



# The Development and Production of Literature Within an Easy Language and a Universal Design Perspective

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## Abstract

Finding suitable books for pleasure reading is difficult for many people with reading challenges. Consequently, authors and publishing houses must consider user diversity when developing books. Easy Language comprises an important component, which is closely related to other elements which together constitute accessible books, such as layout, fonts and use of images. Moreover, extensive user testing and involvement must ensure that the books meet the requirements of the readers. This paper presents The Books for Everyone (BfE) Framework, which describes the process from initiation to publication and promotion of Easy Language books, using Norway as a case study. The BfE Framework is illustrated through examples from books and related to the reception and understanding of various user groups.

**Keywords** Book development · Book production · Reading challenges · Universal design

## Introduction

Reading books is a natural activity for many people in Norway. The Norwegian associations for booksellers and publishers reported in a survey that overall, 83% of the population read at least one book annually, and 26% read more than 10 books every year [1]. Women read more than men, with an average of 18.5 books in 2019, compared to 7.9 books among men. Reading aloud is also a common activity, and 46% of the households with children below 10 years of age read aloud to their children at least 2–3 times every week. However, 13% of the respondents did not read any books at all, with a majority below 60 years of age [1]. To continue the positive trend of people reading books, and to include more of the non-readers, it is

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important that the book market stays relevant for both current readers and potential readers of today and the future.

For most people, being able to visit a bookstore or library to pick up a book with the purpose of pleasure reading is taken for granted. Access to enriching and enjoyable reading experiences, however, is closely related to finding the right book. But what is the right book, and is the publishing industry able to produce and promote suitable books for all readers, now and in the future? Many and very different criteria are applied when selecting a book for pleasure reading. Commonly mentioned criteria are type of reading experience wanted, easy versus challenging text, familiarity versus novelty, characters depicted, physical size of the book, author, publisher and economic and intellectual effort required [2]. Moreover, users have varying language skills, functional differences and are neurodiverse. Consequently, there are more characteristics to consider when trying to match a reader with “the right book” than simply addressing the issue of genre or reading interests. Another vital component is reading level. The reading habits and reading skills of various user groups are changing. An increasing number of people will avoid reading due to difficulties in finding books suitable for their reading level and interests. Consequently, the question becomes: *How can the publication industry work for inclusion of all types of potential readers?*

One approach to neurodiversity and reading challenges is the production of high content/low skills books, also referred to as Easy Language books [3]. Such books usually have a reading level lower than the age of the reader, but address topics suited for the actual age of the reader. Another important aspect of such books is cognitive text simplification, which entails reducing the textual complexity while at the same time avoiding losing content [4]. Although language is a key component in Easy Language books, there are other issues to consider, such as storyline and plot, layout, typography, and the interaction between text and images. Consequently, developing Easy Language books is a process which involves several phases, and user testing is key. A broad interpretation of the concept Easy Language is therefore required.

As a result of working with Easy Language in practice and in close collaboration with the Norwegian publishing industry for more than a decade, the organization Books for Everyone has developed the Books for Everyone (BfE) Framework. This framework is, among others, based on some of the principles behind Easy Language. This paper will address the following research question: *How can Easy Language be applied in practice by the publishing industry to develop books for people with reading challenges?* The paper is limited to fictional books and applies Norway as a case study with a particular focus on the book production initiated by the organization Books for Everyone.

The paper is structured as follows: The background addresses Easy Language, motivation for and benefits of pleasure reading and Easy Language books. Then, the organization Books for Everyone is shortly introduced. A framework applied by Books for Everyone for developing Easy Language books is then presented and discussed. Five fictional books developed by different authors/illustrators and publishing houses with the support of Books for Everyone are applied as examples of the various phases of the BfE Framework. Finally, there is a broader discussion on how

we suggest that the publishing industry can understand and apply Easy Language to accommodate user diversity in the future.

## Background

### Easy Language

In this paper, we will apply the term Easy Language as defined by Hansen-Schirra and Bisang [5], namely as an umbrella term for all versions of language varieties such as “limitations in the lexicon, reduced complexity on the morphological, phrasal, syntactic and textual layers and integration of pictures”. Easy Language was originally aimed at people with learning challenges and intellectual impairments. The term is now also applied in other contexts and related to various user groups, such as people with aphasia, dementia or hearing impairments, functional illiterates, and non-native speakers. Consequently, Easy Language is a purposeful starting point for the production of books for people with various types of reading challenges. Hansen-Schirra and Maaß [6] have pointed out that Easy Language is an efficient tool for inclusion and plays a significant role in the development of an inclusive society.

Easy Language and Plain Language may be regarded as overlapping terms, with the overall purpose of increased comprehension and readability of texts. Hansen-Schirra and Maaß [6] introduced a division between Easy Language and Plain Language, where the former is regarded as having a stigmatizing effect due to the uniformity and simplicity of Easy Language texts. Moreover, Hansen-Schirra and Maaß [6] claim that Easy Language texts in their existing form may often not be accepted by the potential target groups. This is in accordance with other findings, where people with reading challenges do not want to read so-called “special books” [7, 8]. Moreover, this claim supports the assumption that motivation should be a key element in the development of Easy Language books.

### Motivation for Reading

Motivation is a fundamental component in reading literacy. According to Gambrell [7], motivation is related to various characteristics, such as reading being relevant to people’s lives, having access to a wide range of reading materials, opportunities to engage in sustained reading and make choices of what to read and to socially interact with others about the text they are reading, and have opportunities to be successful with challenging texts [7]. Others have addressed the motivation for selecting a book to read for pleasure reading. Ross [2] presents five main categories applied by people when selecting a book, namely (i) reading experience wanted, (ii) altering sources to find out about new books, (iii) elements of a book to match book choices with the desired reading experience, (iv) clues on the book itself and (v) cost or money involved in getting intellectual or physical access to the book. A study by Berget and Fagernes [8] revealed that books that are perceived as “too adapted”

make people with reading challenges “feel stupid” and not motivated to read the book. Becker and McElvany [9] have emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation, which is among others related to valuing books as a source of enjoyment, interests in the topics covered in the books and providing an overall positive experience of reading.

### **The Importance of Reading Fiction**

One important outcome of reading is the development of reading skills. According to McGeown and Duncan [10], fiction reading is the only reading activity that predict differences in reading skills, such as text reading speed, summarization skills and reading comprehension. Researchers have emphasized the “Matthew effects”, where people who read frequently develop better vocabularies and read fast. In contrast, people with inadequate vocabularies read slower and with little enjoyment which will result in less reading and no noteworthy growth in the reading development [11]. Genre may also have an effect on the improvement of reading skills. Jerrim and Moss [12] reported that young people who read much fiction such as novels, narratives, and stories, develop significantly better reading skills than their non-reading peers. The same positive effect was not found for other text types. Providing all types of readers with accessible fictional literature is therefore key for cultural democracy.

An important aspect of language acquisition is learning unknown words. Moghadam and Zainal [13] discussed the importance of having both depth and breadth in vocabulary knowledge, which is closely correlated with reading comprehension. These issues constitute a potential challenge for Easy Language books. One goal is to provide readers with a successful and enriching reading experience, which sometimes do result in a language with a very low complexity [6]. At the same time, such literature will not support vocabulary development. Retelsdorf and Köller [14] reported that the best way to support people with reading challenges is to boost the reading skills and self-concept. Goals and expectancy values are important, resulting in people asking questions such as “will I enjoy reading and why?” [14].

In addition to development of reading skills, Howard [15] emphasized three broad functions fulfilled by pleasure reading, namely for personal development, enhanced academic performance and social engagement. Moreover, young people frequently apply insights from books for everyday life information seeking, helping them in getting insight into self-awareness and self-identification. Another important asset of reading fiction is development of empathy. According to Bal and Veltkamp [16], such a development requires that the reader is emotionally transported into the story. This effect is not found when reading non-fiction.

### **Easy Language Books/Hi Low Books**

According to Nomura and Nielsen [17], there are two basic approaches in producing Hi Low books. The first applies a linguistic adaptation that will make a text easier to read, but not easier to understand. The second affects the difficulty level of both

reading and comprehension. This first category is rarely addressed in research, but is mentioned in studies on the importance of providing readers with fiction in a proper reading level. Gambrell [7] emphasizes that readers may abandon books that are too easy or too difficult to read. Consequently, finding a balance where the reader is adequately challenged is important.

## Books for Everyone

Books for Everyone is a Norwegian organization that works with the initiation and development of books for people with reading challenges. The organization is funded through the central government budget. The overall purpose is to provide readers who cannot read ‘mainstream books’ with high-quality fiction. The organization was established in 2002 and have partly financed (in collaboration with the publishing industry) more than 230 titles in different genres for various ages and user groups. Books for Everyone is not a publishing house but works in close relationship with the established cultural network, authors, illustrators, graphic designers, publishing houses and libraries in Norway. This collaboration implies that the books which are financially and proficiently supported by this organization are published by regular publishing houses and in cooperation with well reputed authors and illustrators.

Books are developed with different adaptations or a combination of these in the categories *Easy to Read*, *Easy to Understand*, *Norwegian as Second Language*, *Big Letters*, *Sign Language/Norwegian with Sign Support*, *Bliss/Pictograms* and *Braille/Tactile Pictures*. The three first categories are closely related to Easy Language, while the remaining categories target people with functional differences. To financially support the production, publishing, and promotion of books, Books for Everyone initiates the process by providing a small grant to authors, illustrators, and graphic novel artists. The recipients of these grants are carefully selected through a thorough application process. The selected developers are followed-up closely by an adviser at Books for Everyone, and all books are developed from scratch.

Books for Everyone has a close relationship with libraries. A network of around 400 libraries receives free copies of the books produced by the organization, and advice on how to promote them to various readers. Buying these copies is how Books for Everyone support publishing houses financially; once a book is published with the support of Books for Everyone, the organization also buys 400 copies. This system ensures a minimum sale, taking away some of the uncertainty many publishing houses face when considering including Easy Language books into their production in the relatively small market that Norway constitutes.

## Developing a Framework for Easy Language Books

Like in most other European countries, Books for Everyone started as an organization aimed at making books for people with cognitive impairments [18]. Feedback from readers and a broader insight into different challenges connected to reading,

however, resulted in two important changes: an expansion of potential target groups, and an increased awareness of the high content aspect of Easy Language books. This section addresses the background for the approach applied regarding Easy Language Books and presents *The Books for Everyone (BfE) Framework*.

## Applying a Universal Design Perspective

At the beginning of 2000, books in Norway aimed at adults with dyslexia were often simplified versions of more complex books that were already published. The shift to a universal design approach led to an awareness that also books intended for challenged readers should aim for the highest possible quality. Not only application of a simplified or adjusted language was necessary, but an artistic approach requiring full attention on how Easy Language can create high-level literature. It was also required to consider the reception and perception of potential target groups. Consequently, Books for Everyone started cooperating with highly qualified authors, graphic novel designers, illustrators, and publishing houses in making new books.

The target groups for Easy Language books produced by Books for Everyone were broadened from people with cognitive impairments to everyone who will benefit from reading an Easy Language book. The primary target group determines the main adaptation approach applied. Nevertheless, the production and promotion of Easy Language books also entail that such adaptations would most likely also benefit other readers. Consequently, the universal design aspect of Easy Language was incorporated into The BfE framework. Universal design refers to the design approach where products and environments are “*usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design*” [19].

Primary target groups include a variety of users in context of neurodiversity, functional levels, and primary language. Examples are people of all ages with dyslexia or general reading challenges, elderly people, neurodiverse people, and second language readers. These user groups are regarded as the primary readers. However, the fact that these books also reach the mainstream market, means that the target group for these books has been expanded to include other types of readers. All types of people may require or prefer an Easy Language book for various reasons, such as illness, fatigue, or lack of time. This expansion has affected the promotion of the books and directed more attention towards e.g., linguistic considerations, layout, and narratology.

Rather than adapting existing books, new books were developed, taking into account the various and complex reading challenges encountered by different users. These considerations were applied from the start of the writing process as artistic premises. This awareness also led to the framework presented in this article. Artistic and literary aspects came into focus with linguistic considerations, layout, and design. Today, Books for Everyone tagline themselves as an organization working towards cultural democracy, stating that “*There is nothing wrong with people who struggle with reading, they just haven’t found the right books*” [20].

The two approaches introduced by Nomura and Nielsen [17] in producing Hi Low books have inspired how Books for Everyone divides Easy Language literature into

the categories: “*Litt å lese*” (“*Easy to Read*”) and “*Enkelt innhold*” (“*Easy to Understand*”). The terminology applied emphasizes how the books are differently adapted, leaving it up to the reader to select the preferred approach. However, the explanations of the categories provided by Books for Everyone indicate that the first category fits readers with dyslexia, second language readers and unfamiliar readers, while the latter relates to cognitive challenges caused by e.g., intellectual impairments, dementia, or aphasia.

Research from Norway [8, 21] emphasizes the importance of finding a balance where the reader does not experience being offered “specialized literature” while at the same time being provided with an accessible book. If the books are perceived as adapted in form or content, they do not appeal to the reader. Nobody wants to feel stupid or be put in a lower rate in the literature hierarchy. Moreover, based on the selection criteria put forward by Ross [2], it seems likely that the universal design perspective approach applied by Books for Everyone will result in increased interest from other potential target readers. There seems to be an important psychological aspect when selecting a book. Consequently, Berget [22] argues that Easy Language books should only be as special as necessary.

What is meant, then, when referring to a book as “easier to read” or contains Easy Language? Which aspects of the language, both in a linguistic and narrative manner, are adapted or modified to meet the needs of a person with reading challenges? And how is the balance between easy and complex content met when the social and psychological motivation aspects of inclusion are taken into consideration? These are examples of questions that comprise the background and foundation for The Books for Everyone Framework.

### **The Books for Everyone (BfE) Framework**

The balance between developing easy versus complex books and supporting the readers in coping to read a book or being motivated for leisure reading are constantly discussed by Books for Everyone. This balance is an important starting point for the development of The BfE Framework for Easy Language book production (see Fig. 1). This framework presents an Easy Language approach where components related to motivation for choosing to read literature are included. The framework has been developed over time and is still evolving.

The BfE Framework consists of five phases: (i) initial phase, (ii) narratology, (iii) linguistic text editing, (iv) layout and design, and (v) publication. Each phase comprises components associated with key topics or activities in the production and promotion process (see Fig. 1). User testing is also vital but is not discussed in detail here. Although considerations for the target groups are specifically included in phase 1, and user testing occurs in phase 3 and 4, the general user perspective comprises the foundation for the entire framework.

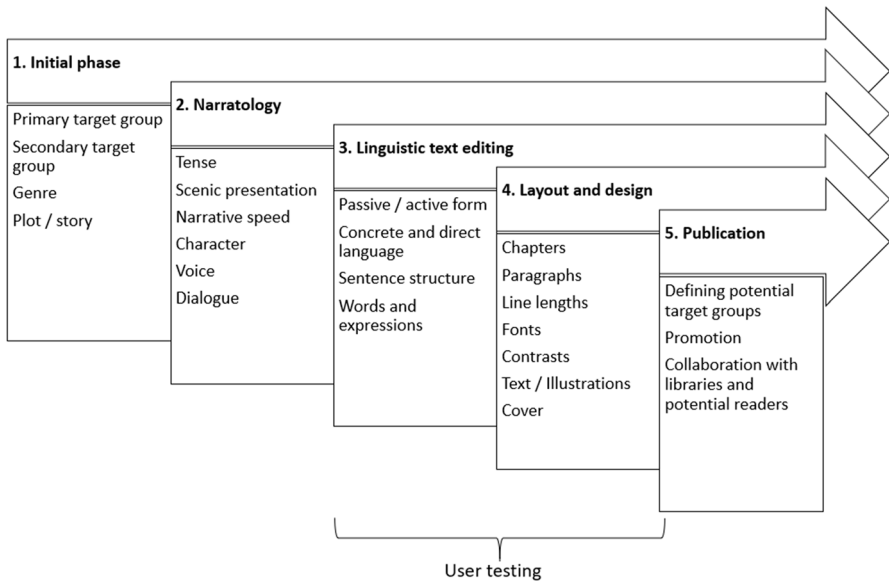


Fig. 1 The Books for Everyone (BfE) framework

## Applying the BfE Framework

The continually increased awareness of removing the hierarchy between different types of readers implies a need for a flexible understanding of how a Hi Low book can create genuine inclusion. Moreover, The BfE Framework acknowledges that high-level literature requires different writing processes, making every book unique. The BfE Framework will therefore be presented and discussed using five books as examples [23–27]. The analysis of how Easy Language is understood in the production of these books will lead to a more general discussion concerning the nature or definition of Easy Language and how the publishing industry can apply this framework to include and reach more readers.

### Phase 1: Initial Phase

The initial phase comprises genre and story, keeping in mind both primary and secondary target groups. In this phase, it is important to keep an open mind and consider the importance of motivation for reading. The author, illustrator and graphic novelist must consider which stories might come forward as relevant and interesting to provide the readers with the required outcome of leisure reading. Examples can be the desired reading experience wanted, as discussed by Ross [2], which might be based upon reading level, mood, if the reader wants to be challenged, frightened or amazed. Other relevant elements described by Ross [2] are the characters



depicted, what kind of world the reader enters, subject and a happy versus sad ending. According to The BfE Framework, there must be an understanding of potential reading challenges among the target users. A discussion of potential considerations for the readers is necessary in the initial phase, such as avoiding too complicated plots.

In this phase, the collaboration between the author (or illustrator or graphic novel artist), the editor at the publishing house and an adviser from Books for Everyone is established. It is important that everyone involved in the development process of the book meet and agree upon the labour of division and a progress plan. Stereotype thinking must be avoided when discussing the theme of the book, the primary and secondary target groups, and which considerations to apply. The initial phrase takes into consideration that different readers should be offered various types of books and to ensure the users have access to a broad selection of genres and topics.

One example is the illustrated children's book "Jenta som ville redde bøkene" (translates "The girl who wanted to save the books") written by Hagerup and Aisato [23]. The main person in this book is a girl who loves books and reads all the time. This book was intended for young people with reading challenges. Originally, there was scepticism towards having book reading as a main plot. The fear was that readers who required Easy Language books would not identify with this story. Consequently, the idea was tested out on people with dyslexia. This user test resulted in a surprising result, where a 12-year-old girl with dyslexia commented: "*I liked the book. I liked that it was about a girl who loves books. I want to find joy in reading books, too, just like her!*". Examples like this show the importance of keeping an open mind when initializing new Easy Language books and avoid stereotype thinking.

## Phase 2: Narratology

Phase 2, narratology, includes aspects such as tense, scenic presentation, narrative speed, character, voice, and dialogue. The narratology approach to Easy Language includes all parts of storytelling that helps the reader navigate the story. Feedback from readers has led to an increased awareness that the narratology and linguistic aspects of Easy Language are equally important. Without an Easy Language narratology approach, only the language itself will be easier, and the storyline might get lost. Consequently, the goal of providing accessible and enjoyable literature for the target group is not reached. However, it will not help the reader if the storyline becomes pedagogical in such a way that the literary aspect is lost.

An important part of reading literature, is the joy and excitement of getting to know a character, following an interesting plot, getting surprized, shocked, excited, or moved by the shifts and movements in the story. The important balance between adaptation and complying with the reader's motivation has led to the narratology advice given to authors of Easy Language books. The author is advised to build a clear and strong character the reader can relate to, which will guide the reader through the story. At the same time the author is advised to make a complex character to reach the high-quality goal of such books. The author should not underestimate

the reader but build a credible story and a character without causing confusion. Moreover, time and space must be easy to follow. The narrative voice should be clear and reliable without losing dramatic shifts.

The thriller story “Hevneren” (translates “Avenger”) written by Røssland [24], is an example where Easy Language narratology is used to meet the need for an exciting storyline that is easy to follow. This book is part of a series aimed at young people with very little reading experience due to dyslexia, general reading challenges or simply scarce reading. These books relate to films or video games to build upon previous experiences with other media types. A dramatic storyline which holds a high intensity keeps the attention of the reader. At the same time, considerations are taken to accommodate a slow reading speed. Adjusting the narrative speed is important. According to Hume [28], many narrators present events too fast for the readers in contemporary novels, which does not result in real understanding. Easy Language books must therefore have a narrative speed that is not too fast, but still makes the books exiting.

In the novel “Avenger” [24], the story is told by two different main characters; Damien and Ella. The story begins with the kidnapping of Ella’s boyfriend, Damien. Ella does not know what has happened to Damien. The dramatic tension grows as the story is told in short chapters, often presented on one page. The story switches between the perspective of Damien and Ella. Every chapter has a headline showing the teller (Damien or Ella), date and time. Damien’s kidnapper keeps getting more dangerous while Ella is occupied with other problems. Through this simple, but effective dramatic trick, the unexperienced reader gets narrative support. At the same time, by letting the reader know more than the characters, a mainstream thriller excitement is kept.

### Phase 3: Linguistic Text Editing

Phase 3 is the linguistic text editing, where much work is put down into ensuring Easy Language. Examples of characteristics that are attended to are passive versus active form, using a concrete and direct language in addition to considering sentence structures, words, and expressions. An overall goal is to reduce the lexical complexity of several layers, which is also pointed out by Hansen-Schirra and Bisang [5]. Nevertheless, unknown words are not always avoided, because Easy Language books should also allow the readers to increase vocabulary and reading skills. This approach is in accordance with Moghadam and Zainal [13], who emphasise the importance of having both depth and breadth in the vocabulary knowledge to increase reading comprehension. Moreover, the careful considerations in the linguistic text editing ensures that not all Easy Language books are very low in complexity [6].

In this phase, the editor, adviser, and writer will often discuss how to balance necessary linguistic considerations aimed at including the primary reader into the story, and at the same time ensuring that the author, illustrators, or graphic novel artists special signature or “literary voice” is kept. The feedback from people who have collaborated with Books for Everyone, is that they were positively surprised

when discovering that the necessary considerations worked as an inspiring frame that sharpened and evolved their artistic and literature skills, not the opposite. As a result, their signature is often strongly present in the book.

The book “Søstre: Min historie etter Utøya” (translates “Sisters: My story after Utøya”) written by Di Fiore [26] illustrates how Easy Language linguistics can be applied to reach a broad target group. The topic of the book is difficult, but important: It is based upon a real-life story of two sisters who went to the Norwegian Summer camp Utøya in 2011. Both sisters were shot by a terrorist. One sister died; the other was badly hurt. The story is told by the surviving sister but is written by an experienced author. The teller point is “I”, to keep the language direct. The sentences are mostly short and address the reader, almost as if the story is told in person. The words are easy to read and create a visual scene.

One of the most important principles applied by authors is “show, don’t tell”. Advisers in Books for Everyone reveal that experienced authors often have a pre-judgment towards Easy Language books, expecting that these books must explain the scenes more often than in Standard Language books. Feedback from readers, however, shows the opposite; the more the text is explained, the more it will come forward as too pedagogical, thus reducing the reading-motivation. On the contrary, difficult words or a complex storyline are not necessary to create a visual scene. Moreover, visual scenes invite the reader to co-create, bringing own experiences, imaginary skills, and empathy to the story. In the book about the two sisters, the reader is invited to see, feel, smell, and hear everything the teller is experiencing. This book is an example of how a Hi Low book can be created by combining Easy Language with visual scenes to lay the groundwork for the same level of co-creation as other mainstream books.

Another linguistic approach in this book is the mixed use of short and half-long sentences. Short sentences might be easier to read when presented one by one, but put together in a book, using only short sentences will create a staccato rhythm that disturbs the reading flow [29]. Reading fiction does not only entail decoding words, but to experience a story and be encouraged to follow the character and visualize the scenes described in the book. A natural reading rhythm that follows the logic of thinking and talking, bridges oral language with written language and makes it easier for unfamiliar readers to engage in the story.

#### **Phase 4: Layout and Design**

Phase 4 relates to presentation of the books, including chapters, paragraphs, line lengths, fonts, contrasts and the relationship between text and illustrations. The cover of the book is also included in this phase. Physical characteristics of a text has been reported to affect eye movements during reading, reading speed and overall reading strategies [30]. The integration of pictures is also important in Easy Language [5]. There has been much research on font types and sizes, blank space and line lengths for people with dyslexia. Common for this research is the conclusion that text layout is an important supplement to Easy Language. Reading speed and experience are thus affected by both the text itself and the presentation [21].

Ross [2] reported that the length and time required to read a book are important criteria, including the size of the book and the cover. People with reading challenges do not want to be seen reading the so-called “easy books” [8, 21]. Measures must therefore be taken to ensure that these books are not perceived as “adapted books”. Gambrell [7] suggests avoiding labels such as “easy”, because the users who would benefit from reading these books typically avoid such categories. The BfE Framework offers an approach to Easy Language literature which involves the specialized skills of different actors in the publishing industry. In phase 4, collaboration with designers in the publishing house is also established.

“Kaffehjerte” (translates “Coffee heart”), written by Dahle and Nyhus [27], is an example of how a universal design approach can make a book appealing to many different types of readers. The primary target group comprises readers with cognitive impairments. The main character, storyline, theme, telling point and linguistic considerations are tailored to meet the needs of this user group. In many ways the story is quite simple; a woman in her 40’s still living with her mother because it seems like she needs a lot of care and cannot manage on her own. Through the poetic and calm tone in the story, the reader is encouraged to sympathize with this woman. The sentences are few and simple, but leaves a lot of room for the reader to think and reflect; might it rather be the mother who needs to hold on to the role as caretaker?

Gro Dahle is a well-known Norwegian author with her own recognizable writing style. In this story, her style is simplified, but still preserved and actually strengthened. The illustrations, layout and design underline an artistic and grown-up approach to the story, inviting every kind of reader into recognizing the universal human aspects of the story. The book is richly illustrated, but the size of the book resembles a novel more than a picture book addressing adult readers. The illustrations are simple, but artistic, and do not come forward as childish. This approach shows that a universally designed book is not limited to Hi Low books with a high-level content but can comprise books with easy-to-understand content. Such books, however, must have poetic, artistic qualities which are also mirrored in the layout and design.

## Phase 5: Publication

Phase 5, publication, comprises defining potential target groups, promotion, and collaboration with libraries and potential readers. An overall goal is to explore novel areas of promotion to reach new readers. By applying the universal design perspective, target groups are expanded beyond people with reading challenges. The main purpose of this phase, however, is to locate readers who rarely visit a library or bookstore. Reaching potential readers is therefore also an important element of The BfE Framework and requires both sufficient planning and effort.

A relatively large part of the Norwegian population consists of people learning Norwegian. Reading literature is an efficient and pleasurable way to learn a new language, understand a new culture, and expand the vocabulary. Hi Low books are therefore highly suitable for second language readers as they present a high-level content in Easy

Language. Nevertheless, literature and Hi Low books are seldomly used as a source for language learning in schools for adults or language cafes (meeting places where second language learners can practice speaking their new language). Books for Everyone has therefore focused on how literature can be used as a source for language learning and bridge to interesting conversations in Norwegian.

Feedback from language cafes has shown that Easy Language poetry works well as a starting point for dialogues in Norwegian. Recognition is perceived as an important inner motivation for many readers [2]. Moreover, the best conditions for learning a new language is a solid foundation in one's first language [31]. Few books written by authors from other cultures living in Norway are published. Books for Everyone has therefore initiated a bilingual book project.

An example of the importance of an Easy Language approach to publication is the bilingual Easy Language poetry book "Lukta av svart" (translates "The smell of black") written by the Iraqi poet Hayder [25]. This is an example of a bilingual book with full-text translation, as opposed to other types of bilingual books [32]. The poems are written in Easy Language both in Arabic and Norwegian. Although the language is easy, the content is challenging. The book is based upon the historical incident when the terrorist group ISIS occupied Mosul in 2014. The poems address dealing with terror, uncertainty, being forced into exile, and coping with loneliness in a new country. The main character of the book must learn to handle memories while adapting to a new society and learning a completely new language and culture.

To accommodate the reading level of an adult second language learner, the poems were simultaneously written in Arabic and Norwegian. This was a new approach where the poet creates the poems in close collaboration with a translator, editor, and literature adviser. This writing process was chosen to ensure that the poems would come forward as new and modern in both languages. The process required discussions and dialogues between the members of the team concerning differences in culture, history, literature, and language.

In the publication phase of the BfE Framework, advisers in Books for Everyone collaborate closely with both the editor and marketing section of the publishing house. Although the bilingual book "Lukta av svart" was originally aimed at second language learners, it was acknowledged that the dialogue-approach applied when making the poems would probably also create dialogues among various types of readers. The book content and the bilingualism made the book interesting for different readers and showed the potential of not limiting the promotion of Easy Language books to one primary target group. After the publication, mainstream high schools were, among others, added to the list of potential places of promotion. This shows the potential of having a universal design approach even to the promotion of Easy Language literature, creating a space for dialogue between various readers and different people.

## Discussion

In accordance with Hansen-Schirra and Maaß [6], the experiences of Books for Everyone is that Easy Language is an efficient measure to increase inclusion, especially in ensuring all types of readers access to high quality fiction. The BfE Framework

shows many additional considerations in making accessible books, e.g., genres, plots, narratology, design, and layout. The interaction of all these components results in high quality Easy Language books.

Another important point is the challenge with level of language complexity [6]. Easy Language is vital to enable people with reading challenges to read books. At the same time, if the text complexity becomes too low, readers will not acquire a breadth and width in their vocabulary, which is necessary to develop and improve reading skills [13]. Consequently, the goal is to make Easy Language books that provide enriching reading experiences and help develop vocabulary skills needed to further develop reading skills and comprehension.

In The BfE Framework, the balance between easy and challenging text is not limited to linguistics. Book production is a process where many different elements cooperate. According to Bal and Veltkamp [16], plots and narratives are vital to ensure that users are transported emotionally into the books to acquire self-identification and insight into self-awareness through literature. Consequently, topics, storylines, and general narratology are important characteristics to consider when developing books for people with reading challenges.

Various characteristics must be taken into consideration and work together to fulfil the potential and benefits of reading fiction. In this context, user involvement is key to get a better understanding of what the readers can relate to and find interesting. It is therefore important to think beyond stereotypes regarding what people with reading challenges want to read. One example is the book discussed above, about the girl who loves books. Consequently, the initial phase plays an important role, including a disclosure of possible prejudice.

Feedback from readers reveals which types of books that are missing in the market. This knowledge creates a circular understanding of The BfE Framework, where different phases affect each other. Prior understanding of which books are missing, and new arenas of promotion can affect the initial phase, and hence the production of new books. The bilingual poetry book discussed above [25] would not have been made without the feedback from second language readers attending language cafes. In addition, simultaneously produced bilingual poetry books have become something new in Norway, resulting in novel promotion arenas. This example shows how an open mind must be kept in all stages of The Books for Everyone Framework, allowing the different phases to influence each other and continue to adjust and expand ideas about what an Easy Language book is and can be.

The needs of the readers are understood in a wide context which includes motivation. The motivational needs will not be met if the reader feels stigmatized [8]. Consequently, while Moghadam and Zainal [13] address the reader's need to develop a breadth and width in their vocabulary, there is also an intellectual and artistic aspect to reading that must be taken into consideration when continuing to build a framework for Easy Language books.

It might be discussed whether one of the main challenges in creating well-written Easy Language literature can be prejudice, not the potential of Easy Language when creating Hi Low books. A mainstream fictional text often combines intellectual ideas with life stories and emotions, inviting the reader to co-create the story. Although a fictional text can be analysed, there is no right or wrong

answer to how the text should be understood. Fiction affects readers in different ways, leaving it up to the reader to contribute to the story with own reflections. Emotions, life experiences, values, and ideas, are considered equally important when reacting to a fictional text. Consequently, a pedagogical approach which removes these important literary aspects from the text will most likely result in stigmatism [8].

The BfE Framework is designed to be a flexible approach where literary considerations and Easy Language aspects work together. One example is the book about the terror attacks at Utøya [26], where the important narratology aspect of “show, don’t tell” is reached within the framework of Easy Language. Linguistic considerations (easier words, a direct language, and descriptive words) do not prevent the author from writing high-quality literature. On the contrary, Easy Language challenges the author to create visual scenes that are shown, not told, or explained.

The five books provided as examples above [23–27] illustrate the importance of collaboration between different people and organizations when producing and promoting Easy Language books. As shown in example one, the stereotype understanding regarding which topics people with reading challenges prefer might not have been adjusted had it not been for user testing. The bilingual poetry book may not have been made had it not been for a dialogue between book producers and target readers. Such dialogue is typically not found in the development of mainstream literature. Detachment of segregation between user groups seem to be an important condition for the further development of Easy Language books in the future.

By applying the universal design approach to book development, Books for Everyone has expanded the potential target users from a more limited perspective focusing on cognitive impairments to involve readers of all types. There is, however, a question whether the eagerness to motivate and include all kinds of readers into the mainstream book production has excluded potential readers with a stronger need for Easy Language. This is an important question, since reading provides many benefits both in context of personal development [15, 16] and reading development [11, 12]. In addition, simply being able to enjoy a good book is an experience all readers should be entitled to have. Self-concept has been reported to be an important factor related to goals and expectancies, and it is vital to help people with reading challenges in realizing that they can also be good readers and enjoy reading [14].

The BfE Framework shows the benefits of including all parts of the publishing industry into the development, production, and promotion of Easy Language literature. Through this framework, Easy Language literature meets the needs of different readers simultaneously. This outcome, however, requires an open-minded publishing industry willing to face old prejudice’s concerning which readers that should be approached and what is required to reach them. In addition, a shift of focus is necessary towards a publishing industry that allows collaboration across previously separated fields. For example, both the editor, designer and marketing section in a publishing house should work with the author and literary adviser when making a successful Easy Language book that will reach a broad group of readers. The Framework also shows a need for financial solutions where the risk of making and promoting an Easy Language book is spread on different actor’s within the publishing industry.

A future development of The BfE Framework should consider broadening the target groups, never losing the most challenged reader off sight. User testing should be strengthened, in addition to extended research and dialogue between different readers and book-producers. Although the understanding of who would benefit from an Easy Language book keeps broadening, there still seems to be a general idea that the reader must have a particular reason for choosing an Easy Language book rather than simply finding the book interesting or entertaining. Is Easy Language, when applied to books as in The BfE Framework, simply a variety of natural language that will make these books fundamental different from other books? Or should we rather understand Easy Language books as a variety within a diverse, mainstream book market, ready to be enjoyed by anyone? Readers may simply appreciate a well-composed easier book with high content as a variation when selecting books without a reason connected to literacy, functional differences, or neurodiversity.

Experiences from Books for Everyone show a great potential in collaboration with target groups, researchers, and practitioners. Examples of this are the studies conducted in cooperation between Books for Everyone and researchers [8, 21]. In these studies, Books for Everyone has been an important contributor to the research design and benefitted from the outcome of the research. Applying a critical perspective of own methods and approaches will benefit the readers. Research shows that The BfE Framework has a great potential in a wider context [22]. Consequently, many key issues may improve the mainstream book production, keeping in mind the huge neurodiversity and functional differences in society.

## Conclusion

The Books for Everyone Framework is a result of two decades of experiences in developing books for all types of readers. The acknowledgment that many types of readers may experience reading challenges or have various reasons for requiring an Easy Language book has resulted in a broader view of target groups for such literature. Moreover, the importance of providing all types of readers with high quality, new books that are “only as special as necessary” [22] has also been an important foundation for this framework. The examples provided in this paper illustrate how the framework has been successful, and how the universal paradigm has enriched the book development for people with reading challenges.

The BfE Framework proposes that the publishing industry might benefit from including Easy Language books. More target groups can be reached without losing other readers. The inclusion results in an expansion that might be part of the solution for a publishing industry that keeps losing readers. Nevertheless, there is also a need for the understanding that such frameworks must be continuously revised based on feedback from readers and how they perceive these Easy Language books. Moreover, there seems to be a future potential in dialogue between researchers, readers, and the publishing industry in discussing the nature of Easy Language books within a broad understanding of inclusion and universal design.



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