ISO/IEC JTC 1 Special Working Group on Accessibility (SWG-A)

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At their meeting this week, agreement was made to work further on the attached discussion paper. Bev Milligan, who will not be able to be at our telecom on Monday, asked me to forward this to the JTC1-SWG-A with the idea that we might add a voice of support. Andy Heath was at the SC35 meeting and I believe can speak better to this item.

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Icons and other indicators

A discussion paper for ISO/IEC JTC1/SC35/WG 6

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Objective

The objective of this report is to stimulate discussion to develop and define next steps for a framework to standardize accessible indicators.

Overview

In the research and samples located to date, there seems to be one universally accepted graphic, originally designed by Rehabilitation International[1] and accepted around the world to mean anything from accessible parking to telephone accessibility, whether it is a lowered telephone for mobility access or having a TTY/TTD, for deaf and hard of hearing. While developed originally for mobility, this symbol seems to have crossed disability and user interface products. It is the Kleenex of tissue paper.

So why develop anything further? Accessibility comes in many different packages. There is employment, Information and Communications Technology, Customer Service, Built Environment and other areas. While user interface products and services could be identical in the aforementioned areas, some are also specific to each and all need unique identification which not only addresses specifically the product or service, but also the user's ability to understand its meaning.

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[1] http://www.riglobal.org/about/history

This subject, specific to video symbols, was looked at previously and reported on in 2005[2], but never completed.

There seems to be at least three main considerations when looking at the over-arching subject of developing a framework for an ISO series of standards related to Icons and other indicators to identify accessibility. They are first, defining the varying types of indicators; then defining the context for indicators; and finally, user comprehension of those indicators.

Types of Indicators

Types of indicators can include Audio, Graphical, Tactile, Picto-grams and others.


Context for indicators

Across North America, as is likely the case elsewhere in the world, governments are undertaking to develop accessibility laws. In doing so they are defining accessibility in tangible ways that that would frame accessibility for the provision of products and services. Once such attempt is the Province of Ontario[3], Canada that has been to define accessibility as it applies to user interface. These over-arching definitions include: Transportation, Employment, Customer Service, Information and Communications, Built Environment. In the first years of development, they isolated each category and are now, 6 years later, attempting a harmonization of overlap in each category. However, this approach may work for laws, but not for our work. For example, new technological solutions for accessibility –e.g. clean audio, audio subtitling, etc – are always being created, and it is important, therefore, to identify, analyze context work being done around the world to assist in the development of our framework.

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[2] See ETSI STF286: Access Symbols for use with video content and ICT devices, Appendix A
[3] http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/index.aspx

User Comprehension

Comprehension must also wrestle with both language and culture. For example, descriptive video also known as audio description has many language specific indicators:
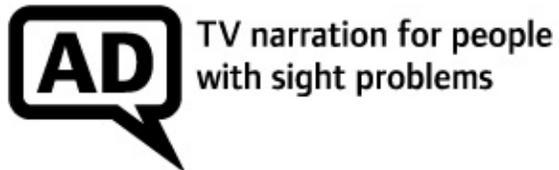
Consistency is also a key consideration. For example, a graphic that may be good for one type of symbol (e.g. the diagonal line widely used to imply something is not available) cannot cross over to other symbols. Take for example the symbol to identify deafness. This is widely used, but offensive to many in the deaf community, to denote the concept that the human ear does not work.

However, if varying disabilities could have one consistent series of indicators:

… then it may be possible to apply that indicator across product and services.

Suggested next steps for discussion could be identifying research and indicators existing around the world for disabilities. Then identifying and defining a context for development of task, industry or grouping, finally defining or developing a framework broad enough in scope to ensure future user interface products and services can be considered.

Appendix A

Specific symbols for audio descriptions and other related video content services are contained in:

ETSI ES 202 432 V1.1.1 (2006-11)
Human Factors (HF);
Access symbols for use with video content and ICT devices

"The present document is an ETSI Standard (ES) that specifies a family of five symbols that denote the availability of access services for use with video content and ICT devices that can promote the provision of access services by increasing their take-up as a result of improved recognition of those services being available."
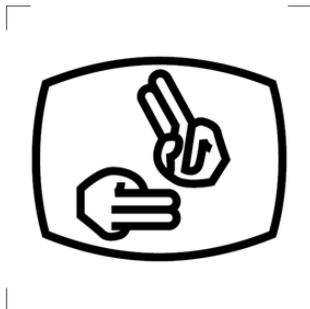
5.1.2   Subtitling symbol
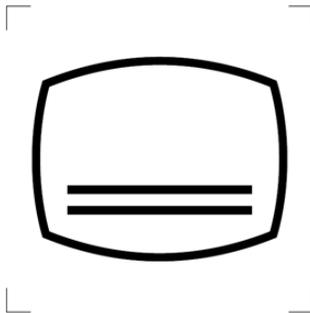
5.2.2   Audio description symbol

5.3.2   Signing symbol

5.4.2 Speech output symbol

5.5.2 Spoken command symbol