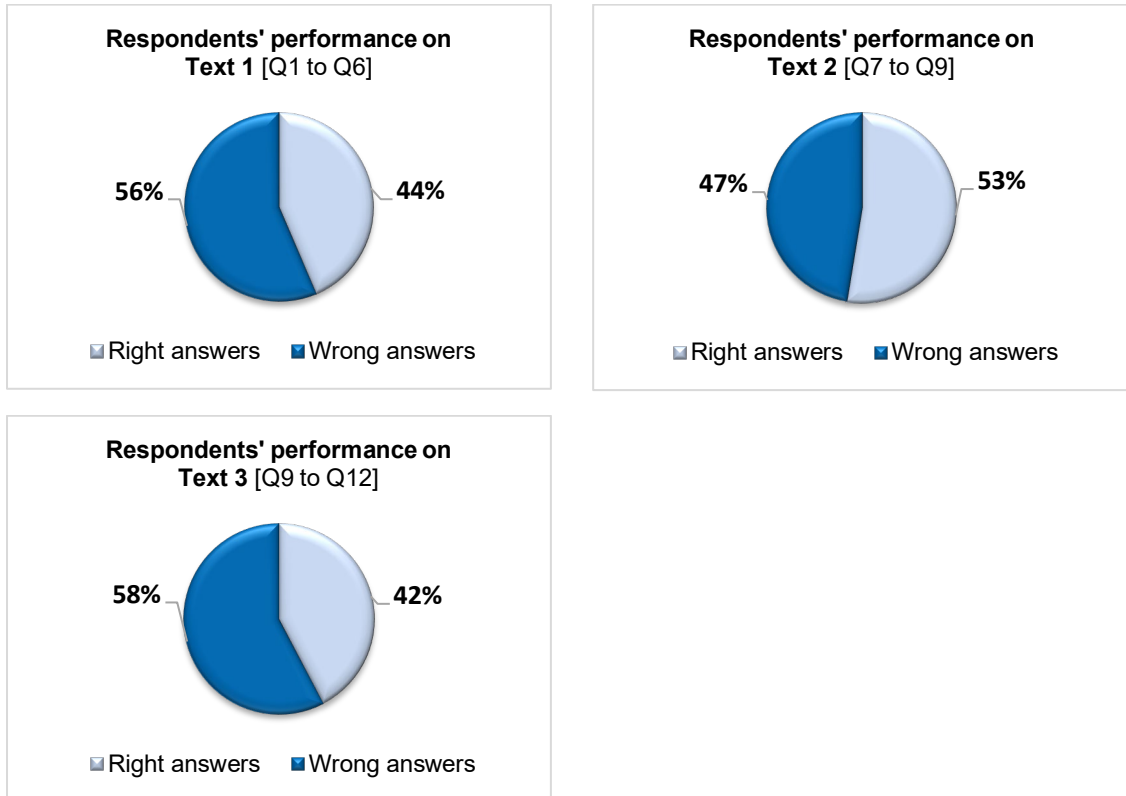


Figure 13: Respondents' performance on RC test (Q1 to Q12)

Figure 14 provides a more detailed illustration of the number of correct answers per number of respondents on each corpus text. As shown in Figure 14, no respondent correctly answered all six questions pertaining to Text 1. Nine respondents out of 25 gave four to five correct answers, whereas almost twice as many respondents (N=17) gave zero to three correct answers. By contrast, Text 2 results are perfectly reversed, with 17 respondents out of 26 correctly answering two to three questions and nine of them giving one or no correct answers. As far as Text 3 is concerned, Figure 14 also shows that well over half of the sample (N=15; 57.7%) gave one or no correct answers, with over one fourth of respondents (N=7; 26.9%) incorrectly answering all comprehension questions. This data further confirms that respondents performed best on Text 2 questions (i.e. Q7–Q9).

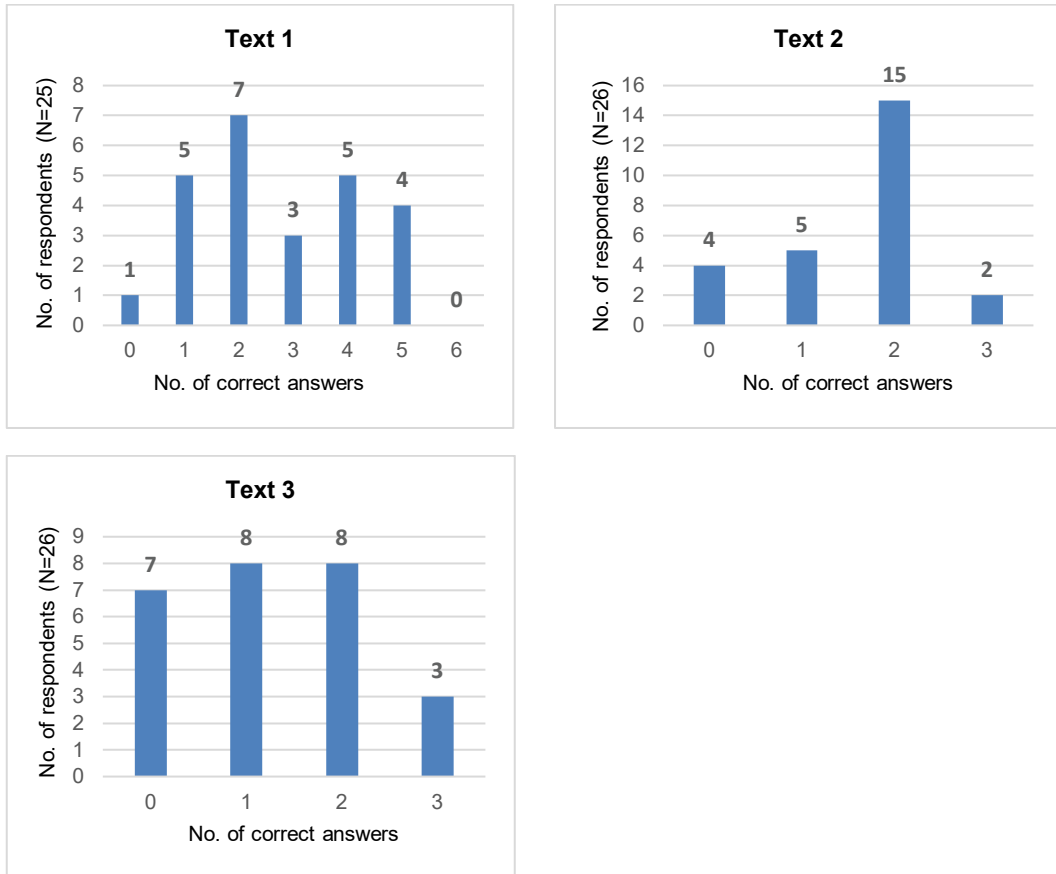


Figure 14: Number of correct answers per number of respondents (Text 1, Text 2, Text 3)

As indicated in Section 7.4.2, the RC test included four control (i.e. Q3, Q4, Q5, Q9) and eight experimental questions, as well as four inferential (Q2, Q7, Q10, Q11) and eight literal questions. The data shown in Figure 15 indicates that the experimental questions obtained a lower percentage of correct answers. This means that respondents' performance on problem constructions (i.e. not complying with Inclusion Europe guidelines) was poorer than on control constructions.

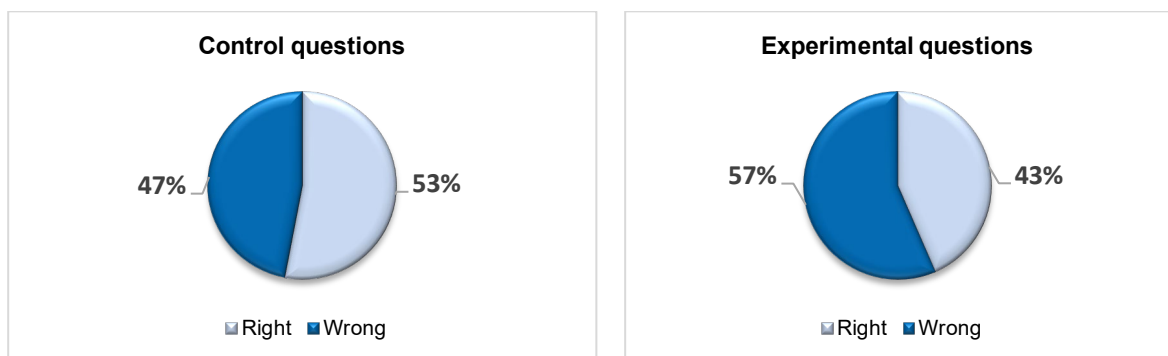


Figure 15. Percentage of correct answers to control (Q3, Q4, Q5, Q9) vs. experimental questions

Particularly relevant is the respondents' performance on experimental questions 1 and 6 (Text 1), 7 (Text 2) and 10 (Text 3). These questions were not answered or were answered

incorrectly by the vast majority of the sample group, as described in Table 11 below (cf. also Appendix H).

Experimental questions	No. of respondents giving blank or incorrect answers	Targeted lexical items (cf. Sections 6.2., 6.3, 6.4)
Q1 (Text 1)	22 out of 25 (=88.0%)	<i>CIP</i>
Q6 (Text 1)	18 out of 25 (=72.0%)	<i>facoltativa</i>
Q7 (Text 2)	22 out of 26 (=84.6%)	<i>servizio per la salute</i>
Q10 (Text 3)	21 out of 26 (=80.7%)	<i>limitare/salumi</i>

Table 11. Respondents' performance on four experimental questions (Q1, Q6, Q7, Q10)

It is significant that all four experimental questions in Table 11 aimed to measure respondents' reading comprehension of text passages which did not comply with Inclusion Europe guidelines (2009a) at the lexical level, thus failing to adequately paraphrase or exemplify low-frequency or specialist vocabulary (cf. right column in Table 11).

It should be emphasised, however, that three out of eight experimental questions (i.e. Q2, Q8, Q12) had more than 50% of correct answers (cf. Appendix H). In particular, respondents' performance on Q8 seems to offer a different perspective on the cause-effect relationship between non-adherence to guidelines and poor comprehension. As can be seen in Figure 16, just under 70% (N=18) of respondents had no difficulty in comprehending a passage which contained a passive voice construction. This relatively high rate of correct answers provides further evidence that that non-adherence to European guidelines may not necessarily imply poor readability (cf. Piemontese 1996, Balling 2013; Bredel/Maaß 2019; Bock 2015, 2018).

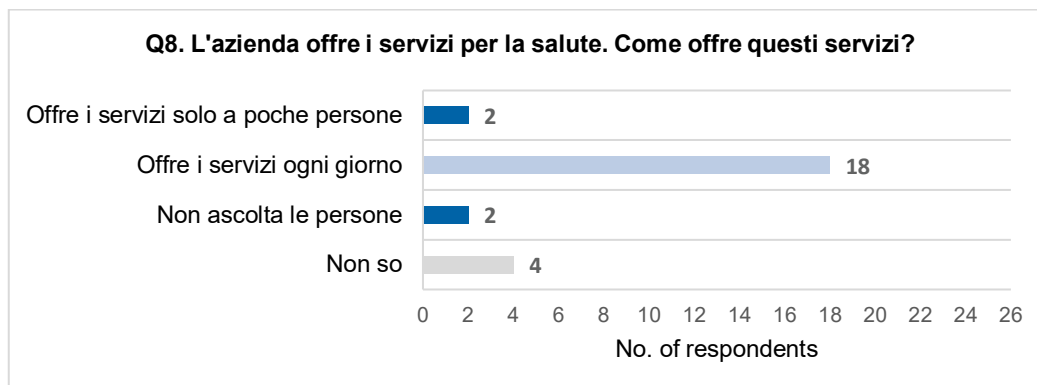


Figure 16. Respondents' answers to Q8 [dark blue = wrong answer, light blue = right answer; light grey = don't know]

Furthermore, during test design (cf. Section 7.4.2), it was hypothesised that inferential questions would require higher reading comprehension skills than literal questions. The data shown in Figure 17 proves that the sample group incorrectly answered 61% of inferential questions, as compared to 50% of literal questions.

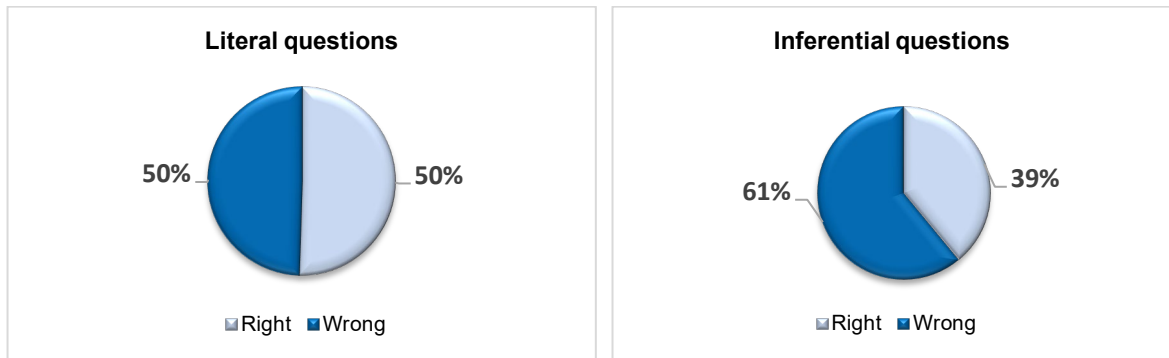


Figure 17: Percentage of correct answers to literal vs. inferential (Q2, Q7, Q10, Q11) questions

Respondents' answers to Q10 (Text 3) offer particularly interesting results. As can be seen in Figure 18, two out of three correct options in Q10 (i.e. 'Mangiare cibo sano' and 'Fare sport e movimento') were chosen by the majority of the sample population (i.e. 22 and 20 respondents respectively), even though this question required readers to integrate different text segments, or text with prior knowledge, in order to be answered correctly. Nonetheless, I would argue that the presence of the targeted lexical items *limitare* and *prosciutto* (the latter aiming to assess the comprehensibility of *salumi*, cf. Section 6.3) in the other two options (i.e. 'Limitare il formaggio' and 'Mangiare molto prosciutto') drastically compromised the overall performance of the target group on this question (cf. Table 11 above).

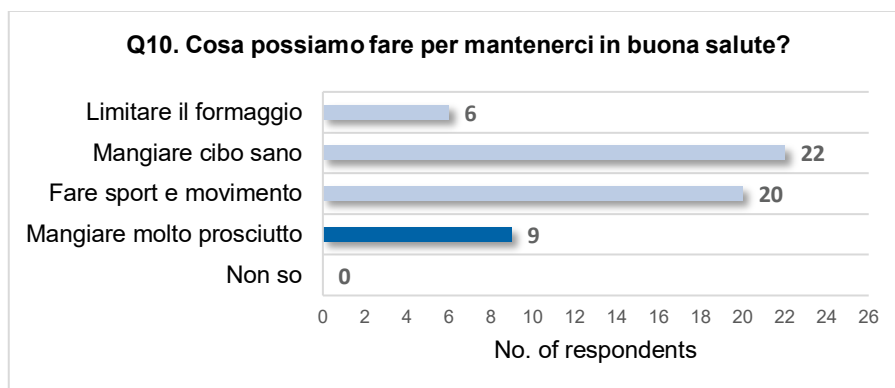


Figure 18: Respondents' answers to Q10 [light blue = right answer, dark blue = wrong answer]

By contrast, respondents performed better on Q11, giving 46.1% (N=12) of correct answers. Nonetheless, it is worth highlighting that the sample group had prior knowledge of the topic covered in Text 3, as it emerged from my focus group interviews (cf. Section 8.3). As can be seen in Figure 19, in spite of this prior knowledge, no more than 16 out of 26 respondents (61.5%) confirmed that sweets, cakes or desserts should be reduced to a minimum (i.e. 'Mangiare pochi dolci') and, most importantly, four respondents confirmed that consuming a lot of sugar (i.e. 'Consumare molto zucchero') helps to prevent health problems. As argued for above, targeted lexical items *limitare*, *consumo* and *zuccheri* involved in Q11 (cf. Section 6.4) may have had a negative impact on the overall performance of the target group on this question (cf. Table 11 above).

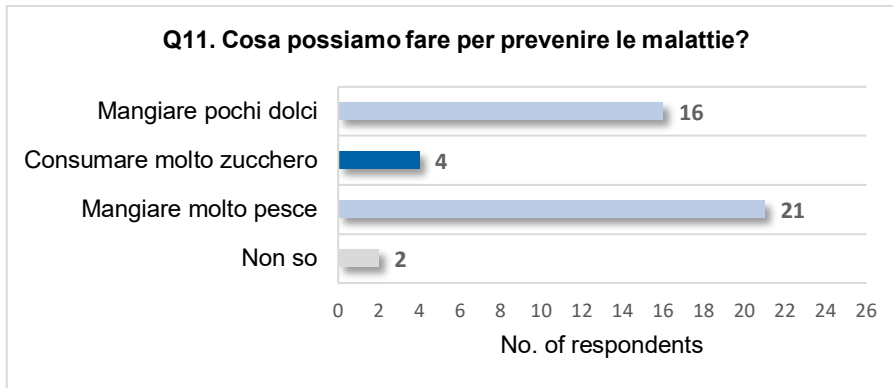


Figure 19: Respondents' answers to Q11 [light blue = right answer, dark blue = wrong answer, light grey = don't know]

Incorrect answers to Q10 and Q11 may have serious implications for the sample population's health conditions. These potential implications will be discussed in Section 9.

As anticipated at the beginning of this section, analysis of variance was used to determine the statistical significance of the relationship between specific parameters (i.e. age, gender, reading frequency, type and level of ID) and reading comprehension results. This analysis confirmed the relevance of the following two correlations:

- a correlation between type of ID and overall test performance with a confidence level higher than 95% (cf. Appendix G). This correlation proves that people with DS performed consistently worse than people with other ID on inferential questions (Q2, Q7, Q10, Q11);
- a correlation between level of ID and overall test performance with a confidence level higher than 95% (cf. Appendix G). This means that people with mild ID performed consistently better than people with moderate ID³⁹.

Another less significant – and yet worth mentioning – correlation was verified between respondents' reading frequency and performance on inferential questions, proving that more experienced readers performed better than less experienced ones. It should be added that this correlation could be more visible (i.e. higher than 95%; cf. Appendix G) if one outlier (i.e. P16) were excluded from the sample group. Despite being one of the three self-reported experienced readers in this sample, in fact, P16 incorrectly answered *all* comprehension questions. This data will be discussed in more detail in Section 9.

Finally, analysis of variants confirmed no significant correlations involving age and gender of the sample population.

³⁹ P2 and P3, whose levels of ID were unknown, were excluded from the sample.

8.3 Qualitative data from focus group interviews

In this section, qualitative data drawn from my post-test focus group interviews will be presented. As already described in Section 7.4.3, the interviews were semi-structured and covered two to four broad areas of inquiry. In each broad area, one question was intended to elicit the respondent's perception of the corpus texts. The four interview questions are recalled here for the convenience of the reader:

1. *Secondo voi, questo testo è facile o difficile?*
2. *Ci sono parole difficili in questo testo?*
3. *Secondo voi, questo testo è utile?*
4. *Per chi è utile questo testo?*

In the following two sections, the data collected in reply to the first two (Section 8.3.1) and the second two interview questions (Section 8.3.2) will be summarised.

8.3.1 Interview questions 1 and 2

When asked whether they found part 1 and 2 of Text 1 easy or difficult, the sample group showed mixed reactions. On the one hand, some respondents' body language signalled discouragement and detachment (i.e. several participants moved the text away from themselves, did not answer my question or shook their heads). Presumably, this was due to the perceived difficulty of the text; P1 and P19 openly admitted "*Non ho capito niente*" and respondents at site 3 and 4 (cf. Table 8) were equally preoccupied – "*Difficile*" or "*Difficilissimo*" were the only recorded answers on those two sites. Similarly, respondents at site 3 and 4 stated that many ("*Tante*") or all ("*Tutte*") words in Text 1 were difficult. More specifically, P11, P13 and P22 identified the terms "*radiografia*", "*vaccinazione*" and "*informatizzata*" respectively as being particularly difficult to understand (cf. text analysis in Section 6.2).

On the other hand, positive and confident attitudes were observed at site 1 and 2; P3 said "*Sì, facile, io lo conosco già il CIP*" and, similarly, P4, P5, P6 and P7 answered "*Facile*". When asked whether they found any difficult words in the text, the two groups consistently answered "*No*" or "*Facile*". This level of confidence might have been motivated by "social desirability" factors (Prosser/Bromley 2012: 108). RC test results confirm this assumption. In fact, P7 gave no correct answer to Text 1 questions; P3 and P6 correctly answered only one out of six questions; P4 gave two out of six correct answers; only P5 correctly answered five out of six questions, thus justifying his or her own perception of the low difficulty of Text 1.

When asked how difficult they found Text 2, P3 stated that the text was easy for him or her ('*Facile*'), just as all respondents at site 2 did unanimously. On the other hand, other respondents at site 1 cautiously admitted that the second text was easier than the first one

(P1: “Meglio”, P2: “Va abbastanza bene”). P4 stressed that s/he did not know the meaning of the term *eguaglianza* (“*Eguaglianza, io non so cosa vuol dire*”) (cf. text analysis in Section 6.3). Similarly, the sample group at site 4 agreed on saying that Text 2 is ‘so so’ (“*Così così*”). Moving along a continuum between different perceptions, respondents at site 3 answered that they found the text difficult (“*Difficile*”). P13 admitted that all words in Text 2 were difficult for him or her and that s/he needed help (“*Tutte, io ho bisogno di aiuto*”). At site 4, the whole group agreed that many words in this text were difficult (“*Tante*”). Interestingly, P5 stated that Text 2 contained difficult words such as *eguaglianza* and *equità*, but also acknowledged that explanations were provided for those words (“*Ci sono parole difficili come eguaglianza o equità ma c’è anche la spiegazione*”). Although respondents perceived Text 2 in many contrasting ways, they achieved the highest percentage of correct answers on this text (i.e. 53%; cf. Section 8.2), with a consistent overall performance across the four test sites.

Finally, when asked whether they found Text 3 easy or difficult, all groups consistently answered that the text was easy (“*Facile*”). P19 added: “*Non è come ascoltare queste cose in TV. Questo testo è chiaro*”. S/he also added, however, that *limitare* was a difficult word for him or her (“*Cosa vuol dire? Io ho bisogno di aiuto*”). It has to be emphasised that all groups showed interest in the topic. The text stimulated respondents’ active vocabulary (e.g. *zuccheri, dolci, integrale*) and elicited personal stories in connection with food and low-sugar diets. As anticipated in Section 8.2, it emerged that participants – particularly people with DS – had previously received nutrition education aimed to assist them in healthy eating choices. Nonetheless, the group’s performance on Text 3 was generally poorer than expected and certainly not in line with the favourable reception of the text.

8.3.2 Interview questions 3 and 4

Interview questions 3 and 4 were not asked in connection with Text 2 and were only inconsistently asked in connection with Text 1 and Text 3. This was due, on the one hand, to some groups showing signs of fatigue at certain points of the testing process (i.e. site 1 and 2); on the other hand, to my own difficulty in managing larger groups of respondents (i.e. site 3 and 4). In the latter two groups, interviewer-interviewee interaction lost structure at times. The reasons for this were mainly my own inexperience in holding semi-structured interviews with the target population and, at the same time, the loquacity of some participants, who tended to deviate from the issues at hand and introduce other (irrelevant) topics. Under those circumstances, asking questions 3 and 4 would have extended testing time excessively.

With regard to Text 1, Italy-based P8 answered interview question 3 by admitting “*Sì, non sapevo che c’era questa cartella*”. After being briefed on the fact that the electronic patient record (EPR) is only available in Switzerland, s/he replied “*Peccato, anche qui sarebbe utile*”. P8 also added that the EPR would be useful for health professionals (“*Per chi lavora in ospedale*”).

Finally, all respondents who were asked questions 3 and 4 in connection with Text 3 agreed on saying that the text would be useful for everyone (P22: "*Per tutti*"). It is significant that P22 replied "*Per noi*", thus acknowledging him or herself as part of the target addressees.

In the following section, the data presented in Section 8 will be further discussed and interpreted.

9 Discussion

The empirical study illustrated in Section 8 is limited by several factors, including the following:

- Both the self-report questionnaire and the RC test were face validated by one EtR expert and a group of self-advocates from ANFFAS Onlus Udine. In addition, both instruments were reviewed and content validated by one EtR expert from Pro Infirmis Ticino and Moesano. Since face validation is often considered to be a casual measure of validity (Bolarinwa 2016: 196), content validation could have been more extensive, involving a wider panel of disability practitioners and EtR experts, as well as experts in reading comprehension research. This would have arguably increased the validity strength of the instruments.
- The instruments' reliability was checked through small-scale pilot testing involving two people with no ID. Reliability could have definitely benefited from a larger pilot testing programme, involving wider samples of the target population and, ideally, alternate-form reliability or test-retest correlation (cf. Bolarinwa 2016: 198–199).
- During RC test administration (cf. Stage 5 in Table 9), a variation of what Creswell (2003: 171) calls the “diffusion effect” was randomly observed. This means that a minority of respondents from sites 1 and 3 (cf. Table 8) was sporadically seen looking at one of their peers' answer sheet and copying answers; alternatively, it occasionally occurred that a minority of respondents would (correctly or incorrectly) answer questions out loud immediately after the latter had been orally accommodated. As a consequence, other respondents from the same group would note down the implicitly suggested answer, causing a potential domino effect of increasingly invalid responses. This effect poses a serious threat to the internal validity of my empirical study. This threat suggests that one-to-one testing – although more time-consuming – should be the elective method for testing people with ID.
- A wider range of accommodations could have been provided during test administration; for instance, technology-oriented accommodations, including the use of particular software (cf. Andreou et al. 2019: 528–531), and multiple day administration – that is, the completion of the test in two or more sessions instead of one (cf. Andreou et al. 2019: 531–533). Fletcher et al. (2009) argue that the latter accommodation enables test participants to limit fatigue, which often prevents them from organising their thoughts and strategies.
- Since my post-test focus group interview was given less priority than the other instruments, it was decided to collect interview data using note-taking (cf. Section 7.4.3). In retrospect, the audio recording of interview sessions would have enabled me to prepare accurate transcripts for later study; in addition, it was observed that note-taking might result in more accurate data collection when a team of (at least two) interviewers conduct each session and, ideally, rotate tasks.

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, the data presented in Section 8 offers preliminary insights to address the second research question of this work – that is, whether translators' strategies did facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with ID. Overall, the RC test results suggest that translators' strategies had an unsatisfactory or insufficient impact on comprehension by the sample population. Out of eight experimental questions (vs. four control questions), only three had over 50% of correct answers, with the remaining five having on average 26.9% (N=7) of correct answers each. As already pointed out in Section 8.2, test results consistently confirm what emerged from my qualitative text analysis. On the one hand, the translation strategy implemented in Text 2 obtained the best results. A very poor performance on Q7 (cf. Table 11) clearly indicates that more exemplification might have facilitated comprehension to the sample group. On the other hand, the translation strategy behind Text 1 – or the writing strategy behind Text 3 – proved to be less effective. The RC test verified that most of the problematic issues identified in my text analysis in fact had a negative impact on respondents' comprehension.

In the next four sections, the results of my empirical study and their implications will be examined in further detail. Maaß's (2019a: 24; 2019b; 2020: 27; cf. Figure 2) twofold classification of the key features that make communication accessible will assist me in organising some points for discussion.

9.1 Findability

The reader profiles described in Section 8.1 revealed salient data that is worth further commenting. Over 70% of the sample population find moderate, considerable or greater appreciation in reading. A correlation between respondents' degree of reading appreciation and their reading frequency was also suggested (cf. Section 8.1). Statistical techniques verified a significant correlation between respondents' reading frequency and their performance on the RC test (cf. Section 8.2). This data proves that more experienced readers performed better than less experienced ones. As it was observed in Section 6.4, the literature widely agrees on "die Potenziale von Leichter Sprache beim Auf- und Ausbau der Lesefähigkeit von primären Adressat(inn)en" (Bredel/Maaß 2016a: 170; cf. also Maaß 2016; Jekat et al. 2020).

Furthermore, as pointed out in Section 8.1, McQuillan and Au (2001) argue that convenient access to reading material, regardless of a person's reading ability, is associated with more frequent reading and increased motivation to read. Significantly, almost 70% of the sample group expressed their interest in reading texts in Easy Italian. It follows that the more reading materials readers can find, the more they read, the more their reading skills may improve. Saletta and Winberg (2019) report evidence that literacy skills of adults with DS may continue to improve even after high school. Very little or no availability of reading materials in Easy Italian may impede that virtuous process. My empirical study confirms that target recipients have an interest in regular publications in Easy Italian covering a wide range of thematic areas. I would argue that there is an urge for such publications to be

produced and be retrievable – where and how depending on the target communicative situation – in order to be conveniently retrieved.

9.2 Perceptibility

My empirical study showed that respondents incorrectly answered 56% and 58% of the questions in Text 1 and Text 3 respectively. These are the corpus texts in which the highest number of inconsistencies or non-compliance with Inclusion Europe guidelines (2009a) were identified at both macro and micro-typographical levels (cf. Sections 6.2 and 6.4). Rink (2019: 56) maintains that “verbale Inhalte, die ausschließlich in graphisch realisierter Weise vorliegen, nicht oder nicht vollumfänglich zugänglich [sind]” to the German-speaking target readership. Based on several studies examining reading skills in adults with ID (cf. Jones et al. 2006; Van den Bos et al. 2007; Hurtado et al. 2014, among others), this scenario can be reasonably extended to speakers of languages other than German, including Italian. As a result, clearly perceptible layout features are crucial, as they may enable the target reader to make valid assumptions about a text. Bock (2018: 73) reinforces this point and argues that the typographical structure of an Easy Language text should “Aufschlüsse darüber geben, um was für einen Text es sich handelt. Leser, denen das Entziffern der Buchstaben große Mühe bereitet, könne von diesen optischen Hinweisen besonders profitieren”.

Bock (2018: 73) concludes that the text structure and the layout of Easy Language texts should ideally evoke the conventional macrotypography of any given text type and yet maintain optimum comprehensibility (cf. also Maaß 2019b, 2020). Not only would this facilitate text comprehension to the target addressees, but it would also contribute to mitigating against stigmatisation⁴⁰ of the target readership. A collaboration between linguists, translators/authors and layout artists or graphic designers would seem therefore desirable (Maaß 2019a: 295).

9.3 Comprehensibility

As emerged from my text analysis, all three corpus texts contained low-frequency and, to some extent, specialist vocabulary. Rink (2019: 54) highlights that all primary target groups “können auf Fachinhalte häufig nicht zugreifen, weil fachliches bzw. inhaltliches Wissen für die Texterschließung Voraussetzung ist [...]”. As a matter of fact, RC test results showed that four out of eight experimental questions aimed at measuring respondents’ comprehension of key low-frequency lexical items were not answered or were answered incorrectly by the vast majority of the sample group (cf. Table 11). In addition, the data drawn from my focus group interviews confirmed that several respondents perceived targeted lexical terms as being particularly challenging (cf. Section 8.3.1). It follows that resources like De Mauro’s NVdB (2019), as well as word frequency corpora for the Italian language – e.g. CoLFIS (Bertinetto et al. 2005), CORIS/CODIS (Rossini Favretti et al.

⁴⁰ On *Leichte Sprache* and stigma, cf. Bredel and Maaß (2016: 36–41) and Maaß (2020: 205–225).

2002), La Repubblica (Baroni et al. 2004), among others – are essential tools to identify not only high-frequency vocabulary, but also which words are most used in any given context.

Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that “die Häufigkeit eines Wortes nicht allein aussagekräftig ist” (Bock 2018: 36). Bock (2018: 36) argues that “welche Wörter bekannt sind und gut verstanden werden, hängt nicht zuletzt von der Person, ihren Erfahrungen und ihrem Wissen, ab und davon, wie viele Hinweise der Kontext gibt, um das Wort zu erschließen”. Therefore, it is only following a careful consideration of the target communicative situation that any sound translation strategy can be developed.

Finally, it is also worth underlining that a significant correlation was described between respondents’ level of ID and their overall performance on the RC test, with people with mild ID performing consistently better than people with moderate ID (cf. Section 8.2). At the same time, my focus group interviews revealed that respondents’ perception of the corpus texts’ level of difficulty (in particular, Text 1 and Text 3) was often not supported by test results, with respondents perceiving texts as ‘easy’ and yet performing poorly on relevant RC questions (cf. Section 8.3.1). This evidence supports my hypothesis that a classification of Easy Language texts according to degree of difficulty could help target readers to make realistic predictions about text comprehensibility (cf. Section 6.5.4).

9.4 Proactivity

When an action-oriented text is comprehended, it can then be retained and, most importantly, it can be accepted by the target readership (Maaß 2019a,b). As a result, recipients are enabled to act independently. In Section 8.2, it was observed that poor test results on Q10 and Q11 – which were concerned with key healthy-eating issues – may have serious implications for target recipients’ health conditions. This is particularly true for people with DS (i.e. the majority of the sample group), as they are at a substantial risk of obesity (cf. Wong et al. 2014; Basil et al. 2016, among others). Wong et al. (2014: 117) emphasise that “education of people with DS and their caregivers on nutrition and healthful eating is a critical aspect of weight maintenance and must be tailored to their individual needs”. Wong et al. (2014: 116) further recommend that “health information provided be easy to comprehend, and educational materials and techniques should be tailored to their learning abilities, living situation, finances, preferences, health, and physical abilities”. These recommendations reinforce the crucial role that carefully tailored health-related documentation in Easy Language may have in supporting recipients’ decision-making and contributing to successful outcomes in treatment programmes (cf. Maaß/Rink 2017). They also emphasise, however, the potentially detrimental – if not dangerous – effect that poorly translated (or poorly written) health-related information in Easy Language may have on patients with ID (cf. Nüssli 2018).

In the following final section, I will attempt to draw some conclusions and discuss future research directions.

10 Concluding remarks

Based on the research findings discussed above, it can be concluded that, on the one hand, standards for Easy Language are essential to guide the translator's work. Test results suggested that non-compliance with guidelines did in fact hinder respondents' comprehension of the texts. On the other hand, it also clearly emerged that adherence to guidelines alone may not automatically lead to "good texts" (Bock 2015, 87). Therefore, high comprehensibility can only be achieved through a careful consideration of the target communicative situation (cf. Piemontese 1996; Balling 2013; Bredel/Maaß 2019; Bock 2015, 2018). As Piemontese argues,

la chiarezza di un testo, di un qualunque testo, non [è] una qualità assoluta, ma relazionale. Essa risulta cioè dal rapporto che si crea tra destinatari, contenuti e situazioni di ricezione del testo [...]. Questo vuol dire che alla minima variazione di uno (o più) di questi tre elementi può cambiare, cioè aumentare o diminuire, il grado di chiarezza del testo. (Piemontese 1996: 115)

This means that intralingual translations, just like interlingual ones, have to be fully functional. Function or functionality "is not a quality of a text in itself but one that is attributed to the text by the receiver in the moment of reception. Thus, it is the receiver who decides whether (and how) a text 'functions' (for her/him, in this situation)" (Nord 2006: 142). It follows that more experimental research is needed involving recipients from different target groups (Bredel/Maaß 2019). For instance, larger sample population including functional illiterates without ID would produce richer data (cf. Bock 2018).

In future studies, a wider range of testing methods should also be considered. Process-oriented techniques like eye-tracking, think-aloud protocols or speed measures would help to gain deeper insights into the recipient's internal cognitive processes (Stevenson 2010; Bock 2018).

Furthermore, following Jekat et al. (2020), it can be remarked that Easy Language research could greatly benefit from a change of perspective. More specifically, Jekat et al. (2020) recommend that the written language production by members of the target groups be systematically analysed in the context of current Easy Language guidelines and text comprehensibility research. Research findings pertaining to Text 3 corroborate the need for this change of perspective. This research approach should provide new insights into how to produce texts in Easy Language that are (and look) as close to Standard Language as possible at both macro and micro-typographical levels (cf. also Maaß 2020). Most importantly, this approach emphasises that future research directions should plan for more participatory studies. Involving people with ID collaboratively in the design and research questions prior to data collection, as well as actively seeking their support during all phases of the research, would be crucial to gain insights into their needs and expectations (Creswell 2003: 65; cf. also Bock 2018).

Finally, and crucially, this study highlighted the urge to produce more regular publications in Easy Language for the benefit of the Italian-speaking target readership. As the sample's reader profiles clearly indicated, the target population needs and seeks information in Easy Italian. Against the background of the above-discussed OECD-PIAAC data on adult literacy skills, this is a call to action that both Italy and Switzerland cannot ignore if they are to successfully implement the provisions of the UN-CRPD.

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List of Abbreviations

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
DS	Down’s Syndrome
EtR	Easy-to-Read
ID	Intellectual Disabilities
NVdB	<i>Nuovo vocabolario di base della lingua italiana</i>
ST	Source Text
TT	Target Text
VdB	<i>Vocabolario di base della lingua italiana</i>

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Appendices

Appendix A: Qualitative text analysis

Text 1

(eHealth Suisse 2019a)

Key: Green = Addition
 Red = Reduction
 Blue = Variation
 IE = Inclusion Europe

Segment 1

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
Cos'è la CIP?	Cos'è la CIP?
Analysis: Original title was transferred unaltered. Initials in headings may pose a barrier to readability (against rule no. 12 and 20, IE 2009a: 10 and 17 respectively).	

Segment 2

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
La cartella informatizzata del paziente (CIP)	La cartella informatizzata del paziente , in breve CIP,
Analysis: Addition to explain what the initials stand for. <i>Cartella informatizzata del paziente</i> was emphasised in bold type (cf. rule no. 23, IE 2009a: 17). The initials 'c', 'i' and 'p' were not capitalised (arguably against rule no. 12, IE 2009a: 10). The verb <i>informatizzare</i> (not contained in NVdB, De Mauro 2019) is not explained in the TT (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).	

Segment 3

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
è una raccolta personale di documenti riguardanti la salute.	è una raccolta di documenti elettronici che riguardano la vostra salute .
Analysis: Addition of qualifier (<i>elettronici</i>) to make clearer what kind of documents the electronic patient record contains. Variation: <i>riguardanti</i> > <i>che riguardano</i> simplifies syntax by replacing the rather formal present participle (here fulfilling the syntactic function of a relative clause) with the relative pronoun <i>che</i> + present indicative. However, the sentence is long and contains at least three ideas (against rule no. 19, IE 2009a: 17). Variation: <i>personale</i> > <i>vostra</i> addresses the readers directly (cf. rule no. 15, IE 2009a: 11).	

Segment 4	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
-	Potete vedere questi documenti sul vostro computer o sul vostro telefonino.
Analysis: Addition to supposedly facilitate the understanding of “informatizzata” and “elettronici” (see Segment 2). The sentence does not start on a new line (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).	

Segment 5	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
Può trattarsi, ad esempio,	Questi documenti sono ad esempio:
Analysis: Variation: use of deixis (<i>questi</i>) and repetition (<i>documenti</i>) to make clear what the subject of the sentence is (cf. Piemontese 1996: 151). Also, change from impersonal to personal construction (cf. Piemontese 1996: 145). Change in punctuation: the colon introduces a bulleted list.	

Segment 6	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
di una radiografia, del certificato di vaccinazione,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> il vostro certificato di vaccinazione una radiografia del vostro ginocchio
Analysis: Addition/variation: bullet points were added to list items (cf. rule no. 26, IE 2009a: 18). Addition of <i>vostro</i> to address the readers directly (cf. rule no. 15, IE 2009a: 11). The term <i>radiografia</i> (not contained in NVdB, De Mauro 2019) is not explained in the TT (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). Addition of <i>del vostro ginocchio</i> to use an example from everyday life (cf. rule no. 8, IE 2009a: 10).	

Segment 7	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
della ricetta per la farmacia o del rapporto di dimissione dall'ospedale dopo la vostra ultima operazione.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> una ricetta per la farmacia il rapporto dell'ospedale dopo la vostra ultima operazione
Analysis: Addition/variation: bullet points were added to list items (cf. rule no. 26, IE 2009a: 18). Reduction: omission of <i>di dimissione</i> to supposedly avoid low-frequency vocabulary (cf. rules no. 6 and 7, IE 2009a: 10).	

Segment 8	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
I professionisti della salute	I professionisti della salute, ad esempio il vostro medico di famiglia,
Analysis: Addition to facilitate the understanding of the subject by giving an example from everyday life (cf. rule no. 8, IE 2009a: 10).	

Segment 9	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
depositano questi documenti nella vostra CIP.	registrano questi documenti nella vostra CIP.
<p>Analysis: Variation: <i>depositano</i> was supposedly considered a low-frequency lexical item (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively) and <i>registrano</i> was preferred instead. <i>Registrare</i> is a polysemic verb (arguably against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).</p>	

Segment 10	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
Anche voi potete depositare documenti personali nella CIP,	Anche voi potete aggiungere delle informazioni nella CIP.
<p>Analysis: Variation: <i>depositare</i> was supposedly considered a low-frequency lexical item (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively) and <i>aggiungere</i> was preferred instead. However, repeating <i>registrare</i> (see Segment 9) might have contributed to lexical consistency (against rule no. 9, IE 2009a: 10; cf. Piemontese 1996: 151). The substitution of <i>documenti</i> with <i>informazioni</i> also adds to lexical inconsistency (against rule no. 9, IE 2009a: 10; cf. Piemontese 1996: 151). The sentence does not start on a new line (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).</p>	

Segment 11	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
come ad esempio una ricetta degli occhiali,	Ad esempio: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> la ricetta per un paio di occhiali
<p>Analysis: Addition/variation: a new paragraph was introduced to add clarity and bullet points were added to list items (cf. rule no. 26, IE 2009a: 18). Lack of cohesion: it may not be immediately clear what the items listed are examples for. The term <i>ricetta</i> is a polysemic noun that may pose a problem for the target reader (Piemontese 1996: 142).</p>	

Segment 12	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
le vostre direttive del paziente	[---]
<p>Analysis: Reduction: supposedly, the lexical items were considered to be low frequency (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).</p>	

Segment 13	
ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
o i valori della pressione arteriosa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> un certificato medico i valori della vostra pressione arteriosa
<p>Analysis: Addition of <i>un certificato medico</i>, supposedly considered to be a better-known medical document for the general public. The term <i>valori</i> is a polysemic (and a specialist) noun that may hinder comprehension (Piemontese 1996: 142). Addition of <i>vostro</i> to address the readers directly (cf.</p>	

rule no. 15, IE 2009a: 11). The qualifier *arteriosa* (not contained in NVdB, De Mauro 2019) is not explained in the TT (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).

Segment 14

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
Tutte queste informazioni, dati e documenti medici vi appartengono: la CIP è vostra.	Nella vostra CIP sono contenute tutte le informazioni importanti sulla vostra salute.
<p>Analysis: Variation: the passive voice was introduced (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 11). The original subject was reduced to promote readability. Addition: <i>sulla vostra salute</i> clarifies the original qualifier <i>medici</i>.</p>	

Segment 15

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
Non siete comunque obbligati ad avere una CIP,	Non siete obbligati ad aprire una CIP.
<p>Analysis: Use of negative construction (against rule no. 16, IE 2009a: 11). Reduction: adverb <i>comunque</i> was omitted to promote readability. Variation: the substitution of <i>avere</i> with <i>aprire</i> (here used with an abstract meaning) may pose a barrier for the target reader. The sentence does not start on a new line (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).</p>	

Segment 16

ST (eHealth Suisse 2019b)	TT (eHealth Suisse 2019a)
che per i pazienti è facoltativa.	La CIP è facoltativa .
<p>Analysis: Addition/variation: a new sentence was introduced to simplify syntax (cf. rule no. 19, IE 2009a: 17). Although the key predicative <i>facoltativa</i> was emphasised in bold type (cf. rule no. 23, IE 2009a: 17), it is not contained in NVdB (De Mauro 2019) and not clearly explained in the TT (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). The sentence does not start on a new line (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).</p>	

Text 2 (SSN 2018)

Key: Addition
Reduction
Variation
IE = Inclusion Europe

Segment 1	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
Carta dei Servizi	Carta dei Servizi. Guida ai servizi per la salute
Analysis: Addition to further clarify the heading (cf. rule no. 20, IE 2009a: 17). The key concept <i>servizi per la salute</i> is not explained and may pose a comprehension problem for the target reader.	

Segment 2	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
-	L'Azienda per l'Assistenza Sanitaria 2 Bassa Friulana – Isontina si occupa dei servizi per la salute.
Analysis: Addition to further clarify what the text is about. It is not explained what an <i>azienda per l'assistenza sanitaria</i> is in practical terms. The key concept <i>servizi per la salute</i> is not explained and may pose a comprehension problem for the target reader (against rule no. 21, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 3	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
L'Azienda sanitaria ha il compito di realizzare le finalità del Servizio Sanitario Regionale mantenendo come valore di riferimento la centralità della persona	Per l'azienda sono importanti le persone.
Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey the main message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17). The sentence starts on a new line (cf. no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).	

Segment 4	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
e assicurando l'erogazione delle attività in coerenza con i seguenti principi:	I servizi dell'azienda seguono queste idee:
Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17). The sentence starts on a new line (cf. no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).	

Segment 5	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
• eguaglianza:	1. L'eguaglianza:
Analysis: Addition of definite article. The item was printed in green, which may pose a problem to readability (against rule no. 10, IE 2009a: 15). The term <i>eguaglianza</i> is not contained in NVdB (De Mauro 2019) and may hinder comprehension if not appropriately explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).	

Segment 6	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
i servizi sono erogati	i servizi sono dati
Analysis: Variation: the low-frequency item <i>erogati</i> was replaced with the more common <i>dati</i> (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). The passive voice was kept (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 11).	

Segment 7	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
secondo regole uguali per tutti a prescindere da sesso, razza, etnia, lingua, religione, opinioni politiche, condizione sociale, condizione fisica o psichica in conformità al dispositivo fondamentale dell'art. 3 della Costituzione;	a tutti nello stesso modo;
Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 8	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
• equità ed imparzialità:	4. L'equità e l'imparzialità:
Analysis: Addition of definite articles. The items were printed in green, which may pose a problem to readability (against rule no. 10, IE 2009a: 15). The terms <i>equità</i> and <i>imparzialità</i> are not contained in NVdB (De Mauro 2019) and may hinder comprehension if not appropriately explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).	

Segment 9	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
i servizi sono erogati	i servizi sono dati
Analysis: Variation: the low-frequency item <i>erogati</i> was replaced with the more common <i>dati</i> (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). The passive voice was kept (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 11).	

Segment 10	
ST (SSN 2018)	TT (SSN 2019)
adottando verso gli utenti comportamenti obiettivi, equi e imparziali;	in modo corretto, giusto e uguale per tutti, senza fare preferenze;
<p>Analysis: Variation: the gerund clause (<i>adottando</i>) was replaced with an adverbial construct to add clarity (cf. Piemomntese 1996: 148). High-frequency lexical items (<i>tutti, corretto, uguale, senza fare preferenze</i>) were preferred to low-frequency vocabulary (<i>utenti, obiettivi, equi, imparziali</i>) (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).</p>	

Segment 11	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
• continuità:	5. La continuità:
<p>Analysis: Addition of definite article. The item was printed in green, which may pose a problem to readability (against rule no. 10, IE 2009a: 15).</p>	

Segment 12	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
i servizi sono erogati	i servizi sono dati
<p>Analysis: Variation: the low-frequency item <i>erogati</i> was replaced with the more common <i>dati</i> (cf. rules no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). The passive voice was kept (against rule no. 17, IE 2009a: 11).</p>	

Segment 13	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
in maniera continuativa nei vari presidi territoriali e senza interruzione, nell'ambito delle modalità di funzionamento definite da norme e regolamenti nazionali e regionali;	sempre;
<p>Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).</p>	

Segment 14	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
• diritto di scelta:	6. Il diritto di scelta:
<p>Analysis: Addition of definite article. The item was printed in green, which may pose a problem to readability (against rule no. 10, IE 2009a: 15).</p>	

Segment 15	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
l'Azienda rispetta il diritto dell'utente di scegliere liberamente	le persone possono scegliere
Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey the main message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 16	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
la struttura sanitaria cui desidera accedere e ne facilita l'accesso;	di curarsi dove vogliono ---;
Analysis: Reduction/Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey the main message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 17	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
• partecipazione:	7. La partecipazione:
Analysis: Addition of definite article. The item was printed in green, which may pose a problem to readability (against rule no. 10, IE 2009a: 15).	

Segment 18	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
il cittadino è parte attiva nei processi di cura e di promozione della salute.	[---]
Analysis: Reduction: supposedly, this information was not considered relevant enough to convey the main message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 19	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
L'Azienda considera suo compito, non solo informarlo su temi sanitari, ma anche ascoltarlo,	l'azienda deve coinvolgere, informare e ascoltare i cittadini.
Analysis: Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 20	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
nella convinzione che consapevolezza, informazione e partecipazione,	In questo modo
Analysis: Reduction to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17). The sentence starts on a new line (cf. no. 17, IE 2009a: 16).	

Segment 21	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
anche in forma organizzata,	[---]
Analysis: Reduction: supposedly, this information was not considered relevant enough to convey the main message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Segment 22	
ST (SSN 2019)	TT (SSN 2018)
aumentano la qualità complessiva del sistema sanitario.	ogni cittadino può aiutare a migliorare la salute di tutti.
Analysis: Variation to simplify syntax and vocabulary and thus convey only the essential message (cf. rule no. 22, IE 2009a: 17).	

Text 3 (Villa Olimpia n.d.)

Segment 1
Cosa devi fare per mantenerti in buona salute?
Analysis: No comments.

Segment 2
Per rimanere in buona salute, puoi seguire alcune semplici indicazioni che riguardano l'alimentazione, l'attività fisica e le abitudini di vita.
Analysis: Lexical inconsistency (<i>rimanere/puoi</i>): repeating <i>mantenerti/devi</i> (see Segment 1) might have contributed to lexical consistency (against rule no. 9, IE 2009a: 10; cf. Piemontese 1996: 151). Complex syntax: long period with three clauses, which may pose a problem for the target reader (against rule no. 19, IE 2009a: 17). To some extent, the lexical items <i>alimentazione</i> , <i>attività fisica</i> and <i>abitudini di vita</i> belong to specialist vocabulary and need to be explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).

Segment 3**Alimentazione**

Analysis:
See above.

Segment 4

Mangiare cibi sani è molto importante perché serve a prevenire alcuni problemi di salute.

Analysis:
Complex syntax: the subordinate clause (*perché serve* etc.) may pose a problem for the target reader (against rule no. 19, IE 2009a: 17). Two sentences with one idea each would be recommended. The verb *prevenire* belongs to specialist vocabulary and needs to be explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively).

Segment 5

Per mangiare cibi sani devi:

- limitare il consumo di cibi troppo grassi, come i salumi o i formaggi.

Analysis:
Limitare, *consumo* and *grassi* belong to specialist vocabulary and need to be explained (against rule no. 7 and 11, IE 2009a: 10 and 15 respectively). *Salumi* might also need to be exemplified for the target readership (cf. rule no. 8, IE 2009a: 10).

Segment 6

- limitare il consumo di zuccheri.

Analysis:
See above.

Segment 7

Gli zuccheri sono contenuti nei dolci, ma anche in altri alimenti come il pane, la pasta e le patate.

Analysis:
Lexical inconsistency (*alimenti*): repeating *cibi* (see Segments 4 and 5) might have contributed to lexical consistency (against rule no. 9, IE 2009a: 10; cf. Piemontese 1996: 151).

Segment 8

- mangiare frutta e verdura, almeno cinque porzioni al giorno.

Analysis:
The term *porzione* might need to be exemplified for the target readership (cf. rule no. 8, IE 2009a: 10).

Segment 9

- mangiare tanto pesce e preferire alimenti integrali.

Analysis:

Lexical inconsistency (*alimenti*): repeating *cibi* (see Segment 5-6) might have contributed to lexical consistency (against rule no. 9, IE 2009a: 10; cf. Piemontese 1996: 151).

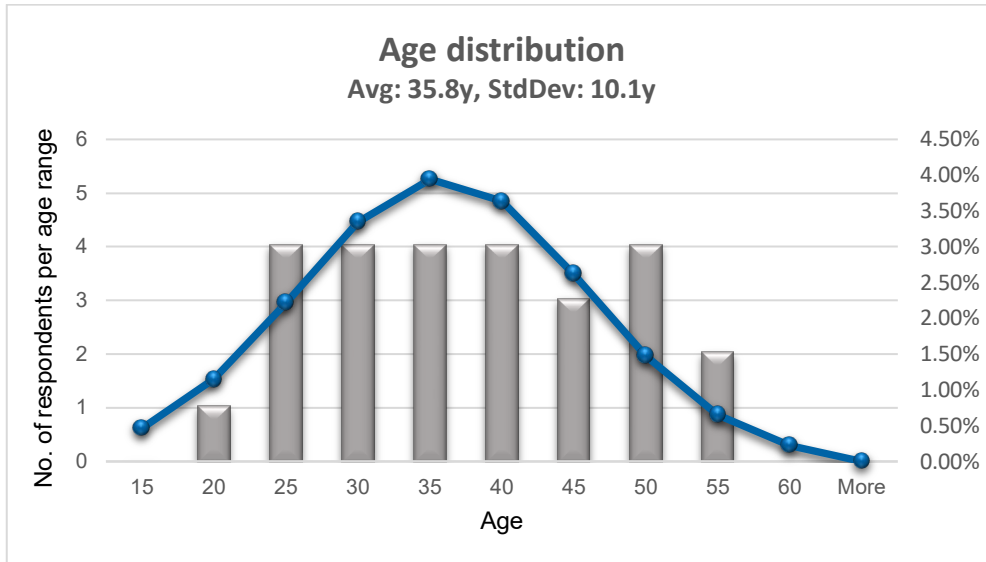
Segment 10

Gli alimenti integrali sono cibi come il pane e la pasta.

Analysis:

Cf. Segment 7: *pane* and *pasta* contain sugar, therefore should not be eaten in large quantities. In this segment, however, it is recommended to eat wholemeal bread and pasta. This information may be confusing and might fail to convey the right message.

Appendix B: Sample age distribution



Age distribution: Gaussian curve corresponding to average age and age standard variation

Appendix C: Informed consent form

Ciao!

Mi chiamo **Luisa**.
Sono di Pordenone.



Studio all'università.
Studio il **linguaggio facile da leggere**.



Il linguaggio facile da leggere è molto importante.
Il linguaggio facile da leggere **aiuta le persone**
a leggere e capire le informazioni.



Scrivo un lavoro per l'università.
Per il mio lavoro **ho bisogno del tuo aiuto!**

Ho dei testi in linguaggio facile da leggere.



Ho domande su questi testi.



Ti chiedo di **leggere i testi e rispondere alle domande**.

Le tue risposte aiutano le persone che usano
il linguaggio facile da leggere.



Le tue risposte sono **solo per il mio lavoro**.
Il tuo nome è **segreto**.



Se non vuoi leggere i testi, va bene.

Se vuoi leggere i testi e rispondere alle domande,
puoi fermarti **quando vuoi**.

Se vuoi leggere i testi e rispondere alle domande,
ricevi **un piccolo regalo**.



Se vuoi fare domande a Luisa, scrivi a: luisa.carrer@zhaw.ch

Grazie!



Voglio leggere i testi e voglio rispondere alle domande.

Ho letto le informazioni.

Ho capito che:

- Luisa studia all'università
- Luisa scrive un lavoro sul linguaggio facile da leggere

Ho capito che:

- Luisa ha bisogno del mio aiuto
- Luisa mi chiede di leggere dei testi e di rispondere alle domande

Ho capito che:

- Le mie risposte aiutano le persone che usano il linguaggio facile da leggere

Ho capito che:

- Le mie risposte sono solo per il lavoro di Luisa
- Il mio nome è segreto

Ho capito che:

- Posso fare domande a Luisa quando voglio
- Posso fermarmi quando voglio

Voglio leggere i testi e voglio rispondere alle domande.

Il mio nome: _____

La mia firma: _____

Nome studente: Luisa Carrer

Firma studente: _____

Luogo e data: _____

Appendix D: Self-report questionnaire

6 domande su di te

1 Sei maschio o femmina?



- Maschio
- Femmina
- Preferisco non rispondere

2 Quanti anni hai?



3 Che lavoro fai?



4 Ti piace leggere?



				
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No	Non molto	Abbastanza	Sì	Sì, molto

5 Leggi spesso?



Leggo ogni giorno

Lunedì	Martedì	Mercoledì	Giovedì	Venerdì	Sabato	Domenica

Leggo qualche volta, per esempio il venerdì e la domenica

Lunedì	Martedì	Mercoledì	Giovedì	Venerdì	Sabato	Domenica

Leggo poco, per esempio 1 o 2 volte al mese

Ottobre 2019						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Non leggo

6 Vorresti leggere testi in italiano facile?

No, non vorrei leggere testi in italiano facile

Sì, per esempio vorrei leggere...



Grazie! 😊

Appendix E: Reading comprehension test

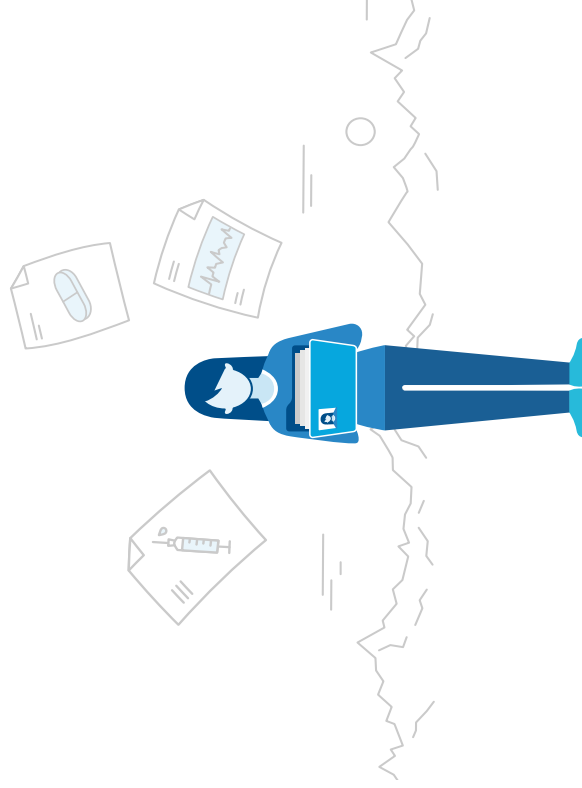
Text 1 – Part 1 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a)

Cos'è la CIP?

La **cartella informatizzata del paziente**, in breve CIP, è una raccolta di **documenti elettronici** che riguardano la vostra salute. Potete vedere questi documenti sul vostro computer o sul vostro telefonino.

Questi documenti sono ad esempio:

- il vostro certificato di vaccinazione
- una radiografia del vostro ginocchio
- una ricetta per la farmacia
- il rapporto dell'ospedale dopo la vostra ultima operazione






Rispondi alle domande:

1. Cosa vuol dire la sigla CIP?



2. Quale immagine mostra un documento elettronico?



 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/></p>
---	--	---

Non so

3. Dove puoi vedere la cartella informatizzata del paziente?
Metti una crocetta su tutte le risposte corrette.



 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> Sul computer</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> Solo dal medico</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="radio"/> Sul telefonino</p>
---	--	---

Non so

Text 1 – Part 2 (extract from eHealth Suisse 2019a)

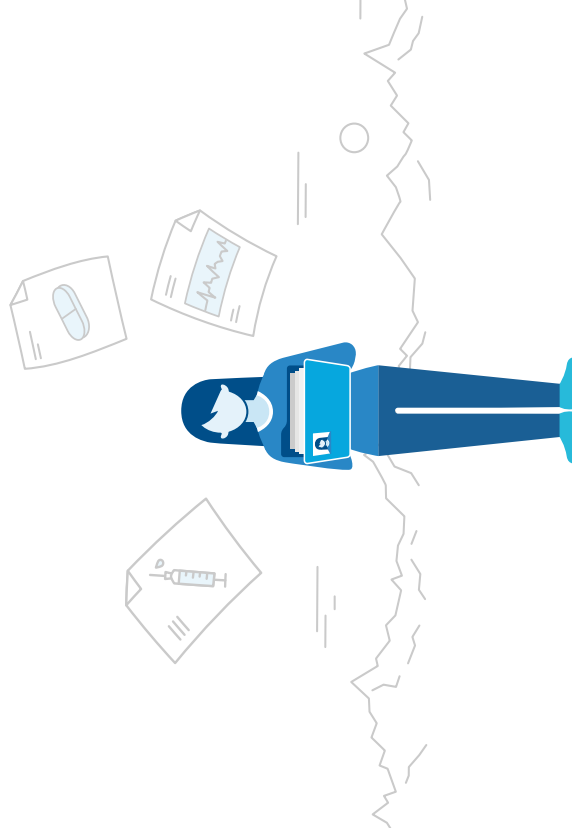
Cos'è la CIP?

I professionisti della salute, ad esempio il vostro medico di famiglia, registrano questi documenti nella vostra CIP. Anche voi potete aggiungere delle informazioni nella CIP.

Ad esempio:

- la ricetta per un paio di occhiali
- un certificato medico
- i valori della vostra pressione arteriosa

Nella vostra CIP sono contenute tutte le informazioni importanti sulla vostra salute. Non siete obbligati ad aprire una CIP. La CIP è **facoltativa**.



Rispondi alle domande:

1. Cosa c'è nella cartella informatizzata del paziente?



- Ci sono documenti poco importanti
- Ci sono informazioni sulla salute del paziente
- Ci sono ricette per preparare un pasto sano
- Non so

2. Solo il paziente può aggiungere informazioni nella cartella informatizzata. È vero?



Sì, solo il paziente può aggiungere informazioni



No, anche un medico può aggiungere informazioni



Non so

3. Tutti devono avere la cartella informatizzata del paziente. È vero?



Sì, tutti devono avere la cartella informatizzata del paziente



No, le persone possono decidere se averla oppure no



Non so

Grazie! 😊

Text 2 (extract from SSN 2018)

GUIDA AI SERVIZI PER LA SALUTE

L'Azienda per l'Assistenza Sanitaria 2 Bassa Friulana – Isontina si occupa dei servizi per la salute.

Per l'azienda sono importanti le persone.

I servizi dell'azienda seguono queste idee:

- 1. L'eguaglianza:** i servizi sono dati a tutti nello stesso modo;
- 2. L'equità e l'imparzialità:** i servizi sono dati in modo corretto, giusto e uguale per tutti, senza fare preferenze;
- 3. La continuità:** i servizi sono dati sempre;
- 4. Il diritto di scelta:** le persone possono scegliere di curarsi dove vogliono;
- 5. La partecipazione:** l'azienda deve coinvolgere, informare e ascoltare i cittadini.
In questo modo ogni cittadino può aiutare a migliorare la salute di tutti;

Rispondi alle domande:

1. Quali immagini mostrano un servizio per la salute?



 <p><input type="radio"/> Pronto soccorso</p>	 <p><input type="radio"/> Frutta e verdura</p>
 <p><input type="radio"/> Sport</p>	 <p><input type="radio"/> Visita medica in ospedale</p>
<p><input type="radio"/> Non so</p>	




2. L'azienda offre i servizi per la salute. Come offre questi servizi?



- Offre i servizi solo a poche persone
- Offre i servizi ogni giorno
- Non ascolta le persone
- Non so

3. Le persone possono scegliere in che ospedale andare. È vero?



	<p><input type="radio"/> Sì, le persone possono scegliere</p>
	<p><input type="radio"/> No, le persone non possono scegliere</p>
	<p><input type="radio"/> Non so</p>

Grazie! 😊

Text 3 (extract from Villa Olimpia n.d.)

Cosa devi fare per mantenerti in buona salute?

Per rimanere in buona salute, puoi seguire alcune semplici indicazioni che riguardano **l'alimentazione, l'attività fisica e le abitudini di vita.**

Alimentazione



Mangiare cibi sani è molto importante perché serve a prevenire alcuni problemi di salute.

Per mangiare cibi sani devi:

-limitare il consumo di cibi troppo grassi, come i salumi o i formaggi.

-limitare il consumo di zuccheri.

Gli zuccheri sono contenuti nei dolci, ma anche in altri alimenti come il pane, la pasta e le patate.

-mangiare frutta e verdura, almeno cinque porzioni al giorno.

-mangiare tanto pesce e preferire alimenti integrali.

Gli alimenti integrali sono cibi come il pane e la pasta

Rispondi alle domande:

- 1. Cosa possiamo fare per mantenerci in buona salute?**
Metti una crocetta su tutte le risposte corrette.



 <p><input type="radio"/> Limitare il formaggio</p>	 <p><input type="radio"/> Mangiare cibo sano</p>
 <p><input type="radio"/> Fare sport e movimento</p>	 <p><input type="radio"/> Mangiare molto prosciutto</p>
<p><input type="radio"/> Non so</p>	




- 2. Cosa possiamo fare per prevenire le malattie?**
Metti una crocetta su tutte le risposte corrette.



- Mangiare pochi dolci
- Consumare molto zucchero
- Mangiare molto pesce
- Non so

- 3. Per stare bene dobbiamo mangiare poco pane e poca pasta.**
È vero?



	<p><input type="radio"/> Sì, dobbiamo limitare il pane e la pasta e preferire il pane e la pasta integrali</p>
	<p><input type="radio"/> No, dobbiamo mangiare molto pane e molta pasta</p>
	<p><input type="radio"/> Non so</p>

Grazie! 😊

Answer Key

- Q1** Cartella Informatizzata del Paziente
- Q2** Tablet [*first image on the left*]
- Q3** Sul computer/Sul telefonino
- Q4** Ci sono informazioni sulla salute del paziente
- Q5** No, anche un medico può aggiungere informazioni
- Q6** No, le persone possono decidere se averla oppure no
- Q7** Pronto soccorso/Visita medica in ospedale
- Q8** Offre i servizi ogni giorno
- Q9** Sì, le persone possono scegliere
- Q10** Limitare il formaggio/Mangiare cibo sano/Fare sport e movimento
- Q11** Mangiare pochi dolci/Mangiare molto pesce
- Q12** Sì, dobbiamo limitare il pane e la pasta e preferire il pane e la pasta integrali

Appendix F: Interview protocol

Focus group interview protocol	
Text [Title]	
Q1	Secondo voi, questo testo è facile o difficile?
Prompt to follow key question	Secondo voi, il testo è difficile o facile?
Interviewer's notes	
Q2	Ci sono parole difficili in questo testo?
Interviewer's notes	
Q3	Secondo voi, questo testo è utile?
Prompt to follow key question	Ci sono informazioni utili nel testo?
Interviewer's notes	
Q4	Per chi è utile questo testo?
Prompt to follow key question	Per chi sono utili queste informazioni?
Interviewer's notes	
Interviewer's comments	

Appendix G: Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
DS	16	76	4.75	6.0666667		
Other	9	64	7.1111111	8.8611111		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	32.1111111	1	32.1111111	4.56211393	0.04355591	4.27934431
Within Groups	161.888889	23	7.03864734			
Total	194	24				

ANOVA: Correlation between type of ID and overall test performance

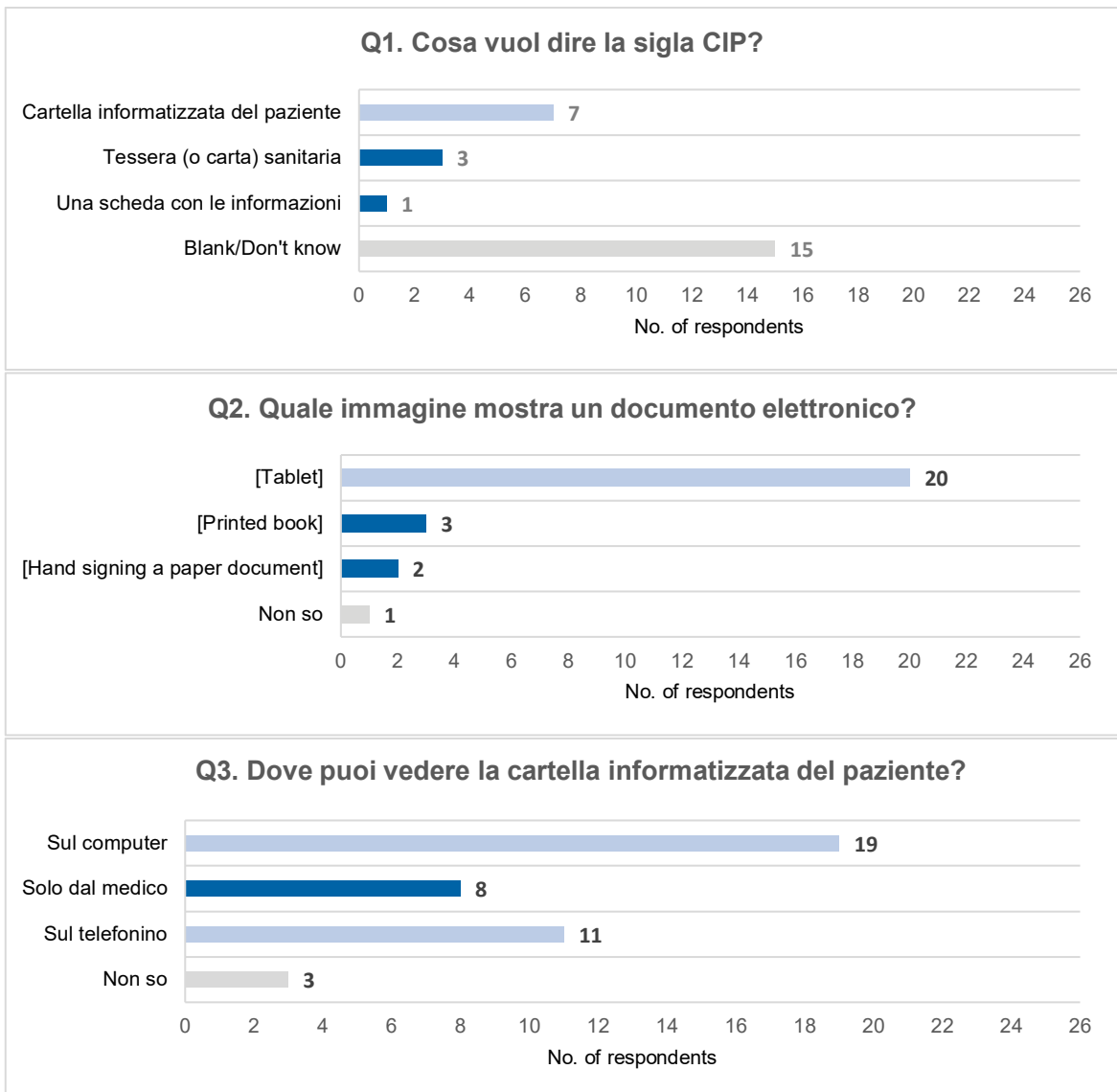
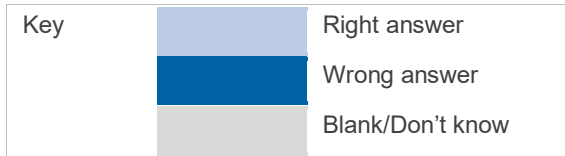
Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
Mild	5	43	8.6	2.8		
Moderate	18	86	4.7777778	7.12418301		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	57.1671498	1	57.1671498	9.07338873	0.00663406	4.32479374
Within Groups	132.311111	21	6.3005291			
Total	189.478261	22				

ANOVA: Correlation between level of ID and overall test performance

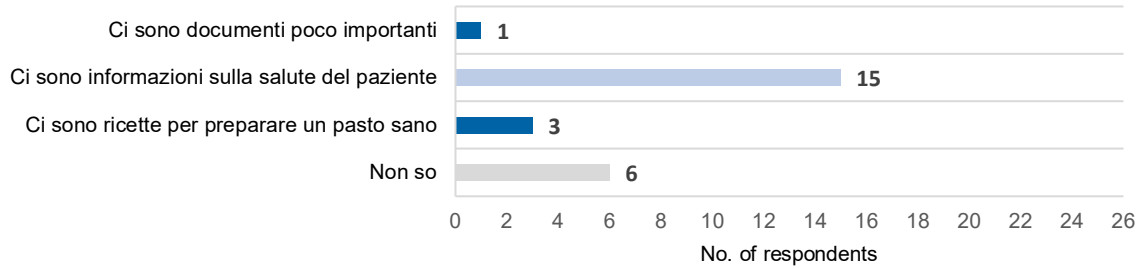
Anova: Single Factor						
SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
1_Inferential	11	16	1.45454545	0.47272727		
2_Inferential	3	5	1.66666667	1.33333333		
3_Inferential	8	11	1.375	0.83928571		
4_Inferential	2	7	3.5	0.5		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	7.85606061	3	2.61868687	3.80375974	0.02624805	3.09839121
Within Groups	13.7689394	20	0.68844697			
Total	21.625	23				

ANOVA: Correlation between respondents' reading frequency and performance on inferential questions

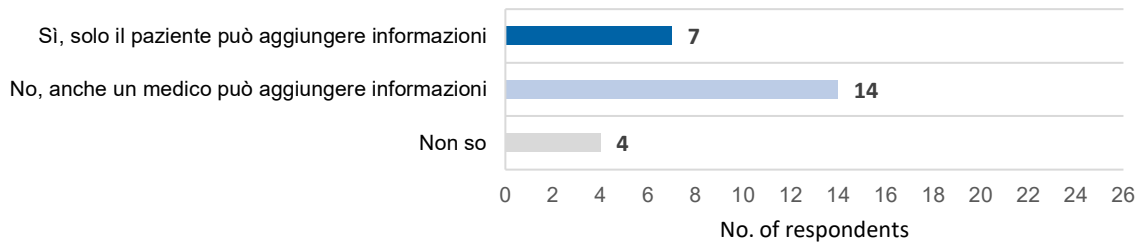
Appendix H: RC test results – Respondents' performance by question



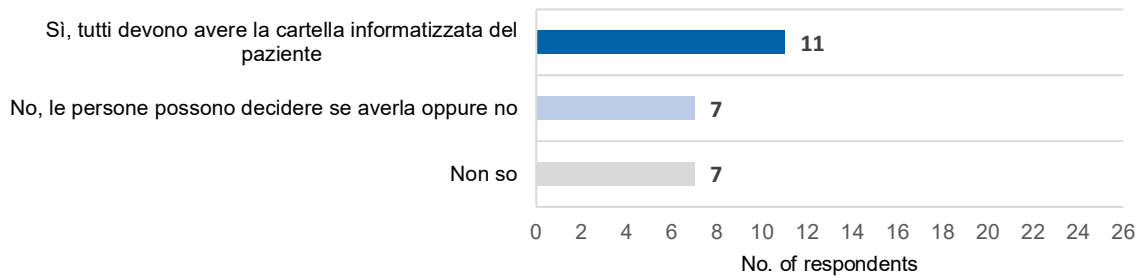
Q4. Cosa c'è nella cartella informatizzata del paziente?



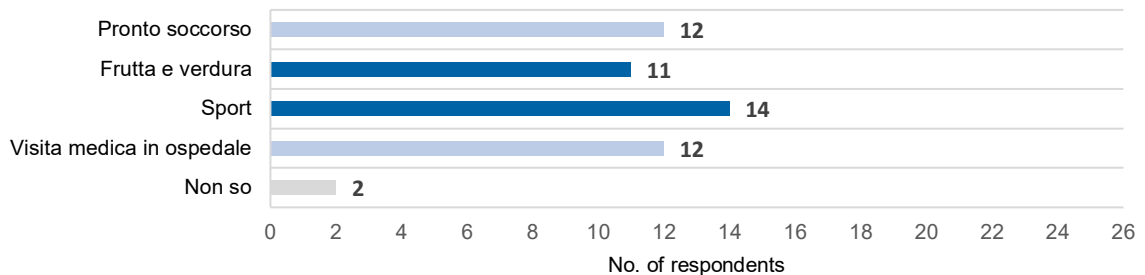
Q5. Solo il paziente può aggiungere informazioni nella cartella informatizzata. È vero?



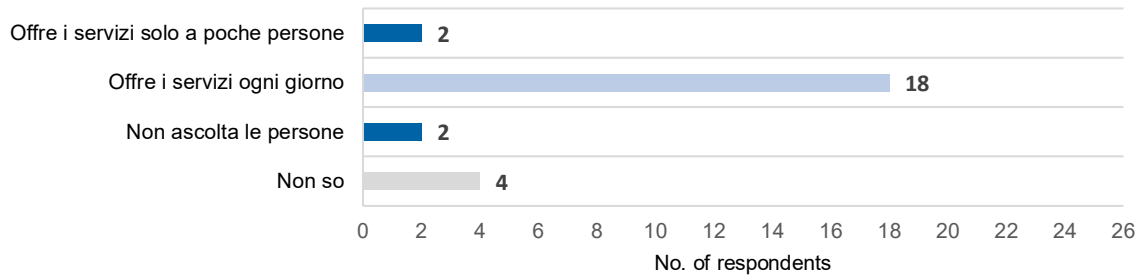
Q6. Tutti devono avere la cartella informatizzata del paziente. È vero?



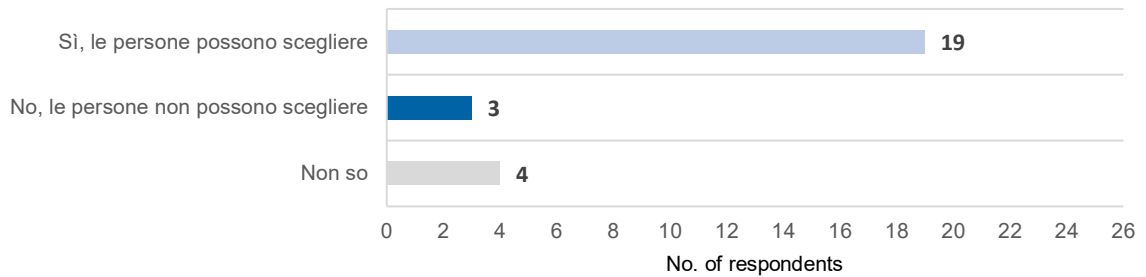
Q7. Quali immagini mostrano un servizio per la salute?



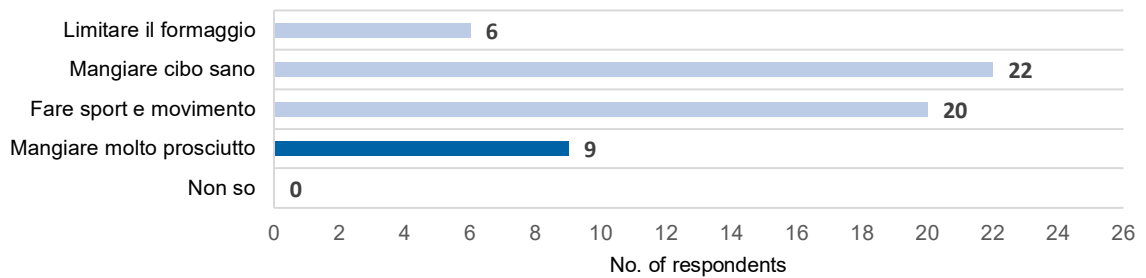
Q8. L'azienda offre i servizi per la salute. Come offre questi servizi?



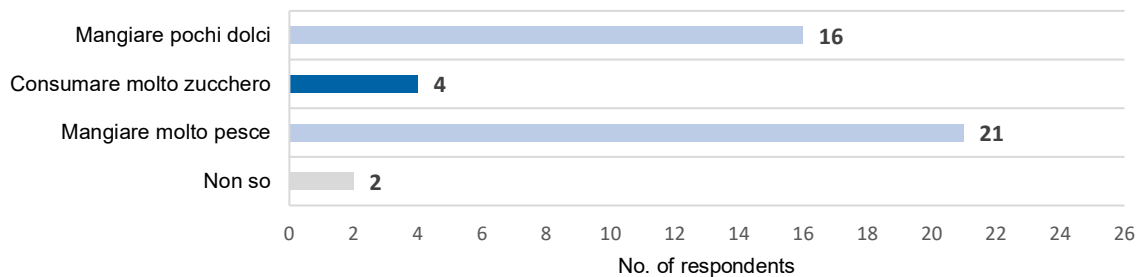
Q9. Le persone possono scegliere in che ospedale andare. È vero?



Q10. Cosa possiamo fare per mantenerci in buona salute?



Q11. Cosa possiamo fare per prevenire le malattie?



Q12. Per stare bene dobbiamo mangiare poco pane e poca pasta. È vero?

