Легкое чтение — потребности, сеть и информационная технология

Easy-to-Read — Needs, Network and Information Technology

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Многие люди испытывают трудности с использованием и пониманием важной информации и литературы. Исследования грамотности показывают, что во многих странах 25, а иногда 40-45 процентов взрослого населения не способны прочитать новости или обыкновенную книгу, хорошо понимая прочитанное. Кроме того, есть люди с ограниченной жизнедеятельностью, функционально неграмотные, иммигранты и т. п. Эти данные очень важны для открытого объединённого общества, основанного на демократии, всеобщем доступе и участии.

Цель данного доклада состоит в том, чтобы пояснить концепцию легкого чтения и рассказать о его шведской модели, которая может сыграть важную роль в преодолении информационного разрыва между теми, кто свободно ориентируется в информационном пространстве и теми, кому этого не дано. Издания для легкого чтения могут включать не только новости и литературу, но и современные информационные технологии, такие как веб-информация или стандарты Дейзи, которые дают огромные преимущества во всеобщем доступе к информации. Страны должны иметь возможность сотрудничать по проектам легкого чтения. Был создана международная сеть легкого чтения, что даст людям и организациям различных стран возможность узнать больше, обмениваться идеями и опытом.

Many people have difficulties in using and understanding important information and literature. Literacy studies show that in many countries 25 or even 40-45 percent of the adult population are not able to read news information or an ordinary book with good comprehension. You will find disabled persons, functionally illiterates, immigrants, etc. This information is crucial for an open and integrated society based on democracy, accessibility and participation.

The aim of the paper is to show that the easy-to-read concept and the Swedish model for easy-to-read can play an important role in over-bridging the information gap between they who easily can surf in the information society and they who cannot. Easy-to-read publications may include news information and literature but also modern information techniques as Web information and Daisy standards can be of great advantage in making information available to all. Countries should be able to cooperate in the easy-to-read projects. An international easy-to-read network will be established and this will give people and organisations in different countries an opportunity to learn more and to exchange ideas and experiences.

Багато хто має проблеми з використанням та розумінням важливої інформації та літератури. Дослідження грамотності демонструють, що у багатьох державах 25, а інколи і 40-45 % дорослого населення не здатні прочитати новини чи звичайну книжку, добре розуміючи прочитане. Окрім того, існують люди з обмеженими фізичними можливостями, функціонально неграмотні, іммігранти і т. д. Ця інформація дуже важлива для відкритого суспільства, яке засноване на демократії, загальному доступі та участі.

Мета даної доповіді — довести, що концепція легкого читання та його шведська модель можуть відіграти важливу роль у подоланні інформаційного розриву між тими, хто вільно орієнтується в інформаційному суспільстві і тими, хто не здатен на це. Видання легкого читання можуть містити не тільки новини й літературу, але й сучасні інформаційні технології, такі як веб-інформація чи стандарти Дейзі, які дають величезну перевагу у загальному доступі до інформації. Буде створюватися міжнародна мережа легкого читання, що надасть людям та організаціям різних держав можливість дізнатися більше, обмінятися ідеями та досвідом.

1. The concept of easy-to-read

What is easy-to-read? The aim of easy-to-read publications is to write simply and understandably, but at the same time in an adult and varied manner. To achieve this you have to take into consideration the
content, the language, pictures and graphic layout. You should try to combine easy reading and understanding with quality and a professional work.

2. Why is easy-to-read needed?
A matter of democracy

Through reading we are able to share ideas, thoughts, and experiences, and grow as human beings. Access to information and literature is considered a fundamental democratic right. It is necessary to be well-informed in order to participate in social life, in discussions at work and in order to be able to influence one’s own situation. It is also a matter of quality of life. Being able to read gives us a tremendous amount of self-confidence. Reading gives us knowledge and perspectives. By reading we are able to understand society and exercise our democratic rights.

When we talk about people with limited reading skills, what about the literacy situation today and what is the problem? Let me point at the international adult literacy survey (IALS). This survey is a collaborative effort of several governments and three inter-governmental organizations (the OECD, EU and UNESCO.) The aim is to assess, analyze and compare adult literacy across populations as well as between subgroups within populations.

The literacy assessment has been carried out as an open test and a background questionnaire to samples of around 3,000 individuals above 16 years of age. Literacy tasks were drawn from everyday materials — newspapers, brochures, information leaflets, medicine prescriptions etc.

The results reveal that a substantial proportion of the adult population in each country has problems mastering even modest literacy demands — ranging from about 25 percent in e.g. Sweden to 40-45 percent in many other countries. These people have difficulties in reading an ordinary newspaper with good comprehension. Their ability to utilize written material, to cope with new work tasks, to understand public information, or understand and use commercial information is limited.

They do not have the reading skill that is needed in a modern society. To cope well in a highly developed country you actually need a reading skill at the level of nine years of schooling. The society itself has become much more complex and complicated during the last decades. And the modern society seems to require a usage of more and more information. They need something that is easier than the normal prose and many people need easy-to-read.

3. Who needs easy-to-read?

How may people may benefit from easy-to-read materials and who are they?

We can identify two main groups (a) persons with a disability and (b) persons with limited language or reading skills. Some readers have a permanent need for easy-to-read materials. Other readers will find this kind of material useful for a certain time. Easy-to-read products can be a training material and a door-opener to reading activities.

Among the target groups of disabled persons you will find, people with an intellectual or learning disability, people with dyslexia or other reading problems, people with ADHD, people with autism, pre-lingually deaf people, deaf-blind people, people with aphasia, partially senile people. All these groups together represent at least 7-8 percent of the population.

Among people with limited language or reading skills we will find recent immigrants, functionally illiterate people, educationally disadvantaged people and in some respect also school-children. These groups represent probably another 7-8 percent.

As a total we can guess that at least 15 percent of the population can benefit from some kind of easy-to-read materials. But, can the needs of all these readers really be combined under mainly one easy-to-read model? Well, there may be differences between the groups, but there is more that unifies the groups than separates them. We must also remember that there are differences of reading skills within the groups. Some people with intellectual disability read by themselves others do not. And some people with dyslexia may have severe problems and need something quite simple to read and use as training material.

In other words, with a variety of products you may be able to support many persons with something to read and a specific book may be used by mentally handicapped, immigrants, dyslexics, school children, etc.
4. What makes a text easy-to-read?

When easy-to-read activities began in Sweden as a trial project at the end of the 1960’s, there was perhaps a belief that we would find detailed guidelines for easy-to-read work, and, in connection with reading research then underway, we attempted to identify the specific factors which could lead to making a text easy to read. We have now — more or less — left such attempts behind, as our knowledge and experience has grown. Do not limit the author's freedom too much. Don't put too many restrictions on writers, illustrators and photographers. Experience has led us to a few broad guidelines, or criteria, for the things that make a text easy to read and understand.

Content and language

a) Write concretely. Avoid abstractions and transferred concepts.

b) Be logical. The action should follow a common thread with logical continuity.

c) Action should be direct and simple, without long introductions and without too many characters involved.

d) Avoid symbolic language (metaphors) that may be misunderstood by the reader.

e) Be concise. Do not place several actions in a single sentence. Place words of the same phrase on the same line.

f) Avoid difficult words, but attempt to use a language that is adult and dignified. If unusual words have to used, they should be explained by context clues.

g) Even rather complicated relationships can often be described and explained if this is done in a concrete and logical manner, where events take place in a natural chronological framework. If you follows this general advice — concrete and logical story construction, a common thread in the story line and so on — then you can substantially reduce problems for people with intellectual disabilities. And this kind of accessibility we believe makes it easier also for other groups with reading difficulties and it is a simplicity that doesn't need to be distracting. A well-made book in a simple language can in fact be a positive experience for anyone to read. Further more;

h) Test the material. To be sure that that material works well, it's a good idea to test it on a number of people from the target group before it goes to print.

It can be very difficult to write simply. Writing for easy comprehension can be a tightrope walk between the simple and the banal. But in a short telling of a story, every word becomes more apparent and gains much more importance.

It may be particularly difficult to adapt existing literature into easy-to-read. It's just not a question of creating a good easy-to-read text. It's also important that the atmosphere and feeling remains, and that the mark of the original author is still found in the easy-to-read version. But an adaptation is always a retelling, not a translation.

Layout and pictures

Easy-to-read is not about the written word only. Easy-to-read is also about layout, design, typeface and type size. The layout should be clear and attractive. Wide margins and generous spacing make a text more accessible. The text should be in short blocks with limited lines per page. The typeface should be clear and fairly large. There should be sufficient contrast between the types and the background/colour of the paper.

In the context of easy-to-read materials, illustrations often play a more important role than in other types of publications. A picture which concretely depicts what is described in the text improves understanding and clarifies the message. A non-realistic picture can communicate an atmosphere and strengthen a feeling. But — the picture must agree with the text. A picture which leads in the wrong direction is likely to confuse.

Levels of difficulty

Easy-to-read is not just one level of difficulty. As I have said, there are differences in reading ability even within groups with the same sort of reading problem. Materials should be produced at various levels of difficulty, from very easy, maybe picture based stories up to the level that requires a certain reading skill, but still is easier than ordinary books and papers («plain language»).
5. Is easy-to-read about printed media only?

What kind of materials should be available in easy-to-read? There is a need for easy-to-read materials of all kinds and in different media, printed media as well as e.g. on the Internet. Looking at the future, the digital publishing will become more important also for the easy-to-read format.

**Literature.** Both fiction and non-fiction is needed. Specially written materials and adaptations of classics, etc. All genres such as novels, short-stories, poetry, thrillers, etc.

**Newspapers and magazines.** Specially made easy-to-read newspapers or easy-to-read pages in ordinary newspapers.

**Audio materials like talking books and papers.** Easy-to-read materials should be available in audio format.

**Programs on TV, radio and video.** There should also be a regular service of easy-to-understand programs on TV and radio.

**Information about society.** E.g. Information about the election procedure, taxes, etc. and information from insurance companies, banks, etc.

**Web information and Digital publishing.** I am sure that electronic media like software programs for computers, multimedia productions on CD-rom, DVD and Web sites etc, will become very useful for persons with disabilities.

When we talk about accessibility there is a great advantage that the digital format allows the users to progress through various levels of skill. But, it is crucial to adapt the software and the equipment to the needs of the disabled, this means to develop an functional interface.

6. Easy-to-read in Sweden

Before talking about information technology and the easy-to-read network I would like to say some words about easy-to-read in Sweden and the Swedish Easy-to-Read Foundation.

The Swedish work related to easy-to-read publishing started 45 years ago, more or less as an experimental work. The Easy-to-Read Foundation was established by a Parliamentary decision in 1987. The Foundation is a a special agency, publishing house which provides easy-to-read materials and also functions as a competence centre. Today the Easy-to-Read Foundation consists of newspaper (8 SIDOR), easy-to-read book publishing, commissions and courses, information and marketing, reading representatives and developmental and experimental work (especially on new techniques). The operation is financed by income from sales and from state grants. Today the turnover of the budget is nearly 4 million US dollars. and the state grants cover about 50 percent.

**Book publishing — Easy-to-Read Books**

Easy-to-read books are easier to read and easier to understand than other books but the degree of difficulty varies from one book to another. Easy-to-read books may be fiction and non-fiction; novels, short stories, thrillers, poems, technical books, etc. Some books are written directly in easy-to-read, some are adaptations of classics. About 30 books are published every year and so far more than 500 books have been published.

We publish Easy-to-read books through our own book publishing house. We try to mix different genres as novels, crime stories, cookery books and e.g. books on consumer rights. When we say that the easy-to-read publishing should be of good quality we mean they should be good products, we do not mean that all literature must be of highbrow culture. There is a need also for love stories, science fictions, fantasy, etc. We also mean that there must be a variety of products from cheap pocket books and more classy colour printed books.

And as mentioned before. Easy-to-read is not about only one level of difficulty. There is a need for different levels of easy-to-read, from the easiest picture based books mainly aiming at mentally disabled persons to easy-to-read text books that require some reading skill of the readers. We publish easy-to-read products at three levels of difficulty.

**News information**
We also publish the easy-to-read newspaper called 8 PAGES (8 SIDOR). Our easy-to-read newspaper is carried out in the same way as an ordinary newspaper and the journalistic grading of news value is the same but the articles are shorter and simpler.

The newspaper contains news from Sweden and other countries, sport, culture, etc. — just like ordinary papers. It is published once a week. A number of theme supplements are also issued, giving backgrounds and explanations. The paper is also on daily bases available on the Web and with synthetic speech. The paper has about 15 000 subscribers but around 120 000 readers.

**Commissions and Courses**

The Centre for Easy-to-Read also accepts commissions to produce easy-to-read versions of reports, publications, brochures and other material for public authorities, companies, organizations, etc. More and more public and private enterprises have aware of the need of easier information. As I have already told, we also offer shorter courses in easy-to-read writing and layout and in creating easy-to-read web sites etc.

**How do we reach out?**

Publication is only half the job. Even a good product must be marketed. Marketing easy-to-read products makes special demands.

How do you market a product based on the written word to culturally disadvantaged people or to people who are not used to reading and seldom visit a library or a book store? Traditional marketing techniques like advertising are seldom enough and not always adequate. It is not a question of marketing only.

You often have to go step by step through intermediaries (teachers, relatives, personnel, etc.) to reach the target groups. Attitudes must be influenced. An interest for reading must be awakened.

**Reading Representatives**

Intellectually disabled persons and others with severe reading difficulties need special support. Reading representatives is a model for how to stimulate reading among such groups. An important part is also to change attitudes to reading as a part of the daily care among intermediaries like staff, parents, etc.

The reading representatives are primarily recruited among staff in group housings and day care centres. The task of the reading representatives is to awaken interest in reading, offer assistance in reading by arranging reading hours, visits to libraries, etc. The activity has been expanded county by county and community by community. Working groups have been established in almost every community with members from the local authority, libraries, study organisations, special schools, handicap organisations etc. Today there are more than 5 000 persons are involved in this organisation. 3 500 reading representatives and 1 500 persons taking active part in working groups.

So far the model has been used mainly for intellectually disabled persons. It should be applicable to other groups as well where you have an organized daily care. Experiments are going on for elderly senile persons and the results so far are very good.

**7. Information Technology — Production and experiments**

Information on Web sites and other types of electronic media have during the last decade become much more important for communication between authorities, organizations, private enterprises and citizens. — And as I said earlier I believe that electronic media can be very beneficial for many groups of people, also for poor readers and people with intellectual disabilities.

All important information should be — and normally is — available on the web. This also means that the information providers must be aware of the fact that may people do not read well and need more easily comprehensible information, well structured and with a clear layout. Important information on the web should be available also in easy-to-read format.

On one hand the modern computerized techniques have so far been demanding high qualifications of the users; you have to be a good reader to use a computer and to surf on the Internet. On the other hand electronic media may very well be of real value also for people with disabilities like reading problems — if information providers master the challenge to make web sites etc easy to use for everyone and designed for all.
Information on the Web gives you the opportunity to present information of different formats and at various levels of difficulty. It is also possible to provide special support for poor readers and people with intellectual disabilities, by using step by step instructions. You can get the most essential information in an easy way. If you manage you can surf on a higher level. You can use and search for information gradually and if you need more help or more information you can ask for support at a helping point.

At the Centre for Easy-to-Read we are very much interested in developmental work in this field. We have found electronic media useful in many ways, both for production, information and communication.

Web productions

At the Centre for Easy-to-Read we have produced easy-to-read materials in electronic formats and for the Web, especially materials designed for people with learning or intellectual disabilities.

I have already mentioned the talking newspaper on the Web. Since almost five years the easy-to-read newspaper 8 PAGES is available also in an electronic version on the web, free of charge. Subscribers of the newspaper can also benefit from an easy-to-read Bonus web at www.8sidor.se. The Bonus web gives background information, additional facts etc. for they who want to learn more of a specific topic. There are also some other multimedia productions made for CD-rom and on the Web.

We have e. g. made printed picture based books also available on CD-rom. An interesting challenge has been to create an interactive «soap opera» on the Web especially for intellectually disabled persons, a site with stories and games where the users can have an influence on the course of events. The address of the site is www.tachansen.nu

We also use the Internet for information purposes. We have tried and are still trying to make the web information easy to use and to understand. Essential information about the foundation and the easy-to-read concept is available on the web, www.lattlast.se. There are home pages for the Foundation, the newspaper, the publishing house, the reading representatives, course activities etc. Some information is available also in English, French, German and Spanish.

We also use the web for marketing and dissemination. All new books are presented on the web. You can order books and subscribe for the newspaper by e-mail and today 30 percent of the orders come from electronic communication. But, there is a lot more to do to in developing standards and making electronic media accessible for disabled persons. Daisy is one standard. More experimental work should be done on easy-to-read web sites. This is an area where countries should be able to cooperate. There might be possibilities to get funding for experimental work from organizations like EU, Open Society Institute and maybe also the electronic industry.

Web-TV and other experiments on the Web

We are now in the process of creating a new easy-to-read Web site for intellectually disabled with information, games, chat rooms, etc. The intention is further development of the soap opera site. Experimental work with easy-to-read DVD-books and e-books is another possibility.

For people with severe reading problems is written material a challenge. Spoken words, sound and moving pictures together, i. e. TV or video media, is probably the most efficient media. Quite a few years ago we made some experimental work with easy to understand news in the video format. We are now planning for experiments with Web TV as a development of the news paper information. TV on the web can be defined as information in filmed sequences for computer use. Experimental work will be conducted by using digital technique for special adaptations for persons with a moderate intellectual disability, e. g. weather forecasts. A step further could be to structure the information by using Daisy standard and the user would then be able to get even more possibilities for adaptation. This kind of experiment can easily be conducted also in an English version and thereby be an international collaboration.

Daisy

Nearly all easy-to-read books are also available as talking books and many of them in Daisy format. Daisy is a standard for structuring and adapting information, mainly text materials, i. e. written or spoken information, but the standard itself would make it possible to structure also other kind of information.

The user reads the books by using a special Daisy player. The Daisy player transforms the text into synthetic speech. The Daisy standard does not limit the use to listening only. You may also adjust the pace.
of the speech, you may search for information, you may also browse through the material, make your own book marks, notes etc.

So far Daisy has been used for making books available for visually impaired people. But the Daisy standard is not for books only. It can be used for any kind of written or spoken material like e. g. newspaper information, information about society, etc.

The Daisy player itself is a computer and the Daisy standard can therefore be used in other types of computers or machinery built on the same type of technology. This means that Daisy can be used for PC computers, etc. It would be possible to integrate Daisy into TV sets and other electronic equipment if that kind of machinery were compatible to the Daisy standard.

8. Easy-to-Read Network

Over the last ten years or so the interest in easy-to-read matters has increased over the world. Easy-to-read publishing work has started in some countries and there are serious discussions in at least 25 countries. There is a need for a special forum for easy-to-read, a place where you can find information and get in contact with others.

This spring we have started an international Easy-to-Read Network. The network is open to everybody who is professionally interested and engaged in easy-to-read matters. Invitations to join the Network have been spread in countries where we know about an interest in easy-to-read. This is the first opportunity to officially tell about the network.

The aim

The aim of the Easy-to-Read Network is to:

• inform about easy-to-read and increase the knowledge of the easy-to-read concept
• make people aware of the needs for easy-to-read
• be a place for contacts all over the world on easy-to-read matters
• make exchange of information, ideas and experiences possible
• facilitate co-operation between people and organizations in different countries

The Easy-to-Read Network also has a purpose to:

• open up for joint venture projects
• raise funds for joint venture projects
• encourage and initiate research about easy-to-read
• stimulate broader competence in the easy-to-read field
• arrange courses in easy-to-read
• stimulate new easy-to-read establishments

Activities

The Easy-to-Read Network consists of

• an Internet based web site with information, notice-board and links
• an Internet based contact forum and mailing register
• a news and information sheet 2-3 times a year
• a conference every second or third year at the venue of the IFLA conference
• (a possibility of satellite meeting), the Crimea conference or at other places

Participation and membership

The Easy-to-Read network is open to everybody professionally interested in easy-to-read, such as publishers, producers, writers, journalists, photographers, illustrators, informers, marketers, librarians and people engaged in organizations, etc. The Network is open to individuals as well as to organizations and companies. The Easy-to-Read Network will seek co-operation with IFLA, Crimea Conference, UNESCO and other actors.

Everyone is welcome to use the Network, to register on the mailing list, to spread information, to seek partnership, to test drafts and ideas, etc. The use of Easy-to-Read Network is free of charge. A web master at the Centre for Easy-to-Read will supervise the network.
A committee of 5-10 persons will be established as a formal body towards other associations and organizations (for an initial period of three years). The committee will decide upon statutes, be in charge of further development, plans for conferences, applications for grants, etc. New members will be included after nomination and elections. Those interested in taking part in committee work are welcome to apply for membership.

You are all welcome to join the Easy-to-Read Network. You will find more information about easy-to-read and the Network on the web site www.lattlast.se

9. Easy-to-Read Democracy Site

Finally, I think an international Democracy Site on the web would be a good idea. To create such a site could be project for the Easy-to-Read Network. At this kind of site the most fundamental documents about democratic rights should be available and easily accessible in easy-to-read format — and speech versions. Documents included should be the UN declaration about human rights, the UN convention on the rights of the Child, the UN standard rules for People with Disabilities, the ILO convention on Indigenous peoples’ rights and other documents. There should also be information about Racism, anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, etc. The web site could also by a search function give answers to frequently asked questions.

Fundamental documents should be available also as easy-to-read publication in printing.

The Democracy site could in different countries be complemented with national acts about democratic rights. The site could be used as a source for national easy-to-read versions of the documents.