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Easy Language in Switzerland

1 Introduction

Since the Middle Ages, Switzerland has developed from a network of alliances of towns and regions into a federal state of 26 cantons. The foundation stone of modern Switzerland is the 1848 constitution, which emphasizes the country's immutable diversity and reflects it in a political system in which federal authorities (based in the capital Bern), cantons and municipalities work together. Among other things, this arrangement determines the financial flow in the public sector. The federal system also results in differences and peculiarities among municipalities, regions and cantons in many fields such as education, social services, and administration. Another special feature of the Swiss political system is its direct democracy, which enables people to express their opinions on federal government decisions and to propose constitutional amendments. The principle of concordance also shapes Swiss politics, as it involves a great number of actors (parties, associations, minorities, social groups) in the political process and leads to slow, consensus-oriented processes to find compromises among actors and different linguistic, social and political-cultural groups. Although the basic infrastructure and public services should in principle be available to all population groups and regions, there are gaps

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1 Until now, the topic of Easy Language in Switzerland has been dealt with in a fragmentary fashion in both theory and practice, in different language regions, and in attitudes and guidelines. In order to obtain the most complete picture possible and to do justice to the Swiss multilingual and federal systems, we decided to form a collective of authors which represented all language regions, practitioners and researchers. The research and writing process was thus also a process of networking and understanding.

in supply in urban centres, rural areas and mountain valleys, some of which are very remote.

Switzerland (surface of 41 285 km²) is bordered by Italy to the south, Germany to the north, Austria and Liechtenstein to the east, and France to the west. Although this puts the country at the heart of Europe, it is a member of neither the EU nor the European Monetary Union.

In 2019, the total population of Switzerland was estimated to be 8.5 million. Over two million are foreign nationals. Besides the four national languages, the most widely spoken languages are English and Portuguese. Spanish, Serbian, Croatian, and Albanian are also common (Swiss Confederation 2020). Like many European countries, Switzerland has an ageing population: life expectancy is currently 85.4 years for women and 81.7 years for men and rising. Approximately 1.7 million people with disabilities² (physical, mental or sensory impairments, or other) live in Switzerland.

Switzerland is a multilingual country. The language(s) spoken in the cantons varies/vary according to geographical position and proximity to adjacent linguistic regions (see Figure 1). In German-speaking Switzerland, people speak one of the many Alemannic dialects collectively called Swiss German. Standard German (*Standarddeutsch*, *Schriftdeutsch*) is mainly used for written and official communication. Standard German and the Swiss German dialects differ on all linguistic levels, and generally, young children only learn Standard German when they start school. French is spoken in the western part of Switzerland (Romandie), and Italian in Ticino and the southern valleys of Graubünden. The written forms of these languages are mostly the same as the French and Italian used in the neighbouring countries, but the spoken forms have some specific variations (mainly lexical and phonological). Finally, Romansh, a Rhaeto-Romanic language is spoken widely in the canton of Graubünden. Only German, French and Italian are official languages of the Swiss Confederation, and all official federal documents (legislation, reports, websites, brochures and building signage) must be trilingual. Federal authorities only use Romansh when communicating with Romansh speakers.

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- 2 The FSO defines 'persons with disabilities as under the Disability Discrimination Act' as people with a long-standing health problem whose participation in common activities is limited (severely or not). Thus the FSO uses the WHO definition of disability rather than a medical one.

‘English, though not an official language, is often used to bridge the divides, and a significant proportion of official documentation is available in English’ (Swissinfo 2019). More than a third of the population uses only one language, while another third uses two languages at least once a week, and a quarter regularly uses three or more languages (FSO 2014).

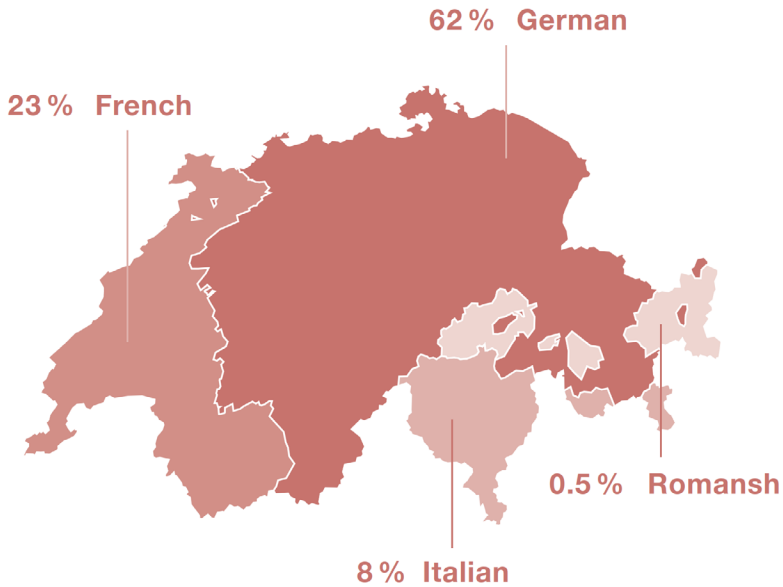


Figure 1: Distribution of national languages in Switzerland (Federal Chancellery 2021: 9)

2 Historical perspectives

Easy Language has only recently found some degree of recognition in public, professional and academic discourse in Switzerland. The most significant milestones in its development are listed in Table 1.

| | |
|------|--|
| 2004 | Federal Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (Disability Discrimination Act, cf. DDA 2002) came into force |
| 2006 | A cohort of Swiss advocacy associations and professionals formed the 'Easy Language Network' (<i>Netzwerk Leichte Sprache</i>) ³ together with members from Germany, Austria, Italy (South Tyrol), Luxembourg and Holland |
| 2014 | Switzerland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| | First translation agency and training initiative in German-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' (<i>Büro Leichte Sprache, WohnWerk Basel</i>) ⁴ |
| 2015 | Federal Council's Action Plan on e-Accessibility (IDA BF 2015) |
| | First research project on Easy Language (Antener et al. 2015) |
| 2016 | First conference on Easy Language (<i>Tagung Leichte Sprache</i>) ⁵ |
| | First training initiative in French-speaking Switzerland (<i>textoh!</i>) ⁶ |
| 2017 | First translation agency in French-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' (<i>Bureau langage simplifié Pro Infirmis Fribourg</i>) ⁷ |
| | First book in Easy German (Krapf 2017) |
| | First version of an Easy Language fact sheet (FBED 2019, April) issued by the Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities (<i>Eidgenössisches Büro für die Gleichstellung von Menschen mit Behinderungen, FBED</i>) |
| | First wide-scope research project on barrier-free communication ⁸ (Jekat and Massey 2018, Bouillon et al. 2018, Jekat et al. 2021) |

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3 Das Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, <https://www.leichte-sprache.org/>. In 2013, the network became the *Verein Netzwerk Leichte Sprache e.V.*

4 WohnWerk, <https://www.leichte-sprache-basel.ch>

5 Tagung Leichte Sprache, <https://www.einfachesprache.ch/blog/tagung-leichte-sprache-impressionen/>

6 Textoh! Cours, <https://www.textoh.ch/cours/>

7 Bureau langage simplifié, <https://www.langage-simplifie.ch/fr.html>

8 Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication, <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/research/barrier-free-communication/>

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 2019 | First translation agency in Italian-speaking Switzerland, 'Bureau for Easy Language' (<i>Servizio Lingua facile Pro Infirmis Ticino e Moesano</i>) ⁹ |
| 2020 | Third version of the eCH-0059 e-Accessibility Standard (e-CH 2020) includes requirements for digital content in Easy Language and sign language |

Table 1: Milestones in the development of Easy Language in Switzerland.

As Table 1 shows, Switzerland ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2014. In Switzerland, the treaty-making procedure requires widespread consultation among cantons, political parties, national and municipal umbrella associations, and pressure groups before international treaty legislation can be introduced (cf. Federal Council 2012). This procedure aims to assess how the ratification of a treaty will affect Swiss law. It may account for Switzerland's delay in ratifying the CRPD and fulfilling its treaty obligations.

In its 2016 Initial State Report (UN Committee 2018) on the measures taken to implement the CRPD, Switzerland expressed overall satisfaction with the implementation of Article 21:

With regard to access to information for persons with mental disabilities, language that is easy to read and understand is developing increasingly in Switzerland. Various projects to promote it have received support (UN Committee 2018: 28).

In fact, despite considerable progress in recent years, the country still has no comprehensive, coherent strategy for meeting CRPD obligations. In reply to Switzerland's Initial Report, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2019: 5) demanded evidence of laws, policies and programmes at the federal, cantonal and communal levels that ensure that information provided to the public is accessible to people with disabilities and that the use of Easy Language is facilitated in official interactions. Similarly, Inclusion Handicap, the umbrella body of Swiss organizations for people with disabilities, chal-

9 Servizio di Lingua facile, <https://www.servizio-lingua-facile.ch/it.html>

lenged the federal government to provide information about which cantons have fulfilled their duty to ensure accessible communication for people with disabilities in their laws (cf. alternative or Shadow Report, Inclusion Handicap 2019: 20).

In a recent report on Switzerland's disability policy, the Federal Council admitted that the commitment to promoting barrier-free access to information and communication services must be strengthened to take into account the challenges of digitalization, and to extend the provision of information in accessible formats, including Easy Language and sign language (Federal Council 2018: 24).

Switzerland's delay in implementing the treaty obligations may help explain why the concept of Easy Language still receives so little recognition among the general public. Nonetheless, as Table 1 shows, the number of translation agencies and training programmes using Easy Language has steadily increased since 2014. The development of Easy Language in the different linguistic regions in Switzerland seems, in fact, to mirror the pace at which initiatives have been progressing in Germany and Austria (see chapters on Austria and Germany) and in France and Italy (see chapter on Italy).

In recent years, Easy Language has also become a focus of academic research and a growing number of interdisciplinary projects (see Section 8). Furthermore, since Switzerland ratified the CRPD, federal initiatives for e-accessibility have gained considerable momentum. The Action Plan on e-Accessibility 2015–2017 (IDA BF 2015) paved the way for improved accessibility to the Confederation's websites, digital documents and applications (see Section 6). In the context of the 2020–2023 eGovernment Strategy Switzerland (Federal Council 2019, November), the third version of the eCH-0059 e-Accessibility Standard (e-CH 2020) introduced Easy Language and sign language as requirements for barrier-free access to the websites and digital applications of public sector bodies. This new standard is based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 (WCAG 2.1) and inspired by the EU Web Accessibility Directive.

3 Current situation

The current Easy Language situation in Switzerland is characterized by the multilingualism of the country on the one hand and its increasing emergence on the other – most recently after the ratification of the CRPD.

3.1 Definitions

Because Switzerland is multilingual and its administrative and political structures result in different methods, rules and standards in policymaking, there is no common terminology to refer to Easy Language. Table 2 presents an overview of related terms.

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| German-speaking regions | <i>Einfache Sprache</i> (= Plain Language) <i>Leichte Sprache</i> (= Easy Language, Easy German) <i>Leicht verständliche Sprache</i> (= Easily understandable language)* |
| French-speaking regions | <i>Langage facile à lire et à comprendre</i> (FALC) (= Easy French) <i>Langage simplifié</i> * <i>Langue facile à lire</i> * |
| Italian-speaking regions | <i>Linguaggio facile da leggere</i> (= Easy Italian) <i>Lingua facile</i> * <i>Linguaggio semplificato</i> * |
| Rumantch-speaking regions | No information available |

*No distinction between Easy and Plain Language

Table 2: Overview of terminology used in Switzerland

In German-speaking Switzerland, Standard German is used in official correspondence, with some Swiss variants in vocabulary and syntax. The easily understandable form of the written language is therefore largely the same as that used in Germany and Austria. The terms *Leichte Sprache* (Easy Language) and *Leicht verständliche Sprache* (Easily understandable language) are the most common when it comes to simplified texts. Both refer to the fact that a text can

be made more comprehensible to inexperienced readers by simplifying both the form and the layout and, depending on the approach, sometimes also the content. The term *Leichte Sprache* is associated with the Network Easy Language, through which representatives from several European countries promote the idea that complex language forms a barrier for people with intellectual disabilities. Inclusion Europe uses the same term and suggests a set of criteria to make texts easy to read. If a text meets these criteria, then it can use the association's 'easy-to-read' logo. The widely used *Regelwerk Duden* (Bredel and Maaß 2016b) also uses the term *Leichte Sprache* and proposes a set of guidelines for simplifying texts. In contrast to Inclusion Europe, the *Regelwerk Duden* (Bredel and Maaß 2016b) explicitly addresses a heterogeneous target group of potential beneficiaries of Easy Language.

Leicht verständliche Sprache is also used to designate an adapted language form that aims to enhance the understanding and participation of people with low literacy skills (e.g., the *capito* method, see chapter on Austria). Various principles are applied to render a text accessible to a specific user group and assign it one of three different language levels (A1, A2, B1) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This terminology makes no formal distinction between Easy Language and Plain Language. Thus it appears that although different labels are used, simplified language forms are best understood as being on a continuum (see chapter on Finland).

Easy French and Easy Italian are currently referred to as *Langage facile à lire et à comprendre* (FALC) and *Linguaggio facile da leggere* (cf. Inclusion Europe 2009). Other common terms (see Table 2) are *Langage simplifié*, and *Lingua facile* (cf. Pro Infirmis 2020¹⁰) and *Langue facile à lire* and *Linguaggio semplificato* (cf. FBED 2019) respectively. While Inclusion Europe has a strict set of guidelines for Easy Language and primarily targets people with intellectual disabilities, the labels used by Pro Infirmis suggest no formal distinction between Easy and Plain Language (see Table 2). *Pro Infirmis* agencies in Fribourg, Ticino and Zurich (Bureau for Easy Language) award translations their own seals of approval (see Figure 2). Depending on clients' communication needs, texts are translated into different levels of comprehension, namely, A1 (very

10 Pro Infirmis, How we work, <https://www.servizio-lingua-facile.ch/it/come-lavoriamo.html>

easy to understand), A2 (easy to understand) and B1 (intermediate difficulty level), which broadly correspond to the CEFR levels.

At the time of writing, the authors were not aware of any initiatives to develop an Easy Language variant for the standardized written Rumantsch Grischun used in the Romansh-speaking region of Switzerland.



Figure 2: *Pro Infirmis*' seals of approval issued by the Bureau for Easy Language (Fribourg, Ticino, Zurich)

It could be argued that shared terminology might significantly reinforce the concept of Easy Language in Switzerland, as is the case in countries such as France and Italy (see chapter on Italy).

3.2 Societal and legal context

At first sight, the Swiss legal system seems not to provide legislation designed to ensure access to information and communication for people with speech impairments and to enable them to participate fully and equally in society. Further investigation, however, and the interpretation of legislation and its abstract terms according to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reveal that Switzerland is obliged to adopt all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to guarantee that people with disabilities have equal access to the information and communication provided to the general public as a precondition for living independently and fully and equally participating in the democracy that Switzerland claims to be. In implementation, the principle of proportionality, as laid down in the Swiss

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the CRPD, may nonetheless allow political and economic interests to restrict this right.

At the federal level, several acts prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities. Article 8 paragraph 2 of the **Federal Constitution** (Bundesverfassung, BV) protects people with disabilities against discrimination both in law and in practice, including against structural discrimination. This protection covers not only explicit discrimination on the grounds of disability, but also neutral acts or regulations that result in people with disabilities being regularly disadvantaged (Schefer and Hess-Klein 2014: 22, Rieder 2003: 232–35). Art. 8 para. 4 BV mandates legislation to protect people with physical, mental or psychological disabilities against actual and structural discrimination, as a supplement to the general prohibition in Art. 8 para. 2 BV. The legislative mandate also addresses the cantons, which must take measures in all areas to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities (Waldmann 2003: 538).

The DDA formulates an unconditional obligation for the state service provider to adapt their services if they cannot be accessed or only accessed with difficulty by people with disabilities (Art. 2 para. 4; Art. 3 lit. e). It is the responsibility of the Confederation, the cantons and the municipalities to take steps to prevent, reduce or eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in service provision (Art. 5). Only addressing the Confederation, however, Art. 14 para. 1 in the DDA stipulates measures to improve access to information on the internet, and Art. 11 of the **Disability Rights Ordinance** (*Behindertengleichstellungsverordnung*, BehiV) requires that access to and adapted communication with state authorities during direct contact are made possible for people with speech and hearing impairments. In accordance with Art. 10 para. 2 of the BehiV and the **Web Content Accessibility Guidelines** (WCAG), federal guidelines for the design of barrier-free internet (P028) have been issued. All federal websites must achieve an AA conformity level. Additional recommendations in an appendix to the P028 guidelines advocate that level AAA conformity is to be reached ‘as far as possible’. The use of sign language videos is expressly recommended for websites. The recommendations do not refer to Easy Language, although the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) also bases its comments in WCAG 2.0 Guideline 3.1.5. (on comprehensibility) on the European Easy-to-Read Guidelines.

Finally, private service providers are not obliged to take active steps to provide services specially adapted to people with disabilities. In cases of discrimination, Art. 11 para. 2 DDA only grants the right to compensation (Schefer and Hess-Klein 2014: 296–303).

The protective provisions are largely formulated in abstract terms and do not go so far as to refer explicitly to Easy Language as a source of help and support for those with speech and hearing impairments. In comparison, CRPD specifications are detailed and far-reaching. In connection with Articles 9 and 21 of the Convention, General Comment No 2 makes explicit reference to the use of ‘easy-to-read’ formats to ensure accessibility to information and communication for people with disabilities.

Having ratified the CRPD, Switzerland is in principle obliged to ensure that all government policy and services conform with its obligations, including people with disabilities having access to information and communication. As a State Party, Switzerland is called upon to make information intended for the general public available ‘in a timely manner and without additional cost’, in accessible formats suitable for various types of disabilities. It must promote appropriate forms of assistance and support to ensure access to information and communication (Art. 21 CRPD).

However, the way in which a provision of international law or its partial content is applied is ultimately decided by the national constitutional law. In the case of economic, social and cultural rights, Switzerland rejects their enforceability and considers those rights merely an interpretative aid in the application of relevant constitutional law (Federal Council 2013; FCD 130 I 113). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has repeatedly criticized Switzerland because in general, individuals in Switzerland cannot invoke economic, social and cultural rights before the authorities or courts (CESCR Concluding observations Switzerland 1998 or 2010, Künzli et al. 2014).

In addition, measures to prevent, eliminate or reduce the disadvantages of people with disabilities are generally subject to the principle of proportionality, which is the basis of both the DDA and the CRPD. The obligation to adapt services to the needs of those with disabilities either does not exist, or no claim can be made for the elimination or omission of service accessibility disadvantages

if the economic effort and the expected benefit for the disabled person are not in balance (Art. 11 para. 1 DDA). The legislator has not yet defined the criteria for assessing proportionality. On the one hand, quantitative, qualitative and temporal factors can play a role in measuring the benefit of adjustments. The yardstick to be considered is the respective collective of people with disabilities and not individual cases (Tschannen and Elser 2012: 28). On the other hand, if the elimination or omission of a disadvantage in the use of a service is economically unreasonable, then the state authority is obliged to offer an alternative solution, tailored to the specific circumstances. Disadvantages that cannot be eliminated at reasonable cost must be compensated, to the greatest extent possible (Art. 12 para. 3 DDA).

3.3 Stakeholders

At the federal level, the **Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities** (FBED) plays a leading role in advocating Easy Language implementation. The FBED issued the first online factsheet on Easy Language, regularly provides public interest texts in Easy Language, and provides funding for accessibility projects (among others).

One of the pioneer providers of Easy Language courses in further education in Switzerland is *WohnWerk Basel*, a partially private foundation that works for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Further important stakeholders can be found among **non-governmental organizations** (NGOs). The most active of these are *Insieme*, a pool of over fifty parents' associations representing the interests of people with intellectual disabilities, and *Pro Infirmis*, Switzerland's largest professional organization for people with disabilities. *Pro Infirmis* runs several translation agencies that offer Easy Language services throughout Switzerland (see Table 1). *INSOS Switzerland*, a Swiss umbrella organization of service providers for people with disabilities, is also making considerable efforts to motivate social institutions to consistently use Easy Language. Furthermore, capito Zürich, the only Swiss partner in the *capito* network, has been offering translations and training in easy-to-understand language since 2018. An ever-growing number of **independent translators** now provide Easy

Language services across Switzerland, and several **communication agencies** promote and offer simplified text editing¹¹.

Several **higher education institutions** play a stakeholder role by implementing Easy Language in their study programmes (see more details in Section 7), by researching Easy Language or by providing Easy Language services and training. Notable examples are the School for Special Needs Education in Zurich (HfH), the Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg, the School of Applied Linguistics at the Zurich University for Applied Sciences (ZHAW), the School for Social Work at the University for Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) and the Institute for Computational Linguistics at the University of Zurich.

In addition, most recently, **Swiss national media** have echoed the progressive development of Easy Language in the linguistic regions (cf. Bloch 2019, Visetti 2019, Gasser 2019, Jeitziner and Cornehl 2020, among others), thereby raising awareness of and interest in the potential benefits of Easy Language for the target populations.

Nonetheless, Easy Language (more than Plain Language) is frequently associated with stigmatized groups or conditions in Switzerland. Jekat et al. (2020) argue that the central function of Easy Language as a gateway to improving reading skills in a first or a second language for specific target groups is still scarcely acknowledged in Swiss public discourse. Moreover, Switzerland did not take part in Inclusion Europe's 'Pathways' projects¹², which played a crucial role in raising awareness of the potential of Easy Language in most European countries.

11 E.g., Textoh! <https://www.textoh.ch/>, Simpletext, <https://www.simpletext.ch/>; Supertext, <https://www.supertext.ch/>

12 Cf. Inclusion Europe Pathways, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/pathways-2/> and Easy to Read, <https://easy-to-read.eu/projects/>

4 Target groups

Table 3¹³ shows the estimated figures per primary target group for Easy Language services in Switzerland. It should be stressed, however, that not all members of the target population necessarily need Easy Language:

| | Group size (estimate) | Source |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Intellectual disability | 50 000 | FBED (n.d.) |
| Deafness | 10 000 | SGB-FSS (n.d.) |
| Aphasia | 5000 new patients every year | Koenig-Bruhin et al. (2013) |
| Dementia (including Alzheimer's disease) | 110 000 | FOPH and CMPH (2018) |
| Functional illiteracy | 800 000 – 1 000 000 aged 16 or over | OECD and Statistics Canada (2005); Guggisberg et al. (2007) |
| Immigrant background and no national language in one's linguistic repertoire | > 200 000 aged 15 or over | FSO (2018a) |

Table 3: Estimates of primary target populations in Switzerland

The collective primary target population for Easy Language services in Switzerland includes an estimated 50 000 people with an intellectual disability (FBED n.d.), as well as people with specific learning difficulties¹⁴ such as dyslexia¹⁵. Easy Language is essential for self-advocates with intellectual disabilities to be active citizens (cf. Anffas Nazionale 2016); it can also facilitate the develop-

13 The table structure is freely adapted from Bredel and Maaß (2016a: 31).

14 To avoid terminological ambiguity, and in line with current professional and academic discourse, 'intellectual disability' and 'specific learning difficulty' are understood as two clearly demarcated concepts here.

15 There are no current official statistics for the incidence of dyslexia in Switzerland, but it is estimated that, in Europe, 3% to 4% of the population has a reading, spelling, or combined reading-spelling disorder (cf. European Dyslexia Association, <https://www.eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia/>).

ment of basic reading skills for people with dyslexia (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 33). Recent studies show that considerable numbers of people in Switzerland have low levels of literacy and numeracy. According to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL) of 2003–2007 (OECD and Statistics Canada 2005), around 16%¹⁶ of the Swiss population aged between 16 and 65 (approximately 800 000, or one in six adults) lacks functional literacy skills. Notably, the figures in Italian-speaking Switzerland are significantly lower than the Swiss average in both prose and document literacy (FSO 2005). This means that low-skilled adults in Switzerland struggle to understand written communication in standard German, French or Italian. New data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) will be available in the next three to four years. Considering the growing diversity of the Swiss population, ongoing digitalization, and the recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results (Konsortium PISA.ch 2019) which indicated below-average reading scores among Swiss 15-year-olds, we can expect the new data to reveal a challenging scenario nationwide. Easy Language has the potential to address this issue.

A good command of at least one national language might be seen as an essential requirement for successful integration into Swiss society. Between 2014 and 2016, among the population aged 15 and over with a first-generation immigration background¹⁷, almost one in ten people (over 200 000) had no national language in their linguistic repertoire (this repertoire involves the main language, the language usually spoken at home/with relatives and the language usually spoken at work/in school) (FSO 2018a). Furthermore, according to the 2017 Swiss Labour Force Survey, among economically inactive and unemployed people (as defined by the International Labour Organization), 42% declared that they needed to improve their skills in an official language in order to find suitable work (FSO 2018b). First-generation immigrants expressed the greatest need for improvement (57%) (FSO 2018b). As of 1st Janu-

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16 Percentage of adults aged 16–65 assessed as being at Level 1 (on a prose literacy scale from 1 to 5, in which 5 is the highest measured level of literacy) (FSO 2005). This share of the Swiss population may include people from other target groups, e.g. people with a poor command of a national language.

17 The first-generation migrant population includes all foreign nationals born abroad, as well foreign-born naturalized Swiss citizens (FSO and SAKE 2019)

ary 2019, the revised Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (FNIA 2020, April) stipulates a certain level of integration in Switzerland (including proof of official language skills) as a prerequisite for obtaining and retaining a Swiss residency permit. First-generation immigrants could greatly benefit from Easy Language to develop or improve their independent reading skills, second language acquisition and, ultimately, labour market integration (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 39–40).

Another significant demographic trend in Switzerland is the ageing population. In 2019, the number of people aged 65 or older increased by nearly 2% and now make up just under one fifth of the total. This entails urgent and unmet health care needs related to chronic diseases, including cognitive decline and dementia, aphasia, eye disease and hearing loss, and multi-morbidity. Approximately 110 000 people are estimated to be living with dementia in Switzerland, a figure that increases by an estimated 25 000 annually. Over the age of 65, prevalence rates of dementia rise sharply (FOPH and CMPH 2018: 7). Age-related communication problems affect important functions such as access to health care and the maintenance of social roles. Easy Language policies could reduce barriers to comprehension, and not least, facilitate communication between patients and health professionals.

Furthermore, according to the Swiss Federation of the Deaf (SGB-FSS n.d.), almost 10 000 people in Switzerland are prelingually deaf or profoundly hard of hearing, and approximately one million have some hearing loss (of the latter, half are working-age adults). The prelingually deaf regularly encounter difficulties in acquiring spoken and written language, which can seriously affect their social participation. A recent study (Hille et al. 2020) revealed that the unemployment rate among deaf and hearing-impaired people is about three times higher than the average. Hille et al. (2020: 21) cite evidence that good communication skills (spoken or sign language), literacy, and a willingness to engage in lifelong learning are prerequisites for professional success. Easy Language can play a crucial role in helping prelingually deaf people acquire these skills (Bredel and Maaß 2016a: 35–36).

5 Guidelines

In September 2020, an online survey¹⁸ among Easy Language service providers in Switzerland collected information on their professional activities. This survey has provided valuable information that offers insights into current issues in Easy Language translation practices in Switzerland. Swiss practitioners reported adhering to specific guidelines when writing and translating into Easy Language; for instance, the majority of Swiss German respondents followed Bredel and Maaß (2016b). Swiss French respondents stated that they sometimes followed several guidelines at the same time (e.g., Ruel and Allaire 2018, Inclusion Europe 2009), including those for *Leichte Sprache*. This suggests that translators may need additional orientation materials to tackle translation problems and to develop effective translation strategies. For an illustration of the Easy Language guidelines used in Switzerland, see Appendix 1.

According to our survey data, translations from Standard into Easy Language are the most common. However, whereas Swiss German respondents provide few interlingual translations (e.g., from *Lingua facile* to *Leichte Sprache*), the situation is quite different in the French and Italian-speaking regions. Particularly in the latter, interlingual translation is the most common service, suggesting that texts are first drafted in Easy German and later translated into Easy Italian or Easy French. As translating into Easy Language normally involves both an intralingual (involving diastatic variation), and an intracultural process (Bredel and Maaß 2016b: 185), this raises the question as to whether interlingual translations of Easy Language texts are functionally appropriate for target readers' own linguistic and cultural settings (discussed in Section 6).

As our survey suggests, the number of Easy Language service providers is growing in all language regions, but the type of service and the client groups differ from one region to the other. Thus, a more professional exchange among

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18 Seventeen respondents participated, i.e., three each from the Italian- and French-speaking regions, and eleven from the German-speaking regions. The survey consisted of 20 questions on the following areas: experience, Easy Language services provided, workload, clients, Easy Language training, Easy Language guidelines, quality control and participation of target groups, and remuneration. The survey was available in German, French and Italian. It was launched on 28th August 2020 and was accessible for 10 days via a commercial online survey tool.

providers and, ideally, a stronger interplay between practice and research, are urgently needed.

6 Practical outcomes

A great deal has happened since the introduction of Easy Language in Switzerland and the start of the first Easy Language services agency. Not only are social institutions and disability associations increasingly using Easy Language more consciously, but information in Easy Language is being increasingly published by public authorities as well as by social and cultural institutions. This applies to all linguistic regions. Yet commitment to offering information in Easy Language varies greatly, especially in public administration, and therefore, the supply of information in Easy Language is still selective and far from homogeneous. As a further result, information in Easy Language is not easily found and target groups are often not aware that it exists (see Section 8 for more details).

6.1 Media

Easy Language is not yet provided in public broadcasting. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) must provide subtitling, sign language and audio description¹⁹. According to the Radio and Television Ordinance (RTVO 2007 Art. 7), the SRG SSR and the main community associations concerned have to determine the services to be provided in an agreement (in particular, subtitled content). The agreement concluded in 2017 and covering the period 2018–2022 stipulates that the proportion of subtitled content gradually be increased to 80%, and that the time devoted to broadcasts with audio description be increased from the current 450 to 900 hours by 2022 (cf. Federal Council 2018, UN Committee 2018)²⁰. It would be highly desirable to integrate Easy Language principles into the existing provisions and use them to produce

19 The SRG SSR has a 35% to 40% market share in each language region. The other 60% belong to foreign television stations, which are not obliged to comply with RTVA regulations (Bundesrat 2018, UN Committee 2018).

20 SWISS TXT (cf. <https://www.swisstxt.ch/en/>; retrieved 15/09/2020) acts as a subsidiary and multimedia competence centre of the SRG SSR and fully implements the RTVO mandate for

easy-to-understand audiovisual content (e.g., news) and access services (e.g., subtitles and audio descriptions) for people with the widest range of cognitive capabilities (cf. SDI München 2020).

An important contribution since 2020 is the online magazine www.infoeasy-news.ch, which translates current affairs and topics published by other media sources. On the website, readers can use a button to rate the accessibility of texts and suggest other topics of interest to them.

Concerning **literature**, many public libraries in Switzerland have books in Easy Language or in simplified language, but these are not designated as such (e.g., see Ethique 2019). In addition, INSOS has co-edited **teaching material** in simplified language for general education classes in vocational training schools²¹.

6.2 Informative texts

One year after Switzerland ratified the CRPD, the FBED published the CRPD text and the Disability Discrimination Act in Easy French, Easy Italian and Easy German on its website. In October 2019, the federal parliament website was also translated into Easy Language French, Italian and German. So far, there is little official information in Easy Language on federal referenda, although two websites (www.ch.ch and easyvote.ch) talk about topics related to politics, elections, and popular votes in simplified language (which is not, however, Easy Language). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) began to publish information and instructions regarding the pandemic in Easy Language.

Fewer than half of the 26 cantons provide any information in Easy Language. St. Gallen was the first canton to translate an official document into Easy Language, namely the cantonal report on the 'Act on Social Security and Integration of People with Disabilities' (*Gesetz über die soziale Sicherung und Integration von Menschen mit Behinderung*). Today, St. Gallen also presents a portrait of the canton in Easy Language and selected documents (including a

audio description. Since 2016, the Ticino-based TV channel RSI has broadcast audio descriptions produced by SWISS TXT.

21 INSOS teaching resources, <https://insos.ch/ausbildung-pra/prae-lehrmittel-und-ausweise/>

report on services available for adults with disabilities in the canton, cantonal planning for the period 2018–2020, and a report on the effectiveness of the canton's disability policy). Another lighthouse project was launched in the Solothurn canton, where since 2016, the child and adult protection authority (*Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutzbehörde*, KESB) has developed letter templates and an information brochure on the protection of adults²² (in the 'Just easy to understand' *Einfach leicht verständlich*²³ project, HSA FHNW). Later, the brochure was extended to child protection and adapted for the cantons of Berne and Zurich²⁴. In the French-speaking part of Switzerland in 2019, the 'Office of Migrant Integration and Racism Prevention' of the Fribourg canton (*Bureau de l'intégration des migrant-e-s et de la prévention du racisme*), in collaboration with the 'Bureau for Easy Language' (*Pro Infirmis* Fribourg), published the 'The Canton of Fribourg Welcomes You!' brochure in Easy Language.

Easy language is also gaining importance in the **public health sector**. In 2019, the 'Alliance for Health Competence' (*Allianz Gesundheitskompetenz*), in close co-operation with the FBED, published a practical guide aiming to improve the communication skills of health care professionals. This is particularly important when the language of the workplace is not an employee's first language and they may have learned it 'on the job'. One major Easy Language project is the brochure on the electronic patient file system issued by *eHealth Suisse*²⁵. Further informative texts have been written in Easy Language on, for example, balanced diets, breast cancer, or sex education for children.

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22 Brochure on adult protection, https://www.jgk.be.ch/jgk/de/index/direktion/organisation/kesb/publikationen/kindes--und-erwachsenenschutz-in-leicht-verstaendlicher-sprache-assetref/dam/documents/JGK/KESB/de/KESB_ES_in%20leichter%20Sprache.pdf

23 Just easy to understand, <https://irf.fhnw.ch/handle/11654/28147>

24 Brochure on child protection, https://www.kokes.ch/application/files/5115/5946/4492/Informationen_zum_Kindesschutz_in_leicht_verstaendlicher_Sprache_ZH.pdf

25 eHealth Suisse, https://www.dossierpatient.ch/sites/default/files/2020-12/Bev_Leichte_Sprache_DE.pdf

Disability organizations in Switzerland (e.g., *Pro Infirmis*²⁶, *INSOS*²⁷, *Insieme*) continue to increase information in Easy language, especially when addressing target groups directly on websites as voters²⁸ or as internet users.

6.3 Other projects

Investment in Easy Language in the cultural sector is promoted by the ‘Special Office for Inclusive Culture’ (*Fachstelle Kultur inklusiv*) of *Pro Infirmis*. This office is the skills centre for inclusive culture in Switzerland, which also awards a label for sustainable projects. On its website, it provides information on the label as well as the Charter for inclusive culture in Easy Language. Several other cultural institutions throughout the country also provide information in Easy language, for example, information on museums and their exhibitions (*Laténium*²⁹, *Creaviva* at the Zentrum Paul Klee³⁰, St. Gallen *Museum im Lagerhaus*³¹), as well as workshops and guided visits with educational material (the *Croque-Musées* project by *Atelier 1001 feuilles* and *ASA-Handicap Mental*). What all these examples have in common is that the Easy Language content is promoted on their websites.

7 Education and research

In-depth research on Easy Language began relatively late in Switzerland, and one of the results of this is that, while some European countries now have a long tradition of Easy Language training courses, in Switzerland these remain relatively rudimentary, unstructured and fragmentary. Still, recently, a substantial supply of opportunities for Easy Language training has been developed in quite a short time.

26 Pro Infirmis Easy Language, <https://www.proinfirmis.ch/leichte-sprache.html>

27 Action plan CRPD, <https://www.aktionsplan-un-brk.ch>

28 Insieme Electoral Assistance, https://insieme.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Wahlhilfe_insieme_A4_DE-2.pdf

29 Laténium, <https://latenium.ch/product/le-latenium-en-langue-facile/>

30 Creaviva, <https://www.creaviva-zpk.org/de/creaviva-inklusive/leichte-sprache>

31 St. Gallen Museum im Lagerhaus, <https://www.museumimlagerhaus.ch/service/leichtesprache/>

7.1 Practical training

At the time of the CRPD ratification in 2014, Switzerland lacked knowledge of and experience in Easy Language. Consequently, interested people had to travel abroad to acquire expert knowledge in the subject matter (see Antener et al. 2014, Studer and Parpan-Blaser 2014, INSOS 2016) and attend training courses such as the ones offered by the KI-I (*Kompetenznetzwerk Informationstechnologie*) in Austria, the Research Centre for Easy Language at the University of Hildesheim, Germany, or the *capito* network in Austria and Germany.

In the long term, however, recourse to training opportunities in neighboring countries cannot be effective because the diverse regional-dialectal particularities of Switzerland cannot be sufficiently taken into account in training programmes designed and offered abroad. Moreover, technical terms, such as those used in the legal field, differ considerably among German-speaking countries. Easy Language can only develop to its full potential if those involved in producing Easy Language texts (including copywriters and translators) are familiar with specific political and regional contexts and thus with the immediate world knowledge of target groups (see also Parpan-Blaser et al. 2018).

To remedy this shortcoming, several training programmes have been developed in Switzerland since 2014 by different providers, offering more or less differentiated introductions to Easy Language. However, the existence of appropriate training courses depends on the commitment and expertise of individuals. This highlights the problem that Easy Language teaching skills can vary greatly, depending on individual understandings of the subject matter and, not least, on the principles and rules used by the trainers. In recent years, the great demand for specialist knowledge in a variety of professions has also led to private providers offering courses. Training opportunities have developed at different speeds in different parts of Switzerland (cf. Section 2).

As mentioned in Section 3, *WohnWerk Basel* was one of the pioneer providers of further education courses on Easy Language. Their programme developed from the identified need for easily understandable texts in the residential area around the institution (Debelle 2015). Since 2014, *WohnWerk's* 'Bureau for Easy Language' has offered practice-oriented two- to three-day courses in Easy Language and customized training courses for companies and other

institutions. The target groups for this further training have largely been professionals working in institutions and organizations for people with disabilities.

Occasionally, professional associations also offer Easy Language training. For example, since 2019, the Swiss Association of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters has been developing further training initiatives in accessible communication, including Easy Language. In the field of speech therapy, the topic was very quickly taken up in presentations at professional meetings, which has increased interest and demand for training. Such inputs and training are essential because, for example, teachers and speech therapists who are already practising special education and speech therapy have seldom come into contact with Easy Language during their education.

In the French-speaking region, the first systematic training courses in Easy Language, specifically based on *Langage facile à lire et à comprendre* (FALC), were established in 2016. The Faculty of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Geneva (FTI UNIGE) offered a pre-existing Easy Language programme in 2016, but this was only run in German (Zaugg 2018). The private agency *Textoh!*, the *Atelier1001feuilles* and the Department of Special Education of the University of Fribourg co-operate to offer several Easy Language training courses, including a two- or three-day introductory course and advanced modules. These courses are designed for managers and employees of institutions, organizations and public services that are responsible for creating information for the general public and those who have reading and comprehension difficulties.

The Italian-speaking region currently has no Easy Language courses at all, so all training still takes place in Italy. Easy Language training in Easy Italian for *Pro Infirmis* translators, for example, is provided in collaboration with Inclusion Europe partner *Associazione Nazionale Famiglie di Persone con Disabilità Intellettiva e/o Relazionale* (ANFFAS Nazionale Italia) (see the chapter on Italy).

Based on the Easy Language research project for adult protection discussed below (Section 7.3) (Antener et al. 2014), the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (HSA FHNW) developed a one-day course in co-operation with the ‘Conference for Child and Adult Protection’ (KOKES, *Konferenz für Kindes- und Erwachsenenschutz*), which is an inter-canton conference of experts and directors in the field of child

and adult protection. This course was specifically designed for professionals in the field, with the aim of raising their awareness of Easy Language. In connection with projects on child and adult protection, the HSA FHNW also offers services to organizations involved in child and adult protection, ranging from a short input to a whole-day course.

The further education courses aimed directly at users of Easy Language texts are also immensely important. Here, the goal is to increase users' opportunities to participate, as well to train them as validators. In the French-speaking region, *ASA handicap mental* proposes an Easy Language awareness course and a course to train people with intellectual disabilities to validate texts in Easy Language. In Switzerland, people with intellectual disabilities can join specific groups, for instance, the *Pro Infirmis* 'Education Club' (*Bildungsklub*). A course on self-advocacy has been available there for a few years now, in which the target groups not only learn about their rights, but also learn to represent themselves. The participants also get to know the concept of Easy Language on this course.

In sum, it can be observed that the linguistic, regional and political diversity of Switzerland influences the development of Easy Language training courses. As mentioned earlier, the language regions look to their respective neighbouring countries in their approach to Easy Language. Accordingly, the development of expert knowledge is based on German, Austrian, French, or Italian approaches. This not only makes it more difficult to bundle resources and exchange expertise at the national level, but also reduces the number of people who can be reached by training programmes. It can also have a financial impact on the implementation of training courses.

7.2 Higher education

In recent years, Easy Language teaching has found its way into the education programmes of some Swiss universities. Initially, tertiary courses were offered in the German-speaking region, but they are now also available, though to a lesser extent, in the French-speaking part. As already mentioned, none are offered in the Italian-speaking region. Easy Language learning is offered in both regular bachelor's and master's degree courses as well as in non-degree contin-

uing education courses. The largely unsystematic and fragmented nature of the Easy Language training courses that the higher education sector offers makes it difficult to obtain an overview of what courses exist and might previously have existed. As far as can be ascertained from discussions with experts and an online review of degree programmes, Easy Language training in this sector still largely depends on the interest and commitment of individual teachers, and the courses are rarely part of a fixed curriculum.

Easy Language training and further education courses are offered within different disciplines, usually in social and education sciences: as part of social work and special education, speech therapy, linguistics, and translation sciences. The following subsection presents an overview of current Easy Language training initiatives, and refers largely to Switzerland's German-speaking region. It discusses a number of examples, but makes no claim to offer a complete picture, because much is still under development and subject to change.

Training courses in the **education disciplines** are playing a pioneering role in Easy Language teaching. **Special education** and **speech therapy**, in particular, took up Easy Language at a relatively early stage. Experts at the University of Applied Sciences of Special Needs Education (HfH³²), which specializes in special education, point out that Easy Language has been discussed in individual training courses via a few selective thematic inputs there for around 15 years – not in the form of in-depth examinations of the concept, but in the form of awareness-raising introductions to Easy Language and its objectives. Easy Language has appeared as a topic in special education, speech therapy and social pedagogy courses, in connection with discourses on participation, empowerment, accessibility and inclusion, which are central to these fields. Since the introduction of these courses, master's theses have been written on, for example, the simplification of texts in already-existing teaching materials and children's and young adults' books.

Currently, the HfH is the only university of teacher education that has relatively broadly incorporated Easy Language knowledge development into

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 32 HfH Institute for Disabilities and Participation, <https://www.hfh.ch/de/institute/institut-fuer-behinderung-und-partizipation>, HfH Institute for Language and Communication Special Needs, <https://www.hfh.ch/de/institute/institut-fuer-sprache-und-kommunikation-untererschweren-bedingungen>

its bachelor's and master's degrees (Arn and Baumann 2019). This is in part because those teaching Easy Language at this institution were involved in the discussions on it in Switzerland in the very early stages. The HfH trains special needs teachers and speech therapists, for example. By including Easy Language in regular degree courses, this institution is trying to provide one of the tools to fulfil this pedagogical mission.

In the speech therapy curriculum at the HfH, Easy Language appears in individual courses in linguistics speech therapy in a special education context – central speech disorders, and counselling. Ideally, Easy Language should be incorporated as a core part of a curriculum and thus prevent possible fluctuations in study programmes depending on the faculty's turnover. In speech therapy, efforts are underway to include Easy Language as a compulsory subject in the next curriculum review.

In the French-speaking part of Switzerland, smaller introductory courses have recently been offered in the master's programs in the French section at the Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg (UNIFR)³³. The aim is to familiarize future special education professionals with the concept of Easy Language. The students are introduced to Easy Language and its methods over three hours, during which the origins of Easy Language, its target groups, and the steps involved in translating texts into Easy Language are discussed. They are also provided with information about the Inclusion Europe guidelines³⁴ and Public Health France's guidelines (Ruel and Allaire 2018).

Capacity building in Easy Language is also being promoted in **social work disciplines**. Individual discussions on Easy Language in social work courses were taking place before 2014 but remained an exception. Since then, expertise in Easy Language in social work courses has somewhat improved, but until now, it has not really been part of degree programmes in German-speaking Switzerland.

In the French-speaking region, the anchoring of Easy Language in social work degrees is a little further advanced. Since 2017, at the School of Social

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33 UNIFR Special Education, <https://www3.unifr.ch/spedu/fr/>

34 Inclusion Europe Guidelines, <https://www.unapei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/L'information-pour-tous-Règles-européennes-pour-une-information-facile-à-lire-et-à-comprendre.pdf>

Work Fribourg (HETS-FR)³⁵, students in the bachelor's programme receive at least a three-hour introduction to the topic. This is the same input as that offered to master's students in the French section of the Department of Special Education at UNIFR (discussed above).

The first further education programme on Easy Language in the Swiss tertiary sector was developed in 2014, in social work, by the School of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (HSA FHNW), which offers a specialist seminar on Easy Language that lasts several days. As mentioned above, this offer was introduced in connection with the first Swiss research project on Easy Language (Antener et al. 2014), triggered by the lack of Easy Language training opportunities in Switzerland at the time. Since 2019, the HSA FHNW has offered a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Accessible Communication, of which the 'Easy Language Seminar' (*Fachseminar Leichte Sprache*) is an optional module³⁶. Here, the Easy Language training is conceived of and integrated into a larger communication framework. The participants of the 'Easy Language Seminar' have changed significantly in recent years: initially, they were mainly staff of institutions for people with disabilities, who needed Easy Language knowledge in their daily work. Increasingly, different specialist areas have become represented on the course, including social educators; social workers; special-education teachers; speech therapists; communication managers; translators; lawyers; professionals from schools, health care and insurance; and people from the cultural sector, for example, theatres and museums. This can be taken as an indication that Easy Language in Switzerland is no longer mainly discussed in the context of disability; it is being seen as a tool for a range of addressee-oriented interactions.

Swiss universities seem to offer very few inputs for Easy Language in **linguistic science** degree courses. However, some notable examples are worth mentioning. In the MA (Master of Arts) programme in linguistics at the University of Zurich, for instance, Easy Language is part of the 'Digital Linguistics' module in the Department of Computational Linguistics (CL UZH)³⁷, where

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 35 HETS Fribourg, <https://www.hets-fr.ch/fr/ecole/accueil>

36 CAS Accessible Communication, <https://www.fhnw.ch/de/weiterbildung/soziale-arbeit/9270392>

37 UZH Digital Linguistics, <https://www.cl.uzh.ch/en/studies.html>

it is discussed in relation to systems for automatic text simplification in the area of Language Technology for Accessibility.

Easy Language is also incorporated into professional translation courses. In 2020, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)³⁸ launched a new specialization in Barrier-free Communication and Audiovisual Translation in its MA in Applied Linguistics. Students are encouraged to investigate the theoretical aspects of intralingual translation into Easy Language, familiarize themselves with the relevant literature and carry out translations. Bachelor students of Applied Languages are also introduced to the basic concepts of Easy Language and can explore the subject further in their final research paper.

Furthermore, after its first training course in 2016 (Zaugg 2018, section 7), the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the German Department at the University of Geneva (FTI) included *Leichte Sprache* in its 'Text Analysis' bachelor's course in 2020. The master's programme at the FTI also offers individual units on Easy Language, as it is a possible professional field for future translators.

These examples show that, today, Easy Language training is not yet systematically implemented in Switzerland. However, a promising range of educational options are already in place.

7.3 Research

In Switzerland, research on Easy Language has only recently begun. This section summarizes the different approaches to Easy Language research, the various disciplinary perspectives and the financing of the work.

Regarding research financing, in addition to the research institutions themselves, the following state institutions have been important contributors to funding: a) the Federal Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities, which co-finances up to 50% of research and development (R&D) projects that increase equality for people with disabilities in certain areas such as accessibil-

38 ZHAW Institute of Translation and Interpreting, <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/institutes-centres/iued-institute-of-translation-and-interpreting/>

ity of information and participation in official procedures, but does not fund ‘pure’ research proposals; b) the federally-funded ‘Swiss Innovation Agency’ (*Innosuisse*), which promotes science-based innovations (products, services) deemed to be in the general interest of the Swiss economy and society; and c) the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (*Staatssekretariat für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation*).

For international projects with Swiss participation, research institutions in the relevant states and the EU can be important funding sources. To a lesser extent, Easy Language R&D is supported by private foundations that sometimes sponsor pilot projects or prepare project applications, especially when these benefit disadvantaged groups. Contract research is of secondary importance; indeed, so far, very little has been done in the field of Easy Language. The scientific discourse on Easy Language is promoted by conferences that either deal exclusively with Easy Language or include a focus on it; for example within the framework of the three Swiss Conferences on Barrier-free Communication, in Winterthur and Geneva in 2017, 2018 and 2020, and the second KLAARA conference, which is in Olten at the School of Social Work (HSA FHNW) in 2021.

In the **social sciences**, Easy Language research has emerged from the increasing use of Easy Language in research projects over the past decade. Easy Language is crucial to understanding the situation of socially marginalized groups (such as people with disabilities, immigrants, children, the elderly) because it enables their involvement, whether this be in recruiting participants for a study, obtaining their consent to participate, conducting interviews and questionnaires, or discussing the findings of the study. So, as Easy Language was used as a means to conduct research, and researchers’ awareness of its importance was growing, Easy Language also became a topic of research itself (see Petitpierre et al. 2013 on declarations of consent and Hedderich et al. 2014 on the use of Easy Language in participatory research).

Producing and making Easy Language accessible to people with disabilities involves selecting, writing, reviewing, and applying texts. In the first social science Easy Language R&D project in German-speaking Switzerland in 2015 to 2018, ‘Just easy to understand’ (Antener et al. 2017), the School for Social Work FHNW investigated the production of Easy Language texts for an adult protection authority and made recommendations for good practice

(Parpan-Blaser et al. 2019, Girard-Groeber et al. 2021). The Department of Special Education at the University of Fribourg has had a similar focus in the French-speaking region since 2017, and has evaluated not only the procedures (translation, validation) but also the documents translated by the Bureau for Easy Language Fribourg. At the time of writing, a PhD candidate is also working on a thesis on how people with intellectual disabilities can participate in translating a questionnaire into Easy Language and whether such a version is more accessible than the standard language one (Diacquenod 2018).

Since 2017, the Institute of Translation and Interpreting at Zurich University of Applied Sciences has been working with the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Geneva to create the foundation for a Swiss Research Centre for Barrier-free Communication³⁹. The project investigates how access to information and education in Switzerland can be facilitated for people with hearing, visual or intellectual disabilities. Easy Language is one of the project's ten research areas. Several corpus analyses have been conducted to understand translation strategies and information loss in texts in German Easy Language (Jekat et al. 2020, Nüssli 2018, Jekat et al. 2017, among others) and Italian Easy Language (Carrer 2021), and to investigate how Easy Language is portrayed in the Swiss German press (Jekat et al. 2020, D'Agostino 2018). Experimental studies have also evaluated the impact of Easy Language texts on the comprehension of health-related issues among people with intellectual disabilities (Carrer 2021, Nüssli 2018). Interim project outcomes include exploratory studies of a) the potential of French Easy Language in inclusive classroom settings (Casalegno et al. 2019), b) the impact of neural machine translation (NMT) on the usability of Easy Language texts by people with intellectual disabilities (Kaplan 2021, Rodríguez Vázquez et al. forth., Rodríguez Vázquez and Bouillon forth.), and c) the use of NMT for rendering speech output into a simplified form in a medical speech-to-speech translation system (Mutal et al. 2019). The results of some of these investigations were disseminated at three international conferences held as part of the project in 2017, 2018 and 2020.

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 39 The project is funded by the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation and is supported by the Swiss University Conference. See Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication (<https://www.zhaw.ch/en/linguistics/research/barrier-free-communication/>; retrieved 14/09/2020) and Proposal and Implementation of a Swiss Centre for Barrier-free Communication (<https://bfc.unige.ch/en/>; retrieved 14/09/2020).

The Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies, TRANSIUS, at the University of Geneva has recently conducted comparative studies of Swiss administrative language, using participatory research methods. They systematically analysed insurance leaflets in three languages (French, German and Italian) and assessed their readability and comprehensibility according to Plain Language principles (Griebel and Felici 2021, Felici and Griebel 2019, Griebel and Felici 2018).

Computational Linguistics (CL) research at the University of Zurich focuses on the contribution of linguistics and language technology to accessibility for people with disabilities and special educational needs. The research topics related to Easy Language are semi-automatic and automatic text simplification, the automatic sentence alignment of standard and simplified texts, and the automatic assessment of text readability. The ‘*Capito automatisiert: Automatic text simplification for German*’ project runs from 2020 to 2021. A system is also being developed for AI⁴⁰-based automatic simplification of German texts. A novel approach at the University of Zurich has enabled such an AI-based system, developed and ‘trained’ on the basis of existing *capito* texts, to be used to turn complicated texts (C1/C2) into simple language (A1 to B1) (Säuberli et al. 2020, Battisti et al. 2019). The Living Lab Handicap⁴¹ at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO Valais-Wallis) is currently developing the ‘FALC-Assistant’⁴². Available on the internet, the FALC Assistant is a software programme for creating and translating documents into FALC. It is designed to assist people by automatically checking the application of the rules. Groups of validators may be contacted via this platform.

Within the framework of **web-accessibility studies**, Easy Language has been examined by academics at the University of Fribourg Department of Psychology. A study of Easy Language used on disability-friendly websites (Schmutz et al. 2019) has shown that Easy Language has both advantages and disadvantages compared with standard languages: Easy Language makes content recognition easier, but also prolongs reading time, decreases the general appreciation of the

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40 Artificial Intelligence

41 Living Lab Handicap, <https://livinglabhandicap.ch/en/living-lab-handicap/>

42 Langage facile à lire et à comprendre (= Easy French)

text and leads to reduced intentions to visit the website again. Note that these are results of tests of non-disabled users (students); no evidence was collected of the views of users with disabilities.

8 Future perspectives

Although much has been achieved in a few years in the field of Easy Language in Switzerland, a great deal of questions remain unanswered. As has been shown here, Switzerland's multilingualism and federal structure impact on Easy Language in many ways. Its prospects and its problems, therefore, are not the same in all regions. Yet, in order to move forward, it would be helpful to agree on a substantial common ground in order to network in a continuous exchange and to advance in the development of knowledge and practice.

A co-ordinated approach to the interplay of practice, research and politics would be valuable. To address such questions and others about the future systematically, however, a determined political will is needed at all levels: Switzerland's federalist democratic political system, based on compromise and consensus, entails both difficulties and opportunities in all areas of policy, and the implementation of Easy Language is no exception. Constructing an overarching strategy is not easy. The resulting patchwork makes it more difficult to define binding principles and standards for Easy Language for the whole country. Switzerland's multilingualism adds to the challenge and raises issues not only of process (should the original text be translated or the one that has already been transposed to Easy Language?), but also of finances.

Collaboration among Easy Language service providers, researchers, community organizations and target groups should be closer. Only through effective collaboration among these various actors can Easy Language services be implemented systematically and in time be regarded as professional services in their own right, like other communication services such as translation and copywriting. Perhaps Easy Language service providers should consider organizing themselves into a professional association. Validators of Easy Language texts should ideally be recruited from the intended target groups. Furthermore,

only appropriate remuneration for providers and validators can guarantee the provision of quality.

Besides collaboration, awareness of the potential of Easy Language should increase. The use of Easy Language and the amount of information available in Easy Language currently still depends too much on the commitment of individuals. Social institutions are aware of its potential but there is no consistency in how they see Easy Language fitting into their communication strategies. Providers of information in Easy Language, such as public authorities, associations, and institutions face the question not only of how to use Easy Language as a means of communication but also of how to integrate it into an overall concept of accessible communication. This entails making information in Easy Language visible in such a way that the target groups can find it without additional effort.

Ultimately, awareness of Easy Language should increase not only in the general population but also among the target groups, especially beyond self-advocates and institutions. They need to know the opportunities and to be made aware of their rights and possibilities, so that they themselves can demand and lobby for more Easy Language. In summary, there is still a long way to go before accessible, comprehensible information and communication can be taken for granted and experienced as part of an inclusive society. An important step towards this goal would be to regard Easy Language as a service to the general public rather than as a special service for individual groups. Nevertheless, it is important, for advocacy purposes, to have up-to-date figures on the different Easy Language target groups (see UN CRPD 2019: 7, Inclusion Handicap 2019: 27).

Our vision for Easy Language in Switzerland is that experts – especially in the social, administrative and communication fields – are sensitized to Easy Language and that all information relevant to active citizenship is available in Easy Language. In addition, efforts should be made to raise users' awareness: end users have the right to know that texts in Easy Language exist and where to find them. This places them in a position to advocate for their own best interests. Disability organizations set a good example and show how Easy Language is used in a meaningful way (e.g., on their websites). Easy Language should eventually become a natural part of communication concepts and be

considered one of the many different means of appropriate communication that must be budgeted for from the outset.

Approaching this vision in a typically Swiss manner means tackling the difficulties enumerated in this chapter with perseverance and making the effort, step by step, to achieve a common ground. For compromises to be viable, they will have to be in keeping with Swiss tradition: once reached, they will be supported by a majority of the population, regardless of their region or national language.

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Appendix 1. An illustration of guidelines for Easy German, Easy French and Easy Italian in Switzerland.

| Standard German | Easy German |
|--|---|
| <p>Source: https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/parlamentsportraet/aufgaben-der-bundesversammlung</p> | <p>WAS TUT DAS PARLAMENT?</p>  <p>Das sind die wichtigsten Aufgaben vom Parlament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Die Gesetze prüfen • Entscheiden, ob ein Gesetz geändert werden muss • Einen Vorschlag schreiben, wie ein Gesetz geändert werden muss • Neue Gesetze vorschlagen <p>Das sind die anderen Aufgaben vom Parlament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Die 7 Bundesräte und Bundesrätinnen wählen • Die Richter und Richterinnen für die Bundesgerichte wählen • Den Bundeschkanzler oder die Bundeschkanzlerin wählen • Die Arbeit vom Bundesrat überwachen • Die Arbeit von den Bundesgerichten überwachen <p>https://www.parlament.ch/de/über-das-parlament/leichte-sprache</p> |

| Standard French | Easy French |
|--|--|
| <p>Source: https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/portrait-du-parlement/attributions-assemblée-federale</p> | <p>QUE FAIT LE PARLEMENT?</p>  <p>Au Parlement, on parle.</p> <p>Au Parlement, les tâches principales des députés sont:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examiner les lois • voir s'il faut changer les lois • écrire des propositions pour changer les lois • écrire peut-être de nouvelles lois <p>Les autres tâches du Parlement sont :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • élire (ou choisir) les 7 personnes du Conseil fédéral: • les 7 conseillères et conseillers fédéraux • élire les juges fédéraux des Tribunaux fédéraux • élire la chancelière ou le chancelier de la Confédération • contrôler le travail du Conseil fédéral • contrôler le travail des tribunaux fédéraux <p>https://www.parlament.ch/fr/über-das-parlament/langage-simplifie</p> |

| Standard Italian | Easy Italian |
|--|---|
| <p>Source: https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/ritratto-del-parlamento/compiti-assemblea-federale</p> | <p>COSA FA IL PARLAMENTO?</p>  <p>In Parlamento, i compiti principali dei deputati sono:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • esaminare le leggi • decidere se occorre cambiare le leggi • scrivere delle proposte per cambiare le leggi • eventualmente scrivere delle nuove leggi. <p>Gli altri compiti dei deputati in Parlamento sono:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eleggere le 7 persone che formano il Consiglio federale. Queste persone si chiamano consigliere e consiglieri federali • eleggere le giudici o i giudici federali dei Tribunali federali • eleggere la cancelliera o il cancelliere della Confederazione • controllare il lavoro del Consiglio federale • controllare il lavoro dei Tribunali federali. <p>https://www.parlament.ch/it/über-das-parlament/lingua-facile</p> |

| Standard English | Easy English (author's translation) |
|--|--|
| <p>Source: Portrait of Parliament – The Federal Assembly is the parliament of the Swiss Confederation on: www.parlament.ch</p> | <p>[WHAT DOES THE PARLIAMENT DO?</p>  <p>These are the most important tasks of the Parliament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examining bills • Deciding whether laws need to be changed • Writing proposals to change the laws • Proposing new laws <p>These are other tasks of the Parliament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electing 7 Federal Councillors • Electing judges for the federal courts • Electing the Federal Chancellor • Supervising the work of the Federal Council • Supervising the work of the federal courts]. |