



# Easy-to-read for multilingual and multicultural readers

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**Reading suggestions:** Sabira Stahlberg's books *Multicoloured book*, an Easy-to-read book with three language levels about changing countries, cultures and languages, and *Multicoloured Language*, about languages, multilingualism and learning languages

## 1. Multilingual learners benefit from Easy books

The question of language learning is a hot topic for many parents and teachers. Learners with other family languages, especially recent migrants, often have difficulties in understanding the school language and contents of learning materials.

Bokpil's **pedagogical Easy-to-read books** can support acquiring both the school language and new knowledge.

With “Easy” books the reading process usually becomes more successful. Chapters are short, structure simple and contents exciting and engaging. The feeling of success and understanding the text can trigger the motivation to improve school language skills.

Pedagogical Easy-to-read books support the **school curriculum**. New or difficult materials can be acquired for instance when an Easy book about the topic is read parallel with the school materials.

For more than twenty years Sabira Stahlberg's Easy-to-read books have been used in schools in several countries. Experiences show that school **results improve**, when multilingual learners get the opportunity to read Easy books.

When learners **understand contents** and contexts, they can learn new terminology faster. Easy-to-read books explain difficult topics in an easily understandable language – but without simplifying the content.

## 2. Language learning with Easy-to-read

Usually we start learning a new language with the help of a textbook or an app. **Repeating** and **exercises** support the memory. But to learn a new language is more than just acquiring vocabulary and grammar. Gradually we begin to read longer texts and create **our own sentences**, while we are gaining more experience and knowledge.

The step from **standard language** in the textbook to everyday spoken and written language may appear too long. With Easy-to-read literature the gap between learning and using the language can be reduced.

### Reading supports learning

Our brains build on previous knowledge and experiences, and creates a new “language channel” for each new language. Textbooks aim primarily to offer **basic knowledge** and to develop certain capacities. Yet, soon more is needed to increase and develop our language knowledge.

The long learning process can be shortened with the help of Easy books. Words are easy to understand and lines and chapters are short. When Easy books are used parallel in language teaching several things may happen:

- the language becomes more **interesting** to learn
- an **emotional bond** is created to the story and language is acquired without specific studying
- **everyday** language in the books can be used directly in and outside the learning situation
- learning a language receives greater **continuity** when reading a whole book over a longer period (in contrast to textbooks with fragmented and disconnected dialogues and texts)
- the feeling of **success** using the language increases; more **motivation** to learn
- **language levels** offer a possibility to choose the right book for the present level
- reading in a group and discussions about the books create greater **togetherness**
- all are **included**, regardless of reading ability or language knowledge

### Translation

Translation is an effective way to learn languages. Multilingual persons and those who have already created routines for learning languages often quickly learn a new language through translations. Translating creates **connections** to existing information and stimulates the brain to build further upon it. During translation of Easy-to-read texts, words, expressions and structures are **discovered**. We **reflect** on how different languages function, how we express ourselves and why, where words and expressions originate... and many more aspects, which make learning more **exciting**.

Simultaneously we provide the brain with a possibility to **compare** languages, when we work with two or more languages parallel. Comparisons are important to stabilise and deepen language knowledge. They support both **memory** and **language awareness**. To translate **together** in a group offers further possibilities for discussions and better understanding of each other’s languages and ways of thinking.

### 3. Multicultural Easy-to-reads

*In today's globalised world, we increasingly meet people from various cultural backgrounds. At school, learners who come from other cultures often find that the schoolbooks and materials they are studying do not reflect their reality. What kind of literature do they need in order to recognise themselves in it? Does it have to be specifically directed to their ethnic, language or cultural group (like in multicultural pedagogy), or can the same book function well in several cultures?*

A learner with another cultural and linguistic background often feels foreign to the teaching materials offered by school. Teaching materials are created for learners who speak the school language as their **mother tongue**. At school, learners are also expected to **identify** with certain social values, which are considered to represent the nation. Those with another home language and a different culture – or those with many languages and cultures – **do not fit into the model**. The feeling of being foreign starts at school and too often influences the future perspectives of a learner. How can these pupils be supported and included?

There are many possibilities and one way is to use Easy-to-read books. Bokpil's experience with Easy-to-read literature in several languages shows that the same book functions quite well in various cultures and contexts. Easy-to-read books have many benefits:

- They are **easier to read** for learners who experience difficulties with the school language.
- When the whole class reads the same Easy book, everyone is **included** in discussions and work with the book.
- If learners read the same book parallel in several languages, their **language and translation skills** develop and also their **vocabulary** and **thinking** improve.

Bokpil's **pedagogical Easy-to-read** books support the school educational goals and they can be used as **extra readings** in various subjects. But the book must be written and illustrated to suit many cultures. The books should not be written for a specific culture; instead, it must **from the beginning** be multicultural so that it can function in multicultural contexts.

Bokpil's books exist today in several languages and are being read both by people who speak these languages at home and by people who are learning the languages.

Philip is the hero in many of the books. He **grows** together with the readers. Philip's world – family, school, friends – could be **anywhere**. He lives in a town like the majority of the world's population, but the events do not depend on the urban environment. Philip encounters events and situations **anyone** can meet with. The author Sabira Stahlberg and the illustrator Maria Viitasalo have consciously created characters and environments all can identify with.

The experience and feedback Bokpil has received from different parts of the world, from teachers, learners and readers in various cultures, shows that *Miranda*, a book about **bullying**, is understood and appreciated also in cultures where bullying does not exist as a discussion topic.

Miranda's encounter with a dolphin is functions differently in diverse languages; in some languages the story is more **descriptive**, while in others there is more **action** and **activity**. The story touches the reader independently of language differences. Many readers from various cultures have shared their own experiences of bullying, finally finding words to express their experiences and emotions.

## 4. Easy-to-reads support language revitalisation

*How can we keep our own language, when the pressure from our surroundings and the majority language is huge?*

Many minorities are worried about their languages today. The number of languages is declining globally and humanity is heading towards an impoverished **language diversity**. Around half of the circa 7,000 languages in the world are estimated to disappear within the next century.

Why is it important to increase the use of and revitalise languages spoken by smaller groups?

Language is closely connected with culture, lifestyle, traditions and much more, such as understanding of a specific environment. A language **reflects** various perceptions and ways of seeing the world and many more aspects of human life and consciousness.

Together with language disappear enormous amounts of **knowledge** and the access of the group to their **background**. On the personal level, well-being, thinking, development, human relations, etc. are affected, when an individual does not learn the family language or has only limited knowledge.

Modern and easily readable literature which **supports language use** and creates interest in reading and writing, can be a way to revitalise languages.

Especially children and youth, but also adults who try to improve their language skills, can through Easy-to-read books access everyday language and at the same time increase their vocabulary.

**Pedagogical Easy-to-read books** contain many different topics and offer therefore a broad range for using words and expressions and possibilities for developing language skills.

All books published by Bokpil are originally written in a minority language, **Finland-Swedish**. Bokpil also has books in the minority language **Tatar**.

We have also written scientific articles about how Easy-to-read books can develop language skills in multilingual children and youth from minorities, whose home language is used mainly within the family and for everyday topics.