



Supporting marginalized communities with a digital interpreter

Red Cross and Capgemini implemented BabelSpeak to ensure that anyone with the need will be able to access translation services without worrying about the expense

Client: Red Cross (Norway)

Region: Norway

Industry: Non-profit

Client challenge:

In confidential conversations in which language is a barrier and that may involve sensitive, personal issues leave vulnerable groups – such as refugees – entirely dependent on interpreters to be understood.

Solution:

Red Cross engaged Capgemini to build BabelSpeak, a tool for real-time translation and transcription in approximately 100 languages that simultaneously secures sensitive data and information.

Benefits:

- Interpretation services made more accessible and efficient
- Cost of interpretation reduced up to 90%
- Every conversation is fully secured and kept private

Digital interpreter helps vulnerable individuals be understood in encounters with authorities

In collaboration with the Norwegian Red Cross, Capgemini has conducted extensive testing and improvement of the AI-based interpretation service BabelSpeak. By doing so, the partners have given a voice to marginalized groups in society and broken down linguistic barriers.

Endless need for translation

The need for interpretation services is vast. While the Norwegian government spends around NOK 1.4 billion annually on interpretation services, this is still not enough to meet demand.

The Red Cross in particular has an almost endless demand for the translation of sensitive conversations. These interpretation needs often involve deeply personal content – and in many cases, the conversations can be about sensitive issues that have major consequences for the people involved. However, as a non-profit organization, the Red Cross must work with a limited budget while professional translation often proves expensive.

This meant that it needed another option that came with a more affordable budget. To that end, the Red Cross partnered with Capgemini, which had been involved with the development of BabelSpeak, an AI-driven interpretation solution.

AI makes translation more accessible

BabelSpeak translates between 100 different languages in four ways: speech to speech, text to text, speech to text, and text to speech. Early versions of the digital interpreter were so promising that Capgemini decided to further develop the concept. As the solution was continually refined, Telenor's recently established AI Factory becoming a key partner to ensure the entire solution was under Norwegian control.

Because BabelSpeak and the information it generates are entirely processed and operated in Norway, it can deliver services to, among others, the police, military, healthcare services, and municipalities. These sectors require strict compliance with security, data processing, and storage regulations, requirements that are shared by many other organizations and companies.

"Capgemini is committed to 'AI for good' - using artificial intelligence for socially beneficial purposes," says Thordur Arnason, Vice President at Capgemini Invent and project owner for BabelSpeak. "Being understood is a human right, and BabelSpeak helps ensure safe and effective communication for vulnerable groups in society. It saves society significant costs – and contributes to avoiding misunderstandings with potentially high risk."

Trustworthy interpreter

Such a complex field as interpretation comes with natural challenges that affected the development of BabelSpeak. For instance, there are significant differences in data availability for various languages. Some Arabic dialects did not perform as well as initially expected, an issue that was clarified via extensive testing with a language expert.

"We hypothesized that formal and technical language - such as legal or bureaucratic - would be a major challenge," explains Arnason.

"However, BabelSpeak performed very well on vocabulary-related content. Instead, variations, nuances, and dialects in sentence structure were the most difficult to get right."

Throughout the development, we ensured that a native speaker was always on hand to review translations for quality and precision. The project team then used the results of this oversight to further refine and improve the system.

From locked in to locked out

Since the introduction of BabelSpeak at Red Cross, the non-profit has been enabled to provide meaningful translation services to vulnerable groups. Primary among them have been refugees and formerly incarcerated individuals.

"BabelSpeak gives a voice to those sitting at the bottom of the table. Language barriers are especially challenging for refugees with experiences that make it difficult to trust authorities and interpreters. For them, BabelSpeak feels safer," says Jeanette Steig Lid, Key Account Manager at the Norwegian Red Cross.

The Red Cross runs the "Network After Imprisonment" program, which aims to help those who want to leave a criminal lifestyle. Convicted criminals often experience the reality that there is a short path from being locked up (prison) to becoming locked out (of society) upon their release. At the same time, personal finances can be challenging.

Many also have a great need to manage their finances, build a network, and build a normal life in society. The network offers a range of activities to support this transition and effective communication is essential to success in this area.

BabelSpeak provides these groups with a new resource that offers critical services, ensuring that nobody has to face life-changing events without a crippling linguistic barrier adding to their challenges.

The collaboration with the Red Cross gave the BabelSpeak team the opportunity for extensive testing, giving them access to valuable experience and insights that would otherwise have been inaccessible. Both parties look forward to continuing the collaboration on a larger scale.

About Capgemini

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