

A tool enhances social inclusion for people with autism

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The University of Alicante has developed, together with centres in the UK, Spain and Bulgaria, a tool designed to assist people with autism spectrum disorders by adapting written documents into a format that is easier for them to read and understand. This is the main result of the three-year project FIRST (A Flexible Interactive Reading Support Tool), funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework

Programme.

"Through language technology and a simple interface we have achieved an enriched version of text which allows a better understanding without assistance. The software called Open Book provides synonyms, images, metaphors and definitions of complex verbs", explains Paloma Moreda, computer programmer at the University of Alicante. "It provides additional information to understand the main ideas of a document and therefore increases independence and [social inclusion](#) of the users as they gain better access to education, employment, health care and social activities," she adds.

An important feature of the software is that it is personalisable and adapts to the abilities of each person. In other words, the user can choose to just see definitions or images, interpretation of metaphors or analyses of a feeling, for example. Furthermore, it is applicable to a broad range of documents from school textbooks, children's stories and literature.

Although in principle the [tool](#) has been designed for people with [autism spectrum disorders](#) who generally have difficulties in areas such as communication, social interaction and understanding of information, the benefits of the tool can be extended to many more groups. In this regard the researcher points out that "Open Book can also be helpful for people with low literacy or learning difficulties, as well as people who are learning a foreign language and the elderly who have problems grasping new words."

Provided by Asociacion RUVID

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