Report of the ITU-T Workshop on

"The impact of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the work of the ITU-T"

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1 Introduction

The workshop was held in Room H of the Montbrillant building on 2 November 2009. The title of the workshop is "The impact of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the work of the ITU-T". The programme and the presentation materials can be found at http://www.itu.int/ITU-T/worksem/accessibility/200911/programme.html

The main aim of the meeting was to determine what work ITU-T should be doing as a consequence of the growing impact of the UN Convention on the Rights or Persons with Disabilities. A secondary aim was to encourage more people, especially those with disabilities, to take part in the accessiblity and human factors work of ITU-T. Both aims were met in that many topics were raised at the workshop that have direct impact on the work of Q26/16 and Q4/2 and two deaf delegates took part in the joint meeting on the following day. Both indicated their willingness to continue with the work.

2 Presentations

The workshop was split into four sessions with similar content. The first was ITU-related in the form of an introduction to the work of Q26/16 and Q4/2 followed by a presentation on AMS (H.325) by Paul Jones. The new facilities offered by AMS could have significant benefits for people with disabilities. Mr Jones requested information directly from people with disabilities to help in the work.

The second session concentrated on aspects of relay services. Christopher Jones explained what deaf people need from relay services and described the system known as captioned telephony, which is aimed at hard-of-hearing users. He also emphasised the importance of high accuracy in the conversion of speech to text.

Karen Peltz Strauss spoke about the importance of the necessary transparency of relay services. The operator must be considered to be a conduit and not a third party to the call. She also explained that the introduction of IP access to text relay services had led to problems with fraudulent use and the services had to change to a pre-registration system.

Judith Viera covered the topic of confidentiality and ethics for operators and interpreters. These are important matters and should be covered in ITU work on relay services.

The third session concerned accessibility standards and procurement. Mitsuji Matsumoto spoke about the ITU work on Recommendation F.790 and how accessibility considerations had led to better products in Japan. He felt that ITU work on a checklist was needed to make it easier to test whether products met the accessibility standards.

Ken Sagawa is an expert on visual aspects. He explained how the perception of colour and contrast changes with age. Manufacturers who understand this can make their products more accessible and pleasant to use. Similar issues occur with sounds, for example, care should be taken in the choice of the frequency of acoustic cues (beeps etc.) so that are useful to the widest range of users.

Loïc Martínez-Normand and Clas Thoren spoke about the public procurement of accessible products in Europe as a consequence of EC Mandate M/376. The work is not yet complete and the speakers are doing research in the methods of assessing conformance to accessibility standards.

The fourth session covered other aspects of accessibility and the UN Convention. Jeff McWhinney concentrated on sign language relay services (Video relays) and remote interpretation. He highlighted the problem of insufficient interpreters and called for more spending on training. He identified for further barriers to the implementation of video relay services; lack of peering between

SIP providers, lack of sufficient upstream bandwidth in broadband services, interoperability of devices and the slow uptake of ENUM.

Jacques Sangla described the Video08 private video relay service in France. It had carried 30,000 calls in its first year but only operated during business hours. He called for funding for relay services so that they can operate 24 hour per day. He has done some work on a signing avatar (computer-generated image of a person), which is being used to provide sign interpretation on displays at French railway stations.

Emmanuel Buu explained that it would be useful if terminals could signal the requirements for a particular call to the other end of the connection. This mechanism could, for example, specify that a particular type of relay service were needed. He felt that the network should contain more processing and that smaller network operators, such as video relay providers should be allowed to use the NGN facilities of the larger networks. He also wanted more work on solving the problems of firewall and NAT traversal [note that SG16 has done a lot of work in this area].

Fanny Corderoy du Tiers described what deaf users needed from a video terminal saying that it should have a touch-screen, text capabilities, good visual alerting, high quality video etc. She described a product (VPAD) that met the requirements.

Tabitha Allum discussed the operation of captioning in theatres and other arts venues. Article 30 of the UN Convention makes access to these venues a right of persons with disabilities. She explained why it is important to time the display of captions very accurately and demonstrated (to the hearing delegates) how accurate timing can make it easier to hear the sounds. It is very expensive to send captioners to theatres to watch the performance several times before a captioned show and how it would be useful to be able to operate remotely. Unfortunately, this requires a reliable, very low latency audio and video link to the venue. The current multimedia devices seem to have too much delay to allow accurate timing. Perhaps the ITU can help?

The last presentation of the day was from Gunnar Hellstrom, who explained the benefits of the ITU F.703 Total Conversation system as applied to relay services and access to the emergency services. He described the progress of the EC REACH112 project, which has 22 partners. He called for relay calls to operate without special prefixes and for calls to the emergency services to be made either directly or via relays.

3 General discussion

The discussion was very lively and covered many topics. Some of the points raised were as follows.

It was felt important to be able to signal human capabilities to the network and the remote devices. ISO/IEC MPEG21 is relevant to this topic as is the ETSI work on personal profiles.

Should networks support proprietary systems such as Adobe Flash as well as standardised systems?

How can users influence governments to find ways of providing funding for relay services and other needs of deaf people?

The needs of persons with disabilities in developing countries were thought to be very difficult to satisfy. The UN is active in this area as is ITU-D. Public Internet Access Points may have a role to play if they can act as general-purpose communication centres.

One delegate asked ITU for a standard to synchronise video and audio accurately to make lip-reading easier. Perhaps this exists?

4 Lessons learned about providing accessible meetings

The workshop, the Q26 meeting and the joint meeting had to be accessible to the delegates, some of whom were deaf. Speech-to-text reporting was provided remotely using the facilities of CaptionFirst. A laptop computer was used to transmit the audio from the sound system of the room to the remote site using a VoIP system; the resulting text was displayed on a screen via a web page. This worked very well and delegates were able to display the text on their laptops if they preferred.

The ITU provided sign language interpreters to assist the deaf delegates. Again, this worked well but the use of a remote service should be investigated on the grounds of cost and flexibility.

The loudspeaker system in the Montbrillant rooms cannot be connected to the microphone system. This causes a potential problem in that audio clips played by presenters cannot easily be transmitted to the captioners. A way should be found to solve this problem. Luckily, it was not an issue during the workshop.

An accessible meeting requires two independent display screens; one for presentations, one for captions. The screens in Room C cannot be split in this way. If the meeting is small, a large flat-screen PC monitor could be used; this approach was used successfully in the meetings of Q26/16. Delegates own PCs can be used to display the captions but this may have drawbacks.

In Room H it appeared that some of the microphones on the front desk were not as sensitive or as clear as the others. This sometimes caused difficulties for the remote captioner.

It was suggested that the captioning should only use the indication “inaudible” if that was really the reason; in some cases the problem was with the speaker’s accent rather than the performance of the audio system.

We discovered that because presenters using sign language have to stand up, it is difficult for them to read their notes. This problem can be partially solved by using a narrow lectern to bring the papers to a better height.

The contrast of the ITU standard Powerpoint template could be improved to make it easier for partially-sighted people to read the material. This may be difficult to change because of branding rules.

In working meetings, documents are frequently displayed on the screen; the readability could improved by better screen resolution and sans-serif fonts. The Times Roman used in many of our documents is not the best for readability. It is possible to change the font of a document temporarily but is difficult if it is being edited on screen.

The delegates were generally pleased with the accessibility of the meetings and only made some of these points when pressed.

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