

LTA – Marcel Bobeldijk interview

Francesca Raffi (FR): Fred Film Radio, this is Francesca Raffi. Today we are going to learn more about the Live Text Access project, which aims to design a certified curriculum for real-time intralingual respeakings and velotypists. If you have listened to our previous interviews, then you already know that there is a lot to take in. So, stay with us, because today we are going to look at the LTA project from a user's point of view. One of the partners of the LTA project is precisely an end users association: The European Federation of Hard of Hearing People. Today we have virtually with us Marcel Bobeldijk, the President of this European organisation. Marcel, welcome to Fred and thank you for being with us today.

Marcel Bobeldijk (MB): Thank you.

FR: OK Marcel, tell us more about yourself and about the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People. What is the main aim of this organisation?

MB: Yes, I'll start with myself. I am 54 years old, I'm living in the Netherlands and I am hard of hearing from the first second of my life. I have two hearing aids on both ears. My education started in special education for hard of hearing children and then I went to regular education. I'm working for the Dutch Tax Office here in the Netherlands. I'm working for the Human Resources department for ill people. We advice to managers how to deal with ill people. I'm working as volunteer also for the Dutch organisation for hard of hearing people. We focus on subtitling for television here in the Netherlands. We have been very active on that issue for many years. During the last year we focused more on the quality of subtitling. I'm also now the President of the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People. The federation promotes the interests of hard of hearing people both in the European Union and outside the European Union. When we talk about hard of hearing people we have also to include late deafened people, that is people who became deaf or hard of hearing when they became older, people with the cochlear implant, the cochlear implant users, but also people with tinnitus and other groups. We focus on all ages and special user groups, we are in close collaboration with all users. Our focus is to inform our members, and also promote the interests of each group at a European level. In Brussels we are an active member of the European Disability Forum so we don't focus only on subtitling for television, but also public transport and

accessibility in all areas, such as living and professional services of good quality and free to all.

FR: So, the federation also aims to raise awareness about the profile, the needs and preferences of hard of hearing people. Marcel, I know that the European Federation for Hard of Hearing People has published its own guidelines on accessibility for hard of hearing people. So, what does accessibility mean for people with a hearing loss, Marcel?

MB: It means that we can participate in all levels of society. When we talk about education, the family can decide if their child shall go to special education, but they also have the possibility that the hard-of-hearing child can participate in regular education, but with technical support, an hearing system or an extra teacher or speech-to-text support in the class. This is in education, but it's the same at work. Hard-of-hearing people have the same possibilities in the labour market. They can do all the jobs that they like to do sometimes with speech-to text support. For example, when I'm in a meeting with more than 20 people I have always a speech-to-text reporter, or interpreter, with me. Here in the Netherlands it's easy to do that, because there is a local big group of well educated speech-to-text reporters. But the main important thing is that you can participate in society on all levels. We are with EDF leading a big campaign to make the European elections accessible. Most of the times, voting is not a problem, the problem is that information from political parties on television or on the radio are not accessible for hard of hearing people, because a lot of TV programs are not subtitled, so hard of hearing people lose a lot of information. Of course you can read it on the newspapers, the magazines or the websites but it is very difficult for hard of hearing people to participate in politics because what politicians say most of the time is not accessible.

FR: So, accessibility for hard of hearing people means a broad range of assistive technology and the LTA project deals in particular with real-time subtitles. I know that the European Federation of Hard of Hearing People regularly publishes surveys and comparative documents showing the rates of subtitling in member countries. So Marcel, what is the current situation regarding real-time subtitling and why are real-time subtitles so important?

MB: It is important for hard of hearing people to have the same access to information as everyone. It is in our opinion that a human right is also for people to have access to information on a television or a website, and also

access to cultural life, movies in the cinemas, plays in theatres, etc. You see there is a big gap in Europe. For example in countries like the Netherlands and the UK, there are very well organised speech-to-text reporters, so the situation in the Netherlands and in the UK is a little bit different. But for example, in Sweden they have well-organised subtitling for the movies in the cinemas. That doesn't happen in the Netherlands. So, there is a difference between European countries. There's also no standardization. An example, when you look in the Netherlands for subtitling on television via teletext you use 888 while in Germany you use other numbers. So when you are in Germany it's difficult to find out the subtitles on television, because each channel is different. In France, they are working hard to have more and more subtitling, also in Belgium, in Finland, in Sweden and also in the Czech Republic and in Spain, but the quality of the subtitling is not always very good.

FR: This is why the LTA project is also so important. What is your role, Marcel, within the LTA project?

MB: I'm very happy and this project is very important. Speech-to-text reporters are... As I said before, there is a big gap between the different European countries. In the UK, in the Netherlands, or western European countries they have a lot of speech-to-text reporters. They have different qualities. But there are also European countries where there are not so many speech-to-text reporters. Lots of countries don't know about the possibilities related to respeaking and velotype. In South-Eastern European countries there's more focus on sign language. In our organisation we're absolutely not against sign language, but most hard of hearing people like to speak and don't like to use sign language, but they need some extra support and that can be speech-to-text. But in a lot of European countries in the European Union, but also outside the European Union, speech-to-text is not an option, because there is no speech-to-text or because there are not many speech-to-text reporters and because of the very low quality of speech-to-text. People mainly rely on their cochlear implants which can be plugged into their laptops. So for us it's important that there are more speech-to-text reporters so that more hard of hearing people can use it in education or at work, etc.

FR: And social life in general.

MB: And that the quality becomes better.

FR: So the real-time subtitlers trained by the Live Text Access project will certainly have suitable skills to provide high quality subtitles and to meet multiple market and users needs. So, thank you very much Marcel for being with us today.

MB: Ok.

FR: And thank you very much to all of you. Don't miss our next interviews on Fred Film Radio to know more about the LTA project. This is Francesca Raffi and this is Fred Film Radio, the festival insider.

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