

# Language for all Promoting inclusion by using accessible and acceptable language for all citizens (who can read)

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# Accessible language for people with special features f.i. learning disabilities?

**Koraal** wonen  
leren  
werken

**ZU  
YD**

  
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VOBC  
Vereniging  
Onderzoeksgroep  
Breedmateriaal

- Special solutions (f.i. German speaking countries: Leichte Sprache)
- Not acceptable for other people (with and without reading problems)
- Emphasizing “otherness”
- Excluding

# An other way of framing the problem of accessible language use

Many people have limited knowledge of reading, writing, working with numbers and they find it hard to understand official forms and to deal with modern technology

people with low literacy skills

# Accessible language for all people with low literacy skills

Some may have left school (too) early

Some may have physical or psychological reasons such as poor hearing, vision or problems with speech or dementia

Some will have a Learning Disability

Some will have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia

Some were part of a large class and not having specific needs catered for

Some are poor and have lack of access to educational resources

Some got out of practice






# In the Netherlands

2,5 Million people have low literacy skills (about 18% of the Dutch population):

- Problems with reading, writing and with numbers
- Causing problems to deals with societal challenges

In many other countries percentages are even higher

# Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - Self-assessment grid

	A1 Basic User	A2 Basic User	B1 Independent user	B2 Independent user	C1 Proficient user	C2 Proficient user
 Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
 Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structural or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
 Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey fine shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
 Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
 Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.



# Common European framework

On this level you can...

## A1

- understand simple conversations.
- introduce yourself and others.
- ask and answer questions about personal details.
- interact in a simple way.

**Breakthrough!**

## A2

- understand sentences related to areas of most immediate relevance.
- communicate in simple and routine tasks.
- describe in simple terms aspects of your background.

**Waystage**

## B1

- understand the main points of regular situations.
- produce simple texts on topics which are familiar or of personal interest.
- describe experiences, events, dreams, and ambitions and briefly give explanations.

**Threshold**

## B2

- understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics.
- interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers.
- produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue.

**Vantage**

## C1

- understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning.
- express yourself fluently and spontaneously.
- use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes.
- produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects.

**Effective  
operational  
proficiency**

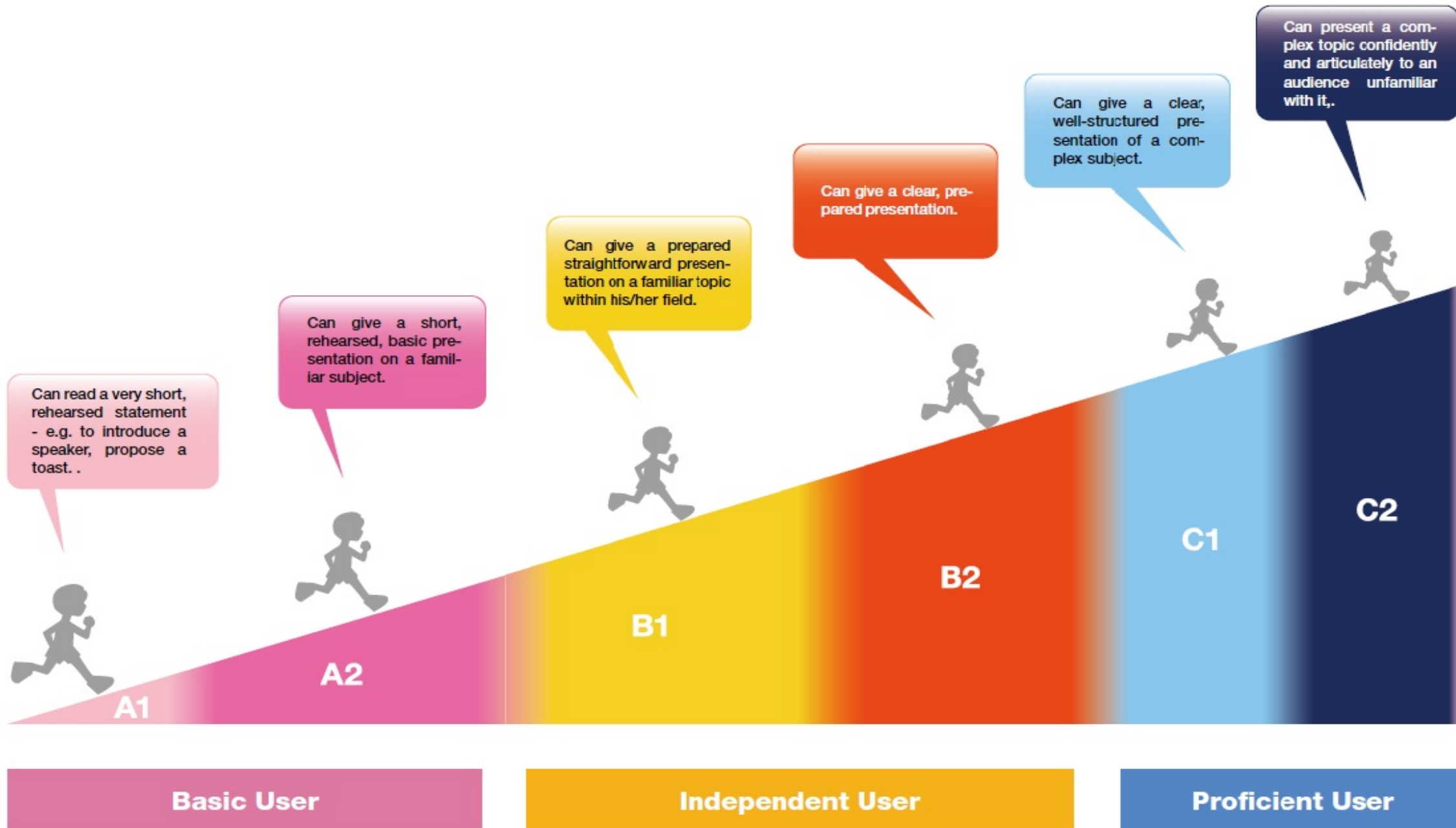
## C2

- understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
- summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.
- express yourself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

**Mastery!**

Boundaries between the levels are not strict but most people function best on a level on which they feel comfortable





# People with low literacy skills

Many have low literacy skills for a while and manage to acquire better skills but many will not succeed in acquiring better literacy skills (not everybody is capable to learn to read and write better)

We do support efforts aiming at improving writing / reading skills

But society can be more accessible if we use language that can be understood by as many people as possible

# Challenge

To use language inoculated on the language level of the least versatile user but offering this language product to all addressees

# Taal voor allemaal project (Language for all): 5 aims

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leren  
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VOBC  
Vereniging  
Onderwijsorganisatie  
Breedbreed

1. Collaboration with all intended communication partners
2. Guidelines for language use
3. Guidelines for visualisation
4. 1,2,3 based on research
5. Researching the effect of Tva



**Taal voor  
allemaal**

# Taal voor allemaal © 4 versions

1. Taal voor allemaal → language products including people with very low literacy skills (A1) (codified)
2. Taal voor allemaal + (plus) → language products including people with low literacy skills (A2) (codified)
3. Taal voor allemaal op maat → for special groups (codified)
4. Combinations for mixed groups (A1 / A2 / B1)



**Taal voor  
allemaal**

It is not only about accessible language use!

- Many people with low literacy skills also have problems with:
- The amount of information
- The density of the information

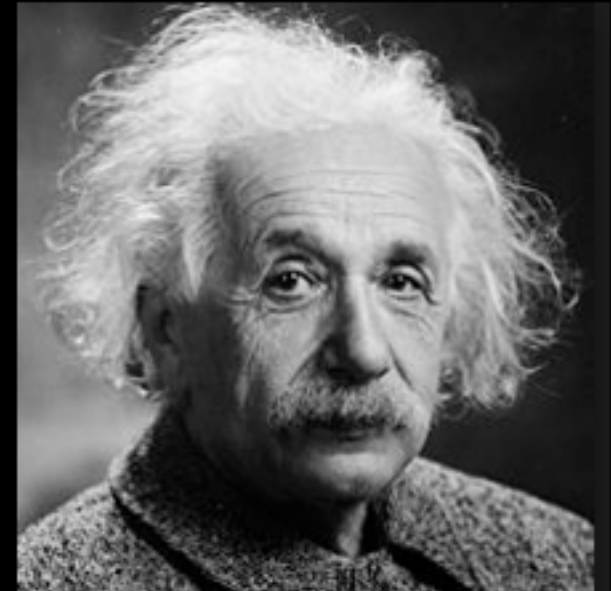
So text writers have to acknowledge this by shortening information or by dosing information

This is also an ethical question: how do we deal with these facts as we do not want to withhold information.....

It is difficult to write  
accessible language

**If you can't explain  
it simply, you  
don't understand  
it well enough.**

Einstein





# What does research tell us?

People with more literacy skills do not have a problem with reading information on a lower literacy level

(as long as the information is not perceived as made for children)

(Meppelink, 2016: Designing digital health information in a health literacy context)

# The challenge!

To design a (n oral or written) communication product (including text, images and lay-out or presentation)

That is accessible for as many people as possible in the targeted group and

That is accepted by as many people as possible in the targeted group

(products must avoid being precipitated as childish)

# Our target group

In most cases all people who can read thus people with and without low literacy skills



Equilibrium between  
Understanding and accepting  
texts

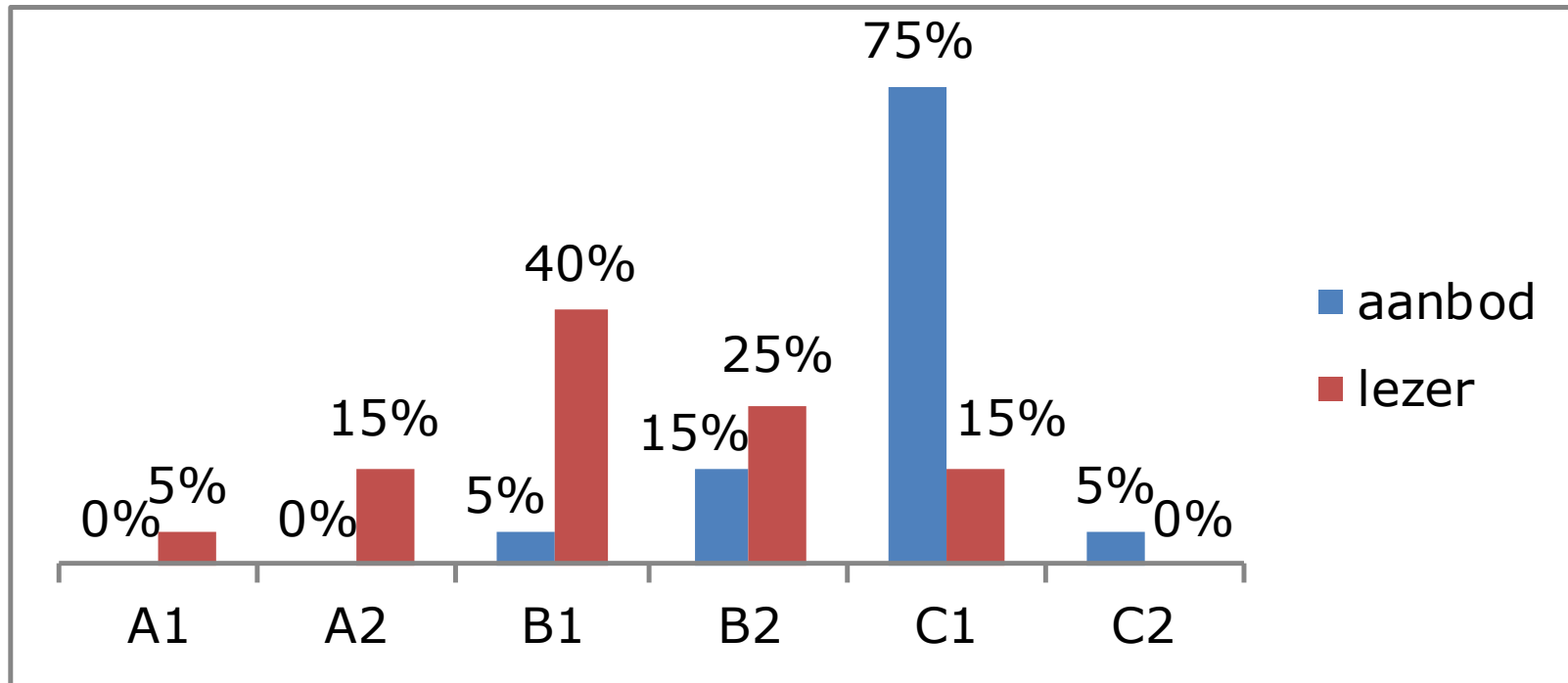


# Why not use T-Scan

Text analysis software based on 400 linguistic measures on lexical complexity, sentence complexity, referential and relational coherence, concreteness, personality and word probability of Dutch texts based on experimental and theoretical research (Kraf & Pander Maat, 2009; Pander Maat et al., 2014).

Because it is not about text complexity but about all readers' comprehension and acceptance

# CEF and texts presented by the Dutch authorities



Figuur 1: verschil aanbod en ontvanger leesniveau van overheidsteksten – een bewerking van de figuur van Stichting Accessibilty (g.j.).

# Collaboration with the Amsterdam municipality

About 30% of the Amsterdam citizens have (very) low literacy skills hindering them to understand the communication products of the Amsterdam municipality (letters, website etc.)

- They miss out on benefits
- They do not know their rights
- They fail to follow up on messages the municipality sends them
- They ask many questions (telephone / mail) but are not satisfied by the answers they get

**X Gemeente  
X Amsterdam  
X**



# Two Problems

- Amsterdam citizens have different literacy skills
- The municipality does not know the literacy skills of every individual citizen



# Project with 17 experienced communication experts of the Amsterdam municipality



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We tested 3 communication products (in different versions)

- a. all boys and girls aging 13 receiving a letter about their identity card;
- b. the letter about the city pass with benefits for people with low income;
- c. a decision by the municipality about a request for a scooter (not presented in this presentation);

# Tests with addressees

- We designed a quick test to assess the actual reading level of a person
- We did tests on remembering and understanding the information presented with at least 5 addressees functioning on a certain reading level
- We included reading and remembering tests with readers on the highest reading level
- Additionally we asked them questions about their acceptability of a text product they just had read

# Testing comprehension

- Free recall
- Multiple choice
- Assorting task
- Scheme task
- Observing task behaviour
  
- Cloze testing?

## Letter (version)

### City pass

2-level letter: core Tva (A1), Rest in Tva+ (A2)

### City pass

Entire letter in Tva+ (A2)

### Identity Card

3-level letter: core in Tva (A1), Rest in Tva+ (A2) and appendix in B1

### Identity card

2-level letter: letter in Tva + (A2) and appendix in B1

# City pass

2-level-Tva-variant on a A2 level was understood best

- No difference between A1/A2 readers in understanding this variant
- B1(+) readers liked the A2 Tva+ variant better

# Identity card

- A1-readers: Variant with core information in Tva (A1) was better understood by them.
- B1(+)-readers: no difference in understanding both variants.
- The B1-readers didn't find it problematic to read a text on a A1 level.
- Pictures did really help readers to understand the message better.

# Questions for adult B1+ readers

We asked readers functioning on a B1 or higher reading level how well they appreciated letters on an A1, A2 or mixed level (mixed results)

Then we told them why the Amsterdam municipality was considering altering their communication format (so that citizens with lower literacy skills also could read the information)

Then we asked again about their opinions (many citizens changed their opinion stating that they now would accept future letters in the new mode, but not all citizens would accept this)

# Lessons learned

- There is not one solution for the problem to include as many readers as possible when addressing a mixed population.
- Explaining the backgrounds for the choice to be made is important to acquire acceptance.
- Not everyone will accept more accessible information formats
- It takes courage to make an inclusive decision



# The next step

- Amsterdam municipality has changed the level of their citizen communication to an A2 level (Tva+)
- A big insurance company decided to go for an A2 level (they were on a B1 level but too many customers did not understand their communication products)
- Both will not reach about 5% of there clients as they will have literacy skills on a A1 level (but both will include far more citizens / clients in their communication as so far)

# Research challenges page 1

- Guidelines we are not sure about all items in the guidelines
- Guidelines we do not know what are the most important items in the guidelines
- We have to validate our test to assess the initial language level of the addressees who collaborate with us to test the texts
- We have to validate our procedures to test the comprehensibility of our text
- We have to validate procedures to collaborate with examiners

# Research challenges page 2

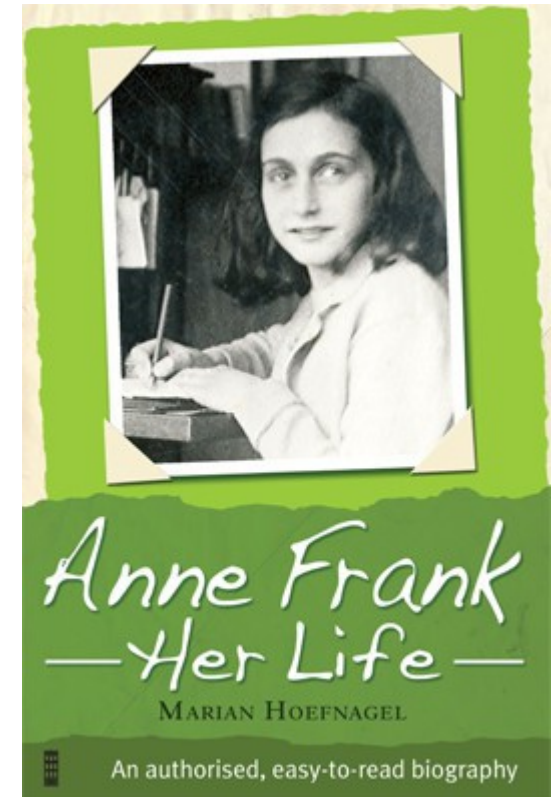
- We have to validate our procedures to test the acceptability of our text
- We have to validate our procedures to test pictures / pictograms / photos rally help to understand a text better
- We have to assess if messages in ‘Language for all(+)’ eventually activate addressees to act according to the message included in the text
- We have to design and maintain procedures to guarantee professionals are capable Tva(+) translators
- We have to find ways to seduce organizations and government to adapt Tva+ as a communication standard

# Research challenges page 3

- We have to find ways to deal with legal issues concerning texts in Tva+
- We have to discuss the pros and cons of shortening texts (ethic boundaries)

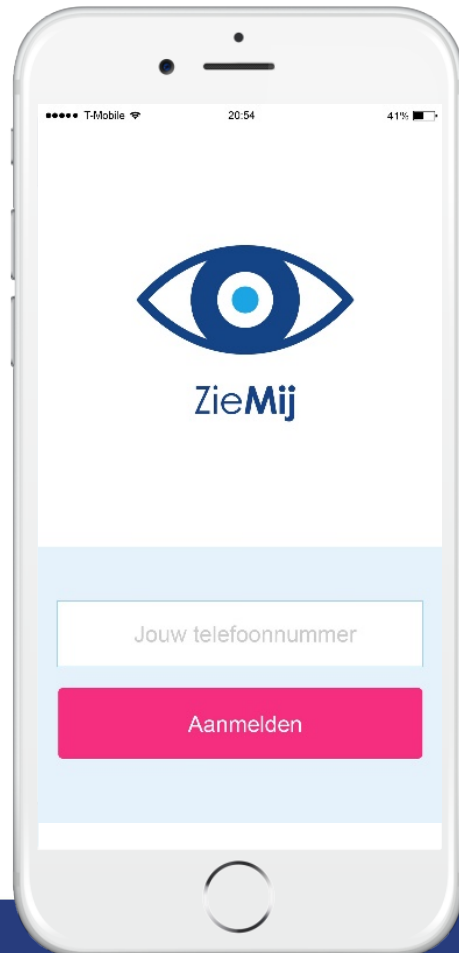
# Next two challenges

- To publish literature in Tva+
- Collaboration with publishing house
- “eenvoudig communiceren” (Spess am Lesen Verlag)
- Research among regular readers of products
- (novels, crime, coursebooks etc.)
- about their motives and experiences to read these texts



# A web based application Translating a text in Tva

## Digital platform



## From letter to action



## Help application



# More research is needed!



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