Two Internet Based Speech Tools:
Audioforum - asynchronous speech dialogues
FLUENT - a speech pronunciation tool for language learning

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Abstract: This interactive session will focus on two newly developed speech tools for the internet: 1) Audioforum enabling asynchronous speech interactions 2) FLUENT a speech practising tool developed to enable language learners to improve their pronunciation. The programs will be demonstrated and tested in the workshop and results form evaluations will be presented and discussed. The opportunity to communicate using speech via internet reduces costs in a number of ways: 1) no phone bills 2) Time, speed and easiness – it takes 7-10 times longer to write a message compared to say it orally. And, not to forget – the natural and spontaneous speech makes it easier to joke, informally chat, sing etc - it gives a human touch and a social dimension that often lacks in the purely text based internet interactions. Three forms of Internet speech interactions are considered: 1) Synchronous speech 2) Asynchronous speech 3) Audio chat.

Background

Fluent is an EU-funded project co-ordinated by the Centre for Language and Speech, University of Antwerp, Belgium. The objective of this LINGUA 2-project is to create a speech-practising tool for EU languages. The tool will be developed for the Internet. The tool will enable language learners of EN, ES, IT, EL, FR, NL, PT, SE, DK and NO to train the pronunciation already from the beginning of the language learning process.

The speech-practising tool will be designed primary for adult autonomous learners, but can also be integrated in contact-teaching. No basic knowledge in phonetics or linguistics will be required.

The tool will consist of 3 modules. The first module will be a theoretical introduction to the phonetics of the target language: sound system, stress, rhythm and intonation. The second and largest module will systematically train the perception and production of the target language. The exercises will be automatically corrected in the tool. The learners can also get in touch with a coach to whom they can send voice-recordings and who will give feedback on the pronunciation. The third module will consist of a basic word list of the language (circa 1000 frequent words) with the correct pronunciation (in writing and audio).

Fluent is developed by an international consortium of partners with the support of the European Union - Socrates Lingua. The partners are:

- Universiteit Antwerpen, Centrum voor taal en spraak, Belgium
- Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, Norway
- Universidade Fernando Pessoa, Potrugal
Audioforum is developed in Sweden and tested in universities and companies. The two tools will be shown in practice and interaction with people in other countries will be demonstrated. The opportunities enabled by these and similar tools will be discussed in particular in the context of teaching and learning – new groups? New pedagogical models? Etc. The choice of distance communication channels has a large impact on the results achieved – the possible content in the dialogues and the degree of user participation. The differences between text-, audio and audiovisual interaction will also be discussed in this interactive session.