



# On 'easy' and 'plain' Russian

Arto Mustajoki

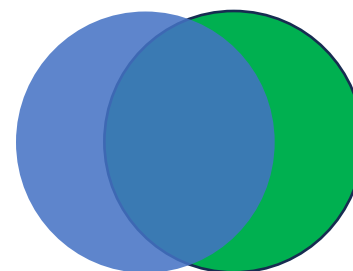
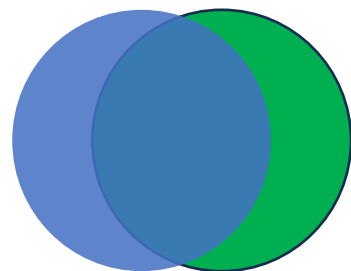
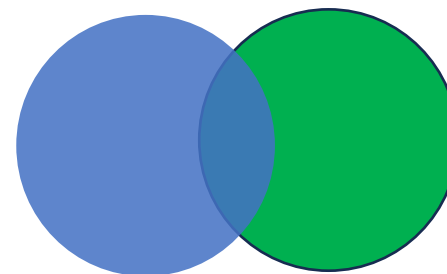
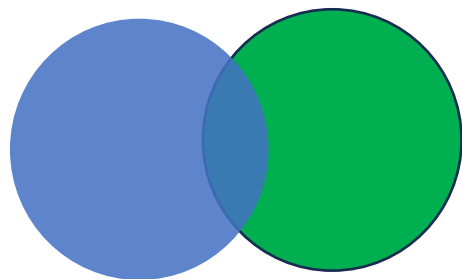
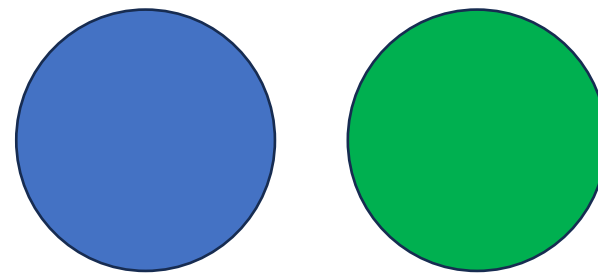
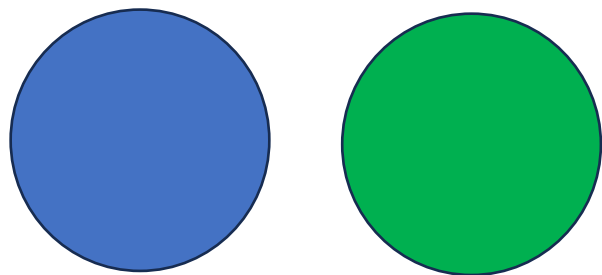
Helsinki University

Why is accomodation needed in communication and how do we achieve it?

We are different:

Shared language

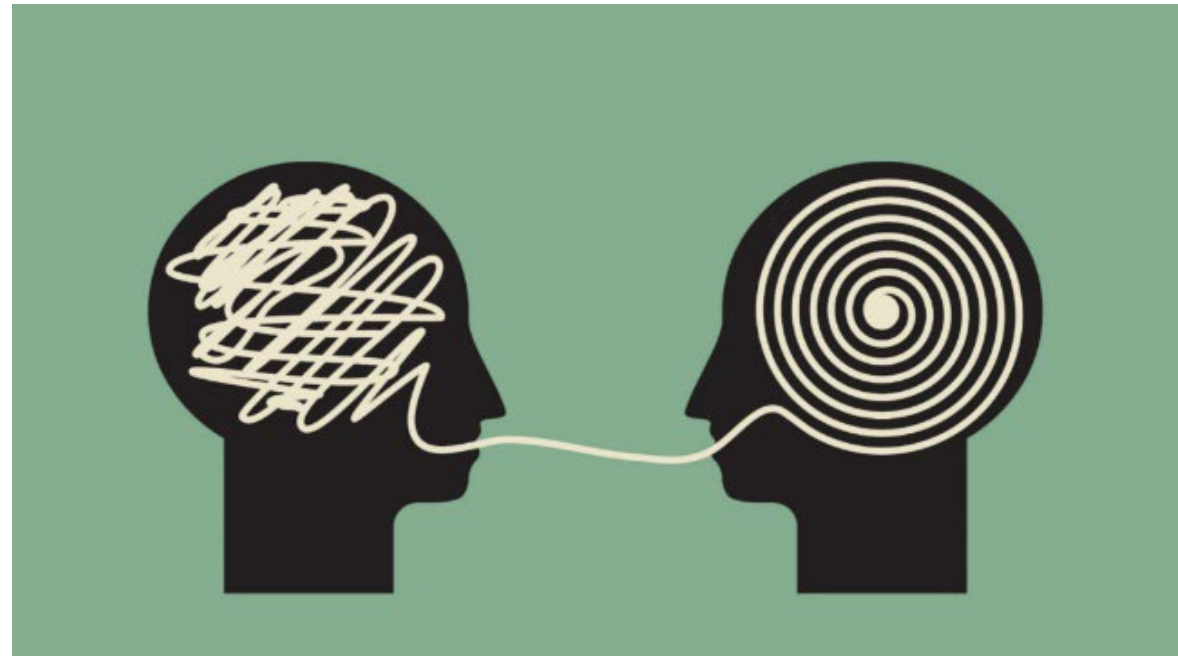
Common ground



# Accommodation of speech as the best guarantee of successful communication

A fundamental characteristic of communicative or pragmatic competence is the **ability to adjust one's speech to suit the current situation and the communicants**

- Adjustment
- Adaptation
- Modification
- Recipient design
- Perspective taking
- Tailoring



# Simplification as a form of accommodation

When communication situation is asymmetric, the speaker (mostly automatically) switches to a simplification mode

Typical cases include conversations:

- With children (baby talk)
- With non-native speakers (foreigner talk)

However, communication failures can sometimes occur in other settings (e.g. at home) often because we are not aware of differences in our shared common grounds

# Simplification as a form of language adaptation, recipient design, or tailoring

Intuitive simplification by authors of texts **to enhance understanding:**

- Children's books
- School textbooks
- Language learning materials
- Popularized scientific texts

# Simplification as a language variety

**Easy language (EL)** for people who have difficulty reading standard texts

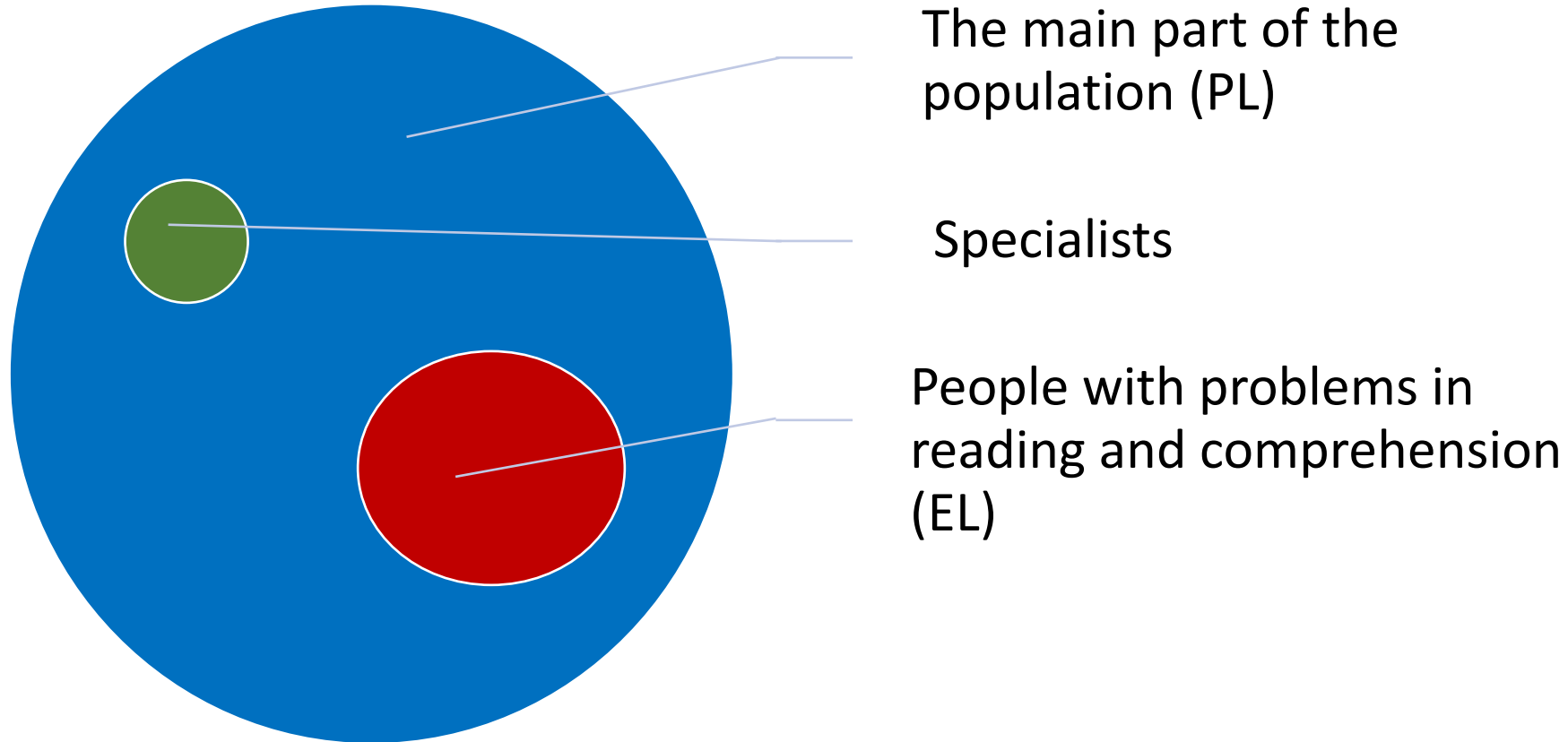
- Immigrants
- Elderly people
- People with mental health challenges
- An increasing number of young people



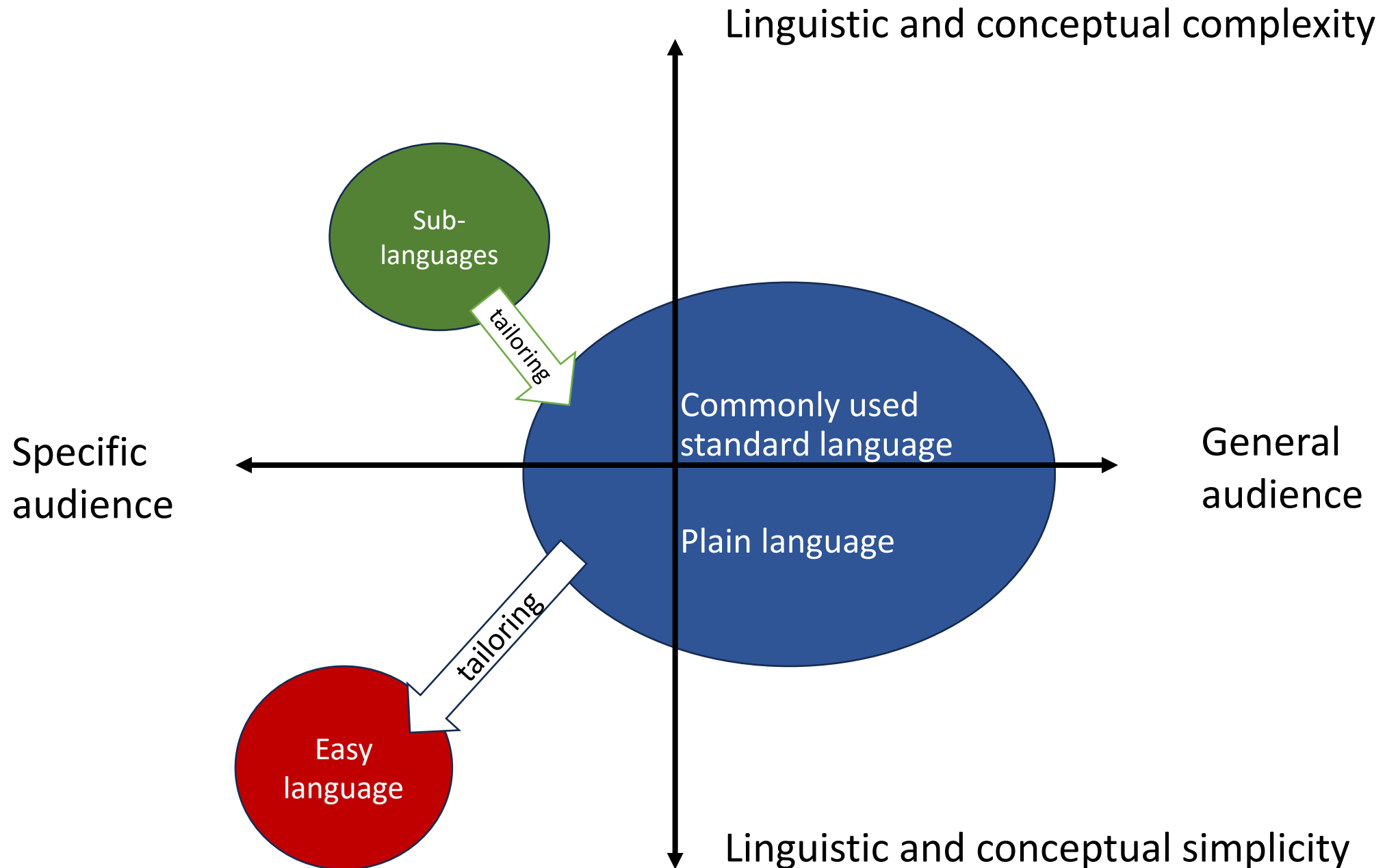
Approximately 15 % of people belong to this group, and this number is increasing

**Plain language (PL)** is intended for the general public

# Target groups of EL and PL







# Why EL and PL?

Adequate access to information is essential for equal rights, democracy, and well-being.

Information gaps can lead to the marginalization of certain groups of people and resource inefficiencies.

## Domains of EL and PL

- Official information from authorities (healthcare, citizens' rights and obligations)
- Guides and handbooks
- Mass media (news)
- Fiction

# EL and PL in comparison to lingua francas

EL and PL as simplified linguistic varieties are used **in order to enhance understanding** within a certain society

- Mainly for written use
- Directed by general guidelines; guidebooks with examples are common

Lingua francas as simplified linguistic varieties are used due to **lack of language command and to reduce cognitive load**

- Mainly for oral use
- Created by users themselves, no guidelines only practices

# EL and PL vs. readability

## Readability (measured by tests, scores)

- Words per sentence
- Characters per word
- Universality (frequency) of used words

## EL and PL

- Avoiding complex grammatical forms and structures (both EL and PL)
- Careful word choice (both EL and PL)
- Simplification of the content (primarily EL)

# Yasashii nihongo

- An increasing number of residents from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a driving factor.
- Catastrophes as an extra stimulus (the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995, Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami 2011)
- Simplified Japanese for learning and distribution of information
- REALISM AGAINST IDEALISM (cf. Russia)
  - Idealism: We should always strive to full command and use of our beautiful mother tongue
  - Realism: In some (many?) situation, such a goal cannot be achieved and as a result, communication does not take place

# PL and EL in the Russian context

# On the Russian linguistic tradition

In the Russian linguistic tradition, **the standard (literary, “good”) language holds high status**

- A key concept is “gramotnost’” *грамотный человек, писать или говорить грамотно*
- “Носитель литературного языка” – representing a person who may make mistakes but knows literary norms
- A significant amount of radio and TV programmes focus on language usage
- “Тотальный диктант”

# Consequences of the Russian linguistic tradition

- ⇒ Linguistic interest in non-standard Russian varieties (e.g. colloquial speech, slang, social media language, *prostoretšie*, Russian as a lingua franca) developed relatively late
- ⇒ Opposition to the existence of other than Moscow-based language variant
- ⇒ Laws against inappropriate use of language
- ⇒ Emphasis is placed more on linguistic norms and avoiding “bad” language than on readability



# More attention to norms and “bad” language than to readability

## **The Law on Russian language (2003)**

- “it is not allowed to use colloquial, abusive words and expressions and foreign words if there exists an **analogue** in the Russian language”
- Ministry of Education has the right to determine the linguistic norm

## **The Law on Russian as the state language (2005)**

## **The Ministry of Education used, for the first time, the right to determine the norm (2009)**

- four authoritative dictionaries
- some relaxations to linguistic norms (most of them connected with word stress: *jógurt* and *jogúrt*, *dogovór* and *dógovor*)
- accepted the use of the word *kofo* ‘coffee’ as a neuter

# Special need for simplification of the written Russian

Complex word formation leads to **long words** (учительница, достопримечательность)

(Church Slavonic) tradition to use a lot participles and passive construction leads to **very long sentences**

Russian legal texts are “more complicated than Kant’s books on philosophy”

Authority mindset: “I fulfil my duty by providing information. If readers don’t understand, that’s their problem”

«Государство гарантирует инвалиду право на получение необходимой информации. Обеспечение выпуска литературы для инвалидов по зрению является расходным обязательством Российской Федерации.

Приобретение периодической, научной, учебно-методической, справочно-информационной и художественной литературы для инвалидов, в том числе издаваемой на магнитофонных кассетах и рельефно-точечным шрифтом Брайля, для образовательных организаций и библиотек, находящихся в ведении субъектов Российской Федерации, и муниципальных образовательных организаций является расходным обязательством субъектов Российской Федерации, для муниципальных библиотек – расходным обязательством органа местного самоуправления. Приобретение указанной в настоящей части литературы для федеральных государственных образовательных организаций и библиотек является расходным обязательством Российской Федерации»

# Considerable attention to other types of language simplification

Adapted for children books (translation from standard language into children's language) *Detskaya entsiklopediya* (Encyclopaedia for children)

Thoughtful linguistic planning of Russian language teaching materials ("minimizatsija" of vocabulary and grammar)

Textbooks ("translation" from standard language into learner's language)

Popularised books and texts for the public ("translation" from scientific language into standard language by famous researchers)

# Quotes on language simplicity by famous writers

- Leo Tolstoy: Ясно понимать предмет - передать его на простонародном языке необразованному человеку.

Understand the subject clearly - convey it in a common language to an uneducated person.

- Anton Chekhov: Язык должен быть прост и изящен.

The language should be simple and elegant.

- Ivan Turgenev: Пишите просто, искренно.

Write simply and sincerely.

# Recent developments of Russian PL and EL

# The Presidential Council on the Russian language: **МИКРОСТИЛЬ** русского языка, **ПРОСТОЙ** р. язык

Stimulus: Obama's Plain writing Act of 2010

The characteristic features of any texts should be according to Serey Kusnetsov:

- (1) correctness; (2) logical course; (3) exact use of terms;
- (4) use of unambiguous structures;
- (5) avoidance of unnecessary words and pleonasm

The main reason of complexity – complicated syntax structures – is not mentioned

The law text provided above is according to

<https://www.plainrussian.ru/>

“Extremely difficult” – For understanding of the text, PhD level is needed

# ЯСНЫЙ РУССКИЙ (EL)

Actors among various NLO societies working with groups of people with troubles in comprehension:

St. Petersburg Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities (GAOORDI) <https://gaoordi.ru/>

«Даунсайд Ап» <https://downsideup.org/o-fonde/o-nas/>

An active promotor of the Russian EL :

The Association of Translation Teachers <https://easyandplain.ru/>



# The most comprehensive guidebook for the Russian EL is compiled in Minsk

<https://lifeguide.by/blagotvoritelnost-2/>:

- Ясный язык прост. В нем **нужно избегать причастных и деепричастных оборотов, обратного порядка слов, метафор и сложных эпитетов.**
- В ясном языке **не следует использовать синонимы.** Нужно использовать одно и то же слово для обозначения одних и тех же явлений, объектов, действий, ситуаций. Так, если мы в каком-то тексте написали «мальчик», то в нем и дальше нужно продолжать писать «мальчик», а не «ребенок», «юноша» или «подросток» и т. д.
- Нужно **аккуратно пользоваться местоимениями** – лучше несколько раз повторить одно и то же слово, чем вызвать непонимание, к чему или к кому относится местоимение.
- Лучше использовать **самые простые, понятные и часто употребляемые слова.** Например, вместо слов «кобыла», «мерин», «жеребец», «жеребенок» лучше сказать просто – «конь» или «лошадь». Однако в тексте для взрослых не стоит использовать «детские» слова и примеры.

<https://lifeguide.by/blagotvoritelnost-2/>

- One should avoid participatory phrases, reverse word order, metaphors and complex epithets.
- Synonyms should not be used.
- You need to use pronouns carefully — it's better to repeat the same word several times than to cause misunderstanding what or to whom the pronoun refers to.
- It is better to use the simplest, most understandable and frequently used words. For example, instead of the words “mare”, “gelding”, “stallion”, “foal”, it is better to simply say “horse”.

# Example: Bank card – normal text

Специальный банковский инструмент в виде пластиковой карты с нанесенными на нее идентификационными данными, который позволяет распоряжаться деньгами со своего банковского счета.

A special banking instrument in the form of a plastic card with personal identification data printed on it, which allows you to dispose of money from your bank account.

# Example: Bank card – EL text

Банковская карта это пластиковая карточка, которую может сделать для Вас банк.

Банк может сделать для Вас банковскую карту, если Вы откроете в банке счет.

Вы сможете оплатить банковской картой покупку в магазине или аптеке.

Это значит, что Вам не понадобятся бумажные деньги или монеты.

Специальный аппарат на кассе магазина возьмет деньги прямо с Вашего счета в банке через банковскую карту.

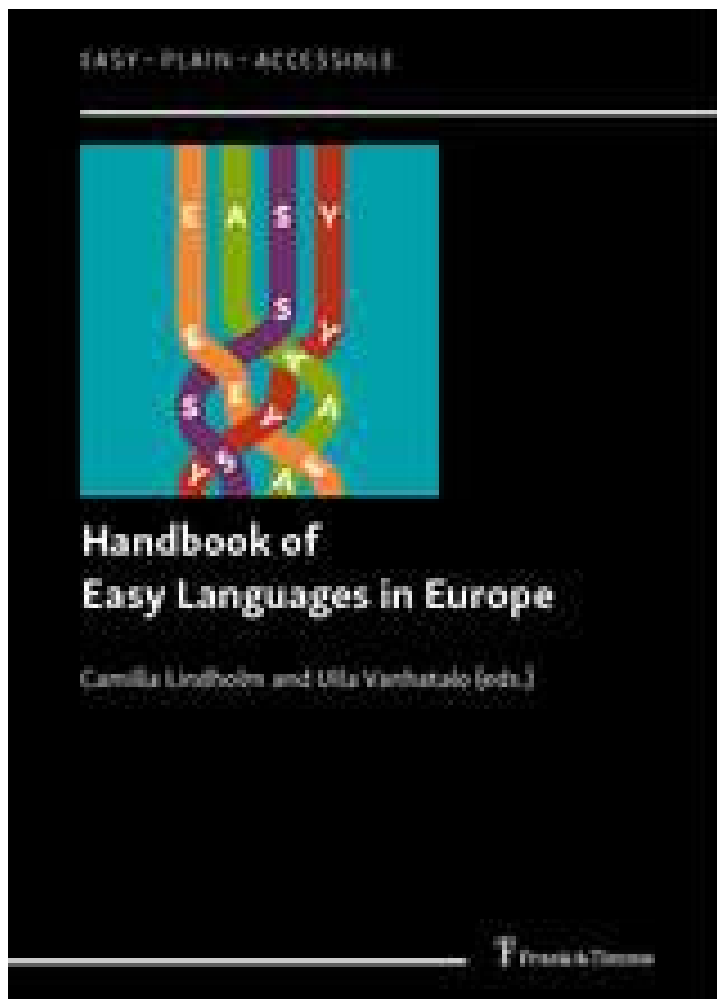
A bankcard is a plastic card, which a bank can make for you.

The bank can make you a bank card, if you open an account at the bank.

You can use your bank card to pay for a purchase at a shop or drugstore.

This means that paper money or coins will not be necessary.

A special machine at the counter will take the money directly from your bank account through your bank card.



Mirjana Lenček, Jelena Kuvač Kraljević: Easy Language in **Croatia**

Silvie Cinková, Camille Latimier: Easy Language in **Czechia**

Agnieszka Przybyła-Wilkin: Easy Language in **Poland**

Arto Mustajoki, Zhanna Mihienko, Natalia Nechaeva, Emma Kairova, Anna Dmitrieva: Easy Language in **Russia**

Tatjana Knapp, Dragica Haramija: Easy Language in **Slovenia**

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ご清聴ありがとうございました

[arto.mustajoki@helsinki.fi](mailto:arto.mustajoki@helsinki.fi)