

Education of Children with Dyslexia in Croatia: The Role of Easy Language

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ABSTRACT

Dyslexia is a language-based disorder that can have serious consequences on the learning needs of individuals with this specific learning disorder. In Croatia, most students diagnosed with dyslexia are taught according to the regular prescribed curriculum while using an individualized approach. However, teachers often find it difficult to implement an individualized approach, particularly when it comes to adapting the level of linguistic complexity of teaching material. In order to address this challenge, the concept of easy language is increasingly being incorporated into the education of students with dyslexia in Europe. Easy language refers to language adaptation of a text in order to facilitate both reading and comprehension abilities. Although there is a history of the use of easy language in the Croatian context, this approach has not yet been fully developed in practice. The aim of this study was to analyze whether the level of language complexity of e-testing exams in natural science subjects is suitable for elementary school students with dyslexia. The materials analyzed in this study were natural science exam questions from a single unit of instruction (one thematic unit) prepared by teachers in the e-testing format (for online instruction during a pandemic) for children from 1st to 6th grade. All questions were analyzed at the level of lexical, syntactic, and morphological criteria, as well as language at the content (pragmatic) level. In addition, graphic adjustments were examined as a function of language. All materials analyzed in the study were adapted according to the guidelines of easy language. The results of our analysis indicate the need for a high proportion of (morpho)syntactic adaptations (51%), followed by language adaptations made at the content (pragmatic) level (36%), and a low proportion of lexical adaptations (13%). These findings clearly indicate that significant adaptations are required for children with dyslexia to be able to actively participate in daily instruction. The implications of this study are directly related to education in the context of dyslexia. Our results highlight the importance of easy language in order to help children with dyslexia reach their full potential. In addition, the importance of speech and language pathologists in the school team is recognized, since they are experts in language and graphic adjustment, and they can provide the required support to teachers who teach children with dyslexia.

keywords: dyslexia, easy language, graphic adjustments, language adaptations, natural sciences

1. Introduction

1.1. Education of Students with Dyslexia in Croatia

Individuals with dyslexia make up nearly 10% of the total global population (Snowling, 2013). Addressing the learning needs of these individuals can pose a major challenge to the education

system. The question of how to adapt school education to the specific characteristics of the population with dyslexia remains unanswered. In Croatia, the education of most students diagnosed with dyslexia is based on an individualized approach of teaching the prescribed curriculum (Croatian Institute of Public Health, 2019): this scientifically based approach has great potential for practical application. Here the content of the subjects remains the same for all students, but different approaches are implemented during teaching and evaluation, namely in the methods and procedures. Visualization techniques, linking different types of knowledge, constant repetition of information in different contexts, the “3P” writing model (hrv. *planiranje, prijenos, provjera* - plan, transfer, review), and different methods of cooperative teaching have proven to be effective in the context of teaching children with dyslexia. Therefore, it is important to introduce students to different learning strategies and to identify the most effective ones in order to achieve an individualized approach (Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2016).

Graphic adjustments (using smartboards, mind maps, diagrams, illustrations, colors and so on) are universally applicable across different languages: they are usually unambiguous and understandable for teachers. Therefore, graphic adjustments are often much easier to implement in daily practice than language adaptations. However, reading and writing are language-related activities that are affected in individuals with dyslexia, since it is a language disorder at its core (Snowling, 2013). This suggests that graphic adjustments alone are not sufficient for individualized instruction and the assessment of students with dyslexia.

Children with dyslexia face difficulties when acquiring knowledge not only with respect to understanding the written text, but also in terms of understanding the questions that are used to test what they have learned. The questions asked by teacher assess both the knowledge of the student, as well as encourage the student to become more active and participate fully in the instructional process by expressing their ideas and thoughts (Morgan and Saxton, 1991). If the children do not understand the questions, they cannot actively and creatively participate in the teaching process. Currently, greater attention is being given to the learning process rather than into developing principles related to adapting the evaluation process for students with dyslexia. Over the last few decades, the concept of easy language has been developed in Europe within the framework of understanding what makes language easy or complex with respect to the difficulties associated with language adaptation.

1.2. Introduction to Easy Language

The theoretical background of easy language stems from social policy principles focusing on the importance of developing an inclusive society and ensuring language accessibility, while recognizing that modern societies are based entirely on language constructs such as legislation, norms, economics, religion, education, science, politics, and so on (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021). Consistent with all ethical norms and values, as well as the goal of “leaving no one behind”, all individuals must be given the opportunity to understand spoken and written languages.

Therefore, “easy language brings the luxury of understanding to everyone, but it is essential for those for whom standard language is not an option” (Lindholm & Vanhatalo, 2021, pp. 22-23). In addition to easy language, other terms that are used include *easy-to-read language*, *easy-to-understand language*, *clear language*, *simplified language*, or *simple language*. Easy language is often confused with another commonly used concept - *plain language*. However, these two concepts differ in terms of purpose, target audience, level of complexity, scope of use, linguistic status, producers, and even legal status in some countries (Chrystal, 2011).

The practice of easy language in Europe differs based on the target group of users. In most European countries (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom), easy language is used as a means of communication for people with learning difficulties as a result of intellectual disabilities. In some countries, easy language is used when working with people with aphasia, dementia, Parkinson's disease, autism spectrum disorders, visual or hearing impairments, language development disorders, as well as older individuals, and/or non-native speakers (see more in Lindhold & Valhatalo, 2021). However, the potential of easy language as a tool for individuals with dyslexia has been discussed or used only in a few countries (Croatia, Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Finland). In other words, easy language is generally used infrequently, and its value and applicability for individuals with specific learning disorders is often overlooked.

The term “easy language” (hrv. *jednostavan jezik*) is relatively new in Croatia, although adaptations based on the principles of easy language have been used in work with children with developmental disorders for more than fifteen years (Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2021). The expanded definition of the characteristics of *easy-to-read* materials proposed by International Federation of Library Associations - IFLA (2010) in the second edition of the Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials has been accepted as the basis for defining easy language in Croatia. "Easy language is a linguistic adaptation of a text that facilitates both reading and comprehension" (Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2021). Although the concept itself was first mentioned in 2004 in the translation of the first edition of the Guidelines for *Easy-to-Read* Materials (Croatian Library Association, 2004, 2005; IFLA 1997; Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2021), easy language does not have an official status according to Croatian law. Moreover, it is rarely recognized as a variety that can be included in the development of educational content, official documents, or media publications. Easy language currently refers exclusively to text in printed and online material, and rarely to spoken language in the media. Most guidelines for the use of easy language in Croatia refer to texts aimed at students with dyslexia (Lenček, 2012; Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2021). The principles of translation of standard to easy language are based on psycholinguistic data (Kovačević, 1996) on the peculiarities of Croatian language used by children (Kuvač & Cvikić, 2005) and on data about language use in the field of educational linguistics (Aladrović Slovaček, 2019; Kovačević & Kuvač, 2004; Peti-Stantić 2019).

1.3. Principles and Guidelines of Easy Language

The principles used to adapt standard language to easy language involve language-independent parts and certain general and language-specific rules that relate to the particularities of each language. These principles take into account the differences between languages and the fact that linguistic complexity occurs due to the structure and script of the language being examined (Juola, 2008; Sinnemäki, 2011). Linguistically independent adaptations are typically of paratextual, textual (discourse), and graphic nature, while general and specific language adaptations can be made at the level of different language components (semantic, morpho(syntactic), and pragmatic). The present study focuses on language adaptations at the lexical, morphological, syntactic, and content (pragmatic) level, as well as on graphic adjustments.

At the lexical level, for example, the goal is to focus on frequently used words that are familiar to the person/student, as well as to avoid the use of abstract and unfamiliar words. At the level of morphosyntax, it is recommended to simplify complex structures, avoid negations, and use active rather than passive constructions (Maaß, 2020).

Graphic adjustments refer to the formatting and organization of text and visual support. These adjustments are made according to the settings of what is known as universal design (Praiser and Smith, 2011; Rao et al., 2014), which overlaps with the easy language principles for graphic adjustments (Maaß, 2020). Graphic adjustments include wider margins, minimum line spacing of 1.5, left alignment, indenting the beginning of a new paragraph in the text, separating sentences with a double space, beginning a new sentence at the beginning of a new line, when possible, as well as choosing the correct font size and type (minimum 12, recommended 14, excluding unnecessary lines and other parts of the graphemes). It is recommended to avoid underlining and/or italicizing text. The best fonts are graphically simple and visually recognizable fonts, e.g., from the *Sans-Serif* series, which must be used consistently throughout the text. The graphic organization of the text also refers to dividing the text into smaller units, separating sections with a thin line, and using illustrations and photographs to visually support the text, although it is important to know where and how the visual support is inserted (for example, inserting visuals without interrupting the text and making it difficult to read). Graphic adjustments also include making negations and keywords bold (to highlight important information) to make them easier to spot. Although the last mentioned adjustment is based on language adaptation at its core, it has a graphic manifestation.

1.4. Aim of study and Research Questions

Based on the importance of the role of questions in the educational process, the knowledge of the specific learning needs of children with dyslexia as well as the principles of easy language, this paper aims to analyze whether the level of linguistic complexity in natural science exams prepared for e-testing is acceptable for elementary school students with dyslexia in grades 1 to 6. Our aim is to show how easy language can be used to develop individualized approaches to learning so that children with dyslexia can reach their full potential.

In accordance with the aim of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Are the questions in the natural science exams linguistically acceptable for students with dyslexia in grades 1 to 6?
2. Are the questions in the natural science exams graphically acceptable for students with dyslexia in grades 1 to 6?

2. Methods

2.1. Materials

The materials examined in this study were natural science exam questions from a unit of instruction (one thematic unit, e.g., food chain) designed by teachers in an e-testing format (for online instruction during the pandemic). The exam questions were intended for children in grades 1 through 6 who are taught according to the regular prescribed curriculum using an individualized approach. Natural sciences teachers and professors ($n = 55$) developed the exams. The exams analyzed consisted of a total of 39 questions (six questions for children from grades 1 to 4; seven questions for children in grade 5; and eight questions for children in grade 6). The exams contain open-ended and close-ended questions, questions related to sentence recognition (true or false statements), and multiple-choice questions: the questions were presented with or without visual support (graphs, schematic representation, images, and/or photographs).

2.2. Procedure

All questions were analyzed at the level of lexical, syntactic, and morphological criteria, and the language was analyzed at the content (pragmatic) level. Graphic adjustments as a function of language were also analyzed. Subsequently, all materials were adapted based on the easy language guidelines.

3. Results and Discussion

None of the 39 questions analyzed were completely linguistically or graphically appropriate for students with dyslexia. The modifications made in the exams were classified into two categories: language adaptations and graphic adjustments. Language adaptations included lexical, (morpho)syntactic, and content (pragmatic) adaptations. These categories were formed based on the material being adapted. Different types of material may require different types and categories of adaptations and adjustments. Therefore, part of the following recommendations can be considered a universal principle for translating standard language into easy language, while other parts are specific to the content and purpose of the material being adapted. A total of 51% of all language adaptations were (morpho)syntactic in nature, followed by 36% of content (pragmatic) level adaptations, and 13% lexical adaptations. The results of the present study clearly show that several adaptations are required for children with dyslexia to actively participate in daily instruction. One possible explanation for this could be that the children had already learned many new concepts (words) that are an integral part of the curriculum material, and therefore, needed very few lexical adaptations at this point. This can serve as an example of how the quality and quantity of adaptations and adjustments depend on the source material being translated. For example, a greater number of lexical adaptations would be required for another type of material, whose purpose is not to test the knowledge of the student, but to provide learning support and/or information.

Table 1.

Total number of language adaptations made in natural science exam questions analyzed

GRADE	LEXICAL/VOCABULARY	MORPHOSYNTAX	CONTENT (PRAGMATIC) LEVEL	TOTAL
1	2	8	8	18
2	6	4	4	14
3	4	8	8	20
4	6	13	5	24
5	2	35	21	58
6	6	33	26	65
1-6	26	101	72	199

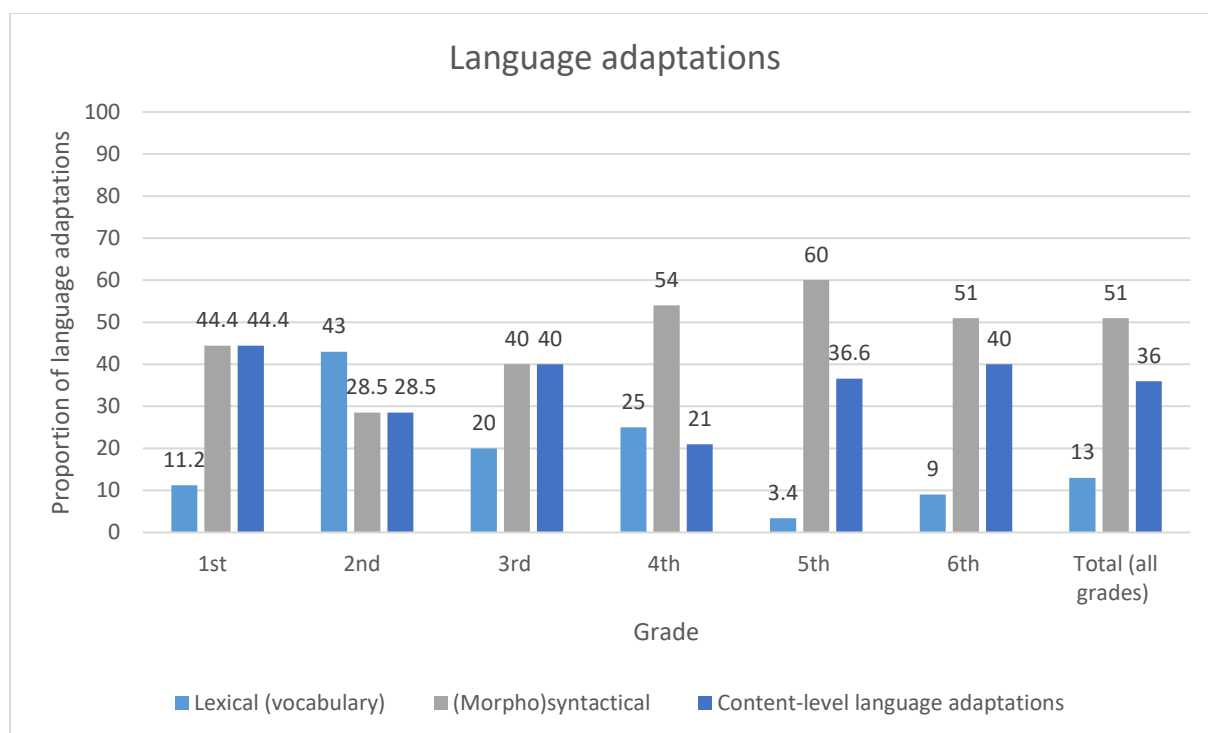


Figure 1. Proportion of language adaptations made with respect to grades

3.1. Language Adaptations

3.1.1. Lexical Adaptations

Testing knowledge through exam questions is a format that offers limited opportunities to use unfamiliar, infrequently used, or extremely long words (Cassels & Johnstone, 1984; Turner & Williams, 2007).

In this adaptation category, it is important to focus on phrasing concrete questions and to avoid abstract language. Lexical simplification (replacing complex words with simpler synonyms) can improve reading speed and accuracy, as well as comprehension in readers with dyslexia (Gala & Ziegler, 2016; Rello, Baeza-Yates, Dempere-Marco et al, 2013; Rello, Baeza-Yates & Saggion, 2013). Figurative language (metaphors), semantically difficult (unfamiliar) words, "trigger" words (e.g., *indeed*, *therefore*, *hence*), and abbreviations were omitted. The adaptation used for the problematic part were based on information found in frequency dictionaries of Croatian children's language (Hržica et al., 2021; Kuvač Kraljević et al., 2021) and the School Corpus of Written Language - RiDDys (Kuvač Kraljević & Lenček, 2020).

For example, in one of the questions aimed at children from 2nd grade -

“Which harbingers of spring did Darko notice on the glade?”

- an adaptation was suggested where the word “the glade” was replaced with an appropriate syntagm (*next to the trail*).

It should be noted that adaptations such as changing the word "select" to the word "circle" in multiple choice questions could also be placed in this lexical category. However, they were classified as content (pragmatic) level adaptations because the original word was as familiar to the children as the adapted one, but it could be confusing at the content level, especially for children with dyslexia.

3.1.2. (Morpho)Syntactical Adaptation

The (morpho)syntactic complexity of the material was the main reason for the need for adaptations. The following types of adaptations belonged to this category:

- 1) splitting a sentence into two sentences due to its excessive syntactic complexity combined with the length (Lenčec & Kuvač Kraljević, 2021)

For example, consider the following question aimed at children in the 5th grade:

“The water in which the Mediterranean seal lives is more resistant to its body because it contains a lot of different minerals, so we say that it is THICK/RARE, and therefore allows it to move more easily.”

Here the suggested adaptation was:

“The water in which the Mediterranean seal lives gives greater resistance to her body because it contains a lot of different minerals. Such water is said to be THICK/RARE, and to allow easier movement.”

It is well known that sentence length can affect comprehension ability (George & Tomasello, 1984; Spache, 1953). Many children with dyslexia have problems with working memory (Jeffries & Everatt, 2004; Pickering, 2006; Smith-Spark & Fisk, 2007). Decoding problems can deplete working memory capacity, which in turn makes comprehension difficult. Therefore, long sentences, especially in question form, are not an appropriate way to test the knowledge acquired by children. Splitting a sentence into two parts (Coleman, 1962) is the most common adaptation in this case. In rare cases, a sentence is split into more than two sentences.

- 2) changing the structure of an (embedded) sentence (Lenčec, 2008)

For example, in a question aimed at children in the 5th grade -

“Which two, in the examples stated properties of water, changed so the organisms died?”

- the suggested adaptation was

„Which two properties of water have changed so that organisms have died?”

Embedded subordinate clauses are typically acquired during the later stages of children's language development. For typically developing children, the acquisition of these clauses occurs during early schooling. However, for children with language difficulties of any kind, relative clauses continue to present an insurmountable challenge at later ages. Embedded subordinate clauses in the form of structures have been studied in detail in the field of psycholinguistics. Certain syntactic procedures are required in order to understand or produce them, such as syntactic movement and trace, thematic role assignment to the moving element, and co-indexing of elements of the relative clause (Balić et al., 2012). Consequently, we now know that the way in which embedded clauses interrupt the flow of an idea is difficult to track even for regular readers. Moreover, the written form of the inserted sentence in Croatian, which is marked with commas, is generally not recognizable to students with dyslexia. This can be addressed with an adaptation. It should be noted that sometimes the adaptation may result in creating a sentence that is longer (number of words), but easier to follow and understand in terms of language processing.

- 3) changing the structure of a relative sentence (Lenčec & Anđel, 2012)

For example, a question aimed at children in the 4th grade included the following sentence:

“Swallows feed on insects whose number declines in September, which is why they migrate.”

But it is not clear whether there is a decline in the number of swallows or insects, nor is it clear who migrates. The suggested adaptation in this case is as follows:

“Swallows feed on insects. The number of insects decreases in September and therefore swallows migrate.”

The acquisition of relative clauses as one of the most complex syntactic structures is an important milestone in language development (see Arnon, 2011). Although all relative clauses saturate language processing, sentences including noun phrases of different genders are easier than those including noun phrases of the same gender. Furthermore, subject relative clauses are easier to understand than difficult object relative clauses (Bališa et al., 2012; Bališa Mečar et al., 2016).

- 4) changing the word order from the non-canonical to the prototype one

For example, another question aimed at children in the 4th grade included the following sentence:

“From the offered ones, choose the correct answer.”,

which was changed to

“Choose the correct answer from those offered.”

In the standard Croatian language, word order is relatively free from a grammatical point of view. However, not all word order is suitable for stylistically unmarked texts. In this type of text, a prototypical canonical order is expected - subject, predicate, and then the object. Adjectives, attributes, and/or appositions precede the noun (e.g., beautiful queen), and the noun attribute follows the noun (e.g., queen of water) (Barić et al., 1995). The prototypical canonical order aims to facilitate reading (del Rio et al., 2013; Rayner et al., 2013).

- 5) substitution of a verbal noun for a verb (directly expressing an action)

For example, the following question for children in the 5th grade

“Explain why the change caused the death of organisms?”

was adapted into

“Explain why the organisms died.”

Studies using language complexity data caution against the use of verbal nouns (Rello, Baeza-Yates, Dempere-Marco et al., 2013; Rello, Baeza-Yates & Saggion, 2013), (i.e.) the need to express an action directly with verbs. By using a verb instead of a verbal noun, sentences can be made clearer and simpler, and therefore more understandable. This is more acceptable to all readers, especially those with dyslexia. Although the change from a verbal noun to a verb occurs at the word level, such a change also results in restructuring at the morphological and syntactic levels and is therefore included in the lists of (morpho)syntactic adaptations.

3.1.3. Content (Pragmatic) Level Adaptations

Research shows that the choice of text type and task can significantly affect comprehension (Lenček, 2013). Therefore, incorrect choice of instructions in exam questions can lead to poor performance. This happens because the child has prior knowledge about the topic, but simply does not understand what is expected of him/her in the task. Adaptations made at this level are

classified into two categories: adaptations due to missing information and adaptations due to unnecessary additional information (redundancy). At this level, sentences were shortened and rearranged so the actions followed a logical sequence. It was important to develop direct and simple texts, questions, and instructions that did not contain long introductions, too many characters, or multiple actions in one sentence. Complicated relationships were explained concretely, and all events were presented in a logical, chronological framework.

3.1.3.1. Adaptations due to Missing Information

Regarding the lack of linguistic information, some exam questions lacked important information for solving tasks (text and/or instructions).

For example, children from the 1st grade had to answer a question about the source of energy used in cars (batteries), but the story about the boy did not provide the correct information necessary to answer the question (i.e.,) that his toy car was an electric car:

“Tino eats healthy every day and actively trains rowing. After school he plays with his toy car and tracks.”

The suggested adaptation was to insert relevant information into the text.

3.1.3.2. Adaptations due to Unnecessary Additional Information (Redundancy)

In contrast, there was often an excess of information, resulting in a redundancy of content that could distract the child from the task at hand. Consider the following sentence in a question for children in the 1st grade:

“Tino broke his leg in practice last month and is now resting”. Here the syntagm “last month” can be omitted because it does not contain any relevant information and is redundant. For children with dyslexia, reading is a very challenging task, so any form of shortening that does not interfere with meaning is a desirable adaptation. The decoding process significantly exhausts the possibilities of further language processing and reading comprehension. Therefore, this form of adaptation is justified, (i.e.,) meaning reduction is necessary whenever the content allows it.

In addition, some questions lacked a meaningful and logical arrangement of information. For example, two boys were described in the 2nd grade exam questions:

“Tin is a 2nd grade student and likes to play computer games after school. After school, Fran goes swimming, which he has been training for two years. Tin ate a hamburger and fries for lunch and drank a glass of lemonade. Fran ate soup, chicken fried steak and vegetables and drank water. “

Unfortunately, there was a lot of unnecessary switching between facts about each of the boys. In the adaptation, the order of the information was rearranged in such a way that all the information about Tin was provided first, followed by all the information about Fran:

“Tin is a 2nd grade student and likes to play computer games after school. Tin ate a hamburger and fries for lunch and drank a glass of lemonade. After school, Fran goes swimming, which he has been training for two years. He ate soup, chicken fried steak and vegetables and drank water.”

In summary, if we want children with dyslexia to successfully master the school curriculum, it is necessary to make several methodological adaptations and adaptations that require a basic knowledge of the language activities covered, as well as sufficient time for their preparation, application, and evaluation (Lenček & Kuvač Kraljević, 2016). Moreover, during the pandemic

when these exams were created, children had to solve the online exams on their own and could not receive explanations from teachers, suggesting that an appropriate level of language complexity is even more important for students with dyslexia.

3.2. Graphic Adjustments as a Function of Language

In addition to the language adaptation of the text, the use of easy language for students with dyslexia includes, among other things, graphic adjustments. The graphic design of the text is also very important, not only to make the text readable and ensure the hierarchy of information, but also to attract and maintain the attention of readers, which is especially important for children with reading difficulties and young readers in general. Graphic solutions refer to text formatting and text organization.

In the present study, several graphic adjustments in the function of language were possible and necessary for all questions analyzed. Adjustments included changing the font, using bold text to highlight important data (keywords and negations), removing italicized portions of the text, increasing the spacing between words, starting a new sentence on a new line, and so on. Visual support was inconsistent across the different exam questions - some included pictures, while others included actual photographs. In addition, the pictures were inaccurate, cluttered, and too close together (several of them had no clear boundary), and the details critical to answering the question correctly were not clearly visible. For example, in the photo from which students must infer and answer that the toy car is powered by electricity (batteries), it is not clear whether the car has a cord or a remote control. In addition, the description mentioned only one boy, but the photo shows three children, which could have led to further confusion. In addition, questions that contained multiple images/photos did not have clear boundaries or sufficient spacing between them. Occasionally, even image sources (e.g., website links) and their descriptions were given in English, which unnecessarily exaggerated the exam content. In addition, schematic representations were often inappropriate and illogical. For example, the direction of arrows in a food chain diagram seemed to indicate that grass eats rabbits and not vice versa.

In addition, the statements included in the questions were often not numbered, making it difficult to follow their order. Some of the statements (offered answers) ended with a period, while others did not. The graphic design of the questions was disorganized; the terms offered in the sentence completion tasks were sometimes written in upper case and sometimes in lower case, sometimes terms had to be selected (by circling them), and sometimes they were offered at the top and had to be written on the blank line. Similarly, some parts of the text in the tables were centered, while others were left-aligned. Errors in graphic design also occurred in multiple choice questions when the questions were too far from the possible (offered) answers. For example, children were asked a question at the beginning, followed by a short text and an inserted photo (which was unnecessary because it has nothing to do with solving the question), and finally, at the end, they were offered potential answers to the question.

Graphic adjustments of the exam questions were made in accordance with IFLA recommendations (1997; 2010), which are also consistent with easy language and universal design principles (Grogan & Ruzic, 2000; McGuire et al., 2006; Praiser & Smith, 2011; Rao et al., 2014; Rose & Meyer, 2006). These include graphic formatting and graphic organization.

Graphic formatting was accomplished by using wide margins, wider line spacing (at least 1.5), left margin alignment, alignment of first lines of paragraphs, separating sentences using double spacing, starting a new sentence at the beginning of a new line whenever possible, and choosing an appropriate font size and type (minimum 12, recommended 14, with no redundant lines such as *Arial* or *San Serif*, but the same font throughout the text). The choice of paper was also important: the paper chosen was flesh and/or cream colored, not glossy or translucent. In the

case of online exams, the background was consistently cream in color. All letters were presented in black font. Italicized or underlined text was avoided.

In Croatia, the *OmoType* font family was developed after years of research on how the font affects the reading of children with dyslexia (Peretić & Reić, 2020). The *OmoType* font family consists of 240 different styles, where the font can be customized to meet individual needs. A special novelty of *OmoType* is the possibility to adjust the height of the descenders and extenders, which makes it one of the so-called variable fonts that are believed to facilitate the recognition of the letter character and thus the subsequent decoding in general (Bredikhina, 2021).

Graphic text organization refers to dividing the text into smaller units, separating paragraphs with a blank line, highlighting titles and subtitles, inserting images or photos as additional visual support for the text, and highlighting essential information (keywords). When providing visual support, it is important to insert images or photos in such a way that the reading process is not disturbed: it should be clear what is to be read and in what order.

4. Conclusion

The search for the most effective way to teach and create learning opportunities for students with dyslexia continues to engage researchers and experts worldwide. The result of the present study clearly shows that a variety of adaptations and adjustments are required in the everyday education of students with dyslexia. However, the use of easy language in the educational setting through individualization of the curriculum can lead to more successful learning outcomes for students with dyslexia. Easy language provides all individuals with the luxury of understanding, but it is particularly essential for those for whom standard language is not an adequate learning option. Nevertheless, translating standard language into easy language is a complex and demanding process that requires adequate knowledge of the specifics of the language, as well as knowledge of the functioning of the population for whom the adapted text is intended. Our results confirm the above-mentioned statement based on the total number of adaptations and adjustments required in order to help improve the comprehension abilities of students with dyslexia. These adjustments are all based on scientific knowledge about the characteristics of students with dyslexia. Lexical, (morpho)syntactic, and content level adaptations, as well as graphic adjustments were made. The graphic adjustments are linguistically universal, while others are partially linguistically universal and partially linguistically specific. Based on the number of (morpho)syntactic adaptations required, we were able to confirm once again that morphological richness and free word order are features of Croatian that pose significant problems for people with language pathology. As the age of education increases, so does the number of adaptations necessary for reading comprehension, as well as the expert knowledge required for them. Since the tradition of easy language is slowly beginning to emerge, future research should focus on the principles of language adaptations. The growing body of academic research on literacy and language can provide evidence-based arguments to promote the use of easy language. For example, it is not clear to what extent, and sometimes even exactly how, certain language should be simplified and made comprehensible. There are still many doubts regarding appropriate text adaptations. An examination of general and specific linguistic features that affect the comprehension of texts could help prescribe adaptations of plain language and develop readability formulas and language-specific readability metrics. The three levels of language adaptations developed in the present research study, along with corresponding examples, can serve as a starting point for developing principles of easy language formation and application for individuals with dyslexia in Croatia. Our findings provide a baseline for a more systematic and comprehensive data

analysis of the use of easy language for individuals with dyslexia. Furthermore, our results highlight the importance of speech and language pathologist as a member of the professional team in all schools, since they can support teachers in the process of language adaptation and the use of easy language in educational settings.

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