

SPEAKING OUT

INTELLIGENT AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENT SYSTEMS ARE NOW AVAILABLE THAT TAKE REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF LANGUAGE, ACCENTS AND WORD CHOICES INTO ACCOUNT FOR A RANGE OF TRAVELERS

■ Since ancient times, people have seen language as a key part of their identity. Take the ancient Greeks, for example, who developed their sense of national identity by observing how people from different cultures, who they called 'barbaros' spoke differently. To this day, the word 'barbarian' is still used in the meaning of 'uncivilized' or 'primitive'. Another example can be found in the modern Russian language, in which the word for people from Germany is 'nemets'. It originates from medieval times, when it had the meaning of a person not able to speak in an understandable language.

In modern times, we see that when tensions between ethnic groups rise, more emphasis is given to the differences in languages than to the similarities. It is often the case, however, that the problem is not about the differences between languages, but that people who do not want to communicate across their sectarian borders look to maximize the linguistic differences to justify their inability (or unwillingness) to communicate.

The language of travel

AviaVox understands these sensitivities in its daily practice of working in a multilingual and global environment. As a supplier of intelligent airport announcement systems, its mission is to efficiently guide passengers through the airport from entrance to departure, and to make this guidance as easily understandable as possible. For that reason, passengers are addressed in their own language whenever possible, as this is the best way to get the message through and make them feel comfortable. In practice, this means that flight announcements are normally made in three languages: the language of the departure country, the destination, and English as the international language for all other passengers. When English is already a departure or destination language, another can be chosen based on the passenger list or flight destination.

In practice, the sensitivities when choosing a language are plenty. In Belgium for example, the Dutch language cannot be used as it differs in accent and word choice, so

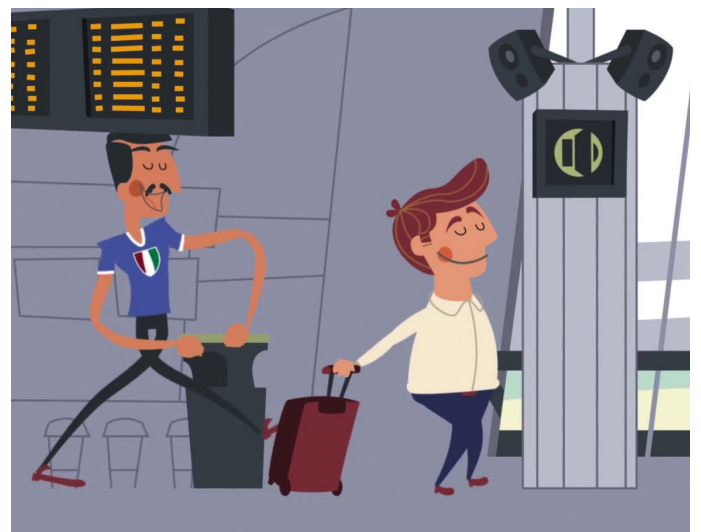
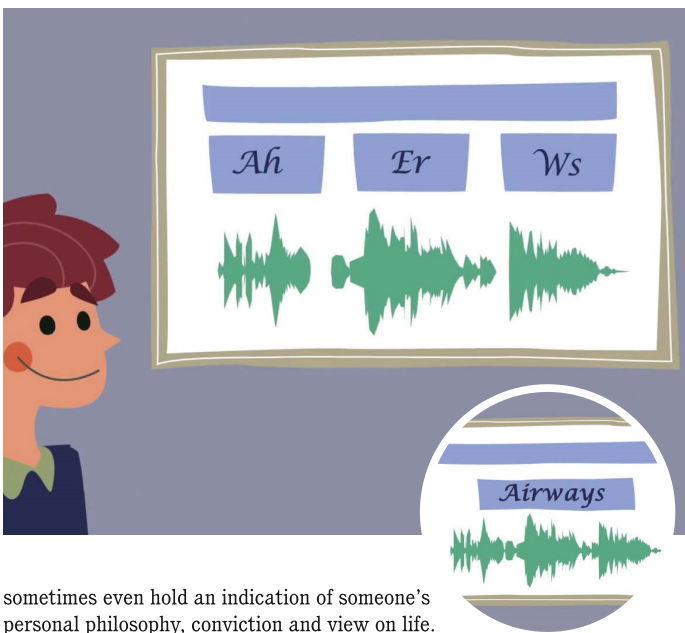
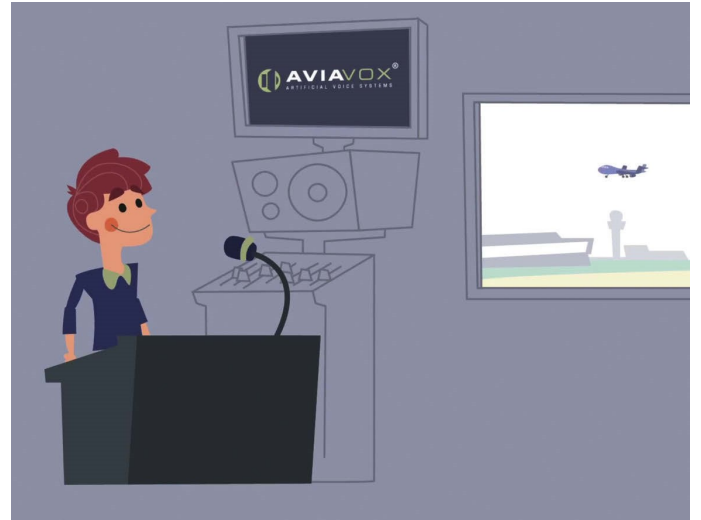
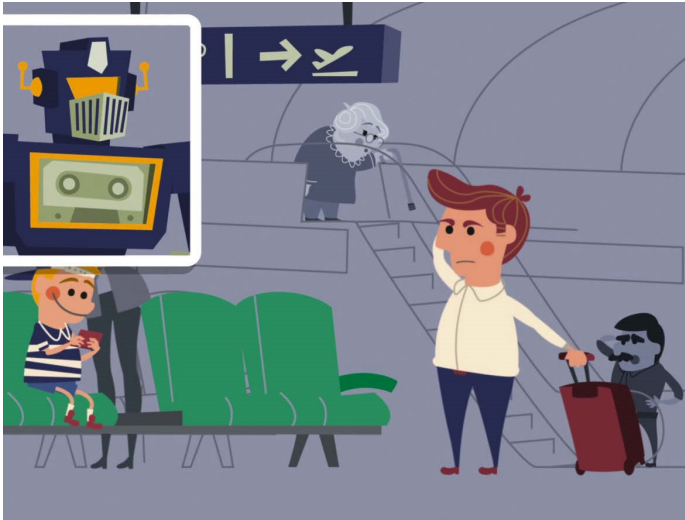


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Flemish is used instead. Likewise, the German language must be adapted before it can be used in Austria or Switzerland, for example. English, while it might be the international language, also varies between British, Australian, American and other varieties.

Other so-called world languages basically show the same issues. Spanish – for which there is not even conformity in its country of origin – is spoken in many countries around the world, but can differ considerably in pronunciation and even the meaning of words.

Portuguese as it is spoken in the motherland also differs considerably from that spoken on in Brazil. And with Arabic the situation is even more complex. Not only are there many dialects, in which the meaning of words can differ dramatically, but the choice of language can



sometimes even hold an indication of someone's personal philosophy, conviction and view on life.

Local sensitivities

Although AviaVox understands the sensitivities between languages and dialects, and always aims to satisfy all passengers, it goes without saying that it can be difficult to cater to everyone's needs and the intricacies of their particular choice of language. However, in some cases a 'parallel' language can be used that at least comes close.

So far, AviaVox has developed Brazilian Portuguese (next to European Portuguese), Egyptian Arabic (next to Modern Standard Arabic), Belgian Dutch (called Flemish) and American English (next to the standard British English). The development of Australian and

ALL IMAGES: AviaVox has developed a phoneme technology with which a remarkably high level of natural speech in many languages can be generated to help passengers easily proceed from check-in through to boarding

South-African English is under consideration, and at Cardiff Airport in the UK travelers can even enjoy AviaVox announcements in Welsh.

The main difference between these languages and what AviaVox calls 'standard' languages is that the majority can only be used at the departure airport. It would seem strange to make announcements in American English for a flight from London to New York, but it would be just as unnatural to hear British English in a US airport terminal.

AviaVox is the only supplier of intelligent announcement systems with such a deep understanding of all the socio-cultural and regional sensibilities that can surround a choice of language, and with the willingness to meet customers' wishes as much as possible while taking these sensibilities into account. ■