I have Aphasia: An app designed by people with aphasia for people with aphasia

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Engaging with users has always been a key element of research and teaching at Computing within the School of Science and Engineering at the University of Dundee, UK. Special emphasis is put on working with users with disabilities or with users who face challenges when using technology.

In 2005, when Computing moved to a new building, a User Centre for older people was established in order to embed this special user group into the department [1]. Later in 2010, the Straight Talking User Group of adults with complex disabilities who use AAC joined the User Centre [2]. The latest addition came in 2013, when members of Speakeasy (now Speakability), a local group of people with aphasia, formed the Aphasia iPad group following an initiative of a person with aphasia from the Speakeasy group and his speech and language therapist. The aim was to learn about the use of Apple iPads and discover new mainstream apps to support communication.

Aim

In this paper we report on the realisation of an iOS app that can be used on iPads or iPhones to introduce yourself and your disability, aphasia, to new communication partners. The app was realised by the Aphasia iPad user group in several stages. The group had expressed the wish to develop such an app that could help them introducing themselves and their condition in an earlier focus session exploring new activities for the group [3].

Method

In 2016 the group was given the opportunity to take part in an eight week stop animation workshop designed and funded by Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust (THAT). The original intention was to give the group a chance to use their iPads in a new and creative way to extend the usual group activities. Emphasis was on having fun exploring the potential of the members' iPad for creating pictures and movies. The group then decided to create a short movie that could explain about aphasia and how to improve communication in conversation.

The workshop was run by an experienced stop animator who worked with the group to develop a number of short animation sequences, using different animation techniques to illustrate key points about aphasia. The group also contributed commentary and short interviews to link the various elements.

Once the animated film was completed the group worked together during the regular group sessions on methods of easy storing and presenting the animation on an iPad. Eventually, working with THAT and through the support of a local mobile app developer, the movie was integrated into an iOS app.

The group worked with the app developer on the realisation of a simple, easy to use interface to allow presenting the video timely for introduction to a new conversation partner. Functional requirements were discussed within the group and communicated to the app developer. Prototypes were tested for accessibility and usability by the group members and results fed back.

The app was submitted for publication on the iOS app store but was initially rejected by Apple due to it's too simple functionality. However, after explaining its use and application, the app was accepted and is now available on the app store for free download.

Currently the group works on updating the software to improve the user interface and make the app available on Android mobile devices.

Acknowledgments

References

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