Newsletter

*Hello! We are the **FIRST Project**. As you probably know, we're developing Open Book – a new tool for people with autism to simplify text and documents. We hope you enjoy the latest issue of our newsletter.*

Sincerely,

The FIRST Project Team

IN THIS EDITION:

OUR PROGRESS...

What people with autism told us about how to make reading easier for them

NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR AUTISM

'e-Mintza' electronic communication tool for autism - FREE DOWNLOAD

A brief guide to e-communicators for people with autism

EVENTS

Autism-Europe International Congress to include technology sessions

THINGS WE THINK YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT

'Network Autism': a new resource for autism professionals

Special autism supplement from Nature journal – FREE COPIES AVAILABLE

RELATED PROJECTS

MASELTOV – technology to support new immigrants to integrate into Europe

_____

OUR PROGRESS

Open Book will be completed in **late 2014.** That's a long time to wait, but you can see how close we're getting:

2011	2012	2013	2014

The Open Book tool is in progress and we are approximately half way to the finish line. Much research has been conducted to determine what the software users (people with autism) need the tool to do in order to make reading easier. The results of this research are detailed below. The technical team has also been busy, developing and improving the prototype, with new research on our users continually being incorporated to ensure that the tool will be as effective as possible.

_____

What people with autism told us about how to make reading easier for them

Open Book is not just being developed *for* people who have autism, it is being developed *with* people who have autism. The team developing the tool is working with a large group of people who have autism across three countries to ensure that the tool will meet their diverse requirements.

The research conducted to date by the Open Book team has included a literature review and reading tests followed by questionnaires for people who have autism. These have identified the reading comprehension difficulties faced by people with autism, including …

- people with autism show more difficulties in reading comprehension than subjects from control groups;
- specific obstacles that impede the reading comprehension abilities of people with autism such as words with more than one meaning, unusual and rarely used words, verbs relating to emotions and mental states, metaphors;
- additional difficulties such as applying previous knowledge in order to understand the meaning of a text, understanding inferred meanings and anaphors (pronouns and other words that replace previously used words in a text).

Some effective methods for improving reading comprehension that have been identified by research include:

- highlighting the most relevant ideas in a text and using color images and real photographs;
- the use of literal questions combined with inferential ones to help the reader access the implicit meaning of the text progressively;
- relating anaphors to their antecedents;
- providing graphics, questions, summaries, word definitions and context clues.

Some strategies used in other tools that aim to improve reading comprehension among other populations, which are predicted to also be effective for people with autism include:

- Using verbs in active rather than passive voice;
- Avoiding the use of abbreviations;
- Avoiding hyphenation;
- Avoiding the use of columns;
- Displaying images in the right margin of the screen/page.
- Ensuring that individual sentences are short enough to fit on one line when the document is printed.

In addition, researchers from the FIRST Project conducted surveys and interviews with teenagers and adults who have autism to gain more insight into the reading comprehension difficulties they face. Parents and carers of people with autism were also given questionnaires to assist in providing insight from an external perspective. The surveys and interviews were conducted in the United Kingdom, Spain and Bulgaria in each of these languages. Some of the strategies this research identified to address reading comprehension difficulties include:

- Providing definitions, images, diagrams, summaries and questions;
- Using simple synonyms for complex words, sentences of 15 words or less with only one clause, bullet points and avoiding conjunctions when possible;
- Designing text to appear in one column only and highlighting key words;
- Enabling personalisation of the type and size of fonts as well as colours and other elements of the user interface.

The results of this research are currently being incorporated into the design of Open Book to ensure that it meets the needs of people with autism.

_____

NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR AUTISM

'e-Mintza' tool to enhance communication for people with Autism – FREE DOWNLOAD

A new electronic communication app for people with autism, called e-Mintza, has been developed in Spain. This app helps people who have autism and have difficulties with spoken language to communicate their needs.

E-Mintza (which in Basque means electronic speech) has already been downloaded more than 26,000 times, across 65 different countries.

The app has been developed with support from Foundation Orange and the Dr. Carlos Elósegui Foundation.

It is expected that it will soon also be available in English and French.

More information (English & Spanish)

Download e-Mintza (Spanish & Basque only)

_____

A brief guide to e-communicators for people with autism

A new guide to electronic communicators for people with autism is now available. The guide aims to assist parents, carers and professionals to choose an appropriate e-communicator for people with autism who need assistance with basic everyday communication.

The guide includes evaluations of 12 e-communicators. It was written by Luis Perez, Director of Aucavi School in Spain and his colleagues, with Autism-Europe (an organisation that promotes and defends the rights of people with autism across Europe).

Download the guide

_____

EVENTS

Autism-Europe International Congress to include technology sessions

The 10th Autism-Europe International Congress will be held in Budapest, from September 26 to 28, 2013.

The congress will feature several sessions on new technologies for autism and research in this area.

The Open Book tool will also be featured at this congress, at an exhibition stand where congress participants from around the world can interact with a demonstration version of the tool.

Preliminary programme, registration & more information (English & Hungarian)

_____

THINGS WE THINK YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW ABOUT

Introducing 'Network Autism' a professional resource for everyone who works with people who have autism

The National Autistic Society of the United Kingdom has launched 'Network Autism', an online network of professionals who work with people with autism. The network is a place where professionals can come together, share good practice and achieve better outcomes during a time of unprecedented changes in the sector. Membership is free and open to all relevant professionals.

Join Network Autism (English only)

_____

Special autism supplement from *Nature* journal – FREE COPIES AVAILABLE

Prestigious scientific research journal, *Nature*, has published a special supplement edition on autism.

The supplement is available online and *Nature* is also offering to send free printed copies to those who are interested.

While *Nature* is a journal of in-depth scientific research papers, the supplement edition contains a range of high quality articles on autism that are reasonably accessible for a general audience to read. The cover latest research and analysis on topics including prevalence of autism, genetics, diagnosis, the DSM-5, treatments, early childhood development, research on adults with autism and more.

Access the autism supplement and request a free printed copy (English only)

_____

RELATED PROJECTS

MASELTOV – technology to support new immigrants to integrate into Europe

The MASELTOV project researches and develops novel ICT instruments with the key objective to facilitate and foster local community building, raising consciousness and knowledge for the bridging of cultural differences.

More information

_____

Like what we're doing? Then 'like' Autism-Europe on Facebook to receive updates and don't be shy about sharing with your friends! www.facebook.com/autismeurope.AE

Want to know more? Go to www.first-asd.eu or contact us contact(at)first-asd.eu

Got something to tell us? If there's something you think people who are interested in autism and technology should know, please tell us by emailing: nikki.sullings@autismeurope.org

Don't want to hear from us anymore? Aw, that's a shame ☹ Well, just send us an email and we'll take you off the mailing list: nikki.sullings@autismeurope.org

_____