News release

Creating the world’s first bespoke Arabic symbol dictionary

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Researchers from the University of Southampton are part of an international collaboration that will develop the world’s first culturally specific Arabic symbol dictionary.

The Qatar National Research Fund has awarded a $891,000 grant to [Dr Mike Wald](http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/people/mw) and his Access Technologies Team in the Web and Internet Science Research Group at the University of Southampton; the Rumailah Hospital, in Qatar; and Mada – the Qatar Assistive Technology Centre, in Doha; to produce the dictionary.

The collaboration will be combining expertise to create the symbol dictionary that will take into account the diverse nature of the language and how it is used in difference social situations.

Language dictionaries supported by symbols and pictures are widely available in American and British English with many thousands of images representing vocabulary, but currently there is no freely available culturally specific Arabic symbol dictionary.

Dr Mike Wald, the project’s Principal Investigator, said: “We are delighted to be part of this international team that will be pulling together resources from across the globe to develop a new Arabic symbol dictionary.

“The ability to communicate is very important and requires skills that are not always available to everyone due to disability, lack of literacy and lack of language skills when travelling. A person visiting an Arabic-speaking nation without access to the language or knowledge of the alphabet may find it hard to communicate without help.

“We hope that our research will use crowdsourcing to identify appropriate imagery to build a symbol dictionary of frequently-used words based on Modern Standard Arabic,” added Mike.

Maha Al Mansouri, Deputy CEO of Mada, said: “Access to technology for Arabic speaking people with disabilities is largely hindered by the lack of availability of tools and resources in the Arabic language. That is why we have made it an absolute priority to work with our partners to create the necessary tools to empower people with different disabilities throughout Arabic speaking communities all around world.

“Having the opportunity to work with researchers at the University of Southampton on a project that is funded by the Qatar National Research Fund is exactly the kind of partnership we envision going forward, and is reflective of the high standards that we strive to maintain throughout all of our research and development work.”