

Easy Language in spoken interaction

Contexts, users, and principles

Leealaura Leskelä

leealaura.leskela@kvl.fi

”Oh sorry, am I disturbing your conversation now?”

Pentti, 56 years old man
with a learning disability
(Leskelä 2006)

What is Easy Language

“Easy Language is a language variety in which vocabulary, language structures and contents are modified to be more readable and understandable than in Standard Language. It is intended for people who have difficulties in reading or understanding Standard Language.”

(e.g. Kulkki-Nieminen 2010; Leskelä 2021)

Who needs Easy Language

- People who need linguistic support throughout their lives.
- People who's need for linguistic support has developed during life.
- People who need linguistic support (probably) temporarily, when they learn a new language.

Allways ask the person themselves,
if they want to use Easy Language or not.

(Leskelä 2021)

Written or spoken Easy Language

Written
language



- slow pace of linguistic processing (writing)
- compliance with standardized norms of language
- no immediate feedback

Spoken
language



- rapid pace of linguistic processing (speaking)
- compliance with spoken language norms
- immediate feedback

(E.g. Leskelä 2022)

Linguistic asymmetry



Interaction between participants who do not share same linguistic abilities can be challenging.

(E.g. Linell 1998; Leskelä & Lindholm 2012; Leskelä 2021)

Atypical interaction



One speaker has a specific condition or disability that affects their ability to produce speech, hear, understand or master basic language structures.

(E.g. Wilkinson 2019)

Why Guidelines for spoken Easy Language

- To speak Easy Language is not easy. In order to help the speakers, we need a collection of tips and advice.
- We need to increase chances for participation to people who need EL.



Two settings for spoken Easy Language

Institutionally
oriented
situations

- Teaching, lecturing, guidance
 - Advicing, customer service
 - Mass media, delivering official information
- **focus on language**

Free, everyday
conversations

- Chatting with friends, close ones and family members
 - Informal talks at work, in the classroom, at home
- **focus on actions**

45 guidelines for speaking Easy Finnish

- 1) Orient to the situation
- 2) Encounter with a person, be present
- 3) Reciprocity and taking turns
- 4) Speak Easy Language
- 5) Checking and repairing.

(Leskelä 2012; 2022.)

Orient to the situation

Help your co-participant to orient themselves to the situation at hand; tell what happens next.

Check the background noise, lightning, air-conditioning and other environment conditions. Appease the speaking environment, when possible.

Encounter with a person, be present

Cherish co-operation! Take care that your co-participant has, according to their capabilities, a chance to be responsible for the progress of the interaction.

Listen sensitively. While listening, express your interest with facial expressions, gestures, position and feedback.

Reciprocity and taking turns

Give your co-participant enough time to react.

Ask questions, but avoid examining atmosphere. Take into account that your co-participant may find it difficult to answer to your questions.

Support and encourage the initiatives of your co-participant.

Speak Easy Language

- Use words that you believe familiar to your co-participant.
Explain difficult words.
- Prefer language structures that are commonly used in spoken language.
- Use clear intonation that helps distinguish the most important point in your speech.
- Pause at the end of a speech segment (not within it).
- Use carefully figures of speech. Prefer common figures of speech.
- Abstract language is often difficult. Use concrete examples, if you speak about abstract things.
- Use other ways to help your co-participant to understand and speak, if these other ways are familiar to you both (e.g. AAC methods).

Checking and repairing

Follow your co-participant, repair your speech if needed.

Use common repair initiators: questions (*what is x?*), repeats (*x?*), interpretations (*oh you mean x*). Often you need them all.

If possible, avoid pretending that you understand, if you don't.

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Kiitos! Grazie! Paldies! Giitu!
Дякую! Danke! Hvala! Ačiū!
Tānan! Tack! Merci! Diolch!
Gracias! Takk! Bedankt!
Köszönöm! Dziękuję!
Vă mulțumesc! Ευχαριστώ!
Obrigada! Ďakujeme! Tak!
Eskerrik asko! Thank you!



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