

# Easy-to-understand language in audiovisual translation and accessibility: state of the art and future challenges

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## Abstract

This article presents a broad overview of easy-to-understand language and links it to audiovisual translation and accessibility. First, it discusses terminological and conceptual aspects. It also summarises the main standards and recommendations related to easy-to-understand language. Then, it describes how easy-to-understand language has been applied to audiovisual translation and accessibility and puts an emphasis on the results of the EASIT project, with a focus on subtitling and audio description. Finally, it suggests a series of challenges in terms of future research.

**Key words:** accessibility, audiovisual translation, easy-to-understand language, Plain Language, Easy-to-Read

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## Introduction

During the last decade in the field of audiovisual translation (AVT) and accessibility, substantial research has been devoted to defining strategies that guarantee the end user's understanding and enjoyment of audiovisual (AV) content when AV transfer modes or access services have been used (Arnáiz-Uzquiza, 2012; Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013; Fresno, 2014; Matamala et al., 2017; Orero et al. 2018). It has often been considered that certain services are addressed to certain users only, hence research on user needs being partial. To offer three examples: so-called subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing have mainly been researched with users with hearing loss, audio description has been investigated with users with sight loss, and dubbing has been researched with those who do not understand the source language. Some authors have begun to challenge this and have advocated for a universal design approach focused on user capabilities (Aglulló et al., 2018). For instance, when researching subtitling, one of the most relevant aspects may be the reading ability of the user rather than their level of hearing loss. Hence, users with difficulties in reading or understanding information may have been neglected in research, and their specific needs may not have been considered.

Easy-to-understand (E2U) language is a solution used in written texts to enhance comprehensibility (Maaß, 2020), but it remains to be seen how E2U language could be transferred to the AV world. The aim of this article is to provide an overview of current research in the field in order to highlight how audiovisual translation and media accessibility could benefit from E2U language recommendations and point towards research gaps and possibilities. It also aims to present some of the main results of the EASIT project in which AVT and E2U languages came together.

The article begins with terminological discussions on E2U language and related terms. It also offers an overview of existing guidelines and recommendations. It then provides a summary of existing research linking AVT and accessibility to E2U language, with a focus on the EASIT project experience. The conclusions stress some of the main challenges that open new research opportunities.

## Easy-to-understand language: terminological and conceptual aspects

There is a wide array of terms that are used to refer to concepts related to E2U language: Easy-to-Read, Easy Reading, Easy Read, Easy Language, Plain Language, Simple Language, Simplified Language, Citizen Language, Clear Writing, among others.

Plain Language (PL) is defined in the US Plain Writing Act of 2010 as “[w]riting that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience”. The ISO standard on PL that is currently being developed defines PL using the International Plain Language Federation as its source: “communication in which wording, structure, and design are so clear that intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information”, a definition that is also mentioned by Cutts (2020: xviii). Although there are previous publications advocating for clearer language, PL started to fully develop as such in the field of citizen and legal communication in the 1960s in the USA and the 1970s in the UK (Mazur, 2000; Montolío and Tascón, 2021: chapter 1). Much work has been developed in the fields of law and business (Bailey, 1990; Garner, 2001). It is also applied in so-called “citizen communication” or “citizen language”, with which public administrations address citizens. In this context, some authors prefer to use the term “clear communication” (Montolío and Tascón, 2020). In Europe, the Fight the Fog campaign launched by a team of translators inspired by the works of Cutts (1995) and Williams (1995) compelled the European Commission (EC) to launch the official Clear Writing Campaign in 2009. “Clear writing” is also the expression used by the EC in more recent events, such as the Clear Writing for Europe 2021 conference.

Regarding Easy-to-Read (ER), IFLA (2010) guidelines acknowledge that there are two definitions of the term “easy-to-read”: “One means a linguistic adaptation of a text that makes it easier to read than the average text but which does not make it easier to comprehend; the other definition means an adaptation that makes both reading and comprehension easier”. More recently, ER has been referred to as Easy Language (EL), which is defined in ISO/IEC DIS 23859-1 as a “[l]anguage variety in which a set of recommendations regarding wording, structure, design, and evaluation are applied to make information accessible to persons with reading comprehension difficulties for any reason”. The preference for EL instead of ER is explained in a note, which states that EL can be applied not only to written content that is read but also to oral or multimodal content.

Lindholm and Vanhatalo (2021: 18) describe the difference between PL and EL in the following terms:

Whereas *Plain Language* is related to institutional documents and aims to simplify legal language for non-professionals, the notion of *Easy Language* refers to making various texts or speech accessible to people who have difficulties reading and understanding standard language. As a language form, *Easy Language* is usually more simplified than *Plain Language*.

Lindholm and Vanhatalo’s definition puts emphasis on three central aspects: type of document, target group, and degree of simplification. Their handbook also offers a good account of the terminological fuzziness of the concepts and their blurred boundaries across Europe. In a chapter dedicated to Austria, Fröhlich and Candussi (2021: 30) state that “there is great confusion regarding these terms in the German-speaking world and little clarity as to how they should be clearly distinguished”. Lencek and Kraljevic (2021: 95), describing the situation in Croatia, comment that “there is no clearly agreed difference between these two terms”. Dealing with Czechia, Cinková and Latimier (2021: 124) state that the concepts are quite new and there are not agreed definitions. Anca and Melnika (2021) acknowledge that there is also a “lack of a stable, commonly understood term in Latvian” and “it is still difficult to draw a strict line between Easy and Plain Language, mainly because there are no commonly accepted definitions of the differences between them” (309). Similarly, the “Netherlands has no officially established distinction between Plain Language and

Easy Language” (Moonen 2021: 351); in Poland, Easy Language is “still frequently confused with Plain Language” (Przybyła-Wilkin 2021: 404), and in Russia, the “terminology is still unstable” (Mustajoki et al. 2021: 443).

The differences are sometimes linked to the target groups: when referring to Belgium, Vandeghinste et al. (2021: 59) write that “the “distinction between Plain Language and Easy Language seems somewhat artificial in the case of Belgium, as they seem to largely pursue the same goal”. EL and PL address different target groups: the general public in the case of PL and persons with low literacy and disabilities in EL. A similar comment is made by Lencek and Kraljevic (2021: 95) for Croatia, where EL has been used in the last 15 years for “children with developmental disorders,” and PL is used to address the “general population”. The Spanish standard considers ER (*Lectura Fácil*) a cognitive accessibility tool and defines it as a “method applying a set of guidelines and recommendations regarding the writing of texts, the design/layout of documents and the validation of their comprehensibility, intended to make information available to persons with reading comprehension difficulties” (UNE 153101:2018 EX). According to Marques (2021: 420), “Portugal seems to have a mixed understanding of Easy Language and Plain Language. *Português claro* (Plain Portuguese) should be separated from *Leitura Fácil* (Easy Language), as they are not the same”, and she adds: “Easy Language targets people with more severe limitations in reading and understanding written material, whereas Plain Language is mainly a way to ensure that most people can understand the information”.

Moving beyond the world of disability, Ólafsdóttir and Pálsdóttir (2021: 256) see EL as “a variation of the Icelandic language that is intended for people with limited Icelandic language skills”, including language learners and people with reading difficulties, language disorders and/or disabilities; whereas PL “is spoken or written language about a complex topic in an academic or formal field (e.g., legal, medical), which is intended for lay people without specific knowledge of the field”. This definition also refers to another difference: the type of texts that are made easier to understand. Horváth and Ladányi (2021: 223-224) explain that “Plain Hungarian is more used in public administration, justice and financial services” and Easy Hungarian is “used in the world of people with intellectual disabilities”, a differentiation that resonates in other chapters.

Some view EL and PL as language varieties in a continuum. Maaß, Rink and Hansen-Schirra (2021: 194) define EL (*Leichte Sprache*) as “a variety of German with maximally enhanced comprehensibility”, whereas PL (*Einfache Sprache*) is “more open and less concretely defined and covers the area between Easy Language and standard language” (2021: 194). An intermediate form (Easy Language Plus, *Leichte Sprache Plus*) is being developed (Maaß 2020). Describing the situation in Swedish, Bohman (2021: 537) says that “it is impossible to say exactly where the line between the two lies”, a similar statement to that of Leskelä (2021: 154) who addresses the situation in Finland: “it is not entirely clear how these two language forms differ from each other. However, as it is accepted in Finland that language varieties have no clear boundaries, Easy Language and Plain Language are seen as being on a continuum from very easy to more demanding language rather than as forming clearly defined categories”. Perego (2021) adopts a similar approach in her article on Italy.

This article follows the definition in the ISO/IEC DIS 23859-1 standard, which provides guidance on making written text easy to read and easy to understand. This definition was inspired by the works of the EASIT project ([pages.uab.cat/easit](http://pages.uab.cat/easit), Matamala and Orero 2018) and Maaß (2020). E2U language is considered an umbrella term that includes “[a]ny language variety which enhances comprehensibility”. This means that it ranges from EL to PL and includes any intermediate variety. In EL the focus is put on making information accessible to “persons with reading comprehension difficulties for any reason”. This “for any

reason” is especially relevant, as the standard does not link it to disability but considers that user needs may vary depending on: a) the circumstances and context of the interaction; b) the different abilities, literacy levels, cognitive and linguistic difficulties or aging, among other factors; and c) the user’s previous knowledge, interest for the topic and textual context.

### **Easy-to-understand language: standards and recommendations**

The previous section has referred to the international ISO standard on E2U language, but there are other recommendations and standards that have been used in the definition and implementation of these language forms. I will provide an overview next, maintaining the terminological choices made by the authors of each document.

In 1997, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions published a series of guidelines for ER materials which were updated in 2010 (IFLA, 2010). ER materials were considered a matter of democracy and accessibility, and recommendations were provided not only concerning language and content but also concerning illustrations, design, and layout.

In 1998, the International League of Societies for Persons with Mental Handicap-European Association (ILSMH-EA)–Inclusion Europe since 2000–published *Make it simple: European guidelines for the production of easy-to-read information for people with learning disability for authors, editors, information providers, translators and other interested persons* (ILSMH 1998). They consider that ER materials are characterized by “the use of a simple, straightforward language, only one main idea per sentence, the avoidance of technical language, abbreviations and initials, a clear and logical structure”. The presentation of information is also seen as fundamental, and visual elements support the written text. The document makes considerations about the target readers and the information needed by persons with learning disabilities. It provides advice on layout, how to write an ER document, and how to use pictures, illustrations, and symbols. Reference is made to other formats, although they do not give detailed advice on them. They consider that the “combination of visual and spoken information can be very powerful and reach people who would have serious problems reading and understanding text” (18).

In 2009, Inclusion Europe published *Information for all. European standards for making information easy to read and understand*, a direct result of the Pathways project (Inclusion Europe, 2009). The guidelines are available in many languages and provide general standards for E2U information; and standards for written, electronic, video, and audio information. They use the word “standard,” meaning a set of rules, although these rules have not been developed by a standardization body. As a general recommendation, they advise choosing the best format and language for the people that the text is addressed to, and they indicate that persons with intellectual disabilities should always be involved in the process.

When dealing specifically with video information, they refer to subtitles and write that “[s]ubtitles can be confusing for people with intellectual disabilities,” but they can also be useful for other user profiles. If subtitles are used, they recommend: a) following the standards for written information, b) creating ER subtitles by using larger writing than usual, c) leaving them on the screen as long as possible, d) having a good contrast between subtitles and the background; e) keeping them in the same position always, ideally at the bottom of the screen; f) giving the viewer the possibility to hide subtitles at any time, with clear instructions on how to do it; g) offering a document with all the text. Audio description (AD) is also mentioned, and again they consider that for “people who are not blind, this audio description can be confusing”. Therefore, they observe that the viewer should be able to turn it off. Their advice is to “make sure the audio description uses easy to understand words” for “blind people who also have intellectual disabilities” (36). Finally, the document

includes some tips for making audio information accessible, such as good pronunciation and articulation, good volume and sound, and slow reading speed with pauses at sensible points.

In 2011, the Accessible Information Working Group published *Make it easy. A guide to preparing Easy to Read information*, which provides advice on how to create ER documents. The guide explains how to prepare ER documents, the specificities of writing ER and how to choose symbol sets and images. It also refers to other communication channels (video, audio, large print, etc.) that make communication more accessible. Additional associations and projects have produced other recommendations which are beyond the scope of this article. In other languages, there are also key references, such as the German recommendations by Bredel and Maass (2016) or the Spanish guidelines by García (2012).

Moving beyond EL into PL, there are other guides for clear, accessible or plain writing. Mencap (2000) provides guidelines for “accessible writing”; with advice on the use of Plain English, layout and design, visual elements, and technology. Also, in English, the *Oxford Guide to Plain Language* by Cutts (2020), first published in 1995 as *The Plain English Guide*, develops 30 guidelines and selects 12 as the main ones.

In the United States, the Federal Plain Language Guidelines (PLAIN 2011) are structured into the following sections: a) think about your audience; b) organize; c) write your document, which includes references to words, sentences, paragraphs, and other aids to clarity; d) write for the web, and e) test, including paraphrase testing, usability testing and controlled comparative studies. Again, some publications focus on PL in certain communicative contexts (for instance, the elderly) but are beyond the scope of this article.

In Europe, the European Commission (EC) launched a campaign in 2009 to promote clear writing, which produced different materials such as *Claire’s Clear Writing Tips* ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/clear\\_writing\\_tips\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/clear_writing_tips_en.pdf)) or *How to write clearly* (Directore-General for Translation, EC, 2016). The EC encourages the use of “good plain English” in its *English Style Guide*, a handbook for authors and translators in the EC. They provide further recommendations for translators in *Clear English – Tips for Translators* (European Union, 2014).

Focusing on the web, WCAG2.1 guidelines by W3C also refer to the fact that the text content has to be “understandable” and “readable” (see <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/#understandable>). Success Criterion 3.1.5 on Reading Level reads, “when the text requires reading ability more advanced than the lower secondary education level after removal of proper names and titles, supplemental content; or a version that does not require reading ability more advanced than the lower secondary education level is available”. The supplemental content can be an audio version, an illustration, or a paragraph summarising the content.

Concerning standards–documents elaborated by a consensus of experts and approved by a standardization body–the first one on the topic was the Spanish standard on ER (UNE 153101:2018 EX). The standard considers that ER documents can be created *ex novo* or from a source text. In both cases, there is an adaptation or creation phase and a validation phase carried out by end-users. The standard provides recommendations in Spanish concerning how to write ER texts (orthotypography, vocabulary and expressions, phrases and sentences, structure and style) and how to design ER documents (presentation, images, paratextual features, visual components). It includes an annex with examples of activities on how to check document comprehension.

A standard is also in the process of being developed in Germany’s standardization agency DIN, namely DIN SPEC 33429 (<https://www.din.de/de/wdc-beuth:din21:321488494>).

At an international level, there are currently two standards under development at ISO: on the one hand, ISO/IEC DIS 23859-1 *Information technology – user interfaces – Part 1: Guidance on making written text easy to read and easy to understand*. This standard includes both EL and PL under the umbrella term of E2U language. It adopts a universal design approach without necessarily linking E2U language to disability or learning difficulties. It also tries to focus on recommendations that are applicable to a wide range of languages, and considers different formats and functions, putting the emphasis on multimodality. The standard describes the process of the creation of E2U written texts, the process of adaptation, and the process of evaluation, where a technical evaluation and a user evaluation are differentiated. Guidance on language in written text is provided in terms of vocabulary, numbers, abbreviations, spelling, punctuation, compound words, grammar, sentences, style, and implied meaning. Guidance on content presentation is also included for elements such as form and layout (structure, headings, text alignment, lines and spacing, columns and margins, page numbers and orientations, fonts, contrast, paper quality, colors, other elements), non-verbal paratextual elements (images and other graphical elements) and verbal paratextual elements (glosses, glossaries, summaries, etc.). When specific recommendations are to be used for either PL or EL, the standard differentiates them. It is worth stressing that the standard includes a section on written text in an AV format where E2U subtitles are mentioned. The standard also provides guidance on the audio presentation of the written text in terms of narration, pronunciation, accentuation and speech pauses, narration styles, reading speed, audio quality, volume, and use of technology. Hybrid access services are also mentioned, namely E2U subtitles and E2U audio descriptions. The standard concludes with guidance on how to identify and access easy content and how to procure information that is easy to understand.

On the other hand, ISO/WD 24495-1, currently being developed by ISO/TC37/WG11, deals with *Plain Languages – Part 1- Governing Principles and Guidelines*. The standard is based on 4 principles: the content should be relevant, findable, understandable, and usable. To this end, they provide a series of recommendations that are now in the process of being developed. Balmford (2020) presents an overview of the origins and development of this standard.

### **Research on E2U language and AVT and accessibility**

The EASIT project has been a central project in putting forward the need to consider E2U language and will be duly described below. In this section, some investigations related to the topic are acknowledged; specifically, the works of Bernabé-Caro (2020), who published the first Ph.D. on the topic, the research done at TransMedia Catalonia research group in Barcelona, and the investigations of the University of Hildesheim team led by Maass.

Bernabé-Caro and Orero describe ER “for Media Accessibility as a service to improve reading and foster comprehension” (2019: 56) and propose it to be included in the list of existing accessibility services as it makes a “message accessible to all people, in their intellectual and learning diversity”. They adopt the Bredel and Maaß’ (2016) model, which considers ER a functional linguistic variety. Bernabé-Caro and Orero provide a list of how a hybrid family of easily accessible services could be produced and mention: easy listening, easy to listen, or easy AD; easy subtitles/captions/SDH; easy audio subtitles/captions/SDH; ER audio introduction; ER Braille, and ER web. Their taxonomy is further developed in Bernabé-Caro (2020), who prefers to use “easy-to-understand” as an umbrella term. Bernabé-Caro states that the new easy-access services to be incorporated in AVT will need to follow text simplification recommendations, the recommendations governing the access service, and digital accessibility guidelines. Bernabé-Caro considers two verbal

methods (PL and ER) and also pictograms. She provides a classification of both non-verbal and verbal E2U access services and demonstrates how the semiotic identity of the E2U content may differ from standard content. However, she is also aware that the classification “should be regarded as a starting point to gather empirical data from reception studies and foster their development” (Bernabé-Caro 2020: 372).

On the other hand, Maaß and Hernández Garrido (2020) provide an overview of how EL and PL can be inserted in AV texts and formulate hypotheses that need to be verified in future research. EL and PL are viewed by the authors as “language varieties with enhanced comprehensibility” (2020: 132), whereas AVT includes “all forms of translation and interpreting between different modalities involving tertiary media of any type”. Tertiary media texts are those consumed via devices such as TV, radio, smartphones or computers. Maaß and Hernández Garrido discuss different parameters that can have an impact on the integration of EL and PL in AVT, posing both opportunities and restrictions: a) AV texts can be scripted directly in EL/PL or an EL/PL component can be added, such as different forms of AV translation; b) EL/PL translations can be planned from the beginning or can be later added to a product; c) AV texts can be fictional or non-fictional, and d) the target audience may differ, i.e., children versus adults. According to the authors, the main challenges for the adoption of EL, the language variety that deviates most from the standard, are that “it has limited acceptability, its use is affected by the medial restrictions that come with AV translation, it has limits with respect to AV translation being a partial translation” (149). The researchers explore the possible application of EL in different AVT forms and observe that “EL in AV translation is subject to more severe restrictions than PL. Its use in fiction formats is generally inadequate. For non-fiction formats, it will be used in AV translation if the original AV product is planned and created in EL. If this is not the case, its use is limited to scripted sub/supertitles and SDH” (157). They consider that for AD, dubbing, voice-over and film interpreting or live subtitles, EL is not applicable. On the other hand, they consider that PL is applicable if the initial product is created in PL from the beginning.

### **Subtitling and EU2 language**

Focusing specifically on subtitles, Alba Rodríguez (2013) suggested creating “adapted subtitles” or “easy subtitles” for persons with cognitive disabilities. She considered that easy subtitles would reproduce simplified explanations of what the actors say but only when the content is difficult to understand for persons with cognitive disabilities, such as metaphors or ironies. Subtitles would not be continuous unless the content is difficult to understand. In her proposal, Alba Rodríguez follows standard subtitling rules in terms of subtitle positioning, line length and a number of lines but modifies some of the standard temporal parameters so that the subtitles stay on screen longer, sometimes affecting synchronization.

More recently, Bernabé-Caro and García (2019: 4) have researched how ER Parameters and SDH parameters “overlap and can interbreed”. They compare the Spanish standard UNE 153010:2012, on subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH), and the ER guidelines by Inclusion Europe and observe that 34.5% of the parameters overlap, but only 20% of the recommendations are shared. They provide a detailed account of these results in terms of visual presentation, temporal aspects, speaker identification, sound effects, contextual information and off-screen voice, music and songs, and editorial criteria. They conclude that “the reviewed documents refer to similar parameters with regards to visual and temporal aspects, editorial criteria, and speaker identification”. They also observe that “the E2R guidelines report less on how to convey music, sound, and contextual information” and “specific E2R parameters were found” (16). A list of 18 parameters and their associated recommendations are listed in Bernabé-Caro and Cavallo (2021), who put this into practice in a video created for the EASIT project. Further research is needed, as

indicated by the authors, especially in aspects such as reading speeds, editorial recommendations, or redundancy. As the next step in this research, Bernabé-Caro et al. (2020) explore the effectiveness of a set of subtitling features on a total of 75 subtitles through a two-staged validation process with users. In the first stage, they gathered general feedback on the reception of SDH subtitles by persons with cognitive needs and in the second stage, the ER subtitles were validated through a questionnaire with three groups. Self-reported preferences were collected on font size, use of color, on-screen time, length of subtitle lines, contextual information, vocabulary, expressions, punctuation, and sentences. The resulting subtitles were then used in a pilot study by Oncins et al. (2020) within the framework of the Immersive Accessibility (ImAc) project. ER subtitles and SDH for operatic 360° content were tested with 8 persons aged 50 to 79. In the pilot study 62.5% of the participants preferred ER subtitles because they were shorter and easier to read and because they had more time to enjoy the visual content. In the main study (Matamala, 2021), with 36 participants with a mean age of 69.4, 52.8% prefer the ER subtitles, 44.4% prefer the SDH, and 2.8% do not have a preference and like both. ER subtitles are reported to be easier to read and understand, which is especially relevant in the context of opera, where the language is literary, and interest lies in the musical performance. Further research on the topic is limited but much needed, with some studies on integrated titles in easy German (Marmit, 2021) and BA dissertations in Italian (Marsano, 2019).

That said, some previous research on SDH audiences (Neves, 2018) has already tested the effectiveness of SDH in terms of “three main criteria: readability, understanding and enjoyment” (2018: 91). Matamala and Orero (2010) present the results of the Subsordig project, which carried out reception studies in Spanish on different subtitling criteria, including font size and type, positioning, sound effects, and icons, among others. Comprehension and the level of difficulty of the subtitles is an aspect addressed by Pereira (2010: 99). Subsordig was the inspiration for the DTV4ALL project led by Pilar Orero at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, which aimed at researching what viewers think about SDH, and how well they understand these subtitles, and how they view them. To this end, questionnaires and eye-tracking tests were performed across Europe in different countries and languages (Romero-Fresco, 2015). The users involved included Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing populations, and the parameters analyzed included typography (boxes, borders, shadows), placement, justification, character identification, sound information, paralinguistic information, and subtitling style. Subtitling style included standard subtitles, verbatim subtitles and edited subtitles (Romero-Fresco, 2009). There is, therefore, a wealth of information available for producing easy-to-understand subtitles, but the focus has generally been on Deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing populations and has adopted a medical model of disability. It would make sense to move forward in subtitling research by adopting a capabilities-based model (Agulló et al., 2018), where the key element is not hearing loss but reading competence or even technological competence in cases where users are expected to interact with certain devices. As already mentioned by Neves (2018: 90) and demonstrated by the works of Ward et al. (2007), “reading competence will be paramount in determining how effective different subtitle types are”.

### **Audio description and easy-to-understand language**

Bernabé-Caro and Orero (2021) consider that due to the dual nature of AD—being a text to be read aloud and an oral text—both writing and listening can be made easier to understand. Using existing AD guidelines, ER guidelines, WCAG 2.1, and sound mix guidelines, they suggest a three-step process (source text analysis, scripting, reviewing) in creating E2U AD. In their proposal, easier AD is a “shorter, more

concise and compact narrative with enhanced audio” (Bernabé-Caro and Orero, 2021: 68).

Taylor and Perego (2021) deal with museum AD and, in one of the sections, a point at the opportunities that ER language offers to enhance museum accessibility. They indicate that the amount of information offered by some existing AD is high and suggest that a reduction in the volume and complexity of these AD through ER language could make information accessible to a large number of users. It remains to be seen how existing AD guidelines (Remael et al, 2015) and practices (Maszerowska et al, 2014; Matamala and Orero, 2016; Perego 2019: 119) and existing EL guidelines can coexist. This was the topic of discussion in a questionnaire and series of focus groups that took place in the EASIT project. Arias-Badia and Matamala (2020) report on the results from Catalonia, in which the possibility of applying E2U language principles to AD was discussed with experts from both fields. Although the experts acknowledge similarities (preference for simple syntactic structures, use of one word per referent), describers think that the primary AD audience—persons with sight loss—would be reluctant towards oversimplified AD as they may consider it patronizing. Taking this into account, they suggest an “audio adaptation” that could be offered through another track. This would be especially feasible in opera, dance, museums, or theatre plays but would make it more challenging in cinematic production. Some of the suggested ideas included an easy audio introduction or the insertion of pauses in the AV material so that more informative AD could be offered.

Further research is needed to prove the usefulness and impact of these new hybrid transfer modes and what specific features should be considered. However, it should be stressed that previous research on AD has already put focused on how to enhance comprehension and recall to improve the user experience. Cabeza-Cáceres (2013) researched the impact of reading speed, intonation and explicitation on comprehension and enjoyment, whereas Fresno (2014) investigated the relationship between information distribution and information load on character description recall. Similarly, Fernández-Torné (2016) compared the reception of text-to-speech and human-voiced AD, and, most recently, Fidyka (2021) explored different AD strategies in immersive environments, including a standard AD, a more dynamic AD, and a so-called extended AD. Again, as with subtitles, a medical model has generally been followed, focusing on users with sight loss and sometimes using sighted users as control groups.

Both AD and subtitling have been the focus of the EASIT project, which is described in the next section. EASIT (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training) was an Erasmus + project funded by the EC that lasted from August 2018 to August 2021. It was led by the author of this article, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and the partners included universities (SDI München, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim, Universidade de Vigo, Università degli Studi di Trieste), user associations (Dyslexieförbundet, Zavod RISA), and a broadcaster (RTVSlovenjija).

### **The EASIT project**

EASIT’s starting point was the following question: can E2U language be used in the AV world, including AV access services? Based on this, the project aimed to: a) map E2U practice and training in Europe; b) research whether E2U language could be transferred to the AV world, more specifically to AV news and AV access services such as subtitles and AD; c) define new professional profiles with their associated skills cards; d) design curricula to train these new professionals; e) create open-access educational resources, and e) explore certification strategies. The project was structured into six blocks, the so-called “intellectual outputs” (IO), each corresponding to one of the previous aims.

In IO1, an online questionnaire was distributed in seven languages to producers, translators and evaluators of E2U content. The 128 responses collected

provided a map of the professionals currently involved in E2U language: mostly women (74%) aged 41-60, with university training (66%). They usually work as trainers (44%), translators (41%), content creators (39%), mostly focusing on ER (56%), although some deal with both ER and PL (26%). They usually work for public administrations and cultural and educational agencies and have received in-house training (42%) or have attended dedicated workshops (59%). Printed texts (84%) and digital texts (63%) are central, and AV content and EL interpreting are still not widely applied (13%). Perego (2020) presents a thorough report on this output, with more details on the needed skills of future professionals and Arias-Badia and Fernández-Torné (2020) report on the results of the Spanish informants.

In IO2, 23 interviews and 4 focus groups took place, with a total of 41 participants. The aim was to discuss whether E2U language could be used in audiovisual genres and access services. Due to the expertise of the consortium and previous projects in the field, the focus was put on E2U subtitles, E2U AD, and E2U audiovisual news. During the discussions on E2U subtitles, some experts considered that current subtitles already follow simplification rules but pointed at some challenges concerning line length and synchronization when subtitles are further simplified. Some of them also expressed doubts in relation to the acceptability of simplified subtitles and suggested personalization as fundamental. Educational and informative genres were considered the most suitable genres for easy subtitles. As far as AD is concerned, space restrictions and the clash between an easy description and difficult dialogues were two of the aspects put forward by the experts. As an alternative, professionals suggested a new type of AD, one closer to audio guides or extended AD, addressed to those who may have difficulty understanding certain AV content but who can actually see it. As mentioned before, Arias-Badia and Matamala (2020) present the results of the focus groups in Barcelona in more detail. Finally, as regards AV news, the main challenge is that news items are short texts where a lot of information is taken for granted. However, participants thought that easy daily news should be offered, and some suggestions on the skills of the professionals were offered.

In IO3, three skills cards were developed for the three professional profiles identified in the project: the expert in E2U subtitles, the expert in EU2 AD, and the expert in E2U AV journalism. The project considered that prior knowledge about subtitling, AD and journalism would have been acquired previously and focused on the specific needs of the new profiles. All three cards had three units of shared content: media accessibility (including human diversity, accessibility, universal design, media accessibility, access services); E2U language, and professional aspects (including personal and interpersonal skills). Then, there is a specific unit for each of the profiles dealing with processes, linguistic aspects, and technical aspects.

In IO4, the project designed two proposals: on the one hand, a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) addressed to those who wish to acquire some basic training in the field. On the other hand, a 30-ECTS postgraduate course of a modular nature lasting six months. Using this curriculum structure and considering the skills identified in IO3, IO5 developed a wide range of educational content, which is now uploaded in an open access repository and is accessible in a user-friendly platform at [transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit). The platform is structured into the following units:

- Unit 1, media accessibility.
- Unit 2, EU2 language.
- Unit 3A, EU2 language and subtitling.
- Unit 3B, EU2 language and audio description.
- Unit 3C, EU2 language and audiovisual journalism.

- Unit 4, the profession.

Each unit includes different elements and contains a series of videos and educational materials. The typology of materials produced is as follows:

- Video lectures, in which a lecturer is visible and gives a presentation based on a series of slides. Available downloads include the video, the slides only, the audio only, subtitles, and a transcript.
- Other videos, which may contain interviews with end-users and professionals and samples, as well as external videos which have been offered to the EASIT project. These videos also include subtitles.
- Additional materials: links to interesting resources linked to the previous videos.
- Reading lists for each of the units with seminal works in the field.
- An introductory video for each of the units.
- A questionnaire for each of the units which can be taken online and automatically corrected.
- A list of suggested tasks addressed to lecturers willing to use these materials in their classes.

The EASIT platform is addressed to two distinct profiles: self-learners who go online and check the videos, and lecturers who want to use the materials in class or in flipped learning situations. Considering the latter situation, a training guide has been created with a thorough description of the educational resources and how they can be used. Additionally, the website includes a video addressed to lecturers, and a video addressed to learners explaining how the educational resources can be used. All materials are available in the EASIT platform ([transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit](https://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/easit)), which links to the materials hosted in open access in the EASIT educational materials collection at UAB's DDD (<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/243556>).

Finally, IO6 considered certification when developing the project: for instance, while creating the skills card, the European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA) recommendations were considered. When developing the curricula, recommendations from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) were also considered. This approach will make the project sustainability and transferability easier, as proven already by the two specialization courses offered at UAB in 2021-2022, which use EASIT educational materials. More information can be found in each of the IO reports, all published in open access.

### **Conclusions: the road ahead**

This article has provided a broad overview of E2U language, ranging from ER (or EL) to PL, and has highlighted the most relevant guidelines and recommendations. It has also explained how E2U language has been related to AVT and accessibility and the main research outputs that have been produced so far. Specific attention has been paid to the EASIT project, which has paved the way for further research on the topic.

Both research and practice in E2U language have generally focused on written, printed text and have been limited to certain languages. It is time to consider other channels (spoken, oral) and formats (AV content), and to adopt a more international perspective, as done by Lindholm and Vanhatalo (2021). These new approaches to the topic will pose many new research questions that can be explored in the coming years. It remains to be seen how multimodality, personalization and customization will impact the development of accessible solutions. It remains to be seen how E2U language will be integrated into different formats and products. It remains to be seen what the role of the user will be when developing accessible

content and how the user will be defined, probably moving beyond the realm of disability into a capability-based model. Another challenge is not only to develop and offer accessible content but to provide easy access to the easy content, adopting a born accessible approach (Orero, 2020). Within this context, the role of the technology will need to be revisited to provide not only automatization tools but also tools that support professionals. A last but very relevant path will probably concern the scientific validation or rejection of existing practice-based rules through empirical testing with users. The road ahead is long but fascinating and opens new innovative approaches in the field of AVT and accessibility.

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