MULTI-LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION METHOD AND SYSTEM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a multi-language communication method and system for communicating with and making announcements to a group of people, of particular but by no means exclusive application in communicating with aircraft passengers.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

With increased international travel, many carriers, particularly airlines, have placed great emphasis on the language expertise of their attendants. Airlines are particularly sensitive to differing passenger profiles, which vary according to route and season, and attempt in many cases to concentrate cabin attendants with particular language skills on flights to and from the corresponding destination. For example, an airline based in an English speaking country but flying into or out of Italy might endeavour to ensure that all cabin attendants speak Italian.

Further, announcements broadcast over the public address system within an aircraft are commonly repeated in multiple languages. For a carrier based in an English speaking country, these might be English, the language of the place of origin of the flight and the language of the destination of the flight. Some countries, on the other hand, have more than one national language, and all such announcements will generally be repeated in each of these.

However, most airlines have insufficient crew or attendants with foreign language expertise to handle both the numbers of passengers with foreign language demands and the diversity of those foreign languages. In some cases this difficulty is exacerbated by hiring criteria which limit the pool of adequately qualified crew and attendants, as language ability is only one recruitment criterion amongst many.

In addition, many passengers (particularly if elderly or infrequent travellers) are hesitant to seek assistance, whether by pressing a "call button" and attracting the attention of fellow passengers or otherwise, even if adequate language support is available. They may be embarrassed by what they see as calling attention to themselves, or as demanding more than they are entitled to.

Further, playing announcements in multiple languages over the public address system annoys some passengers, who must wait until all the languages versions are complete before they can return to reading, working or partaking of in-flight entertainment. In addition, foreign-language speaking passengers may feel that they are accorded a lower priority, being informed in their native language only after the principal language version (such as the English version) and possibly other foreign-language versions have been completed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a multi-language communication method, comprising:

providing to each of a plurality of persons access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of the persons an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by the respective person from the language options;

storing the language choices in a database; and

making the language choices accessible by at least one application so that the application can when operated selectively provide output to each respective person in the respective language choice;

wherein the application is an announcement system for making an announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public announcement system in a principal language, the method includes making the announcement available to each person who has indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a respective personal announcement system in the respective language choice, and a respective person who has chosen a language can access the personal announcement in their respective language choice by means of their respective personal announcement system.

Preferably those of the persons who do not choose a language are assigned a language choice being a principal language.

The principal language is simply a default language, and will usually be a national language of the carrier on which the passengers are travelling.

In one embodiment, the method includes presenting the announcement by means of the public announcement system in at least each language choice.

Thus, the public announcement system could be a public address system with audio output, an electronic display, a combination of both, or any suitable alternative. The announcement can be made once per chosen language, even if more than one person has chosen a particular language. This avoids redundant repetition of the announcement.

For example, if there are 25 passengers and 10 choose Chinese, 8 choose English and 7 choose Japanese, an in-flight safety announcement or video presentation would be played once in Chinese, once in English and once in Japanese, that is, just enough languages to accommodate all passengers. The principal language would generally be included, even of not actually chosen by one or more passengers.

The present invention provides a multi-language communication method for making an announcement to a plurality of persons, comprising:

providing to each of the persons access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of the persons an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by the respective person from the

language options;

making said announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public address system in a principal language; and

making said announcement available to each person who has indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a respective personal address system in said respective language choice;

whereby a respective person who has chosen a language can access said personal announcement in their respective language choice by means of their respective personal address system.

In one embodiment, the plurality of persons are passengers, such as in an aircraft.

Thus, the principal language could be an official language of the country of origin of the majority of the persons or, in the case of an group of aircraft passengers, the country of origin of the airline. In some cases, there may be a plurality of principal languages (such as where the country of origin has more than one official language), in which case the public announcement can comprise the announcement repeated in more than one language.

Preferably the method includes making said respective language choices accessible by an attendant so that said attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective person.

Preferably the personal announcement comprises a prerecorded audio translation of the announcement in

the respective language choice of a respective person, played over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

More preferably the personal announcement comprises a prerecorded audio translation of the announcement in the language choice of a respective person, accessible by means of a headphone or ear-piece output allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can access said personal announcement by means of a headset connected to said output.

Alternatively, the announcement is an audio announcement and the method includes translating said announcement by real-time computer translation into the respective language choice of a respective person to form the personal announcement, and playing said personal announcement over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

In one embodiment the personal announcement comprises a prerecorded text translation of the announcement in the language choice of a respective person, accessible by means of a display allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can read said personal announcement on said display.

Alternatively, the announcement is a text announcement and the method includes translating said announcement by real-time computer translation into the respective language choice of a respective person to form the personal announcement, and making said personal announcement accessible by means of a display

allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can read said personal announcement on said display.

Thus, as the principal announcement is being made over a public address system (such as a set of loudspeaker in an aircraft cabin), those who have selected a language can listen to the same announcement (preferably simultaneously) in their language choice through their headset, or read the personal announcement on the display, or both. Translations can be performed in advance (particularly for standard announcements), or by means of real-time translation software (particularly for non-standard announcements).

Preferably the method also includes making said announcement available to each of said persons who has not indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a personal address system in said principal language.

Thus, those who do not select a language can still listen to the announcement by means of, for example, a headset but in the principal language.

Preferably said language options are provided to each of said persons by means of a console having a display (such as a screen) and a data entry device (such as a keypad and/or touch-sensitive portions of a display), configured to allow each respective person to select said language option.

Preferably the console also provides access to a plurality of predefined service request options, so that each of said persons can request the corresponding service by means of said console.

Preferably said one or more persons who have indicated a language choice are presented with said service request options in the respective language choice, and each of said persons who has not indicated a language choice are presented with said service request options in said principal language.

Thus, a person (such as a passenger) may wish to request one of any number of possible services: for example, that an attendant attend them, that a (particular) drink or item of food be provided to them, that they are unwell, that they require a blanket, that a companion is unwell, or that do not wish to be disturbed.

Preferably the method also includes providing one or more personal messages to a respective one of said persons by means of said console, said messages being displayed in said language choice where said respective person has indicated such a language choice and in said principal language where said respective person has not indicated such a language choice.

In one embodiment, the method includes receiving from a respective one of said persons an indication of a temporary choice of language chosen by said person from said language options and applicable to a secondary location, and making said personal

announcement over a personal address system in said secondary location in said temporary language choice.

Thus, the secondary location could be a rest-room in, for example, an aircraft. The person can indicate a language choice applicable to the rest-room, so that announcements made while that person is in the rest-room will be provided to that person in their language choice. The choice of language could be made in the rest-room, or previously (such as from that person's seat). Indeed, the temporary choice can be made in (or when approaching or just outside) the rest-room by the person's providing identification information (such as a seat number), wherein the method includes setting the temporary language choice to be that person's language choice.

Preferably the method includes setting the temporary language to be the principal language if said person does not indicate a temporary choice of language.

The method may also include providing the secondary location with reset means (such a button or switch coupled to an announcement control system) so that the temporary language can be reset to the principal language.

The present invention also provides a multi-language communication system for making an announcement to a plurality of persons, comprising:

a database for storing a respective language choice of each of said persons;

a public address system for making said

announcement in the form of a public announcement in a principal language; and

a plurality of personal address systems, each for making said announcement available to a respective person in the form of a personal announcement in the respective language choice of that respective person; and

a control system operable to select each of said personal announcements on the basis of said public announcement and said language choices, and to direct each respective personal announcement to the corresponding personal address system of each respective person;

wherein said language choice of a respective person comprises the principal language if the person has not indicated a language choice, whereby each of the persons can access the personal announcement in their respective language choice.

Preferably the system includes a real-time translation module (such as a server provided with real-time translation software), for providing any one or more of: text to text, text to voice, voice to voice, and voice to text real-time translation, so that the system can provide real-time translations of the announcement.

Thus, content (for example, the personal announcements) can be prepared from the announcement in real time if desired. This module can also be used to translate other content, including messages from one or more of the plurality of persons.

Preferably said respective language choices are accessible by an attendant so that said attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective person.

In one embodiment, the system includes a plurality of input devices, each allocated to a respective one of said persons, operable to input said respective language choice and to convey said choice to said database.

Thus, the language choice can be made on an aircraft from a passenger's seat.

Preferably the system is operable centrally to be input with a language choice of each of one or more of said persons, so that a system administrator can enter said languages choices.

Thus, a passenger, for example, could indicate a language choice when buying a ticket or obtaining a seat allocation, and this choice could be stored on behalf of the person (though the choice would preferably be overrideable by the passenger once in the aircraft). The default language choice would, as above, be the principal language.

Preferably the system includes a prerecorded audio translation of the announcement in each available language choice, and is configured to play the appropriate audio translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

More preferably the system includes a prerecorded audio translation of the announcement in each available language choice, and is configured to direct said personal announcement to headphone or ear-piece output allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can access said personal announcement by means of a headset connected to said output.

Alternatively, the system includes a real-time translation module operable to prepare an audio translation of said announcement in each chosen language, said system being configured to play the appropriate audio translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

Preferably the system includes a prerecorded text translation of the announcement in each available language choice, and is configured to display the appropriate text translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person on a display allocated to said respective person.

Alternatively, the system includes a real-time translation module operable to prepare a text translation of said announcement in each chosen language, said system being configured to display the appropriate text translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person on a display allocated to said respective person.

In one embodiment, the system includes both audio and text translations of the announcement, and is operable to play a respective audio translation and display a respective text translation to a respective person.

Preferably the system includes for each person a console for providing the language options the respective person, the console having a display (such as a screen) and a data entry device (such as a keypad and/or touch-sensitive portions of a display), wherein the console is configured to allow each respective person to select the language option.

Preferably the console also provides access to a plurality of predefined service request options, so that each person can request the corresponding service by means of the console.

The present invention still further provides a multi-language communication method for communicating with a plurality of passengers, comprising:

providing to each of the passengers access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of the passengers an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by the respective passenger from the language options;

providing to each of the passengers who has chosen a language access to content in his or her respective language choice;

making an announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public announcement system in a principal language; and

making the announcement available to each of the passengers in the form of a respective personal announcement by means of a personal address system;

wherein the respective personal announcement is in the respective language choice of each passenger or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language.

Preferably the method includes providing to each of the passengers who has not chosen a language access to content in a principal language.

The content may be promotional material, educational material, entertainment, safety announcements, subtitles for movies, closed captioning, or otherwise, and could be provided by means of, for example, a visual display, an audio output device (such as a headset), or both. Thus, a carrier (such as an airline) can provide passengers with information or other content in each passenger's language of choice.

Preferably the method includes making the respective language choices accessible by a passenger attendant so that the attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective passenger.

The announcement can be a text announcement displayed for each respective passenger on a display assigned to that respective passenger.

The announcement can be an audio or audio announcement directed for each respective passenger to an audio output assigned to that respective passenger, whereby

each passenger can listen to the announcement, such as by means of a headset. More preferably the method includes making the announcement in the form of a public announcement in the principal language over a public address system.

The present invention still further provides a multi-language communication system for communicating with a plurality of passengers, comprising:

a database for storing a respective language choice of each of the passengers;

a control system operable to retrieve the language choices from the database and operable to provide each of the passengers with access to content in his or her respective language choice or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language;

a plurality of output devices, each assigned to a respective passenger for providing the content to the respective passenger in his or her respective language choice or, if no language was chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language; and

a public address system for making an announcement in the form of a public announcement to the passengers in a principal language;

wherein the system is configured to make the announcement available to each respective passenger in the form of a respective personal announcement by means of the output device assigned to the respective passenger, the respective personal announcement being in the respective language choice of each passenger or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language.

Preferably the output device is a display, an audio output device (such as a headset), or both.

The system preferably includes a plurality of consoles, each assigned to a respective passenger and operable by the passenger to make their respective language choice from a plurality of language options, and to communicate the respective language choice to the database.

Preferably the system includes a plurality of personal address systems, each assigned to a respective passenger for providing at least one announcement to each of the passengers, wherein the announcement is in the respective language choice of each passenger or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in the principal language.

The announcement can comprise visual material (such as text or text mixed with graphical elements) displayable for each respective passenger on a display assigned to that respective passenger.

The announcement can be an audio announcement comprise audio output devices, such as headsets.

Preferably the system is operable to receive the language choices from an operator who has received the respective language choices from one or more of the passengers.

Thus, language choices could be provided at check-in and loaded into the database for later access by the

control system or attendants.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order that the present invention may be more clearly ascertained, a preferred embodiment will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of an in-flight multi-language announcement system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a view of the personal display of the system of figure 1, displaying a language option menu;

Figure 3 is a view of the personal display of the system of figure 1, displaying a menu of items that can be ordered from a cabin attendant; and

Figure 4 is a view of the personal display of the system of figure 1, displaying a free-text field for sending a message to a cabin attendant.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

An in-flight multi-language announcement system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention is shown schematically at 10 in figure 1. The system 10 includes a headend server 12, a cabin management terminal 14 for operating and accessing server 12, a plurality of galley terminals 16 (principally for receiving food and drink requests), and a public address system 18 to allow cabin crew to make announcements throughout the aircraft cabin to the passengers (whether "live" or translated in real-time by translation software on server 12 into one or more chosen languages) and to broadcast prerecorded

announcements to the passengers.

It should be noted that galley terminals 16, although principally intended to provide communication with galley personnel as necessary for performing their tasks, are provided with full cabin management terminal functionality. This functionality can be used if required, such as if cabin management terminal 14 is malfunctioning or, for some reason, inaccessible. In addition, each galley terminal 16 can optionally be provided with any other desired application software.

System 10 also includes a plurality of personal seat monitors 20, one assigned to each passenger, each comprising a display 22 and a control console 24. Each display 22 can be operated by a means of its corresponding console 24. Each display 22 is optionally a "touch-screen" display and, if so, many of its functions can additionally be operated by touching the appropriate portion of the display.

Furthermore, system 10 includes a plurality of personal audio outputs 26 (typically an audio jack), one for each passenger, so that each passenger can connect a headset to the audio output in order to listen to music, movie soundtracks or other audio content.

Referring to figure 2, when a passenger first activates his or her monitor 20, the passenger is presented on his or her display 22 with a list of available language options. These options or in

written form in the appropriate language and script in each case.

The passenger selects the preferred language option either by means of his or her console 24 (or, if a touch-screen display is provided, by touching the relevant portion of display 22), and this language choice is then communicated to and stored in a database in server 12. This database records the language choice against the seat allocation from which the language choice was received. Those passengers who do not chose a language are assigned as a default the principal language of the flight, commonly English but dependent on the country in which the airline is based. However, such passengers (and, indeed, passengers who have chosen a language) can return to the list of language options shown in figure 2 at any time, and either choose a language as described above or update an earlier choice of language by essentially the same method.

Thereafter, announcements and other language-dependent material accessible by means of monitor 20 and displayable on display 22 are customized to the respective language choice of each passenger. This also includes instructions and the like displayed on each display 22 and transmitted to each audio output 26 concerning the use of the monitors 20 and the other facilities on the aircraft.

Thus, in-flight content, such as entertainment, information or promotional material, commonly includes audio or text components. These text components can

be, for example, information about the aircraft, services available on the aircraft or offered by the airline, safety, travel destinations or meal menus. These text components are displayed in each case on display 22 in the language choice of the respective passenger. This is accomplished by providing server 12 with multiple versions of each piece of content, each in one of the language options available to the passengers, including the principal language.

Alternatively, however, server 12 can be provided with a single master version of each piece of content (typically in the principal language); the master version of a requested piece of content is then translated in real-time by the aforementioned translation software on server 12 into the chosen language of each respective passenger to whom the content is to be delivered.

Other material or content may not normally have a text component but might have an optional text component. Such material includes movies, television programs, instructions items and other audiovisual entertainment, in which sub-titles may optionally be requested. If a passenger has selected, for example, Chinese and a particular movie - though otherwise available - is unavailable in a Chinese version, then an available version (such as English) will be displayed when requested by the passenger, but with Chinese sub-titles. Alternatively, if a Chinese version is available, the selection of a particular movie by a passenger who has previously indicated Chinese as their language of choice will automatically

prompt the Chinese version to be played.

These multiple versions of lengthier content may be stored in any suitable form. In this embodiment they are stored in digitized form on server 12, or alternatively on magnetic or optical media playable on a suitable reader (such as a VCR, a DVD player, a PC with CD or DVD drive or a CD or DVD drive in server 12) that is controllable by server 12, and whose outputs are selectively couplable to each monitor 20.

Public announcements (i.e. those broadcast over the public address system 18, which can include a large, shared screen for displaying visual content), which include important safety announcements and information concerning imminent arrival at the destination, are broadcast in the principal language over the public address system 18 and in the respective language choice of each passenger over the respective audio output 26 of each passenger. Visual versions of such announcements (comprising text and/or graphical material) may additionally be displayed on each passenger's corresponding visual display 22, with any text component in each respective passenger's chosen language. Consequently, each passenger can listen to such content by means of a headset plugged into his or her audio output 26 (and optionally view the visual version). For example, a safety announcement might be in English when broadcast over the public address system 18, but be heard simultaneously in Japanese through a headset plugged into the audio output 26 of a particular passenger that has chosen Japanese. The text of the announcement can optionally be displayed

in Japanese on that particular passenger's display 22.

It may optionally be desired, despite the above facility, to ensure that the most important announcements are available to all passengers by means of the public address system 18. Some passengers, for example, may not be wearing their headset early in a flight. If so, such important announcements can be repeated just enough times so that a version in every language actually chosen by any passenger is played. Alternatively, multiple language versions of the same announcement can be displayed simultaneously on a suitable screen or screens visible to all. In either case, the required number of versions will almost always be many fewer than the number of passengers. The principal language version will generally either have been chosen by at least one passenger or assigned to at least one passenger (through their not choosing a language), so a version of the announcement in the principal language will also be played. However, it will generally be desirable to play the principal language version even if no one chooses or is assigned the principal language.

It should also be noted that this can also be done in the airport, such as at the gate where passengers are waiting to board. If the language choices have been made earlier (such as at check-in), as will be discussed below, announcement made to the gate area can be repeated in all requisite languages.

Each passenger may also communicate with a cabin attendant by means of a further screen displayable on

that passenger's respective display 22. Referring to figure 3, a passenger can use his or her respective console 24 to display on display 22 as screen 30 a list of items and services that can be requested from a cabin attendant. This screen 30, though illustrated with English text in figure 3, is in the chosen language of the respective passenger. Thus, using either console 24 or by touching the relevant portion of the display 22, the passenger can request items such as a newspaper, a pair of slippers, a drink, a snack, etc. In addition, screen 30 includes a "Call Attendant" field 32 which, when touched by the passenger or selected by means of the passenger's console 24, operates in the same manner as the passenger's call button to summon an attendant.

Referring to figure 4, in much the same way, a passenger can display screen 34 on his or her display 22. The instructions in screen 34 are in again the chosen language of the passenger (though, by way of example, in English as shown in figure 4). Screen 34 includes a free-text field 36, in which the passenger can enter text by means of that passenger's console 24, in the passenger's chosen language. This may, in some embodiments, be limited by the number of characters that can be produced by means of the keys of console 24. Optionally, console 24 can be provided with a microphone so that the passenger can dictate text to be entered into free-text field 36, whereby the words spoken by the passenger are converted into text by means of speech recognition software resident on server 12.

Once the required text has been entered into free-text field 36, the passenger activates (by touching or using console 24) the SEND button 38 to transmit the message in free-text field 36. Screen 34 also includes a "Call Attendant" field 40.

With both screen 30 and screen 34 of figure 3 and 4 respectively, when a passenger submits a request for an item or service, sends some free-text or summons an attendant, the passenger's monitor 20 transmits the relevant request to the most appropriate destination. Thus, if a passenger requests a snack by means of screen 30, that request is sent to a galley terminal 16 in the galley responsible for that passenger. Although the passenger views screen 30 in their chosen language, the request appears on the gallery terminal 16 in the principal language so that it can readily be interpreted by the relevant member of the cabin crew.

On the other hand, free-text entered in field 36 is sent to and displayed on cabin management terminal 14, having first been translated by means of the aforementioned translation software on server 12 into the principal language. For example, a French speaker might can send a free text request reading "please wake me an hour from our destination" in French, but this request will be displayed on cabin management terminal 14 in the principal language, such as English. The cabin attendants need not necessarily, therefore, speak the passenger's language (in this example, French).

Similarly, a cabin attendant can operate cabin

management terminal 14 or a galley terminal 16 to send free-text messages and certain pre-programmed messages (both audio and in text form) to one of more selected passenger monitors 20 and/or audio outputs 26. If in the form of free-text, the message is translated by means of translation software on server 12 into the chosen language of each respective passenger before being displayed on their displays 22. If selected from a menu of prerecorded text or audio messages, the appropriate language version is transmitted to the respective display 22 and/or audio output 26. Importantly, therefore, the cabin attendant does not have to consider the language spoken by each passenger, as this is handled automatically by server 12 when forwarding the appropriate message or announcement.

Although, as discussed above, each passenger is responsible choosing and entering their preferred language, this information can be input by cabin attendants through cabin management terminal 14. This might be desired if, for example, a cabin attendant becomes aware that a particular passenger has been unable to operate his or her monitor 20 or has forgotten to do so. Indeed, this task can also be performed by ground crew through the booking, check-in or seat allocation systems. For example, a passenger could be asked, when booking a ticket, what the preferred language would be for announcements and the like in-flight, and the response can be entered into a central database. The relevant information is then copied to the corresponding database on server 12 of a particular flight. Thereafter each passenger can

modify that selection but in many cases would have no need to do so. A passenger would then automatically be played safety announcements, etc., before and after take-off in their chosen language without having to operate their monitor 20. Information concerning the preferred language can also be tagged according to the passenger's "frequent flyer" membership number or airline club membership number so that their language choice is preserved for future flights and automatically loaded into each subsequent aircraft's server 12.

Modifications within the scope of the invention may be readily effected by those skilled in the art. It is to be understood, therefore, that this invention is not limited to the particular embodiments described by way of example hereinabove.

MULTI-LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION METHOD AND SYSTEM

CLAIMS

1. A multi-language communication method, comprising:

providing to each of a plurality of persons access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of said persons an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by said respective person from said language options;

storing said language choices in a database; and

making said language choices accessible by at least one application so that said application can when operated selectively provide output to each respective person in the respective language choice;

wherein said application is an announcement system for making an announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public announcement system in a principal language, said method includes making said announcement available to each person who has indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a respective personal announcement system in said respective language choice, and a respective person who has chosen a language can access said personal announcement in their respective language choice by means of their respective personal announcement system.

2. A method as claimed in either claim 1 or 2, wherein those of said persons who do not choose a language are assigned a language choice being a

principal language.

3. A method as claimed in either claim 1 or 2, including presenting said announcement by means of said public announcement system in at least each language choice.

4. A multi-language communication method for making an announcement to a plurality of persons, comprising:

providing to each of said persons access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of said persons an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by said respective person from said language options;

making said announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public address system in a principal language; and

making said announcement available to each person who has indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a respective personal address system in said respective language choice;

whereby a respective person who has chosen a language can access said personal announcement in their respective language choice by means of their respective personal address system.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4, including making said respective language choices accessible by an attendant so that said attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective person.

6. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said

personal announcement comprises a prerecorded audio translation of said announcement in the respective language choice of a respective person, played over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6, wherein said personal announcement comprises a prerecorded audio translation of said announcement in the language choice of a respective person, accessible by means of a headphone or ear-piece output allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can access said personal announcement by means of a headset connected to said output.

8. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said announcement is an audio announcement and said method includes translating said announcement by real-time computer translation into the respective language choice of a respective person to form said personal announcement, and playing said personal announcement over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

9. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said personal announcement comprises a prerecorded text translation of said announcement in the language choice of a respective person, accessible by means of a display allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can read said personal announcement on said display.

10. A method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said

announcement is a text announcement and said method includes translating said announcement by real-time computer translation into the respective language choice of a respective person to form said personal announcement, and making said personal announcement accessible by means of a display allocated to said respective person, whereby said respective person can read said personal announcement on said display.

11. A method as claimed in claim 4, including making said announcement available to each of said persons who has not indicated a language choice in the form of a personal announcement over a personal address system in said principal language.

12. A multi-language communication system for making an announcement to a plurality of persons, comprising:

a database for storing a respective language choice of each of said persons;

a public address system for making said announcement in the form of a public announcement in a principal language; and

a plurality of personal address systems, each for making said announcement available to a respective person in the form of a personal announcement in the respective language choice of that respective person; and

a control system operable to select each of said personal announcements on the basis of said public announcement and said language choices, and to direct each respective personal announcement to the corresponding personal address system of each respective person;

wherein said language choice of a respective person comprises the principal language if said person has not indicated a language choice, whereby each of said persons can access said personal announcement in their respective language choice.

13. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a real-time translation module for providing any one or more of: text to text, text to voice, voice to voice, and voice to text real-time translation, so that said system can provide real-time translations of said announcement.

14. A system as claimed in claim 13, wherein said module comprises a server provided with real-time translation software.

15. A system as claimed in claim 12, wherein said respective language choices are accessible by an attendant so that said attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective person.

16. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a prerecorded audio translation of the announcement in each available language choice, and is configured to play the appropriate audio translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

17. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a real-time translation module operable to prepare an audio translation of said announcement in each chosen

language, said system being configured to play the appropriate audio translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person over one or more personal loudspeakers located proximate said respective person.

18. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a real-time translation module operable to prepare a text translation of said announcement in each chosen language, said system being configured to display the appropriate text translation corresponding to the respective language choice of a respective person on a display allocated to said respective person.

19. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a console having a display and a data entry device for each of said persons for providing said language options to each of said persons and to allow each respective person to select said language option.

20. A system as claimed in claim 12, including a console having a display and a data entry device for each of said persons, each of said consoles providing access to a plurality of predefined service request options, so that each of said persons can request the corresponding service by means of said console.

21. A multi-language communication method for communicating with a plurality of passengers, comprising:

providing to each of said passengers access to a plurality of language options;

receiving from each of one or more of said

passengers an indication of a respective choice of language chosen by said respective passenger from said language options;

providing to each of said passengers who has chosen a language access to content in his or her respective language choice;

making an announcement in the form of a public announcement over a public announcement system in a principal language; and

making said announcement available to each of said passengers in the form of a respective personal announcement by means of a personal address system;

wherein said respective personal announcement is in the respective language choice of each passenger or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language.

22. A method as claimed in claim 21, including providing to each of said passengers who has not chosen a language access to content in a principal language.

23. A method as claimed in claim 21, wherein said content comprises any one or more selected from the set comprising: promotional material, educational material, entertainment, safety announcements, subtitles for movies and closed captioning.

24. A multi-language communication system for communicating with a plurality of passengers, comprising:

a database for storing a respective language choice of each of said passengers;

a control system operable to retrieve said language choices from said database and operable to provide each of said passengers with access to content in his or her respective language choice or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language;

a plurality of output devices, each assigned to a respective passenger for providing said content to said respective passenger in his or her respective language choice or, if no language was chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language; and

a public address system for making an announcement in the form of a public announcement to said passengers in a principal language;

wherein said system is configured to make said announcement available to each respective passenger in the form of a respective personal announcement by means of the output device assigned to the respective passenger, the respective personal announcement being in the respective language choice of each passenger or, if no language has been chosen by a respective passenger, in a principal language.

25. A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said respective language choices are accessible by a passenger attendant so that said attendant can anticipate the language needs of a respective passenger.

26. A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said output device is a display, an audio output device, or both a display and an audio output device.

27. A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said announcement comprises visual material displayable for each respective passenger on a display assigned to that respective passenger.

28. A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said announcement comprises an audio announcement and said output devices comprise audio output devices.

29. A system as claimed in claim 24, wherein said system is operable to receive said language choices from an operator who has received the respective language choices from one or more of the passengers.