

The Situation of Speech to Text (STT) Interpreting in Nordic and Baltic Countries

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STT started in Nordic countries in the 1980s with the Swedish text telephone. It provided 6 lines per screen. It was connected via video recorder to a TV or with some other complicated method.

Before that, meetings and rehabilitation groups used a flip chart and an overhead projector for reading handwritten text. Pen and pad were in individual use.

Later on PCs and laptops connected to a video projector could be used in STT. Nowadays they can be connected to a huge TV screen for group use. Bluetooth keyboards and tablets are used for individual interpreting settings. Harnesses have made STT mobile. Pandemic has made remote STT and its solutions possible.

In the Nordic countries interpreting services are based on individual needs and regarded as being part of *subjective rights* while in other European countries the approach may be different. It involves the individual in finding funds for the interpreting services in extracurricular or situations outside of work.

In Nordic countries, the development and progress of the STTI service is mostly similar, but there are differences toward using interpreting services abroad.

Furthermore, regulations in some countries allow translating between languages, but in others it is not currently allowed. So-called relay interpreting may improve the current procedures.

Estonia has created STT service in a short time. Latvia has no STT yet.

Overview

My presentation is in three parts

1. Here are some highlights from the survey. The data of the survey was collected during the end of 2020.

I hope you have already checked it at the VDNR website.

2. Then I have examples on how flexible remote STT has been during the pandemic.

3. And then my Estonian colleagues share their experiences and concerns.

Question 3 STT Abroad

The STTI service has advanced in much the same direction in all these Nordic countries. The biggest difference is in interpreting abroad, Denmark has the most limited and Finland the most flexible ruling.

In Finland interpreting for trips abroad needs to be applied separately, but up to 14 days there are no limitations. If interpreting is needed for a longer period of time, you need to provide explanations.

In Denmark interpreting abroad can be used only for disability politics and sports events.

Maybe VDNR could provide assistance to Denmark and help with lobbying for more freedom in using interpreters abroad?

Question 4 STT and translation

Although STTI is an intralingual system, Sweden, Norway and Denmark allow translating from another language to native language and vice versa and typing it. It is possible between western European languages. Finnish and Estonian belong to another language group, so the translation and typing is harder and more strenuous. It could be possible though, especially if *relay interpreting* was allowed.

When a person uses sign language interpretation, they are getting the translation and signing in one. Those who do not know sign language are not equal with sign language users.

There is one Exception: An STT client who is a native English speaker living in Finland has received permission to get translated STT interpreting. This was after they made a complaint to The National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal.

From the Finnish STTI association point of view STT is intralingual. The other aspect is

STT interpreters' training in Finland that is focused on intralingual interpreting, not translating, so in general STTIs are not qualified to do translations. Of course there are some interpreters, who have another profession and are qualified to do translations.

Questions 5, 6, 7

With questions 5, 6 and 7, I aimed to find out what different countries think about saving the interpretation output, or saving a presentation and interpretation output in one recording. The latter is one possible way to comply with the EU web accessibility directive which was implemented just before this survey.

Giving transcriptions of the interpretation afterwards is different in the Nordic countries. In general, it is not allowed.

In Finland, speech to text interpreting as a *government service* is in a similar position with sign language interpreting. They are both *simultaneous interpreting*, not meant to be saved later. Third party events with interpreting are different from Kela's service, because it is agreed together between the third party organiser, the service provider and the interpreter. The subjective interpreting service by the government does generally not include giving a saved text for a client afterwards.

However, taking photos of the STT screen is allowed for a client or any person attending. It may even be more convenient, because you can take pictures of the things that you want to remember in the future.

In Scandinavia, in general, we need to consider lobbying for note taking services!

How does

the EU Web accessibility directive

affect subtitling online content?

The directive states that all public officials and organisations that receive 50% public funding need to follow web accessibility guidelines on their websites and mobile applications. This includes subtitling videos within 14 days of their publication. Of course, captioning videos is a good practice for everyone.

Subtitles for online videos can be captioned by anyone, such as an employee of the office, organisation, or association who is publishing the video. Or you can purchase captioning

services from a company separately.

In Finland it is considered enough to have a recording of a live STT interpretation that is linked to the video.

Question 9 How to reach out?

How to disseminate information about STT services? Associations have information internally, for members. The info reaches only a small part of all late deafened and hard of hearing people who could benefit from these services.

How to improve the awareness that speech-to-text interpreting exists as one of the interpreting methods available?

Workshop or think tank in VDNR?

This survey is available at VDNR's website.

[The Situation of Speech to Text \(STT\) * Vuxendövas Nordiska Råd \(VDNR\)](#)

Soon* there will be a list of academic dissertations, MA and BA theses and articles related to STT. Older documents call STT print interpreting. So far, all the academic writings are from Finland. I wish other countries would complete the list.

*) Please, see below

Future Vistas

Making abbreviations in Finnish with the purpose of making STT faster, is not as easy as in Scandinavian and West European languages whose word body does not change when being in genitive, translative, plural or having other endings. Finnish has so called consonant gradation.

However, *re-speaking* seems promising. It is already used by Yle, the national broadcasting company, as part of producing closed captioning to programmes.

The need for advocating remote speech-to-text interpreting has arisen due to the 2020-2021 coronavirus pandemic. In the future, the interpreting services should be available on all occasions and preferably without prior booking well in advance.

Finnish need to increase lobbying for relay interpreting. It helps in translation + STT

interpreting for deafened people, and between different Sign Languages, which is now forbidden.

Blessings of Covid - flexibility of remote STTI

Nowadays there are no seminars or webinars without mentioning covid.

In Finland the pandemic turned out to be a blessing. Kela, the national social insurance institution in Finland, which runs the interpreting services for people with disabilities, was forced to give permission to remote interpreting services.

The remote option at the relay center of Kela currently has only one option. It is limited to running short errands during working hours and in Sign Language only.

When the pandemic spread across the world and all other instances had already started online meetings and gatherings, Kela had to allow remote services covering all kinds of interpreting, no matter if they were short or long.

I began figuring out technical solutions for online meeting platforms and programmes with STT interpreters. We started from zero.

First we used Google Docs. It was painful to scroll the screen to see where the typing was going. The name tag of the person who is typing was also partially covering the most recent text.

Then we learned about Google Meet, Teams and Zoom. Skype was tested before them. The screen sharing in Skype and Teams did not work well in STT. The menu in Teams was floating in front of the text.

Finally we landed to Zoom, and to the 'terps sharing the screen. Font size and colour is chosen in cooperation with 'terps. If there was a recorded material to be interpreted, the screen was split to video and STT half and half. Terps used their programmes in typing, Velonote and Kitu or Kiva. Text on Tap came later on.

I enjoyed using this remote system. My mobile phone works as a microphone. It is very convenient for running errands.

What about meetings?

I sit with a tablet in front of me. My mobile phone is moving from one speaker to another and the microphone takes speech from a 2 meter radius.

Dentist appointment

Where is the interpreter? Oh, they are in my hand. The Dentist checks my mouth and gives their verdict and I can read it. They don't need to go and write for me in the middle of working. Which interpreter could fit in between there? It has always been hard to see the interpreter at the dentists' before.

In the operating room

I had a minor surgery under my knee. The surgery was done in the operation room with local anesthesia. I had my phone hygienically in a re-sealable plastic bag. I was in a half sitting position. Everyone introduced themselves by bending over my bed to look at the phone and see how the interpreting worked.

Car ride

Last week I attended the 50 year anniversary of my Matriculation. During the day I had 2 in-person STT interpreters. They were hybrid interpreters who were allowed to sign, too. We signed while walking to meet our 106 years old English teacher who lived nearby. Terps were also "leashed" wearing harnesses while typing our speeches for our "eternal" teacher.

Next morning during breakfast and a car ride, we had remote STT interpreting. I put the tablet on the handle of my suitcase in front of the front seat. At the back seat two classmates held my phone as a microphone.

In general, a more professional and reliable microphone system is needed for official professional use. Kela does not lend microphones to clients. But if you use remote interpreting often enough, you can borrow a tablet from Kela for that purpose. You can't do anything else with it.

Art exhibition, masked communication

We were wearing masks while communicating, as required. There were 3 of us and we booked a remote STT in Zoom. We spoke our comments and read them on our mobiles. In this type of scenario, it is important to remember to turn off the loudspeaker, and also switch off the microphone when you are not speaking.

Youtube/STT

If you need to check something from Youtube or listen to other pre-recorded videos, you

can book remote STT interpreting. The interpreter splits their own screen so that the video covers half the screen and STT the other half. It works well.

Thank you for your attention!

Next up, my Estonian colleagues will tell how they started the STT service in a short time and share their concerns.

*) List of academic dissertations, MA and BA theses

Studies on speech-to-text interpreting (abstracts in English or German available)

Soile Mäkiranta 2006. <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uta-1-15943>

Virpi Salakari 2008. <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uta-1-17842>

Maija Tanhuamäki, 2008. <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uta-1-17933>

Marja Ohrankämmen, 2008. <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uta-1-19191>

Tiittula & Tanhuamäki, 2011. <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/fi/publications/via-interpreting-to-equality-challenges-of-print-interpreting-for>

Iida Bernhardt, 2013. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201304265168>

Hanna Kuittinen, 2014. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201404275030>

Moislahti & Mäkilä, 2017. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201704285783>

Heikkonen & Muhl, 2011. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201105025463>

Marttila, 2016. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201604295481>

Grönroos, 2018. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201805026135>

Honkala, 2015. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201504295471>

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Turkki & Härkönen, 2010. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:amk-201005129067>

Wiklund, 2014. DOI: 10.1515/text-2014-0013

Wiklund, 2013. <https://journal.fi/pk/article/view/9431>

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Wiklund, Sharmin & Tiittula, 2016.

http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2016/SKYJoL29_Sharmin,Wiklund&Tiittula.pdf

Sharmin, 2015. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/96850/978-951-44-9776-6.pdf?sequence=1>