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A proposal for tools and methods to increase the use of plain language in administrative procedures about immigration

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Context

Public Administration → intercultural context

An increasing percentage of users who interact with the public offices are foreign nationals

Public institutions need to learn to communicate with all their users to ensure all citizens the right to information



Context

Important

- to use the right type of language
- the language used should be appropriate for the Web



Research aim

To develop a collaborative method to support public officers in simplifying information content about administrative procedures relating to immigration.



Products → guidelines, rules and suggestions that can be used for the drafting of clear institutional texts comprehensible in **cross-cultural contexts** and also be implemented through automatic drafting tools.

Case study

PAeSI Project

(Public Administration and Foreign Immigrants)

(Tuscany Regional Administration, Prefecture of Florence, ITTIG/CNR)



Aims:

- improving **dissemination, transparency and standardization** of the information regarding procedures and norms in the field of immigration in Italy **through the Web**

Case study

PAeSI Web Portal

A **support tool for civil servants** who have to deal with Italian immigration law (complexity, variability, different responsible bodies)

Users

→ Civil servants working in **immigration and public relation offices** at the local government level, **NGO** and **associations** who give out information and explanations to migrants through front-offices



Case study

PAeSI Web Portal

The two main sections :

→ **database of information sheets** describing the different immigration procedures certified by the public administration involved in the project



**Schede informative
sui procedimenti**

→ **law database** that contains the Italian immigration legislation

Case study

PAeSI Web Portal information sheets

- › Title of the Procedure
- › User
- › Time required for the procedure
- › Holder of the procedure (*Person-in-charge, body, office*)
- › Access to the service (*Requisites, Documentation requested*)
- › How to ... (*Retrieve the application form, Present the application, Receive the measure*)
- › Normative references
- › Frequently asked questions about the procedure

Case study

PAeSI Web Portal Information sheets are designed for **domain expert readers**

- **bureaucratic and technical language**
- **very complex text structure**

Difficult to understand for readers who are not domain experts

Operational objective

→ **convert** these information sheets into clear text, comprehensible for final users (**migrants living in Italy**) and also web contents usable

To create a “simplified section” in the PAeSI Web Portal



Research methodology



The research has been developed through a **theoretical approach** and **participatory approach**

Theoretical approach

Theoretical background



- **Guide for drafting administrative acts. Rules and suggestions** (*ITTIG/CNR - Accademia della Crusca*)
- the "**Guida all'uso delle parole**" *The Word Usage Guide* (Tullio De Mauro)
- an **index of discriminatory terms** (result of an our previous research)
- **Plain language handbooks adopted by Third countries Public Bodies** (Argentina, Colombia, Hong Kong, Mexico, USA, Canada, Australia)
- **Web usability guidelines** (Norman, Nielsen, ...)

Work steps

Step 1. Selection of information resources on administrative procedures that need to be simplified

Prefecture of Florence

30 most common procedures
(Family reunification, Integration Agreement,
Study, Seasonal work, National Health Service)



Work steps

Step 2. Verification and rewriting of difficult terms

Do the terms belong to the “basic Italian vocabulary”?



Work steps

Step 2. Verification and rewriting of difficult terms - “Terms conversion table”

Termine/formula originari	Termine/formula sostituiti
ai fini di	per
attività lavorativa	lavoro
conseguire (la laurea)	laurearsi
consente	permette
convocare	chiamare
dimora	luogo in cui si abita
diniego	rifiuto
documentazione	documenti
equipollente	di uguale valore

Work steps

Step 2. Verification and rewriting of difficult terms

Are the terms discriminatory?

straniero → **cittadino non comunitario**



Work steps

Step 3. Simplification of syntactical structure

“La validità dell'iscrizione coincide con il periodo di validità del permesso di soggiorno e, alla scadenza dello stesso, il cittadino straniero, per avere titolo alla assistenza sanitaria, deve provvedere al rinnovo. Per evitare discontinuità nell'assistenza sanitaria e consentire al cittadino di regolarizzare la propria posizione, l'iscrizione al S.S.R. rimane valida per sei mesi, oltre la data di scadenza dell'iscrizione. In tale periodo di tempo il cittadino straniero deve provvedere alla regolarizzazione della propria posizione presentando la ricevuta della domanda di rinnovo. Alla presentazione della ricevuta entro i primi sei mesi dalla scadenza, l'iscrizione al SSR verrà prorogata aumentando di sei mesi la precedente data di scadenza.” [106 words]

Work steps

Step 3. Simplification of syntactical structure



“L’iscrizione è valida fino alla scadenza del permesso di soggiorno.
Alla scadenza la persona ha sei mesi di tempo per rinnovare
l’iscrizione presentando alla ASL la ricevuta della domanda di
rinnovo del permesso di soggiorno.” [35 words]

Work steps

Step 4. Modification of text structure

- Tempi del procedimento
- Titolare del procedimento
- Requisiti
- Documentazione richiesta
- Reperire i moduli
- Presentare la domanda
- Ricevere il provvedimento



- Cos'è
- Chi può fare la domanda
- Quando si può fare
- Come inviare la domanda
- Cosa succede dopo che la persona ha inviato la domanda
- Tempi per avere il permesso
- Per informazioni
- Controllo online della domanda



Work steps

Step 4. Automatic Readability assessment test



Read-it

Institute for Computational Linguistics
of the National Research Council

Step 5. Legal verification of the new simplified content produced

Prefecture of Florence



Participatory approach

Technique used: focus-groups and Interviews

Stakeholders



- **linguistic-cultural mediators**

familiar with the peculiarity of language groups, know how legal concepts can vary, no “bureaucrats”

- **immigration front-office civil servants**

awareness of complexity immigration procedures, know about problems in user communication

- **teachers of Italian as a second language**

understand stages of learning Italian as L2

Participatory approach

Technique used: focus-groups

Users

Migrants living in Italy

- different Countries
- different age groups
- different reasons for being in Italy
- different levels of knowledge of the Italian language



Participatory approach

Focus-group tasks

Stakeholder tasks



1. tell about misunderstanding of institutional written texts from users
2. read information sheets theoretical simplified by us and indicate not clear sentences or terms (suggestions)
3. “terms conversion table” – *how much comprehensible are the new words used?*

Participatory approach

Focus-group tasks

Users tasks



1. tell about institutional written texts they couldn't understand
2. read information sheets theoretical simplified by us and indicate not clear sentences or terms
3. “terms conversion table” – *do you know these words?*

Focus-group results



Set of guidelines on how to structure clear contents relating to public administration procedures in **a intercultural context**

Focus-group results



Guidelines examples

- ✓ **shape communication** with respect to different types of users (*students, workers, ...*)
- ✓ explain the procedures respecting the real **chronological phases** of the administrative procedure
- ✓ use **keywords** that provide a first guidance on matters
- ✓ provide **guidance on the timing** of certain actions adding examples (*e.g. the expiration date of a certain procedure*)

Focus-group results

Guidelines examples

- ✓ add explanations to **technicalities** that users need to know
- ✓ spell out clearly **actors and actions** of a certain procedure
- ✓ always balance the need for **simplification with the precision** requirements
- ✓ in case of **politically incorrect terms** always make a balance between the needs to use a terminology that could be offensive to certain groups of users with the comprehensibility and clarity

Focus-group additional result

Stakeholders have provided useful information to the research

... but at the same time they have **achieved awareness** of the **importance of clarity and simplicity** for communicating with foreign citizens more effectively



General results

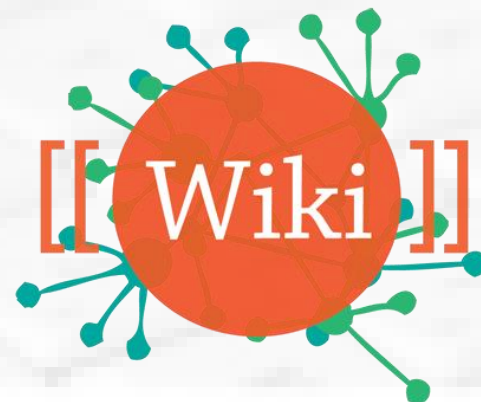
Data and information derived both from the application of theoretical tools to immigration procedures and from social research

- list of **difficult terms to understand** and related substitute terms
- list of **discriminatory terms** and related substitute terms
- list of **technical terms user need to know** and related explanation to add in the text
- **difficult expressions** and corresponding simplified rewriting
- **strategies** to facilitate understanding of institutional texts
- **definition of the optimal structure of contents** to foster understanding of the procedures (including the Web layout)

Knowledge Sharing

WikiPAeSI

Guidelines, rules and tips
obtained from the research have been displayed
through a **wiki-based website** so that
the “community of practice” could access it and update it



Knowledge Sharing

WikiPAeSI

The screenshot displays a web browser window with the URL `wikipedia.pbworks.com/w/page/116350053/WikiPAeSI`. The interface includes a top navigation bar with 'My PBworks', 'Workspaces', and 'wikipaesI'. A search bar is present with the text 'swedish migration agency'. The main content area shows the 'VIEW' tab selected for the page 'WikiPAeSI', which was last edited by 'PAeSI' 1 week ago. The page content includes a welcome message and a list of resources.

Benvenuto in WikiPAeSI

Cos'è

- E' uno spazio in cui sono raccolte tutte le risorse utili ricavate dall'attività di **semplificazione delle schede informative PAeSI sulle procedure amministrative** rivolte ai cittadini di Paesi terzi. Le risorse derivano dalle linee guida per la scrittura semplificata in uso e dai risultati dei focus-group condotti con funzionari e operatori della PA, mediatori linguistico-culturali, insegnanti di italiano L2 e utenti stranieri.

Contenuti

- [Tabella termini generale](#)
- [Linee guida generali](#) (lessico, sintassi, stile, struttura del testo, layout, categorizzazione delle risorse informative)
- [Strumenti di supporto alla redazione](#) dei testi relativi al [lessico](#)

Come partecipare

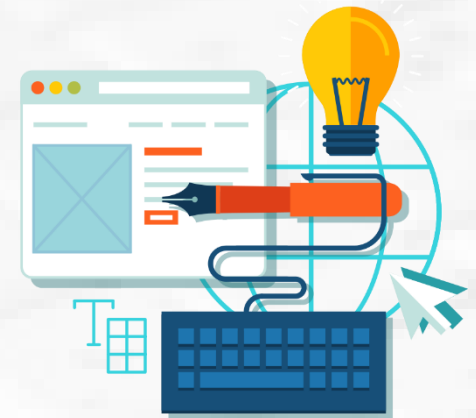
- Commenta, suggerisci termini e sinonimi sostitutivi ...

The right sidebar contains sections for 'Create a page', 'Upload files', 'Invite more people', 'Share this page', 'Put this page in a folder', 'Add Tags', 'Control access to this page', and 'Copy this page'. Below these are 'SideBar' and 'Navigator' sections.

Legal informatics perspective

Results of this research

→ resources for the development of **applications in the field of legal information** that would support in automatic or semi-automatic ways the simplification processes in the public administration.



Legal informatics perspective

Drafting tool for administrative documentation to be published on the Internet.

These tools will be provided with **specific rules** derived from this research and its development.

(An application could be the customization of the editor for administrative acts – ITTIG/CNR)

[term] →



- *replace with [alternative term]*



- *add [explanation] – add [example]*



- *do not use it*



- *use it*

Thank you!

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