Easy To Read and Plain Language

- can we learn anything from linguistic research?

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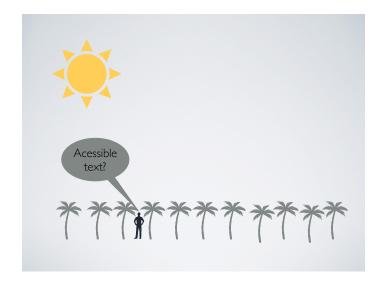## LINGUSTICS

- The study of

  - Human languages

  - The human language ability

  - Lingustic communciation

LINGUISTICS

- The study of:

  - Language form

  - Language meaning

  - Language in context.

LINGUSTIC ACCESSIBILITY

- Making language (multimodal communication?) as accessible as possible for as many as possible?
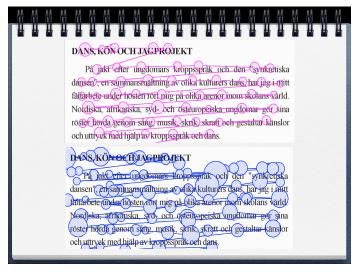

Acessible text?

RELATIVELY ACCESSIBLE FOR ME

- Detective stories

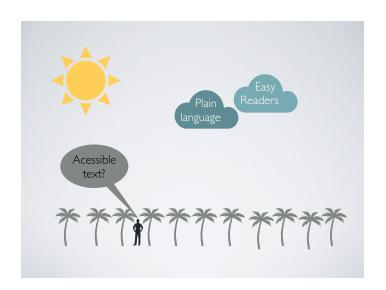- Texts about swimming, skiing, sailing

- Computer magazines

- Grammar books and other linguistics

LESS ACCESSIBLE FOR ME

- Motor magazines
- Texts about football, baseball
- Science Fiction
- Physics books
- …

DANS, KÖN OCH JAGPROJEKT

På jakt efter ungdomars kroppsspråk och den "synkretiska dansen", en sammansmältning av olika kulturers dans, har jag i mitt fältarbete under hösten rört mig på olika arenor inom skolans värld. Nordiska, afrikanska, syd- och östeuropeiska ungdomar gör sina röster hörda genom sång, musik, skrik, skratt och gestaltar känslor och uttryck med hjälp av kroppsspråk och dans.

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Plain language

Easy Readers

Acessible text?

INTERNATIONAL PLAIN LANGUAGE FEDERATION

- A communication is in plain language if its wording, structure, and design are so clear that the intended audience can easily find what they need, understand what they find, and use that information.

PLAIN LANGUAGE IN SWEDEN

- the language of **public administration** should be "cultivated, **simple** and **comprehensible**" (Language Act 2009:600)

- Simple = free from words that are difficult to understand and from complex grammatical structures

- Comprehensible = adapted to a level the reader could be expected to understand.

EASY READERS IN SWEDEN

- Originally targeted specific groups

- Not only texts from authorities

- Includes layout, illustrations, graphical design

WRITERS (IN BOTH CASES) ARE TYPICALLY TOLD TO

- Avoid long words, jargon, slang and old-fashioned words.

- Avoid abstract words

- Vary the sentence length

- Use active voice

- Avoid nominalisation (Say ''they approved'', rather then ''they gave their approval'')

HOWEVER...

As stated by the Swedish easy-reader author Ann-charlotte Ekensten:

– One of the most interesting parts of writing a book is to explore what happens when I add or delete a couple of words - which words will contribute most in making the text exciting?

RESEARCH ON ''SIMPLE AND COMPREHENSIBLE''?

Yes and no

- Largely based on word/sentence-level experiments - not necessarily with the aim to understand text readability but rather the cognitive processes of words and grammar.

- Mostly English

- Not focussed on people with reading difficulties

- Focus on simple rather than comprehensible

SIMPLE WORDS?

- Short?

- High-frequent?

- Familiar?

- Age of acquisition?

Cat
Cucumber
Cernel

SIMPLE SENTENCES?

- Embeddings?

- Passive voice?

- Nominalisation?

- …

Bill hit Bob
Bob was hit by Bill

PICTURES CAN CHANGE THE RULES...

- Active voice: the friends left the frog behind

- Passive voice: The frog was left behind by his

ALREADY GIVEN INFORMATION CAN CHANGE THE RULES

- The committee proposed a new sports centre

- VS
  The committee made a proposal...

- The committee proposed a new sports centre.
  The proposal involved....

BUT WHAT ABOUT COMPREHENSIBLE?

- Activating previous knowledge is important

- Different readers have different needs (for example experts vs novices)

- Pictures should support the text

- Layout and structure...

IN THE SUPERMARKET

- You wander around, looking high and low, and fill up a metallic container. Some people know in advance what to put in; others just make things up as they go along. Two important tips. Make sure that you know what today's date is, as it can prove helpful. And don't put hard things on soft. Take the container and unload it unto a rubber surface. The contents travel a short distance. Each of the objects round and square, big and small, has to be put on to a piece of glass. Sometimes weight will be an issue and money will certainly have to change hands.

  Cited from Bransford, J.D., & Johnson, M.K. (1972), p 722

LINGUIST RESEARCH CAN CONTRIBUTE BUT WE NEED TO…

- widen our scope from words and sentences

- continue to work on our knowledge about the interaction between language, pictures and layout

- focus more on how we can support the reader in activating previous knowledge (or create it?)

- study different languages

- investigate the reading processes of easy-reader readers

- document and explain the work of experienced easy-to-read-authors