

Introduction

On March 5 1998 a letter came from the Commission informing the undersigned that our project on the accessibility of baby-food labelling was included on the list of selected projects and that funding was agreed in principle. The grant request for the project had been submitted on November 17 the previous year. Final confirmation then came in June 1998 and the contract was signed in Oulu, at the co-ordinating university, on July 2. The date of the beginning of the project, B5-1000/98/000064, "Design and accessibility of baby-food labels from the consumer's point of view", was September 1 1998. The duration was 18 months and the project accordingly came to an end on February 29 in the year 2000.

The project, which was initially based on the co-operation of six European Universities, began work as a consortium of five universities as follows:

<u>Country</u>	<u>University</u>	<u>Contact person(s)</u>
Finland	Oulu	Heikki Nyyssönen
Belgium	Gent	Anne-Marie Vandenberg Stef Slembrouck
Spain	Santiago de Compostela	Xabier Fernandez Polo
Sweden	Stockholm	Britt-Louise Gunnarsson
Britain	Reading	Guy Cook

The contact persons formed the steering group leading and monitoring the project and meeting, together with the five project officers, at four different times either in Gent or Reading.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Project officer(s)</u>
Finland	Pentti Haddington
Belgium	Katrijn Maryns Karen Simal Bernard De Clerck
Spain	Cristina Suárez Gómez
Sweden	Anders Björkvall
Britain	Kieran O'Halloran

The objectives of the project are stated in the application as follows: "In close co-operation with consumer organisations in the participating EU countries, to educate consumers in EU on how to interpret relevant information in baby-food labels. By means of this initiative, to contribute to the harmonisation of food labelling and food safety in EU." These objectives are linked with key concepts in EU Consumer Policy such as targeted action, new consumer skills and consumer confidence in foodstuffs. It was believed that by making recommendations concerning the phrasing and representation of written information on baby-food

labels it was possible to make the information more readily accessible to consumers and to compare practice within the European Union.

The work in the project was based on the assumption that interpretation of labels is not just a question of the information being literally true (or informationally complete); interpretation is crucially influenced by other factors as presentation, ordering, assumptions of background knowledge and specific linguistic choices. The influence of these factors on accessibility was studied in a sample of baby-foods comprising infant formulae and infant cereals in the five countries. The first steps involved, among other things, checking on legislative regulations and nutritional problems and factors to be taken into account in label design. Some of this information was garnered through interviews with experts in the respective fields. The purpose of this part of the project was to find out about the 'label production process'.

The other parts of the project, as detailed in the report, consisted of two main ingredients: 'label analysis', and 'consumer study'. The first relates, specifically, to the design of the labels in our sample, the second to their *de facto* accessibility to consumers. The study of the labels was carried out using the methods of discourse analysis. The analysis yielded the following framework of concepts for the consumer study:

- READ BY PARENTS (+ -)
- AWARENESS OF THE LABEL PART (+ -)
- SALIENCE (+ -)
- BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE (+ -)
- IMPORTANCE TO PARENTS (+ -)

The consumer study, which was preceded by a smaller-scale pilot study, consisted of in-depth interviews and written questionnaires where the parents were asked questions about their label reading behaviour. The results of the consumer study are discussed, in the report, in relation of the above categories, indicating whether or not a piece of obligatory information on the label, e.g. the list of ingredients, is salient and regarded as important and read by parents.

On the basis of the label analysis and the consumer study it was possible to identify specific discorsal and linguistic features which seem to cause difficulty and to make a number of recommendations, both national and EU wide, as to how the information on baby-food labels can be made more accessible to consumers. For the distribution of these results a website is being set up in the Department of English server in Oulu (the department home page is located at <http://www.ekl.oulu.fi>). The website will be opened after the submission of this final report to Brussels. In addition, each partner will distribute the results by other means, e.g. through the respective consumer organisations and by publishing articles in consumer and other magazines. There is also a plan to structure an "ideal label", based on the results of the project, at the University of Reading.

The report that follows consists of the following main parts:

- National summaries.
- National reports.
- National recommendations to consumers in national languages.
- EU wide recommendations.

We hope that the report presented here will make a contribution to the general aim of improving the level of consumer protection, aware of the fact that it is the consumer himself or herself who is ultimately responsible for selecting the goods and services they need and therefore needs to be educated to use the appropriate and relevant information that will enable him or her to make the selection.

Oulu May 10, 2000

Heikki Nyysönen, Project Co-ordinator