

EBU in Action Episode 11: Merci Louis: 200 years of braille.

Intro

[Music]

(Neven): Welcome back to another episode of “EBU in Action”, the podcast of the European Blind Union, your voice of blind and partially sighted anywhere in Europe. My name is Neven Milivojevic, and as always, I'm joined by my fantastic co-host, Paweł Masarczyk. Hey Paweł, great to have you here.

(Paweł): Hello, hello Neven! Welcome to our dear listeners! Great to be back, isn't it Neven? How have you been doing?

(Neven): Oh, I'm doing well. I'm really looking forward to some summer holidays and some sun and some warmth, it's been kind of cold up here in Sweden.

(Paweł): Oh, I can imagine. Same here, same here, even though the climate is much warmer, but the weather has been playing with us the recent days. Sometimes cold, sometimes warm. This doesn't seem to be able to decide.

(Neven): No, well, it'll be good, I think, for us and all the listeners. And as always, it's a pleasure to be with you both, with you Paweł, but of course, to connect with all our wonderful listeners again. You know, I'm in a quite celebratory mode today, because we are actually marking a huge milestone for blind and partially sighted people around the world today; or actually, this year, isn't that right?

(Paweł): That's right, that's the bicentenary of the invention of the braille alphabet. And if you have been interested in the topics of blindness, this is definitely one of the first terms you have come across, the braille writing system invented in 1825 by a Frenchman, Louis Braille, who enabled us access to culture, education, work, and so many other fields, because, well, before it was very difficult or nearly impossible to read and write. So yeah, thank you, “merci, Louis”.

(Neven): “Très bien”. Yes, well, it's absolutely fantastic and, you know, people might be surprised by just how much it's possible to do with braille.

And, on that note, we will also today hear about what the EBU is doing right now to promote braille through its braille Working Group. And we have also got from this Group Reiner Delgado and Tkáčik Michal, from the Group, joining us to share their latest activities and commitments.

(Paweł): True, true. Very hardworking people, I've been following up on the livingbraille.eu initiative. We'll hear about it soon, I'm sure, but they're not our only guests. Actually, this podcast has always been about blind and partially sighted people in Europe, so we've always traveled around the continent, around our members to find out what's new.

But this time, we'll focus on one particular country, the country that has already been mentioned, the country of Louis Braille, France, and we'll hear from our French guests: Lachwana Caboche, a student at INJA, the school where Louis Braille actually graduated and completed his studies, and also from Fernando Pinto, the Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of Persons with Disabilities in France.

So, I'm really looking forward to what our guests have to say. What about you, Neven?

(Neven): Well, absolutely, me too. And I mean, I couldn't be more excited about this episode. We have so many amazing guests and stories to actually talk about and to listen to. It's all centered about a key theme, just how important braille is in our everyday lives. So Paweł, what do you think? Should we dive in?

(Paweł): Definitely.

Focus segment: Thank you Louis: 200 years of braille

[Music]

(Neven): Can you believe it's been 200 years, two centuries since Louis Braille, an absolute genius, created a code that's become a game changer for inclusion worldwide. As we mentioned earlier, braille has grown and adapted in so many ways, touching every part of life and making the world more accessible for all of us.

And to help us celebrate, our colleague in the EBU Paris office, Nacho Lopez, is back as our correspondent, bringing us conversations with some truly inspiring people. So, "Hola Nacho", how are you?

(Nacho): “Hola Neven”, I'm doing fine. I might join both Paweł and you in providing the latest weather update here in Paris. It's true that here we've had quite a lot of temperature swings over the last few weeks, but the heat is coming back and we're fast approaching the summer.

Just before the summer break, and as you said in your introduction, we are going to give our audience a focus episode on the 200 years of the invention of the braille code. As Paweł already said, braille has evolved in many different aspects from culture, technology, also arts.

It has so many applications today and I'm pretty sure, and I hope that in the future, the code will evolve into so many forms so it can even bring more inclusion for blind and partially sighted people across the world. As you already said, we had the privilege to talk to different guests for this episode.

Some of the people we spoke to were actually Reiner Delgado and Tkáčik Michal from EBU's braille Working Group. As part of our working structures, our braille Working Group is in charge of promoting the use and reading of braille across Europe, having and hosting webinars among our members and also carrying out different activities.

By the end of last year, they produced a paper on fast-reading braille that was disseminated earlier on this year, in 2025. It was actually a very nice chat, to talk with both of them to have a better insight of what EBU's braille Working Group is up to and is currently doing.

So without further to add, I would like to give the floor, metaphorically speaking, to our dear guests, Reiner and Michal.

Interview with Reiner Delgado and Tkáčik Michal, from EBU's braille Working Group

(Nacho): EBU's braille Working Group is composed of people coming from different backgrounds and National Members. Michal, what are the main challenges faced by our communities across Europe regarding the promotion of braille? And how can EBU's braille Working Group best contribute to tackling those?

(Michal): I think we are facing recently a lot of new challenges because, of course, braille is here for 200 years. We all know that. And we all know what it can mean, what it can do, what it can mean for us. The thing is

that we are trying to show and persuade people around the world that it's really important in the 21st century.

It really needs to be addressed in educational systems. We have a lot of information gathering in the livingbraille.eu website, and this is our main goal, to bring these resources together and bring people together around braille and stress its importance.

(Nacho): I would like to come back to the point of the teaching of the code. We're now in a moment where technology is increasingly present in our daily lives, this context has also an impact on braille users.

Months ago, our braille Working Group participated in the drafting of a document covering the factors involved in braille fluency. Reiner, how can technological innovation be best integrated in the educational curricula for visual impaired students?

(Reiner): I think the first thing is, if you talk about technology and braille, there are two devices, very important.

The first are braille displays and the other are braille embossers. The big problem is the financing of these. In some countries, you get braille displays and braille embossers paid by estatal bodies, but in other countries, blind persons have to pay those things by themselves and they are very expensive. So that's a problem.

But if you have such devices, like a braille display, you have a lot of opportunities in learning braille, in learning to write and to read and learning other things like foreign languages and so on.

And for example, in our project of teaching braille to adults who became blind, we have a learning software where the learning of braille with a teacher and paper is supported with additional exercises.

So this is one example where technique can help to get into braille. And for this, you need a braille display, of course, and a computer. And I think in education for children, for blind children, their technology is quite present already.

In most countries, the majority of blind children go to mainstream schools and they have a laptop and a braille display to take part in the lessons together with sighted children.

And this is very much easier to organise and to provide material for learning than in the time before, when there was no computer and braille displays. So technique and technology can give a lot of new opportunities in learning.

(Nacho): Recently, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities shared its review regarding the EU's compliance with disability rights. In spite of the progress made during the recent years, there is progress to be done in areas such as the use of braille in public spaces and the labelling of products. Michal, what needs to be done at a policymaking level to bring change in areas like these?

(Michal): Although we can speak about progress and we are happy about things getting more accessible, still, if we consider how much braille is there, in public space or products, I think we have to say that it's too few or almost none.

There are, of course, medicines, medicine packages, which is a perfect thing that was achieved in the European Union. When I speak with people from other countries, they really like this, that when they come to EU countries and they see our medicine, and see the braille there, they really appreciate it, and I think it's a huge achievement in the EU.

But is it enough? Shouldn't we try to pursue other producers, other manufacturers to add braille on their packaging? You know, there is a lot of movement about accessibility through QR codes, through applications which can read the text on the packaging and so on.

Of course, all those are very nice and important, and they have their own place, but still, I think Braille has it as well because it's very effective, much more effective than fiddling with cameras and whatever devices you have to just reach and read.

So it is important to speak about this thing and although it is not so far in any policy, at least, I'm aware of, I think the more we talk about the importance of braille on packaging, braille on public spaces, buildings, doors, public transport, it's really upon us to stress this and to tell people that it's really a way to show the information, which is normally readable for sighted people, also in braille.

(Nacho): As part of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the invention of the braille code, you launched a focus initiative through our [livingbraille.eu forum](http://livingbraille.eu). On a daily basis. Reiner, you publish an entry covering different uses of the code. What have you discovered through this activity? Are there any particular applications that you would like to share with our audience?

(Reiner): First, I have to say it's really amazing how big is the variety of contributions that we get. So it's a lot of different things like braille cookies, braille music, braille dance, braille games or poems about braille.

So it's really amazing what we get from people all over the world. And it shows how really living braille is still, so we don't have to fear about the future that braille will die someday, I guess. And there are two things which were quite impressive for me.

One report from a young woman who learned to write and to read with braille, a blind woman as child from her older sister. So before going to school, she played school with her older sister. And so, let's say, she was five and the sister was eight years old. And she learned from her older sister how to read and to write braille.

And when she came to school, she was able to read already and that's really impressive. We talk a lot about how to teach braille to blind children. And this example shows that it must be quite easy. You can learn even from other children to write and to read. And this was quite impressive for me.

And another thing is a poem, a poem from a lady from Spain who reflected a bit about how braille persuaded her identity and what she's reading. Her life is full of scripture and scripture is braille, so it's braille dots and braille becomes a part of her identity. And thinking about this, I thought: "Yes, that's true".

Braille, for blind people, has another meaning than normal print for sighted persons. Maybe it's because of...As a sighted person, you always have scripture in your environment. You see advertisements on newspapers or scripture on packages, on projects.

And for blind people, braille is always something special and I think there are a lot of blind people who say: "I love braille". And I never heard a sighted person saying: "I love my scripture". Braille is something really different for blind people than just a code of letters.

And that was quite impressive for me. So this campaign shows us really that braille has a big importance for blind people. And it cannot be said in some words how impressive it is.

(Nacho): Many thanks, Reiner and Michal, for sharing what's currently going on within our braille Working Group and many thanks to having contributed to this focus episode, aimed at commemorating the bicentenary of the invention of the braille code.

(Reiner): Thank you for your invitation and for your interest in listening. And greetings to all the audience.

(Michal): Thank you. Greetings from Slovakia.

End of interview with Reiner Delgado and Tkáčik Michal, from EBU's braille Working Group

(Neven): Yes, thank you, it's really great work you do in this Working Group within EBU. I don't know, Paweł, do you have any reflections? We have heard about both opportunities and challenges. What are your reflections on the braille work they do within EBU's Working Group?

(Paweł): I am happy that we are discussing so much this kind of union between technology and braille because, quite often, this argument was brought both in my education and in other conversations I have heard elsewhere, that it's either this or that, and there were people suggesting that because we have technology, we will lose our ability to read braille.

And what Reiner said that there are all these modern devices like braille displays, like notetakers, shows that it doesn't have to be so, and we just found a way to adapt this analog writing system into modern technology which I think is great. Now, the biggest problem, as Reiner said, we have to solve is how to get these devices into the hands of more blind people worldwide.

And I know what a struggle it is to obtain these devices in some of the places, even in Europe. So, I'm really rooting for either better funding

schemes to be offered or even better for these devices to become more affordable at some point in the future.

(Neven): Well said.

(Nacho): Yes, actually, it was very interesting to listen to both Reiner and Michal. You actually could see that our braille Working Group is very active in many fields and they are up to many things on the occasion of the bicentenary of the invention of the braille code.

Speaking of Louis Braille himself, I also had the privilege to visit INJA, the place where Louis Braille completed his studies. I have to tell you, it was an amazing facility. It was a very big building, a lot of sculptures of Louis Braille himself. And you could see the rooms full with blind and partially sighted people going through their studies and also doing their first or continuing with their steps towards inclusion.

There, we had the opportunity to talk to a very young braille user, Lachwana Caboche, a student from INJA who is 18 years old, who explained, gave us more information about her personal path with learning the code and also about her aspirations, her goals for the future.

So without further to add, I would like to share with our dear audience the testimonial of Lachwana Caboche, student from INJA.

Interview with Lachwana Caboche, student from INJA

(Nacho): It was between these walls that the legend of Louis Braille was forged. Not only he completed his studies here, but he changed our daily lives by inventing one of the most revolutionary tools for our communities. As a blind student, when you came into contact with his legacy, was there one element of his story that particularly touched you?

(Lachwana): So frankly, I find it incredible to be here at the INJA because this is where Louis Braille lived and studied. So it's a place steeped in history. And when I think of all that Louis Braille did, I tell myself that he really changed our lives, because braille isn't just a code. It is a tool of freedom that allows us to learn, to read, take notes, to be independent.

And what touches me the most is that he invented the system at a very young age, and he was blind too. So, he really knew the difficulties and he didn't just accept things as they were. He looked for solutions for

himself and for everyone else. So that's it. He's an example for me when I'm in doubt. I remember that he dared to invent something revolutionary in a context that wasn't easy at all, so I have a lot of admiration and respect for him.

(Nacho): I'd like to know more about your personal background. When did you start learning braille? What particular difficulties did you encounter, and how has INJA helped you to improve your braille skills as you've grown?

(Lachwana): So I started learning braille really young. I was about five, I think. I don't remember too much because I was really small, but it was during nursery school.

At first, it was very complicated because you had to learn to read with your fingers, to recognise the dots. At first, you were very slow. You make mistakes and it's a real learning process, just like when sighted people learn to read with their eyes, but with different reference points.

Sometimes you get discouraged, especially if you see that others are going faster or are learning better than you, but it's by making mistakes that you learn.

So I learned quite quickly in two years. I think I managed to learn the whole code when I arrived at the INJA, when I was 16. They taught me abbreviated braille, which helps me to read faster and write faster.

(Nacho): Since its creation, it has evolved in such a way that it has found different applications in various fields, such as the arts, culture, and technology. How do you see the code evolving? Is there an area in which you would like to specialise?

(Lachwana): Braille has come a long way. Before, it was only on paper with very simple machines. Now, we have electronic braille displays, software that translates texts, braille readers, and tools for writing music and mathematics.

It's impressive to see how braille has adapted to technology. Personally, I think it's a real good thing that braille is opening up to a number of fields because it can be used for art, culture, science. Braille isn't just a tool, it's a real language. I don't really know what I want to do when I grow up, but

what I do know is that if I can help, if I can help make things more accessible and get messages across like what I'm doing here.

(Nacho): Coming back to technology, digitalisation is increasingly changing access to information. This clearly has an impact on the daily lives of blind and partially sighted people, because not all devices and websites have accessibility features. What role should the younger generations play in promoting physical formats such as braille?

(Lachwana): It's true that braille has come a long way, and now technology is taking up a lot of space. We use our telephones, voice synthesizers, voice assistants, and sometimes you might think that braille is disappearing, but I don't think we should give up because it's an irreplaceable tool. There are things you understand better when you read for yourself, like talking about books.

When you read audio, you don't have the spelling that goes with it, so it's better to read them in braille. Braille allows us to be active, to take ownership of the text, and I think that young people will have a very important role to play. First of all, we have to continue to learn braille, to practice it, even if it's not always easy.

We also have to talk about it, make it known to those around us, and then, we put forward ideas to ensure that braille is even better integrated into technology. For example, we could imagine more applications with braille-connected objects. I think that would be a way of anchoring it in the present while respecting its history, and I think that young people like me and many others have the energy to do that.

(Nacho): Finally, is there a wish or hope that you would like to share with our audience as a young braille user?

(Lachwana): My greatest wish is that braille continues to be taught and that it is recognized as a real tool. I'd love every blind and partially sighted child to have the chance to learn, to read or write in braille if they need to.

And I'd also really like people to see braille in a different light because a lot of people see it as a tool from the past, but we use it every day. So, it's still a modern way of communicating. I would also really like society to

make more of an effort to make everything accessible, not just with sound, but also with touch.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Ms. Caboche, for having responded to our questions for “EBU in action”.

End of interview with Lachwana Caboche, student from INJA

[Music]

(Paweł): Yes, also, thank you from us. Good luck to you, Ms. Caboche. Thank you for sharing your story and your insights. It's been a while since I have attended school myself, and I have indeed learned braille there.

And back then, when we started, it was just a stylus and a slate. I mean, the typewriters were also there, but they were introduced at a slightly later stage. So it's great to hear that the younger generations has high hopes for braille, both in this analog, but also in this digital form.

And that they hope, as Ms. Caboche hopes, that there will be more public space devoted to braille, that braille will be more omnipresent all around us. Neven, what has your favorite usage of braille been so far? More like products, more like museum inscriptions? Is there anything you enjoy particularly about braille, like the way it's presented or where it is to be found?

(Neven): Well, it's a very tricky question because I have to admit that I actually do not use braille. I would love to be able to do that and I think this is something which is related to many people who do, maybe, have small sight left and they could use braille, but they never learned it.

So I think that a very good use would be like, you know, taking notes and being in that way independent. As she said, I think it's about being active, not only passively listening to something in a voice or reading some book, it's also actually being able to use braille, the code, actively. So this is, I guess, something which would help me, to be able to use it.

But let's move on to another aspect. Nacho, you have met one more person, the Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France, Fernando Pinto. Could you tell us about that talk?

(Nacho): Yes, sure. I had the privilege to meet Fernando Pinto, who has been recently appointed as the Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France. I have to say, Fernando is a very authorised voice when it comes to analysing the current state of accessibility aspects in France.

I had the privilege to collaborate with him in the past as part of the UPowerWAD project that EBU was part of, which consisted basically on teaching blind and partially sighted people about how they can best give feedback to the accessibility of websites, public websites to be more concise.

It was a pleasure to talk to him. Without further to add, I would like to introduce you to the very interesting insights and thoughts of Fernando Pinto, the Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France.

Interview with Fernando Pinto, Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France

(Nacho): France was the country where the braille code was invented. As of today, it has evolved in a way that it has many applications in different domains, such as mathematics and music. Where do you think the code's development is directed to? Is France destining enough public funding to extend and improve the use of the code on a daily basis by blind and partially sighted people?

(Fernando): France is the birthplace of Louis Braille's invention from 1825, but today the situation is concerning. Paper braille lacks resources. Specialised libraries are the only places that lend tactile books. They hardly acquire new editions anymore. Transcription centers operate on minimal budgets.

We are facing a shortage of qualified braille teachers. This undermines literacy and daily access. We don't have significant public subsidies. There's no real braille plan in place. Because of this, blind readers are denied the same rights to paper reading that sighted people enjoy.

(Nacho): You've recently been appointed as the Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France, and you are also a digital accessibility expert at the French Federation of

Blind People. You are quite active in the promotion of both physical and digital braille. What are the latest updates on these areas?

(Fernando): Well, at the French Federation of the Blind, we believe paper and digital Braille must work hand-in-hand. On the paper side, our member CTEB in Toulouse keeps transcribing and selling braille books to individuals, but no public funding exists to stabilise their fragile economic model for digital braille.

We conducted a study in January, 2025. Our study confirmed that the recommended accessible format, yet most commercial, and library websites still fail to meet accessibility standards. These blocks blind users from independently buying or borrowing books.

We have also made technical progress with partners. We worked with the EDL Lab, the European Digital Reading Lab based in Paris. We collaborated with CECIAA, one of the distributors of these products in France. Together, we have shown that LCP content can be correctly displayed on hands braille displays.

LCP stands for light content protection. This proof of concept is ready. Now, we are waiting for a broader implementation across platforms.

(Nacho): We know that FAF is already carrying out many activities to commemorate the bicentenary of the braille code. Could you give us more details about what your association has in mind for the remainder of the year?

(Fernando): On November 13th, we're organising a special event. The French Federation of the Blind will join forces with several partners: the National Institute for the Blind here in Paris will be there. So will apiDV, AVH and the Campus Louis Braille. Together, we'll host a full day conference at the National Library of France. For more details, you can visit <https://www.revolutionbraille.org/>.

The event will feature keynote speeches and panel discussions. We will highlight braille's vital role in personal independence. We'll show its importance in education and professional life. Most importantly, we will present clear demands to public authorities. We need robust funding. We need promotion of both paper and digital braille. This bicentenary is our chance to push for real change.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Fernando, for taking your time and responding to the microphone of “EBU in action” and giving us a very beautiful insight on what your association is doing this year to commemorate the bicentenary of the braille code.

(Fernando): My pleasure.

(Nacho): And again, it's been nice talking to you.

(Fernando): Thank you.

End of interview with Fernando Pinto, Vice-President of the National Consultative Council of People with Disabilities in France

(Neven): Well, great. There is a lot of work to be done still, and I'm looking forward to this event in November.

But I was wondering, Paweł, what do you think is the biggest challenge when it comes to what he calls “braille on paper”? Because I can see the trend he's talking about, that it's more difficult for braille on paper also in Northern Europe.

I'm sure you have seen that too. What could we do to promote braille more? Do you have any ideas?

(Paweł): So braille paper, the way I know it, is quite expensive to produce and heavy. So if we take a look at the regular book, my favourite example is “The Hobbit” by J.R.R Tolkien, which I really enjoyed reading, in my teenage years.

So for sighted people is just one book. The Polish edition in braille was four books. So, you can imagine probably how costly and material hungry this process is. Nevertheless, I hope it will still be possible to produce some shorter works as well.

For example, music notation or individual excerpts of books that you will need for your study materials.

Also, I am hoping for that that was already mentioned before by Michal and Reiner, that we will see some more braille on products, so that we can actually identify, for example, our food products or our cleaning products just by touching the packaging.

And I have seen this happen. I have seen this, for example, in a French supermarket I visited and nearly anything I picked, any tea, any biscuits package, it had a braille on it and I could read the most essential information from there; so what it is, what flavour, how much of it is there in the package.

It was interesting to see at that time, but now that I think about it, it's very useful. I'm a huge fan of technology, so I don't mind scanning codes or pointing the camera at the products.

If it works, it doesn't always work, but when it does, it's great. But actually picking up a package even from of a supermarket shelf, touching it and feeling what kind of product is and being able to read this information, this is amazing. This is a feeling you can't compare with anything else.

So I hope we can start small and we can find, in the meantime, a way to also produce bigger works. Although also looking at the trends with sighted people, I think it's all moving more towards electronic readers.

(Neven): So a question to you, Nacho. I think you did some fantastic interviews here and thank you for being such a professional interviewer correspondent for our podcast: do you have any reflection after meeting our guests and talking to them which you would like to convey for our listeners?

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Neven, for your kind words. You know that it's a pleasure for me to act as your correspondent. Meeting those people was a very enriching experience for me.

I really hope that braille is widely promoted worldwide in the near future because, without a shadow of a doubt, it's quite clear that it's definitely a tool for inclusion. I'm also eager to see what applications braille might have in the area of technology, especially in an era where digitalisation is taking place.

I'm really interested to learn more about how the promotion of the braille code will be coupled with this, it will be very interesting to see.

(Neven): Wonderful. So guys, I think we are coming to the end of this episode. I would like to thank you both for your participation and also to wish you both fantastic summer holidays.

(Nacho): Thank you very much, Neven.

(Paweł): Thank you. And enjoy your holidays as well.

[Music]

(Neven): Thank you also to our fantastic listeners, the audience. We shouldn't forget, as always, we owe a big thank you to our sound master, who is Emiel Cornelisse in the Netherlands, so thank you very much to you for working with all our audio.

If you enjoyed today's episode, don't forget to subscribe to “EBU in action” in your favorite podcast app. And if you want to learn more about the European Blind Union or something we have said, or if you would like to share some thoughts with us, you can just check out the contact details in our show notes.

So from all of us to all of you, have a fantastic summer. And don't forget to celebrate the 200 years of the invention of the braille code.

(Voiceover: “EBU in Action” is co-funded by the European Union).

END OF EPISODE