

## Focus on Text Producers: Plain and Easy Language in the Swiss Multilingual Institutional Context

*Paolo Canavese, Annarita Felici & Cornelia Griebel*

**Abstract** This paper is part of the MACSI project (Multilingual Accessible Communication in Swiss Institutions) and focuses on a case study carried out with the Federal Statistical Office (FSO). The broad aim of this collaboration with the FSO is to evaluate how multilingual accessible communication on statistics can be produced. While most of the research on accessible communication is text- and recipient-based, in this study we focused on text producers. Like writers, who are specialized experts in different domains, translators are also presented with the challenge of interlinguistic transfer when it comes to both plain and specialized texts. This paper presents the results from a questionnaire on accessibility submitted to writers and translators within the FSO. The responses show that writers either address several target groups with the same text or produce a variety of texts for different target groups. Moreover, both writers and translators have little knowledge or experience with plain and easy language, even though most of them are interested in writing more lay-friendly texts. There is therefore a need to train and raise awareness among writers and translators so that they are able to adapt content, level of technicality and language to different levels of expertise when producing a variety of multilingual, accessible texts.

**Keywords** accessibility, easy-to-understand, expert-lay communication, institutional communication, multilingual communication, plain language, text producers

### 1 Introduction: easy-to-understand in the institutional context

The last twenty years have given rise to several initiatives around the world aimed at accessible communication (e. g., the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; the Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications)<sup>1</sup>, that is, communicating in such a manner that as many people as possible can understand what is being communicated. As Hirvonen/Kinnunen (2020: 470) point out, “[a]ccessibility has various dimensions, from overcoming physical, linguistic, and social barriers to coping with sensory and communicative impairments”. The aforementioned EU directive, for instance, has a strong focus on the technical side of accessibility for disabled people. This paper will focus on linguistic accessibility for the general public and will not account for all aspects of accessibility in the field of institutional communication (cf. also Maaß/Rink 2019b for a comprehensive model of accessible communication).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx> and <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016L2102>, respectively (20.01.2022).

#### Zitiervorschlag / Citation:

Canavese, Paolo / Felici, Annarita / Griebel, Cornelia (2023): “Focus on Text Producers: Plain and Easy Language in the Swiss Multilingual Institutional Context.” *Fachsprache. Journal of Professional and Scientific Communication* 45.3–4: 106–130.

The idea of increasing audience access to written texts is rooted in the *plain language* movement, which gained particular strength in the 1970s and is aimed at bridging the gap between institutions and common citizens (Kimble 1992, Garner 2001, Macdonald 2004).<sup>2</sup> According to the International Plain Language Federation, a “communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended readers can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.”<sup>3</sup>

However, nowadays, the notion of linguistic accessibility encompasses various simplified varieties of natural language that can be placed on a continuum between *plain language*, aimed at common citizens, and *easy language*, which primarily targets people with communication impairments and disabilities (Bredel/Maaß 2016, Bock 2019, Maaß 2020). As Lindholm/Vanhatalo (2021: 18) put it, “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”.

If *plain language* aims at writing specialized content in a clear, concise and organized way that is suitable for the intended audience, *easy language* involves an extra level of simplification and necessitates extensive text and content reduction for people with enhanced communication needs. Despite the difficulties of addressing such a broad target group, *easy language* has recently spread to many institutional environments across Europe, from healthcare to media and public administration.<sup>4</sup> The countless initiatives and activities, both at the institutional level and in academia (e. g., Inclusion Europe, EASIT,<sup>5</sup> the International Federation of Library Associations – IFLA Guidelines) have simultaneously given rise to a plethora of terms like *easy language*, *easy-to-read-language*, *easy-to-understand-language*, *easy read*, *simplified language*, *simple language*, and *barrier-free-communication*, each of which is well-grounded (Lindholm/Vanhatalo 2021, Perego 2021), but no less confusing.<sup>6</sup> For the sake of clarity, we will use “easy-to-understand” (E2U) as an umbrella term for texts that include both plain and easy language in the wake of EASIT (2019) and Perego (2020: 236). We will also use “clarity” as a synonym (cf. for instance the edited volume by Wagner/Cacciaguidi-Fahy 2008, entitled *Obscurity and Clarity in the Law*).

From an academic point of view, research on linguistic accessibility developed at the beginning of the 20th century with the first investigations into readability (François 2015: 80 f.). In the 1970s and 1980s the focus shifted to comprehensibility (cf. e. g., Langer/Schulz von Thun/Tausch 1974, Groeben 1982). While empirical investigations of comprehensibility always involve text-reader interaction, i. e., comprehension tests with groups of people (Christmann/

<sup>2</sup> Cf. also <https://www.plainlanguage.gov> and <https://plainlanguagenetwork.org/> (14.02.2022).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. <https://www.iplfederation.org/plain-language/> (20.01.2022). Cf. also <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf> (18.10.2022).

<sup>4</sup> In Germany, for example, it is now mandatory for all Federal websites, as provided for by the Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung BITV 2.0 (2011) [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bitv\\_2\\_0/BJNR184300011.html](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bitv_2_0/BJNR184300011.html) (14.02.2022).

<sup>5</sup> EASIT (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training) is an Erasmus funded project that aims to provide training material in easy-to-read language and single out new professional profiles. Cf. <https://transmedia.catalonia.uab.cat/easit/> (20.01.2022).

<sup>6</sup> Hansen-Schirra et al. (2021) have recently attempted to standardize terminology related to accessible communication in English and German, and establish clear definitions for both languages.

Groeben 2019) or even refined laboratory testing methods like eye-tracking (e. g., Maksymski/Gutermuth/Hansen-Schirra 2015), readability indices are based exclusively on mathematical formulae. They account for text parameters like sentence and word length, and are typically matched with the estimated level of education required to be able to read and comprehend a text without difficulty. The main criticism against traditional readability formulae is that they do not adequately capture all facets of text complexity (e. g., Lutz 2015). However, recent computational developments have fostered research on readability metrics, thus going beyond basic readability formulae; the new frontier in readability research is the so-called “AI readability” (François 2015), which makes use of machine-learning algorithms to predict the level of complexity of a text.

In this paper, instead of dealing with texts and their recipients, we focused on text producers and, more specifically, writers and translators. While plain-language producers “are mostly domain experts that are given the additional task of writing in a comprehensible way”, easy language texts are usually “written or translated by easy language experts” (Maaß 2020: 180). This means that domain experts are largely untrained or barely trained in accessible writing and often have no direct contact with their target groups (Maaß 2020: 181). On this point, Krings (1996) shows that the intuition of domain experts can be deceptive when it comes to producing plain language texts. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that they sometimes have to sacrifice precision to adapt content for a lay audience or target groups with special needs.

Previous studies on text-producers in communication from governmental organisations focus on the skills required for plain communication in regulatory organisations (Skopal 2022), the production of client-friendly insurance notices (Fiedler-Rauer/Margies 2021) and design, production and cooperation processes (Martin/Gregor/Rice 2008, Jenkins 2011, Gotti 2018). In a case study on governmental organisations, Skopal (2022) investigates the writing processes by triangulating data from interviews with writers, testing readability with users and analysing text. Although the text-producers were writing for an intended readership, the reader-participant analysis revealed that less than half of the texts were easily accessible (Skopal 2022: 201). Like in the present study, these text producers are essentially domain experts who do not have a background in languages. In the conclusion of her analysis of competencies and skillsets, the author asks how “staff view their role as a writer” (Skopal 2022: 200), but leaves the question unanswered.

In this study, we tried to close this gap by zooming in on the perspective of expert writers who are called on to produce primarily plain, but also, in part, easy language texts in the Swiss institutional context. We focused on the attitude of domain experts towards more accessible informative texts, as this is an important factor when it comes to motivating change in text production processes and producing texts for a lay audience.

More specifically, this paper is part of the MACSI project (Multilingual Accessible Communication in Swiss Institutions)<sup>7</sup> and focuses on a case study carried out with the Federal Statistical Office (FSO). The broad aim of this collaboration with the FSO is to evaluate different ways of implementing multilingual accessible information on statistics.<sup>8</sup> Text producers

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <https://www.researchgate.net/project/MACSI-Multilingual-Accessible-Communication-in-Swiss-institutions> (20.01.2022).

<sup>8</sup> The collaboration consists of three main stages, i. e., collecting background information and defining the goals in terms of accessible communication, sensitizing text producers and assisting them in the production of their first E2U texts and evaluating the outcomes with target reader populations. In this

at the FSO include both writers and translators. The writers are experts in different domains and work either in the central Publishing and Communication Division or specialized units (e. g., Population and Education, Health and Social Affairs, Territory and Environment, etc.). They deal with the production of both specialized and popularized texts for different audiences. Translators work in the Language Services and translate all kind of texts produced within the FSO, thus facing the challenges of interlinguistic transfer in both specialized and plain communication. We will use the term “text producers” to refer to both writers and translators.

To assist with implementing multilingual E2U communication at the FSO, we decided to directly involve writers and translators by inviting them to preliminary interviews and a larger-scale, structured survey. As per Saldanha/O’Brien (2014: 152), “[a] questionnaire may be used to collect background information on research participants; to collect data on facts, opinions, attitudes, behaviour, etc. or to combine the collection of both”. We will refer to these types of information as “profile” and “stance”, respectively.

We explored three main questions:

- 1) To what extent is accessible communication a concern among domain experts who are producing texts for various peers and lay audiences?
- 2) What are the opinions on E2U and experiences of text producers at the FSO?
- 3) For text producers, what are the main shortcomings and difficulties when it comes to producing accessible texts?

The results from this case study are arguably valid for other institutional settings. Indeed, it is essential to work with the people in charge of text production and raise awareness on good writing practices in order to foster a culture of accessibility.

This paper is structured as follows: in section 2, we provide more information on the Swiss institutional context in general and on the FSO in particular; to answer our research questions, we adopted a multi-methodological approach that is described in section 3; section 4 analyzes the results from the questionnaire submitted to writers and translators within the FSO; and, finally, our conclusions and new avenues for future research are presented in section 5.

## 2 A case study at the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO)

The idea of writing plain institutional texts is not new in Switzerland. It is deep-rooted, above all, in legal drafting, where the ideal of a *popular legislation* for lay citizens dates back to the drafting of the Civil Code at the beginning of the 20th century (Huber 1914). This principle has survived until present day and has recently been enshrined in the law; civil servants should not only strive for clarity but should also receive appropriate training.<sup>9</sup> Over the last few decades, the Confederation has taken several initiatives to ensure quality in institutional texts, such as guidelines, seminars and organizational efforts (Canavese 2020: 26–29). However, when it comes to administrative texts on specialized subject matters, further efforts still need to be

---

paper, we present the results from the first stage, which has already been completed; publications on results from the other stages are either available (cf. Felici et al. 2023, forthcoming, which presents some results from the second stage) or planned.

<sup>9</sup> Art. 7 of the Languages Act, <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2009/821/en>; Art. 2 Languages ordinance, <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2010/355/en> (04.02.2022).

undertaken to ensure accessibility, as shown in recent studies on information leaflets for old age insurance and disability insurance (Felici/Griebel 2019, Griebel/Felici 2021).

This led to the creation of the aforementioned MACSI project, which aims to strengthen the exchanges between academia and institutions, and foster accessible communication for the general public. Since Switzerland is a multilingual country, accessible communication is mandatory at an institutional level in all its official languages (German, French and Italian),<sup>10</sup> thus giving rise to a particular demand for drafting and translation. Consequently, when dealing with plain and easy language, we have to take into account not only intralingual, but also interlingual translation.

Our partner, the FSO, makes for an interesting case study: i) it has a large and complex structure, ii) it deals with a variety of specialized domains, and iii) it addresses different stakeholders ranging from politicians to media, economists and the general public. As it is the official national center for Swiss statistics, it surveys and describes the status and development of almost every aspect of the Confederation, including population, economy, society, environment, culture and education. The FSO thus provides both raw statistical data and specialized communications aimed at an expert audience and the general public. The variety of texts mirrors the heterogeneity of its recipients and ranges from technical reports and complex statistics to surveys, press releases, e-mails, news, popularized reports and statistics, social media posts, websites and informative brochures, thus constantly shifting from experts to laypersons with different knowledge and educational backgrounds.

Most of this statistical information is used to orient key political areas of Swiss life and society and provide objective figures for public debate, thus promoting fair governance and democracy. Implementing accessible communication is therefore paramount at the FSO, since official statistics “have the mandate of compiling and imparting user-friendly information on important areas of life” and society.<sup>11</sup> The technicality of the topics may appear to be a deterrent for E2U communication, but the FSO also deals with a variety of non-expert target groups. The general public often comes into play through surveys, censuses and mainstream information on the country’s development; media and journalists rely on statistics for news and events; schools often visit the FSO; and every year, the FSO publishes *Statistical Data on Switzerland*, an informative publication aimed at the general public.<sup>12</sup>

Based on Hoffmann’s LSP model (1985), communication at the FSO encompasses several levels of technicality. Hoffmann refers primarily to the technological domain, but also transfers the model to other areas of communication. He defines five levels of technicality with a

---

<sup>10</sup> The fourth national language, Romansh, “is also an official language of the Confederation when communicating with persons who speak Romansh” (Art. 70, Para. 1 of the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation, <https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1999/404/en> (11.08.2022)). However, Romansh is greatly underrepresented in institutional writing.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the webpage “Official statistics” on the FSO website: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/fso/official-statistics.html> (20.01.2022).

<sup>12</sup> The publication is freely available on the FSO’s website. The download page stresses the importance of statistics to describe our society: “Statistics speak volumes about society: what is interesting is not the figures specifically but the messages they convey on the state of society as well as relations between individuals both within and outside of Switzerland.” <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/catalogues-databases/publications/overviews/statistical-data-switzerland.assetdetail.15864467.html> (20.01.2022).

decreasing degree of abstraction, from A (highest level of abstraction, use of artificial symbols and mathematical formulae) to E (very low level of abstraction and technicality). Finally, he assigns corresponding groups of communication participants to these levels, which, in turn, have a decreasing degree of expertise, from A (scientist to scientist) to E (experts to laypersons and vice versa). FSO publications are aimed at participants with different levels of expertise, including the lowest level, and writers need to take into account these different degrees of knowledge.

Given that the FSO is meant to communicate in its three official languages and English, offering information in plain and easy language means reflecting closely on text production and, even more importantly, the interplay between writing and translation. It is only possible to produce multilingual E2U texts by collaborating with writers, who are field experts and can provide explanations on specialized topics, as well as feedback on content selection, reduction and terms.

### 3 Methodology

The aim of this study was to bring to light the difficulties of producing texts for a wider audience at the FSO, as well as to identify potential solutions together with participants. Given our focus on text-producers, we started with interviews and focus group discussions with communication management staff, writers and translators to gain an initial, broad understanding of important aspects of text production and translation processes. It allowed us to gain direct access to our partners' thoughts and opinions, without worrying about gathering representative samples. Due to time constraints (both ours and our partner's) and the variety of participants and their availability, we did not consider other approaches, such as the ethnographic one.

To answer the research questions presented in the introduction (section 1), we relied on distinctly qualitative approaches (Silverman 2017) with an exploratory sequential design (Creswell 2015: 41):



Figure 1: Research design

Between December 2020 and May 2021, we carried out three explorative interviews with staff in charge of the Publishing unit and two focus group discussions, which included writers and translators. More precisely, we began by discussing E2U communication with our main project partner, the Head of the Dissemination and Publishing section within the Communication and Publishing unit. The interviews were unstructured in order to explore the perspective of our partners and better grasp their potential needs, in terms of clear communication at the FSO. We then organized two focus group discussions with text writers and translators from the same unit. We began the meetings by presenting some linguistic/textual analyses we carried out on selected pages of *Statistical Data on Switzerland*. Together with our main partner, we selected some specific sections and analyzed them according to the general and language-specific standards of plain language (cf., for instance, Cutts 2013 for English; Baumert 2016 and Schubert 2013 for German; Ministère fédéral de la Fonction publique de Belgique 2015 for French; Cortelazzo/Pellegrino 2003 for Italian). During the presentation, we pointed out relevant aspects from an accessibility perspective. This was then followed by an unstruc-

tured discussion on these aspects within the focus group. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and the content of the discussions were summarized. We used the questions as analytical categories to aggregate individual responses and identify frequent and relevant topics for the survey.

Based on the knowledge we acquired, we performed four semi-structured interviews with another four writers from the communication/publishing department. The results from these interviews were also summarized and formed the basis of a questionnaire that was distributed on a larger scale.

After this exploratory phase, we developed two questionnaires using the LimeSurvey online platform: one for writers and a second, with slightly different questions, for translators (cf. Annex 1). The questionnaire consisted of three groups of questions on the background and current position of respondents, their usual writing and/or translation activities at the FSO and their stances on accessibility. More specifically, it contained both close-ended and open-ended questions on target audiences (experts and/or laypersons), writing processes, language of writing (mother tongue or other language/s), their experiences with E2U and their attitude toward writing accessible texts within the thematic and specialized framework of the FSO.

The questionnaire was administered to 60 participants, 48 writers and 12 translators. The sample was created by our main project partners, who only included employees who are actually in charge of writing texts. This helped us avoid unqualified responses, which would have distorted the outcomes of the survey. As far as the translation unit is concerned, no selection was necessary, as translators deal with text production on a daily basis due to the nature of their work. The whole translation unit was therefore invited to take part in the survey. Participation was on a voluntary and anonymous basis. Although we asked questions about their background and experiences, as well as personal and professional opinions, we analyzed the responses in an aggregate manner, so as to make it impossible to trace back answers to the respondent.

We sent out the questionnaire in July 2021 and respondents had 15 days to complete it. A reminder was then sent out, giving them another 15 days to fill it out. We were able to collect a total of 33 responses, which correspond to a participation rate of 55 %. Despite the high level of participation, it is also worth probing the reasons behind incomplete responses (N = 13) and non-responses (N = 14). One simple explanation may be that the questionnaire took place during the holiday season and participants had a high workload during that period. Nevertheless, another possible interpretation may be that there is little awareness on the issue of accessibility, and thus, little interest in participating.

Finally, we organized a one-day workshop with 20 writers and translators in September 2021. The morning period was devoted to various presentations that were accompanied by discussions. First, we introduced the results of the questionnaire, then we presented the different pillars and rules of plain language and accessible communication. Finally, we discussed the above-mentioned linguistic analyses. During the afternoon section, participants were divided into three groups (German-speakers, French-speakers and a bilingual French/German group, where participants were allowed to speak the language of their choice) and given a hands-on exercise using different texts they brought in themselves. This exercise, along with a final discussion with the whole group, was particularly helpful from a research perspective, because it helped us understand the main difficulties encountered by writers when trying to simplify their texts and shed light on further training needs. A year later (November 2022), we organized a second hands-on workshop.

## 4 Text producers to the fore: a focus on writers and translators

This section presents the main findings from the online questionnaire along three main axes: 1) writing and translating at the FSO, 2) knowledge of E2U communication and 3) stances towards E2U. After conducting a qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2016), we summarized the answers to the open-ended questions significantly and tried to indicate the proportion of participants that expressed an opinion through the use of quantifying adverbs (“all, few, some respondents indicated that ...”). The answers to the closed-ended questions were aggregated and analyzed quantitatively to calculate percentages.

### 4.1 *Writing and translating*

This section reports on our first axe – the profiles of writers and translators – and delves into their activities within the FSO. Information on their educational and professional background allowed us to learn about their writing-related activities within the FSO, the most frequent types of texts they deal with, their awareness of target readers and the potential degrees of simplification they consequently should aim for.

#### *Writer and translator profiles*

The first finding from the survey is that the writers are mostly domain experts who write, revise and edit texts. They all have a tertiary-level education and most of them hold a university degree (BA, MA and/or PhD). Based on their specialization, writers deal with data from different areas, such as formal, natural, social and human sciences. Only a few writers have a degree in a language- or communication-related field (public relations, communication, language and literature, German studies). Most of them hold a degree in other disciplines where language training is not essential (statistics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, geology, agricultural engineering, economics, history of economics, political science, political economy, geography, archaeology, sociology, psychology, criminology).

Some of the respondents currently work in the fields of communication, publishing, dissemination and media, while others work in specialized domains and draft texts on their subject matters for different target readers. Writers are at the frontline when it comes to creating plain language content. In light of this, this first result confirms that plain language producers are mostly untrained domain experts and having to communicate in accessible language gives them with yet another task (cf. Maaß’ 2020 take on this in section 1).

As far as translators are concerned, most of the respondents have a BA and/or MA degree in translation, or have completed language-related studies, such as German or Romance studies.

#### *Time devoted to writing*

As shown in Figure 2, the time that writers devote to writing full texts is extremely heterogeneous. For many respondents, writing texts is merely a collateral activity, but more than 50 % write texts on a regular basis (at least once a week to every day):



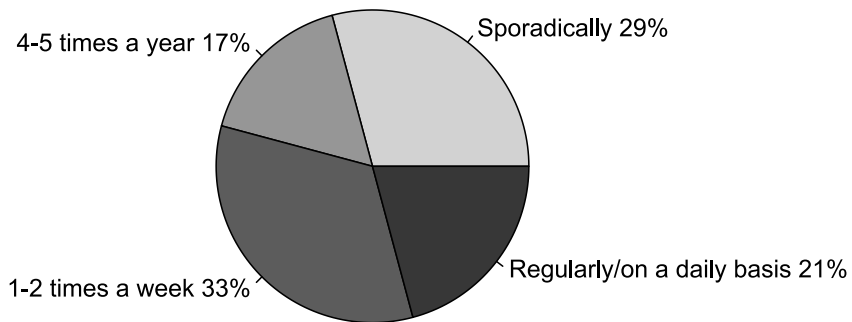


Figure 2: Time devoted to writing full texts

Besides pure writing, writers carry out several side activities like proofreading, verifying translations (in one case, even translating), assessing publications, answering internal queries (from clients) and external queries (from journalists, academics and the general public), communicating with data deliverers and consulting. They also deal with more technical activities, such as analysing data, creating thematic maps, tables, graphs and statistics, conducting surveys and programming. Many of these additional activities include some form of text work, like writing questions for surveys or inserting textual elements in graphs. This means that even writers who are less involved in text production are likely to be confronted on a daily basis with a writing task that includes issues of linguistic accessibility. Furthermore, some of the respondents are in charge of a team and project management, and carry out clerical and organizational tasks. The fact that writers do not necessarily have a linguistic background and/or training, and that some of them only deal sporadically with text production, may represent a barrier when it comes to implementing E2U.

### Text types

Writers produce (and translators translate) a wide range of texts, many of which seem to be addressed to a somewhat non-specialized target audience. Below, we list the different text types mentioned by respondents and interviewees and try to display them on an imaginary continuum ranging from the general public to domain experts:

- popularization of texts dealing with statistics (e. g., *Statistical Data on Switzerland*, cf. footnote 12)
- survey manuals
- publications about surveys
- web texts
- social media posts
- summaries for statistical portal
- press releases
- e-mails
- news mails
- staff-related publications (job advertisements, job references)
- short texts (titles, legends, explanations of visual elements)
- texts and employee magazine

- internal working papers
- legal documents
- description of results
- Statistical Yearbook<sup>13</sup>
- technical reports

#### *Target readers*

Both writers and translators are aware that their texts are addressed to a wide range of target readers. One interviewee classified the different target readers in three main categories:

- *general readers*: laypersons interested in statistical information, schools, survey participants;
- *users*: journalists with a specialized background, students, researchers, public authorities, politicians, colleagues;
- *experts*: statisticians, field experts.

These categories reflect different levels of technicality and expertise under Hoffmann's model (1985), as mentioned in section 2, and require varying degrees of simplification. The first category is clearly the one most concerned by E2U content, but it is still quite heterogeneous. Furthermore, when it comes to readership, some translators pointed out that when they receive an assignment, it is not always clear who the target reader is and some of them take it upon themselves to ask the writer to specify who the text is for.

#### *Writing and clarity*

Most writers consider the texts written at the FSO to be accessible for their intended audience. Some of them added that they make an effort to adopt clear language in texts for the general public, as highlighted by one respondent: "We deliberately formulate our texts in a much simpler way than typical scientific texts." (Writer\_11)<sup>14</sup> At the same time, many of them recognize that specialized texts are written for field experts and are consequently more complex, both from a content and linguistic point of view. Only a few respondents pointed out that, in some cases, texts can be further simplified.

#### *Translation and clarity*

Translators generally agree that highly specialized texts cannot be made accessible for the general public and, all in all, they believe that some texts are already accessible to the lay reader. When translating, they sometimes encounter difficulties that can be perceived by lay readers as well. Comprehension is sometimes hindered by highly specialized content, terminology and complex formulations. Their remarks mainly concerned the quality of the source text, which is often poor, not only at the word and sentence level, but also in terms of information structure and message cohesion. Sometimes texts are also too long and detailed, due to repetitions and the use of many figures. When moving from the product to the process, translators admitted that frequent modifications to the source text make their task more difficult.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/catalogues-databases/publications/overviews/statistical-yearbook-switzerland.html> (25.10.2022).

<sup>14</sup> In this paper, we have translated all citations from interviews or the questionnaire into English. The original citation is provided in a footnote. Here: "Unsere Texte sind bewusst deutlich einfacher formuliert als typischerweise wissenschaftliche Texte."

As a result of these shortcomings, they try to reformulate texts to improve clarity without sacrificing precision. To do so, they move away from the source text by trying to convey the same content using the most natural and comprehensible structures in the target language. More specifically, they shorten and paraphrase long, convoluted sentences, avoid repetition and reorganize the content in a more logical order. Whenever possible, they also discuss issues with the authors; they sometimes ask for clarifications, or point out mistakes or unclear sentences that need to be rectified in the source text. These reflections seem to confirm the hypothesis that multilingualism and translation can be an ally to clarity in institutional communication (Egger 2012: 430, Canavese 2022). At the same time, their freedom to improve the text is limited: translators are not allowed to fully rethink or transcreate the text (cf. Díaz-Millón/Olvera-Lobo 2021 on the notion of “transcreation”), as the different language versions need to display a high degree of parallelism and equivalence, in terms of structure and content.

#### *4.2 Knowledge of E2U communication*

After profiling the text producers and understanding the context of production, the interest of the survey gradually shifted to more accessibility-related questions. In particular, we wanted to understand what the level of knowledge of E2U is and to what extent it is a concern for each respondent and their team.

##### *Definition of plain and easy language*

The easiest way to survey knowledge of E2U consisted of asking participants to define the concepts of “plain language” and “easy language” in their own words. Only a few writers admitted that they are not familiar with these concepts. The vast majority of respondents, both writers and translators, correctly identified some features of E2U languages. For instance, they identified the main target readers of E2U, including the general public, people with poor language knowledge, people without a higher education, people with reading or learning disabilities or cognitive impairments and L2 speakers. They also touched upon linguistic features that characterize E2U varieties, for instance, conciseness, simple formulations, avoidance of jargon, specialized terms, foreign words, acronyms, use of everyday vocabulary, reduction of subordination and passive voice, as well as maximal explicitness. Finally, they recognized that layout is also a key element of E2U and that simplifying means both reducing content to create short texts and adding explanations of difficult concepts and terms. With the exception of one respondent, however, participants were unable to make a distinction between plain and easy language. This shows that both writers and translators have some degree of awareness of accessible communication, but more training is needed to refine their understanding of different language varieties for different readerships. This lack of awareness on plain and easy language is once again in line with Maaß (2020: 180 f.); it is rare for writers to receive systematic and in-depth training in this area, even when they are at the frontline of accessible text production.

##### *Discussions about accessibility*

We asked participants whether they had already discussed accessibility in their unit. More than half of both writers and translators responded positively, as shown below (Figure 3):

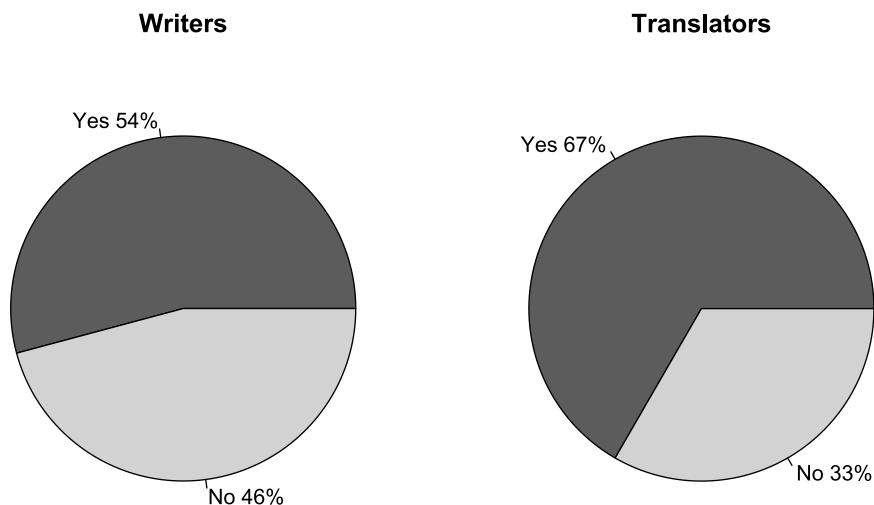


Figure 3: Previous discussions on accessibility

Nevertheless, writers specified that they had focused on technical aspects of accessibility (especially web accessibility), for instance, how to make content suitable for screen-readers, reach blind and partially-sighted users, describe visual content or carefully choose file formats, colors for diagrams and font size. This type of accessibility falls within the scope of the provisions of the EU Accessibility Directive mentioned in section 1, but there were only a few unstructured reflections related to E2U language. For example, one respondent explained that their team tried to identify the most suitable means of communication for the intended target audiences and they reflected on content selection. The same respondent also pointed to the inverted-pyramid model of content presentation (important information first, followed by details), the importance of creating good summaries, the necessity of accompanying readers with consistent web pages, glossaries, abbreviation lists and graphs along with examples. At the crossroad between content and language, one respondent highlighted the need to simplify sentences and avoiding complex calculations and models in texts intended for a broad audience. However, some respondents admitted that linguistic accessibility is still not their main concern; language simplification is carried out in a mostly intuitive way, without any clear model or guidelines. As put forward in section 1, drawing on Krings (1996), intuition is not always sufficient or appropriate when simplifying a text – at least not when proper training is absent.

As expected, accessibility had also been discussed in the translation unit, especially in terms of easy language. However, as of now, creating E2U texts is not considered to be a duty for the translation unit. One respondent admitted that the translation unit had already discussed potential training in this field. Unlike writers, linguistic accessibility seems to be crucial for most translators, in view of promoting political participation in direct democracy. Nevertheless, a lack of time and resources may hinder further steps in this direction. Indeed, text simplification and, more specifically, translation in easy language is rarely an integral part of translators' training and there is a need for specific courses on the topic (Maaß 2020: 177). The willingness of translators to engage in linguistic accessibility is therefore insufficient without a proper strategy and adequate resources.

### 4.3 Stances towards E2U and potential difficulties

Bearing in mind that E2U is not yet a reality at the FSO (section 4.1) and that writers and translators have limited knowledge of it (section 4.2), it was interesting to learn about the participants' stances towards accessibility. It helped us to identify potential barriers to the implementation of E2U and the steps that might be taken to overcome them in the practical part of this collaboration.

#### *Usefulness of E2U*

First, we asked participants whether they think that accessible publications are useful for the FSO. The vast majority of the respondents answered positively, as shown below (Figure 4).

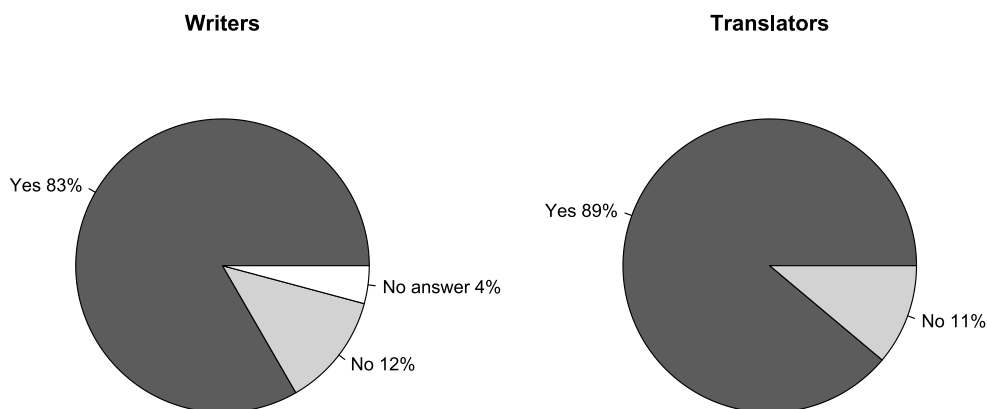


Figure 4: Usefulness of E2U for the FSO

Most writers and translators agree that only a selection of content should be offered in E2U. Some of them believe that separate, simplified publications should be produced, while others would prefer to integrate E2U summaries in already existing texts. Some examples include web pages (e. g., initial page of thematic sections), the most consulted publications (e. g., on population), summaries of press releases, overview publications, such as *Statistical Data on Switzerland* and leaflets, survey material, questionnaires and social media texts. Creating E2U information always involves some content reduction (Maaß 2020: 120–122); it is not possible (nor useful) to simplify each and every text and, within a text, relevant pieces of information are usually selected. The awareness among participants constitutes a solid basis for carrying out a cross reflection at the Office level on what content should be simplified for specific audiences.

#### *Interest in producing E2U content*

We also asked writers whether they are interested in creating plain language texts, and translators, plain and easy language texts.

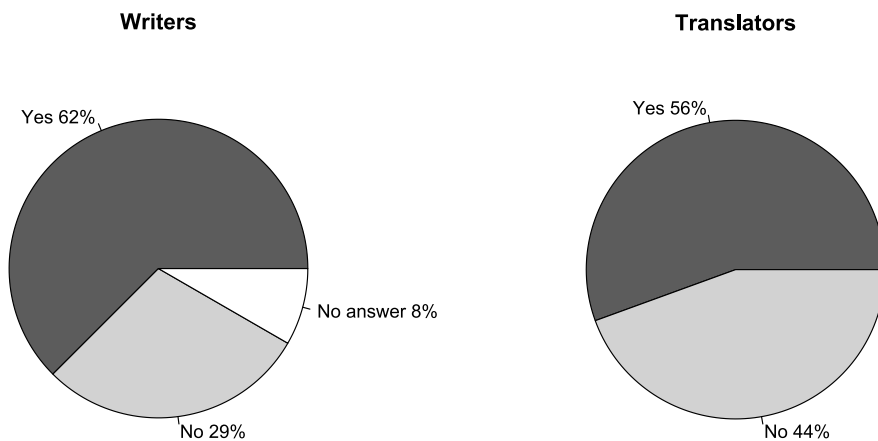


Figure 5: Interest in producing E2U content

The following table summarizes the primary reasons behind positive and negative answers:

	Writers	Translators
YES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Interest in finding out new ways to make their texts more comprehensible</li> <li>– Curiosity and willingness to accept a challenge</li> <li>– Reach a wider public besides field experts</li> <li>– Reuse some E2U strategies in standard texts and improve them as well</li> <li>– Understand what can and what cannot be simplified</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Personal interest, challenge</li> <li>– Task diversification</li> <li>– Positive social impact</li> <li>– Curiosity</li> <li>– Language specialists are the right stakeholders for accessible communication</li> </ul>
NO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Lack of time due to many other tasks</li> <li>– It would fall outside their primary field of responsibility</li> <li>– Enough efforts are already made</li> <li>– Difficulty in explaining specialized terms for someone who does not work in data production</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Lack of knowledge about writing E2U content, but interest in translating simplified texts</li> <li>– Lack of time and resources</li> </ul>

Table 1: Interest and lack of interest in producing E2U content

Once again, more than a half of both groups gave a positive answer. The lower percentage of positive answers by translators is, in our view, mainly related to the high workload of the relatively small translation team within the FSO. The focus groups, which included translators, confirmed that there is interest in developing E2U skills, but their workload does not allow for them to take on additional tasks. Moreover, they have more marked linguistic awareness compared to domain experts. They understand the stakes of providing accessible communication and fear that they cannot easily compensate for their lack of knowledge in the field. However,

the fact that E2U is not being implemented concretely in the writing process, even though both groups recognize the usefulness of it, supports Skopal's (2022) and Gotti's (2018) plea for cooperation between linguists and domain experts in the production of comprehensible institutional texts.

### *Barriers to producing accessible publications*

The "NOs" in Table 1 exemplify the most relevant barriers and difficulties identified by respondents. These concerns are particularly related to complex content that can hardly be simplified, as put forward by one respondent:

One must dare to leave some gaps (leave out certain details, e. g., in definitions) in order to convey the main message without distorting the facts. (Writer\_24)<sup>15</sup>

The main concern brought up by our respondents is that they would not be able to handle terminology correctly, as they fear that they would have to compromise on precision and, consequently, correctness and transparency. For instance, the results of a survey could be interpreted incorrectly if detailed explanations and terminology are missing. Some respondents also fear that an oversimplified text would be less appealing and neglect the primary target's expectations.

As we have already stressed in previous sections, striking a balance between specialized communication and popularization for a general audience requires training and clear rules, and respondents are aware of it. As pointed out by several participants, aside from training, there would also need to be a lot of effort on an organizational and technical level. First, the persons who are in charge of these new tasks must be identified. Second, there would need to be more steps in the text production and circulation process, as well as a wider portfolio of text/text versions. Consequently, the writers' workload would increase. It would not just be a matter of changing habits; more resources would need to be allocated, which seems to be one of the major barriers. Finally, such a big and costly change requires a solid system to measure its impact and understand whether or not it is worth it to produce E2U content.

### *Sceptic stances*

Although the majority of respondents are convinced that E2U would be useful for the FSO, some of them also expressed scepticism for various reasons, as shown in the following quotes:

(Plain language is an) oversimplified language, both in terms of wording and vocabulary, which implies a loss of information and embraces a simplistic view of society and ongoing processes. (Writer\_07)<sup>16</sup>

On the one hand, this answer confirms the lack of knowledge of plain language, which is once again confused with easy language. However, it also reveals the concern that linguistic simplification can consistently lead to a lack of information and precision. This sentiment is confirmed by another writer:

<sup>15</sup> Original statement: "Es braucht den Mut zur Lücke (weglassen bestimmter Details z.B. bei Definitionen), um die Hauptbotschaft herüberbringen zu können, ohne Sachverhalte zu verfälschen."

<sup>16</sup> Original statement: "(Le langage clair est un) langage simplifié à l'extrême, tant dans la formulation que le vocabulaire, qui implique une perte d'information et s'approche d'une vision simpliste de la société et des processus en cours."

The maxim “Leave no one behind” may be appropriate for offices that provide “vital” basic public services. However, applying it to statistical information is detrimental to the great mass of well-educated citizens. (Writer\_15)<sup>17</sup>

This answer reflects one of the main concerns of highly specialized experts, namely that language simplification might lead to the loss of important information and that certain target groups might no longer be fully informed. One translator even related accessibility to economic considerations:

I see this as (...) a concern for profitability, as people are expected to digest more information in less time. Quantity, therefore, comes before quality, as it does everywhere in business (be it private or public). (Translator\_04)<sup>18</sup>

Simplifying texts in order to make subjects less complex can be useful. But taking people for fools is counterproductive. Moreover, is it up to us, writers and translators, to make up for the fact that public education has failed to ensure first language proficiency over the last few decades? (Translator\_04)<sup>19</sup>

In conclusion, these critical opinions relate to misconceptions of E2U, targets, aims of E2U, as well as social importance and responsibility. This further confirms the necessity of both training and developing a culture of accessibility.

## 5 Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we presented a specific case of expert-lay communication, i. e., the production of statistical information for the broader public within the Swiss multilingual institutional context. Our study showed the need to train FSO’s writers and translators so that they are able to face the challenges of E2U. It is paramount to develop widespread awareness or, in other words, a “culture of accessibility”. This also involves reflecting on the broader social interest of accessible communication and overcoming the scepticism expressed by some respondents. All in all, the findings from our survey provide a useful basis for developing specific training modules. As similar studies and research projects (Gotti 2018, Skopal 2022, cf. also Perego 2019 on the EASIT project) have shown, there is a need for interdisciplinary cooperation.

At the same time, there are practical concerns common to all multilingual institutions, like the lack of time and resources, as well as cost efficiency. These structural and financial bottlenecks may hamper the production of texts in plain and easy language. Indeed, it is only if E2U

---

<sup>17</sup> Original statement: “Die Devise ‘Leave no one behind’ mag für Ämter angezeigt sein, die ‘lebensnotwendige’ staatliche Grunddienstleistungen anbieten. Wendet man sie jedoch auf statistische Informationen an, dann geschieht dies zum Nachteil der grossen Masse der gut gebildeten Bürgerinnen und Bürger.”

<sup>18</sup> Original statement: “J’y associe (...) un souci de rentabilité, puisqu’on veut que les gens digèrent davantage d’informations en moins de temps. La quantité passe donc avant la qualité, comme partout dans le monde de l’entreprise (privée ou publique d’ailleurs).”

<sup>19</sup> Original statement: “Simplifier les textes dans l’idée de décomplexifier la matière peut s’avérer utile. Mais prendre les gens pour des benêts est contre-productif. En outre, est-ce à nous, rédactrices ou traductrices, de pallier aux manques de l’instruction publique en matière de maîtrise de la langue première de ces dernière décennies?”



is perceived as a priority at the managerial level that it is possible to allocate time and resources to training and producing additional simplified texts. Undertaking direct field research helps us better understand these real-world implications, which are sometimes overlooked by researchers, even though they have a huge impact on the successful implementation of E2U.

A key finding concerns the target readership, which is not always clearly defined for each text genre, despite being an absolute precondition of effective writing (as stressed in most guidelines on clear language, such as the plain language guidelines, cf. PLAIN 2011). Keeping in mind Hoffmann's (1985) LSP model, the responses show that, in some cases, writers address several target groups with the same text and, in others, they produce texts for different target groups. They therefore need to be able to adapt content, level of technicality and language to different degrees of expertise, which is not always an easy task. Translators, on the other hand, seem to be aware of the importance of adapting texts to the target audiences, even though they sometimes do not receive this information along with the translation job. This skill is inherent to the activity of translation, which involves decoding and recoding the message, and is often seen as a means to overcome communication barriers (e. g., Maaß 2019a: 292 f.). As Neves (2022: 446) puts it,

[i]nterlingual translation eliminates language and cultural barriers; intralingual translation will take care of linguistic and stylistic variation that hinders understanding among same language speakers (...).

In our case, the multilingual institutional dimension requires adapting and “rethinking” E2U in terms of linguistic equivalence and harmonization. The interlingual (from one official and/or working language to the others) and the intralingual (from LSP to E2U) dimensions are interwoven, and aiming for accessibility does not only mean “writing accessible texts”, but “writing accessible texts and translating them into different languages”.

This has various practical consequences. While the positive impact of translation on clarity is undisputable, creating additional simplified texts for laypersons and doing so in different languages implies longer, more expensive procedures. As for the intersection between intralingual and interlingual translation, focusing on the necessary collaboration between writers and translators is a possible avenue to explore for future research. Plain language should primarily be implemented at the writing level. As experts in the field, it is desirable for writers to produce plain language texts themselves and benefit from the translators' input. It is proven that encoding a text in a different language involves deeper reflection on the source text message, thus often unveiling additional linguistic nuances and potential pitfalls. Conversely, easy language requires more specific linguistic and translation skills, which are better suited to the translator's work. However, given the high amount of textual simplification, this task cannot be carried out without the help of writers, with whom they would need to collaborate to define the appropriate level of content reduction (Maaß 2020: 170). The question of whether or not, to what extent, and how specialized statistical information and, more specifically, terminology can be simplified in plain and easy language presents a promising area for further collaboration between research and practice (an initial study in this field that is part of the same project is presented in Felici et al. 2023, forthcoming).

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning the potential use of neural machine translation (NMT) in interlingual text production. Previous studies have shown that NMT can prove to be useful for extending the information offer in several languages (Nurminen/Koponen 2020).

At the same time, both ethical considerations (Nurminen/Koponen 2020) and quality control (Rodríguez Vázquez et al. 2022) should be considered. However, the use of NMT within the language services of the Swiss Confederation is still in its infancy (Nussbaumer 2020) and it will probably not be possible in the immediate future.

Beyond the results of this case study, it would be highly interesting to repeat this survey on a larger scale and involve other federal Departments and Offices. This would allow us to gain a better understanding of the main trends that have an impact on straightforward institutional communication in E2U and to single out potential variables that only apply to specific contexts. In doing so, we can fully embrace and assist in the current trend (and need) of making institutional information accessible to the widest possible audience.

---

### References

- Baumert, Andreas (2016): *Leichte Sprache – Einfache Sprache. Literaturrecherche – Interpretation – Entwicklung*. Hannover: Bibliothek der Hochschule Hannover. <https://serwiss.bib.hs-hannover.de/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/697/file/ES.pdf> (15.08.2022).
- Bock, Bettina M. (2019): „*Leichte Sprache*“ – *Kein Regelwerk: Sprachwissenschaftliche Ergebnisse und Praxisempfehlungen aus dem LeISA-Projekt*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Bredel, Ursula / Maaß, Christiane (2016): *Leichte Sprache. Theoretische Grundlagen. Orientierung für die Praxis*. Berlin: Duden.
- Canavese, Paolo (2020): “Lexical Readability as an Indicator of Quality in Translation: Best Practices from Swiss Legislation.” *Institutional Translation and Interpreting: Assessing Practices and Managing for Quality*. Ed. Fernando Prieto Ramos. New York / Abingdon: Routledge. 26–43. DOI: 10.4324/9780429264894-4.
- Canavese, Paolo (2022): “Plain Legal Language through Translation: A Comparison of Swiss, EU and Italian Legislative Texts.” *Contemporary Approaches to Legal Linguistics*. Eds. Daniel Green / Luke Green. Münster: Lit. 123–151.
- Christmann, Ursula / Groeben, Norbert (2019): „Verständlichkeit: die psychologische Perspektive.“ Maaß/Rink (2019a): 123–145.
- Cortelazzo, Michele A. / Pellegrino, Federica (2003): *Guida alla scrittura istituzionale*. Rome/Bari: Laterza.
- Creswell, John W. (2015): *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cutts, Martin (2013): *Oxford Guide to Plain English*. 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Díaz-Millón, Mar / Olvera-Lobo, María Dolores (2021): “Towards a Definition of Transcreation: A Systematic Literature Review.” *Perspectives*:1–18. DOI: 10.1080/0907676X.2021.2004177.
- Egger, Jean-Luc (2012): “Elementi per un paradigma della traduzione istituzionale.” *LeGes* 23.3: 429–435.
- Felici, Annarita / Canavese, Paolo / Griebel, Cornelia / Brianti, Giovanna (2023): “Plain Language at the Swiss Federal Statistical Office: The Challenges of Terminology when Writing for the General Public.” *Intralinea* (forthcoming).
- Felici, Annarita / Griebel, Cornelia (2019): “The Challenge of Multilingual ‘Plain Language’ in Translation-Mediated Swiss Administrative Communication: A Preliminary Comparative Analysis of Insurance Leaflets.” *Translation Spaces* 8.1: 167–191. DOI: 10.1075/ts.00017.fel.
- Fiedler-Rauer, Heiko / Margies, Burkhard (2021): „Auf dem Weg zum Kunden. Die Deutsche Rentenversicherung vereinfacht ihre Bescheide und Formulare.“ *Zeitschrift für Europäische Rechtslinguistik* (Sonderausgabe 2021). DOI: 10.18716/OJS/ZERL/2021.0.1271.
- François, Thomas (2015): “When Readability Meets Computational Linguistics: A New Paradigm in Readability.” *Revue française de linguistique appliquée* 20.2: 79–97.

- Garner, Bryan A. (2001): *Legal Writing in Plain English. A Text with Exercises*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gotti, Maurizio (2018): "Collaboration between Applied Linguists and Professional Experts: An Interdisciplinary Perspective." *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice* 13.1–3: 78–96. DOI: 10.1558/japl.31841.
- Griebel, Cornelia / Felici, Annarita (2021): „Inhalt des Originalsatzes unklar ...: Verständlichkeit und Vereinfachung von Schweizer Verwaltungstexten: Eine empirische Untersuchung im Kontext der Mehrsprachigkeit." *Parallèles* 33.1: 133–156.
- Groeben, Norbert (1982): *Leserpsychologie: Textverständnis – Textverständlichkeit*. Münster: Aschendorff.
- Hansen-Schirra, Silvia / Abels, Katja / Signer, Sarah / Maaß, Christiane (2021): *The Dictionary of Accessible Communication*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Hirvonen, Maija / Kinnunen, Tuija (2020): "Accessibility and Linguistic Rights." *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Ethics*. Eds. Kaisa Koskinen / Nike K. Pokorn. London: Routledge. 470–483.
- Hoffmann, Lothar (1985): *Kommunikationsmittel Fachsprache. Eine Einführung*. 2nd edition. Tübingen: Narr.
- Huber, Eugen (1914): *Erläuterungen zum Vorentwurf des Eidgenössischen Justiz- und Polizeidepartements*. Zweite, durch Verweisungen auf das Zivilgesetzbuch und etliche Beilagen ergänzte Ausgabe. Bern: Buchdruckerei Buehler & Co.
- IFLA, International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (2010): *Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials*. <https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/hq/publications/professional-report/120.pdf> (20.01.2022).
- Inclusion Europe (2009): *Information for All. European Guidelines for Making Information Easy to Read and Understand for All*. Brussels: Inclusion Europe. [https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EN\\_Information\\_for\\_all.pdf](https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/EN_Information_for_all.pdf) (20.01.2022).
- Jenkins, Julian (2011): "What Constitutes Effective Disclosure? A Case Study in Designing Accessible Product Information for Investors." *Information Design Journal* 19.3: 233–248. DOI: 10.1075/idj.19.3.04jen.
- Kimble, Joseph (1992): "Plain English: A Charter for Clear Writing." *Thomas M. Cooley Law Review* 9: 19–21.
- Krings, Hans Peter (1996): „Wieviel Wissenschaft brauchen Technische Redakteure? Zum Verhältnis von Wissenschaft und Praxis in der Technischen Dokumentation." *Wissenschaftliche Grundlagen der technischen Kommunikation*. Ed. Hans Peter Krings. Tübingen: Narr. 5–128.
- Kuckartz, Udo (2016): *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung*. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa.
- Langer, Inghard / Schulz von Thun, Friedemann / Tausch, Reinhard (1974): *Verständlichkeit in Schule, Verwaltung, Politik und Wissenschaft: Mit einem Selbsttrainingsprogramm zur verständlichen Gestaltung von Lehr- und Informationstexten*. München: Reinhardt.
- Lindholm, Camilla / Vanhatalo, Ulla, eds. (2021): *Handbook of Easy Languages in Europe*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Lutz, Benedikt (2015): *Verständlichkeitsforschung transdisziplinär*. Vienna: Vienna University Press.
- Maaß, Christiane (2019a): „Übersetzen in Leichte Sprache." Maaß/Rink (2019a): 273–302.
- Maaß, Christiane (2019b): "Easy Language and beyond: How to Maximize the Accessibility of Communication." Invited Plenary Speech at the KLAARA 2019 Conference on Easy-to-Read Language Research (Helsinki, Finland, 19–20 September 2019). <https://hildok.bsz-bw.de/frontdoor/index/index/docId/996> (20.01.2022).
- Maaß, Christiane (2020): *Easy Language – Plain Language – Easy Language Plus. Balancing Comprehensibility and Acceptability*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Maaß, Christiane / Rink, Isabel, eds. (2019a): *Handbuch Barrierefreie Kommunikation*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Maaß, Christiane / Rink, Isabel (2019b): „Über das Handbuch Barrierefreie Kommunikation." Maaß/Rink (2019a): 17–25.

- Macdonald, Ros (2004): "Plain English in The Law. A New Model for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* 30.1: 922–947. DOI: 10.1080/03050718.2004.9986660.
- Maksymski, Karin / Guterath, Silke / Hansen-Schirra, Sandra, eds. (2015): *Translation and Comprehensibility*. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
- Martin, Nigel / Gregor, Shirley / Rice, John (2008): "User Centred Information Design Practices and Processes at the Australian Taxation Office." *Information Design Journal* 16.1: 53–67. DOI: 10.1075/idj.16.1.08mar.
- Ministère fédéral de la Fonction publique de Belgique (2015): *Écrire pour être lu : comment rédiger des textes administratifs faciles à comprendre*. Brussels: Communauté française de Belgique.
- Neves, Josélia (2022): "Translation and Accessibility: The Translation of Everyday Things." *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Methodology*. Eds. Federico Zanettin / Christopher Rundle. Abingdon / New York: Routledge. 441–456.
- Nurminen, Mary / Koponen, Maarit (2020): "Machine Translation and Fair Access to Information." *Translation Spaces* 9.1: 150–169. DOI: 10.1075/ts.00025.nur.
- Nussbaumer, Markus (2020): „Maschinelle Übersetzung. Eine Revolution (nicht nur) für die Sprachdienste der Bundesverwaltung?“ *LeGes* 31.3: 1–5.
- Perego, Elisa (2020): "The Practice and the Training of Text Simplification in Italy." *Lingue e Linguaggi* 36: 233–254.
- Perego, Elisa (2021): "Easy Language in Italy." Lindholm/Vanhatalo (2021): 275–304.
- PLAIN, Plain Language Action and Information Network (2011): *Federal Plain Language Guidelines*. <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf> (18.10.2022).
- Rodríguez Vázquez, Silvia / Kaplan, Abigail / Bouillon, Pierrette / Griebel, Cornelia / Azari, Razieh (2022): « La traduction automatique des textes faciles à lire et à comprendre (FALC) : une étude comparative. » *Meta* 67.1: 18–49. DOI: /10.7202/1092189ar.
- Saldanha, Gabriela / O'Brien, Sharon (2014): *Research Methodologies in Translation Studies*. Abingdon / New York: Routledge.
- Schubert, Klaus (2013): „Bürgernahe Sprache. Überlegungen aus fachkommunikationswissenschaftlicher Sicht.“ *Synaps* 29: 48–57.
- Silverman, David (2017): *Doing Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Skopal, Dana P. (2022): "Written Communicative Expertise: The Production of Public Information Documents." *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice* 16.2: 185–206. DOI: 10.1558/jalpp.19105.
- Wagner, Anne / Cacciaguidi-Fahy, Sophie, eds. (2008): *Obscurity and Clarity in the Law: Prospects and Challenges*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Dr. Paolo Canavese  
University of Geneva  
Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) and Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies (TRANSIUS)  
Uni Mail – 40 bd du Pont-d'Arve  
CH-1211 Geneva 4  
[paolo.canavese@unige.ch](mailto:paolo.canavese@unige.ch)

Prof. Dr. Annarita Felici  
University of Geneva  
Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) and Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies (TRANSIUS)  
Uni Mail – 40 bd du Pont-d'Arve  
CH-1211 Geneva 4  
[annarita.felici@unige.ch](mailto:annarita.felici@unige.ch)

Dr. Cornelia Griebel  
University of Geneva  
Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (FTI) and Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies (TRANSIUS)  
Uni Mail – 40 bd du Pont-d'Arve  
CH-1211 Geneva 4  
[cornelia.griebel@unige.ch](mailto:cornelia.griebel@unige.ch)

## Annex 1: Questionnaire

((Welcome))	
<p>Diese Umfrage steht auf Deutsch und Französisch zur Verfügung. Sie können Ihre bevorzugte Sprache in der Menüleiste «Sprache ändern»/«Changer de langue» wählen.</p>	<p>Cette enquête est disponible en français et en allemand. Vous pouvez choisir votre langue de préférence dans la barre de menu «Sprache ändern»/«Changer de langue».</p>
<p>Willkommen und vielen Dank für Ihr Interesse an unserem Forschungsprojekt! Wir sind ein Forschungsteam an der Fakultät für Übersetzen und Dolmetschen (FTI) der Universität Genf und sind Mitglieder des Centre for Legal and Institutional Translation Studies, Transius.</p> <p>Derzeit führen wir ein Projekt zu verständlicher und barrierefreier Kommunikation von Institutionen durch. Eines der Ziele ist es, herauszufinden, wie bestimmte Zielgruppen, z.B. Menschen mit eingeschränkter Lese- und Verstehenskompetenz, durch Publikationen in vereinfachter Sprache besser angesprochen werden können. Ein weiteres Ziel ist es zu untersuchen, welche Möglichkeiten es gibt, die Kommunikation des BFS zugänglicher zu gestalten, und welche Grenzen der Barrierefreiheit gesteckt sind.</p> <p>Sie als Redaktorinnen und Redaktoren und als Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzer des BFS stehen im Zentrum der Textproduktion. Deshalb wären Sie von der Erstellung zugänglicher Texte möglicherweise direkt betroffen. Mit dieser qualitativen Umfrage zum Thema Verständlichkeit und barrierefreie Kommunikation möchten wir <b>Ihre Meinung erfahren und herausfinden, welche Möglichkeiten und Grenzen Sie als Textproduzentinnen und Textproduzenten sehen.</b></p> <p>Die Beantwortung des Fragebogens wird ca. 20 Minuten dauern. Wir versichern Ihnen, dass wir Ihre Antworten streng vertraulich behandeln, und garantieren Ihnen die Wahrung Ihrer Anonymität. Die Befragung erfolgt über den Server der Universität Genf.</p>	<p>Bienvenue et merci de votre intérêt pour notre projet de recherche ! Nous sommes une équipe de recherche de la Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation (FTI) de l'Université de Genève et membres du Centre d'études en traduction juridique et institutionnelle, Transius.</p> <p>Nous menons actuellement un projet sur la communication compréhensible et accessible au sein des institutions. L'un des objectifs du projet est de déterminer comment mieux atteindre certains groupes cibles, par exemple des personnes ayant des capacités de lecture et de compréhension limitées, par le biais de publications en langage simplifié. Un deuxième objectif est d'identifier les moyens de rendre les textes de l'OFS plus accessibles et de cerner les limites de la communication sans barrières.</p> <p>En tant que rédactrices/rédacteurs et traductrices/traducteurs de l'OFS, vous êtes au cœur du processus de production de textes. Vous seriez donc directement impliqués dans la production de textes accessibles. Par cette enquête qualitative sur le thème de la communication accessible, nous souhaitons <b>connaître votre opinion au sujet du potentiel et des limites que vous entrevoyez dans la production de ces textes.</b></p> <p>Le questionnaire a une durée d'environ 20 minutes. Nous vous assurons que nous traiterons vos réponses de manière strictement confidentielle et garantissons votre anonymat. Le questionnaire est géré par le serveur de l'Université de Genève.</p>

<p>Selbstverständlich haben Sie das Recht, die Befragung zu jedem Zeitpunkt, aus jedem beliebigen Grund und ohne daraus resultierenden Nachteil zu beenden.</p> <p>Sollten Sie Fragen oder Kommentare zur Befragung haben, kontaktieren Sie xxx Sie können Ihre Fragen auf Deutsch, Französisch, Italienisch oder Englisch senden.</p> <p>Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich die Zeit nehmen und an der Umfrage teilnehmen.</p>	<p>Bien entendu, vous avez le droit de mettre fin à l'enquête à tout moment, sans devoir indiquer la raison de votre choix et sans conséquences pour vous.</p> <p>Si vous avez des questions ou des commentaires sur l'enquête, vous êtes priés de contacter xxx Vous pouvez leur écrire en allemand, français, italien ou anglais.</p> <p>Merci d'avance de votre disponibilité !</p>
<p><b>((Repondents' profile))</b></p>	
<p>Ist Ihre Haupttätigkeit das Verfassen/Veröffentlichen oder das Übersetzen von Texten?</p>	<p>Votre activité principale, est-elle la rédaction/publication ou la traduction de textes ?</p>
<p><b>((Questions for writers))</b></p>	
<p><b>Teil 1</b> <b>Ausbildung und aktuelle Tätigkeiten</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aus welcher Disziplin kommen Sie (Studien-/Ausbildungsabschluss)?</li> <li>• In welchem Bereich sind Sie derzeit tätig?</li> <li>• Seit wie vielen Jahren sind Sie in der Redaktion/Veröffentlichung tätig?</li> <li>• Wie oft verfassen Sie Texte? (z.B.: jeden Tag mindestens eine Stunde, einmal pro Woche, sehr sporadisch usw.)</li> <li>• Welche anderen Aufgaben haben Sie ausser der Redaktion von Texten? (z.B. Korrekturlesen von Texten der Kolleginnen und Kollegen, Überprüfung von Übersetzungen usw.)</li> <li>• In welchen Sprachen verfassen und/oder bearbeiten Sie Texte?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Partie 1</b> <b>Formation et responsabilités actuelles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quelle est votre discipline (diplôme/formation) ?</li> <li>• Dans quel domaine travaillez-vous actuellement ?</li> <li>• Depuis combien d'années travaillez-vous dans le domaine de la rédaction/publication ?</li> <li>• A quelle fréquence rédigez-vous des textes ? (par exemple : au moins une heure par jour, une fois par semaine, très sporadiquement, etc.)</li> <li>• Quelles sont vos autres tâches outre la rédaction de textes ? (par exemple : correction des textes des collègues, révision des traductions, etc.)</li> <li>• Dans quelles langues rédigez-vous et/ou révisez-vous des textes ?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teil 2</b> <b>Textredaktion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welche Art von Texten verfassen Sie am häufigsten?</li> <li>• Welches sind die Hauptzielgruppen Ihrer Texte?</li> <li>• Denken Sie, dass die von Ihnen/Ihrer Abteilung veröffentlichten Texte für die breite Öffentlichkeit verständlich sind?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Partie 2</b> <b>Rédaction de textes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quel genre de textes rédigez-vous le plus souvent ?</li> <li>• Quels sont les principaux groupes cibles de vos textes ?</li> <li>• Pensez-vous que les textes publiés par votre unité ou par vous-même sont compréhensibles pour le grand public ?</li> </ul>

**Teil 3****Barrierefreiheit**

- Was verbinden Sie mit den Begriffen «Einfache Sprache», «plain language» und «Leichte Sprache»?
- Haben Sie das Thema Barrierefreiheit in Ihrer Abteilung schon diskutiert?  
Wenn ja:
  - Was wird hauptsächlich besprochen?
  - Spielt die sprachliche Barrierefreiheit eine Rolle?
 Wenn nein:
  - Kennen Sie die Gründe, warum zugängliche Texte noch kein Thema sind?
- Denken Sie, dass vereinfachte Publikationen des BFS sinnvoll sein könnten?  
Wenn ja:
  - Welche Publikationen könnten das sein?
  - Welche Grenzen oder Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie bei der Vereinfachung der Inhalte, für die Sie normalerweise zuständig sind?
 Wenn nein:
  - Welche Grenzen oder Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie bei der Vereinfachung der Inhalte, für die Sie normalerweise zuständig sind?
- Wären Sie selbst daran interessiert, vereinfachte Texte zu erstellen?
  - Ja, Begründung:
  - Nein, Begründung:
- Welche Auswirkungen könnte die Einführung vereinfachter Publikationen auf die Arbeitsprozesse in Ihrem Bereich haben?
- Wären Sie an einem Workshop zur Redaktion zugänglicher Texte interessiert?
  - Ja
  - Nein

**Partie 3****Accessibilité**

- Qu'associez-vous aux termes « langage simple », « plain language », « langage facile à lire et à comprendre (FALC) » ?
- Le sujet de l'accessibilité a-t-il déjà été abordé dans votre unité ?  
Si oui :
  - Quels aspects ont été principalement discutés ?
  - L'accessibilité linguistique joue-t-elle un rôle ?
 Si non :
  - Connaissez-vous les raisons pour lesquelles les textes accessibles ne sont pas encore un sujet d'actualité ?
- Pensez-vous que des publications simplifiées à l'OFS pourraient être utiles ?  
Si oui :
  - De quelles publications s'agirait-il ?
  - Quelles sont les limites ou les difficultés liées à la simplification des contenus dont vous êtes responsable ?
 Si non :
  - Quelles limites ou difficultés rencontrez-vous dans la simplification des contenus dont vous êtes responsable ?
- Seriez-vous intéressé à rédiger vous-même des textes simplifiés ?
  - Oui, parce que :
  - Non, parce que :
- Quel est l'impact potentiel de l'introduction de publications simplifiées sur les processus de travail dans votre unité ?
- Seriez-vous intéressé par un atelier sur la rédaction de textes accessibles ?
  - Oui
  - Non

<b>((Questions for translators))</b>	
<p><b>Teil 1</b> <b>Ausbildung und aktuelle Tätigkeiten</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aus welcher Disziplin kommen Sie (Studien-/Ausbildungsabschluss)?</li> <li>• Seit wie vielen Jahren sind Sie als Übersetzerin/Übersetzer tätig?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Partie 1</b> <b>Formation et responsabilités actuelles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quelle est votre discipline (diplôme/formation) ?</li> <li>• Depuis combien d'années travaillez-vous en tant que traductrice/traducteur ?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teil 2</b> <b>Übersetzungstätigkeit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welche Art von Texten übersetzen Sie am häufigsten?</li> <li>• Was sind Ihre Hauptschwierigkeiten beim Übersetzen der Texte?</li> <li>• Sind Ihnen die Hauptzielgruppen der Texte, die Sie übersetzen, bekannt? Welche sind diese?</li> <li>• Denken Sie, dass die von Ihrem Amt veröffentlichten Texte für die breite Öffentlichkeit verständlich sind?</li> <li>• Versuchen Sie zuweilen, bei der Übersetzung Texte verständlicher zu formulieren?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Wenn ja, in welcher Weise?</li> <li>◦ Wenn nein, gibt es Gründe?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Partie 2</b> <b>Activités de traduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quel genre de textes traduisez-vous le plus souvent ?</li> <li>• Quelles sont les difficultés principales que vous rencontrez dans la traduction des textes ?</li> <li>• Connaissez-vous les principaux groupes cibles des textes que vous traduisez ? Lesquels sont-ils ?</li> <li>• Pensez-vous que les textes publiés par l'OFS sont compréhensibles pour le grand public ?</li> <li>• Essayez-vous parfois de rendre les textes plus compréhensibles lorsque vous les traduisez ?             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Si oui, de quelle manière ?</li> <li>◦ Si non, y a-t-il des raisons ?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Teil 3</b> <b>Barrierefreiheit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was verbinden Sie mit den Begriffen «Einfache Sprache», «plain language» und «Leichte Sprache»?</li> <li>• Haben Sie das Thema Barrierefreiheit in Ihrer Abteilung schon diskutiert? Wenn ja:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Was wird hauptsächlich besprochen?</li> <li>◦ Spielt die sprachliche Barrierefreiheit eine Rolle?</li> </ul>             Wenn nein:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Kennen Sie Gründe, warum zugängliche Texte noch kein Thema sind?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Partie 3</b> <b>Accessibilité</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qu'associez-vous aux termes « langage simple », « plain language », « langage facile à lire et à comprendre (FALC) » ?</li> <li>• Le sujet de l'accessibilité a-t-il déjà été abordé dans votre unité ? Si oui :             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Quels aspects ont été principalement discutés ?</li> <li>◦ L'accessibilité linguistique joue-t-elle un rôle ?</li> </ul>             Si non :             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Connaissez-vous les raisons pour lesquelles les textes accessibles ne sont pas encore un sujet d'actualité ?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denken Sie, dass vereinfachte Publikationen des BFS sinnvoll sein könnten? Wenn ja: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Welche Publikationen könnten das sein?</li> <li>◦ Welche Grenzen oder Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie bei der Vereinfachung der Inhalte, die Sie normalerweise übersetzen?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Wenn nein: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Welche Grenzen oder Schwierigkeiten sehen Sie bei der Vereinfachung der Inhalte, die Sie normalerweise übersetzen?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Wären Sie selbst daran interessiert, vereinfachte Texte oder Texte in Leichter Sprache zu erstellen? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Ja, Begründung:</li> <li>◦ Nein, Begründung:</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Wären Sie an einem einführenden Workshop zur Redaktion zugänglicher Texte interessiert? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Ja</li> <li>◦ Nein</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pensez-vous que des publications simplifiées à l'OFS pourraient être utiles ? Si oui : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ De quelles publications s'agirait-il ?</li> <li>◦ Quelles sont les limites ou les difficultés liés à la simplification des contenus que vous traduisez ?</li> </ul> </li> <li>Si non : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Quelles limites ou difficultés entrevoyez-vous dans la simplification des contenus que vous traduisez ?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Seriez-vous intéressé à rédiger vous-même des textes en langage simple ou en FALC ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Oui, raison :</li> <li>◦ Non, raison :</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Seriez-vous intéressé par un atelier sur la rédaction de textes accessibles ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Oui</li> <li>◦ Non</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>((Conclusion))</b>	
<p><b>Schluss</b> Wir würden uns freuen, wenn wir Sie für ein Interview kontaktieren dürften. Wenn Sie einverstanden sind, geben Sie bitte hier Ihre E-Mail-Adresse an.</p> <p>Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich die Zeit genommen haben, unsere Fragen zu beantworten!</p>	<p><b>Conclusion</b> Pouvons-nous vous contacter pour d'autres questions ? Si tel est le cas, nous vous saurions grés de bien vouloir indiquer votre adresse de courriel.</p> <p>Merci d'avoir pris le temps de répondre à nos questions !</p>