Localization framework for Assistive Technologies

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Background

Mada has a mandate to stimulate and support the production of Assistive Technology for use by Arabic speakers. An early report into availability and awareness of assistive technologies in Qatar suggested that there were very limited available technologies in Arabic, other than for people with little or no vision. Mada entered into a three year program of localization of successful assistive technologies, with a proven track record for English speakers, to meet the needs of people with a disability within the Middle East.

Activity Report

The lack of assistive technologies for Arabic speakers was clearly a major barrier to increasing access to technology for people with a disability within Qatar. To address this shortfall Mada engaged with a range of developers and vendors to seek opportunities to bring new products to the market. We recognized that in benchmarking existing tools and supports for English speakers, that there was a significant gap existing across all forms of assistive technology and across the full range of disabilities.

As a result Mada identified that a series of actions and supports were required to address this gap.

Over a three year period 2010- 2013 Mada engaged with developers through the provision of :-

1 Development of a business case to raise awareness of the market opportunity in the Middle East

2 Seed funding to mitigate the risk of entering the Arabic Market

3 Technical Support to localization efforts

4 Arabic language and culture advice and support

5 Face to face meetings to engage between users in Qatar and developers overseas

Mada also identified that it should seek to support solutions that worked across a range of platforms, and were founded upon differing business models. As a result the solutions that were brought to market were both proprietary and based on open licensing (Open Source and Creative commons).

Mada then captured this experience into a website to support future localization efforts that can be viewed at http://localisation.atbar.org/

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Conclusions

The creation of Arabic Assistive Technology has been a successful outcome for the first 5 years of the Mada center in Qatar. Over 30 products for a range of needs have been brought to market, increasing the diversity of solutions offered, and reducing the cost of access for many.

Key issues to be considered in bring a solution to market include Cultural Nuances, Design Issues, Language Layout, Translation Accuracy and Options, Understanding the Individual Needs of users and Technical Issues. Full details of these can be found at the localization framework website and a suummary of key points is also available.

Planned future support to developers include the distribution of freely available language resources and the creation of an Arabic symbol ditcionary to support new and exisiting products.

References

Localization Framework website - http://localisation.atbar.org/

Call for Arabic Assistive Technologies http://mada.org.qa/en/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/call-for-assistive-technologies-to-support-disabled-people-in-Qatar.pdf

Key Points for Localizing Assistive Technology - http://www.techshareme.org/files/2014/11/Key-Points-for-Localizing-Assistive-Technology.pdf

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