ELIPS

Survey – results – further perspectives

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Structure of the session

- General intro & demo

- The survey: answers to the questionnaire
  - ˜ Plain language
  - ˜ Easy-to-read, terminology, diversity
  - ˜ Training, colleboration with EU

- Conclusions and Recommendations

- Discussion

The ELIPS project

ELIPS refers to European Languages and their Intelligibility in the Public Sphere.

The aim of ELIPS is to

examine the use of European languages as instruments of communication for public administration

find ways for EFNIL and member institutions to enhance interest in and good quality of communications by authorities.

The project started in 2017 with a survey on this subject to the member institutions in 2018-2019.

The ELIPS project

24 member institutions of EFNIL representing 24 countries and 28 national languages or regions
(e.g. Finnish and Swedish for Finland; England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales for UK)

The ELIPS survey

The ELIPS survey maps the situation of member countries in the following subdomains with 69 questions:

- 1. Plain language policies and actions
- 2. Easy language policies and actions
- 3. Terminology policies and actions
- 4. Policies and actions on the use of other languages, gender, cultural and sexual diversity
- 5. Training
- 6. Collaboration between the member states and the EU institutions

Results (on EFNIL's website) give opportunity to compare situations in different countries and to find information about regulation, responsible bodies, websites, databases, tools, materials etc.

The ELIPS survey webpages

Interactive webpage allows to:

Select information by question/questions and country/language/region

Compare information by combining several countries and questions

Search for specific information using keywords

Free text comments contain live links to more information (legislation, materials, databases etc.), quotations on the webpage are translated into English.

The website designers: Ivan Mittelholcz and Ferenczi Zsanett, Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Sabine Kirchmeier (Kirchmeier.dk).

The Elips survey: Plain language

Plain language: concept known also as *clear language, clarity, comprehensibility, intelligibility*

A communication is in plain language if its **wording, structure**, and **design** are so clear that the intended readers

- can easily find what they need,
- understand what they find,
- and use that information.

International Plain Language Federation (2010)

Plain language organisations

- **Clarity:** largest international organization, 650 members in 50 countries

- **Plain Language Association International** (PLAIN): members from over 30 countries, 15 languages

- **Comprehensible Public Administration and Government Network in Belgium and the Netherlands** (Netwerk Begrijpelijke Overheid)

- **Nordic Plain Language Network**: Danish, Norwegian,Swedish, Finland and Iceland

Public interest and institutions for plain language

Public interest in government and **public administration** using plain language:

- 89% – confirm interest
- 7% – no interest
- 4% – do not know

Established **institution or body responsible** for plain-language policies for public authorities:

33% – the institution of the respondent

42% – another institution

17% – no official institutions

8% – do not know

Explicit policies and measures for plain language

Central recommendations for plain language:

- 67% of the respondents

- 50% have legal provisions and regulations

- 13% report **no policies or measures** for plain language: Hungary, Lithuania and Slovenia

- **Far-reaching provisions in Slovakia and Wales:** citizens have the right to comprehensible communication and the right to refuse unclear information

Plain language materials, services and tools

- **Publication of guidelines**: 83% (20 out of 27 respondents)

- **Web services:** 71%

- **Templates:** 42%

- **Digital tools, style checkers, complexity of text predictors:** 46%

Denmark, Finland (*Finnish*), Greece, Norway and Sweden use all possibilities

Measuring the effect of plain language policies

1/3 of the respondents report projects that measure quality and user satisfaction or efficiency

- **Netherlands:** treasury of the central state authority has a project that focuses on behavioural insights in response to letters and emails about the collection of taxes and potential reductions in costs

- **Flemish government**: project team (2017-2020) on behavioural insights in the Flemish administration

- **The Swedish Social Insurance Agency**'s language #guardian examines (proofreads) all mass mails, letters, forms and other written information

- **Norway** has a free online toolbox with methods for user involvement and measuring results

Measuring the effect of plain language policies

- **The Social Insurance Institution of Finland** measured the effect of a project improving the comprehensibility of decisions on social benefits

- **The Finnish Immigration Service** reformed its information on residence permits for foreign students in 2011. After rewriting the information on the website and in leaflets in plain language and reorganizing the process, telephone calls with questions about the permits went down from 4,820 to 1,027 in one year

Promotion of plain language policies and awareness

63% report initiatives to promote plain language: **plain language prize**, **competitions** and **campaigns**, **quality seal** (Scotland, Wales, Estonia)

- **Belgium:** Wablieft-prijs, a yearly award for a project, an organization or a person that uses clear language to make information accessible

- **Denmark:** Language Award, once a year to private companies or public institutions for an appropriate, clear and comprehensive text

- **Estonia:** The Clear Language Contest, awards in four categories for the best plain messages in images, text and video/homepage/poster and the best PL developer

- **Finland:** Plain Communicator of the Year, biannual competition, award to an authority for effective or inventive plain language measures

Promotion of plain language policies and awareness

- **Netherlands:** Directly Clear Prizes, person on a management or political level in favour of clear communication and best communicator on behalf of a public administration body

- **Norway:** annual Norwegian Plain Language Award to a government agency which has made an effort to improve the language in written information for the public

- **Sweden:** Plain Language Crystal once a year to an authority, municipality or county council for clear and comprehensible public language

- **UK:** Plain English Campaign for best use of plain English including in public bodies

- **Wales:** Cymraeg Clir Seal, the author has adhered to the 12 'rules' of Cymraeg Clir in order to help you read and understand it straight away

International cooperation

- Cooperation across borders is rather limited

- **Members of PLAIN or Clarity:** Estonia, Finland, Norway, the Slovak Republic and Sweden

Half of the respondents are not involved in any kind of international cooperation

Easy language

EFNIL

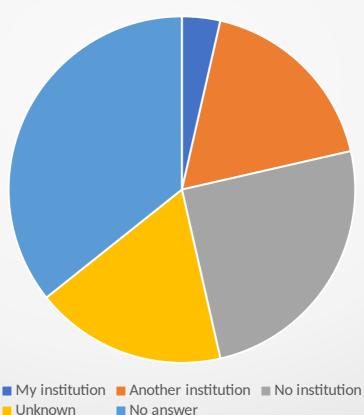## 2.3. Is there an institution responsible for the use of easy language by public authorities?

My own 1 = 4%

Another 5 = 18%

No institution 7 = 25%

Unknown 5 = 18%

No answer 10 = 36%

Responsibility for easy language

■ My institution ■ Another institution ■ No institution
■ Unknown ■ No answer

Easy language

Easy = easy-to-read language: simplified form of language for persons with restricted reading and/or understanding skills

Not to be confused with plain language: content not simplified: a natural pair to cover the needs for almost the entire population

- Awareness for the need of easy language exists:

    50% of respondents report legislation or rules about use of easy language, 29% report nothing of the kind.
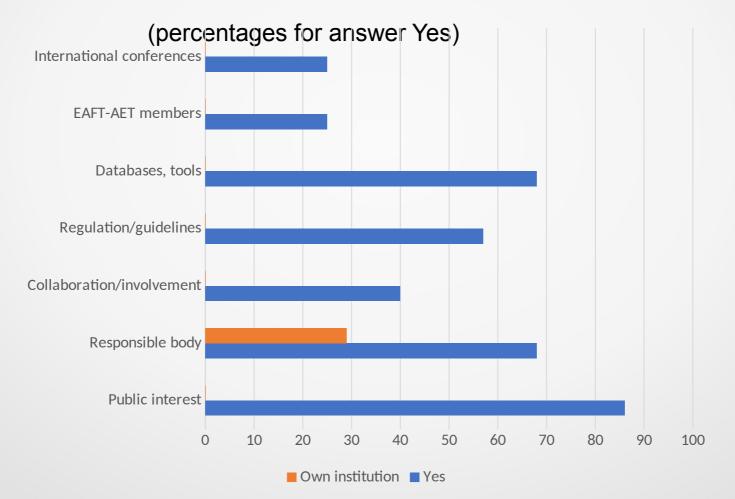- Not core activity of EFNIL member institutions:

    Collaboration with the responsible body or other involvement by   respondents:

    Yes 1 = 4% Other involvement 1 = 45 No 4 = 14% **No answer 21 = 75%**
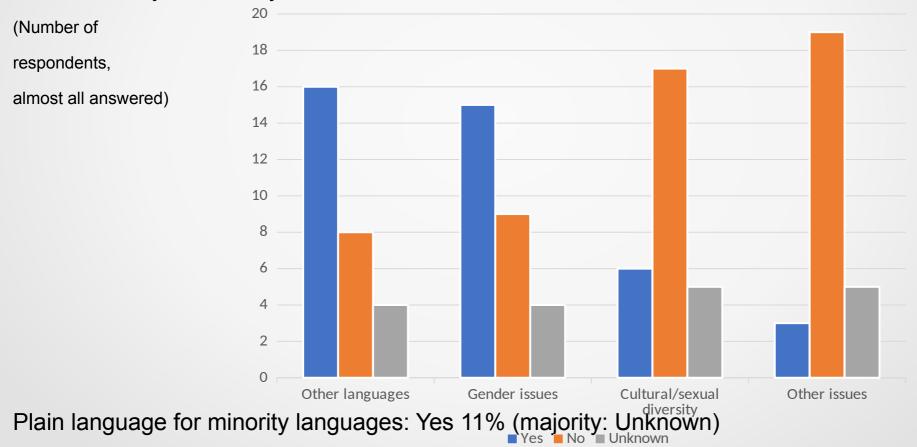- No questions about tools or international cooperation

Terminology
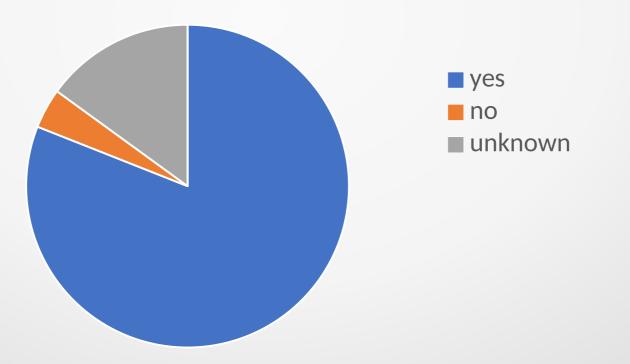
High awareness and activity in the field of terminology:

(percentages for answer Yes)

Diversity issues

4.1. Other language-specific instructions or guidelines for communication by public authorities in your country?

(Number of

respondents,

almost all answered)

Plain language for minority languages: Yes 11% (majority: Unknown)

Training

5.1. Do civil servants in your country receive specific training regarding aspects of language use, effective writing and communication?

Training

5.2. What aspects are addressed in training?

Correct usage of language, including spelling and grammar	16 = 73%
Plain language, comprehensibility	16 = 73%
Stylistic aspects, information structure, perspective	16 = 73%
Text types, e.g. forms, bad-news letters, instructions	15 = 68%
Formation and use of acronyms and abbreviations	14 = 64%
Terminology	12 = 55%
Tone of voice, level of politeness	12 =55%
Issues regarding gender equality, cultural diversity, avoidance of stereotypes	7 = 32%
Other aspects	3 = 14%

Collaboration between member states and EU

6.1. Is there a platform for collaboration with language services of the EU (translation – interpretation) and your national institution(s) for language regarding your national language(s)?

Collaboration between member states and EU

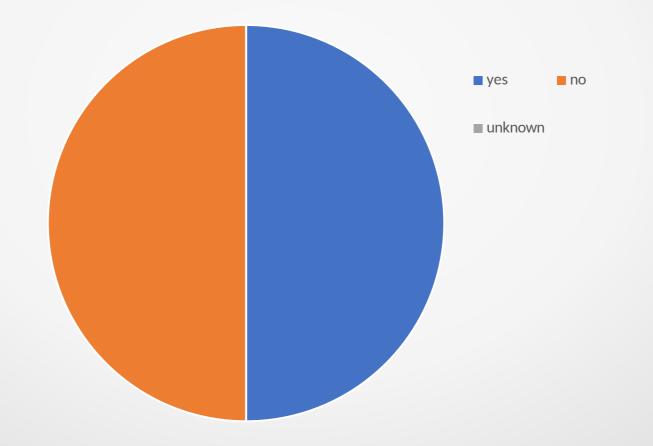## 6.2. What aspects does the platform address?

(Answers only from the 12 people who answered "yes" - more than one yes-alternatives is possible)

Terminology bases and tools	8=77%
Translation tools (dictionaries, etc.)	7=58%
Organization of meetings, conferences etc.	4=33%
Plain language and comprehensibility	3=25%
Style guides, templates, models	3=25
Gender equality and cultural diversity	0=0%

Collaboration between member states and EU

6.3. Is your institution involved in the collaboration platform?

Conclusions (1)

1. Most countries have policies in the various domains of this questionnaire, **but**

2. with important differences between countries and domains regarding:

   - importance / weight (both overall and between specific domains)

   - long(er) commitment vs. more recent awareness / commitment

3. Policies operate at a national level, with little or no international scope l

   - little or no international collaboration / exchange or experiences

   - little or no involvement of European institutions

4. There is little or no collaboration between the various subdomains

More coherence / convergence is possible (countries – domains) and could lead to a better overall quality & effectiveness of language use in the public sphere.

Conclusions (2)

1. Many EFNIL members are involved in these policies;

2. sometimes as primary actors (in some domains)

3. sometimes by collaborating with the primary actors.

There is a potential within EFNIL members to actively contribute to **strengthening the policies** in these fields and to **creating more convergence** between the national language situations within Europe as a whole.

Recommendations: <u>members</u>

1. Get involved / continue & strengthen your involvement in the field(s) of language use in the public sphere, e.g.:

   - Initiate / strengthen policies where these are inexistant or insufficient;

   - Offer you expertise & language resources (e.g. for development of tools);

   - Encourage exchange and collaboration between subdomains;

   - Encourage national bodies to build on experiences of other languages;

   - Encourage national bodies to integrate the perspective of the European institutions.

Recommendations: <u>members</u>

2. Consider to become involved in / members of international platforms regarding aspects of language use in the public sphere such as PLAIN, Clarity, EAFT, COTSOES and others.

3. Help to <u>localise</u> the upcoming ISO standard for plain language (i.e. identify and integrate specific characteristics of your language and of your society) and promote the use of it within your country.

Recommendations: EFNIL

1. Use this survey to identify gaps and discrepancies between countries & domains and use this information to activate policies, esp. by encouraging member institutions to take up the challenge.

2. Collect, compare language specific instructions and stimulate more convergence / coherence on an international, European level.

3. Stimulate development of tools in the field of language use in the public sphere and encourage developers to share the technological and scientific base for these tools.

Recommendations: EFNIL

4. Contribute to the integration of national language resources, tools and applications into a multilingual, European language infrastructure.

5. Explore the feasibility of forming special interest groups for these domains for the partner institutions that are interested in it.

And now...

… **the floor is yours!**

Thanks!