

MATCH-eN. Can a mobile app facilitate the explanation of abstract concepts in multilingual healthcare consultations?

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In this paper we report on a simulation-based experiment which was set up to test a custom-made multilingual app in preventive healthcare for young children. The app facilitates face-to-face communication between caretakers and mothers with limited proficiency in a host country's language. It is designed in 5 foreign languages: English, French, Turkish, Spanish and Berber language. It has (very much like translation apps in the app-store) a 'dictionary' tool, and (quite unlike commercialized apps) a 'storyboard' where clients and service providers can drag and drop drawings to compose their own personalized story. All written text is doubled with audio so that even clients with low literacy skills can access the information. In case of extreme communication difficulties, the app offers the possibility to connect with telephone or webcam remote interpreting.

For this paper, we cross-compared two different contact modes: (i) a technology-free face-to-face consultation with (ii) a technology-facilitated face-to-face consultation. We conducted a two-group between-subjects experiment, in which respondents (N=12) were randomly assigned to either a consultation with app (N=7), or a consultation without app (N=5).

We formulated two hypotheses:

H1: It will take service providers longer to explain abstract notions in technology-free consultations.

H2: Service providers will use more hand gestures to explain abstract notions in technology-free consultations.

The findings address lengthened visit time, a reduced usage of hand gestures, and additional training needs. The paper closes with brief guidelines for unlocking the potential of technology-mediated translation in multilingual healthcare. We frame the results in the broader context of a 2-year project "MATCH-eN. Multilingual Healthcare for Newcomers" which was recently granted funding by the Flemish Agency for Innovation and Enterprise (Belgium).