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## **Teaching media accessibility: three case-studies**

**Eix temàtic A - Planificació i organització de la docència // Àrea científica 1 - Art i humanitats**

**Authors: Anna Matamala & Pilar Orero (CAIAC/Departament de Traducció i d'Interpretació, UAB)**

### **Abstract**

Media access and information access have been part of a proactive policy at different UAB sectors, from student's welfare office, building administration and architecture to research and training. The **aim** of this paper is to present three experiences related to the teaching of media accessibility at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, focusing on student's cooperative work and lecture organisation. The focus will be on a newly-created MA course on Accessibility and Interactivity within the MA in Multimedia Ambient Intelligence, an online MA in Audiovisual Translation, and an undergraduate course in Audiovisual Translation and Localisation.

### **Aims**

This paper aims to present three experiences related to the teaching of media accessibility at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in which researchers from TransMedia Catalonia/CAIAC (Centre d'Accessibilitat i Intel·ligència Ambiental de Catalunya) have been involved. Our interest lies in student's cooperative work and lecture organisation in three courses (on-line/face-to-face) at various levels (MA/undergraduate) addressed to students with different backgrounds (engineers/translators). These case-studies will allow us to put forward many interesting issues worth discussing and sharing, as pointed out in the last section of this extended abstract.

### **Development**

Audiovisual content, with cultural/instructive/informative/entertaining aims, is available in multiple formats and platforms, and all audiences, regardless of their capacities, should be able to access it. This "universal accessibility" to the media is a human right recognised by UN in 2003 and has been fostered by national and international regulations. Dubbing, subtitling or voice-over are transfer modes used to make the language content accessible to those who do not understand the language (linguistic accessibility), whereas subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, audio description, audio subtitling or sign language are targeted to an impaired audience who cannot access either the video or the audio content (sensorial accessibility).

Since European (Media for All, TV without Frontiers, e-Inclusiveness) and State (I Plan Nacional: Diseño para Todos) directives has been passed on the promotion of Media Access in education environments much effort has been paid at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona on this topic. Media access and information access have been part of a proactive policy at different UAB sectors, from Student's welfare office, building administration and architecture, also in research and training. Traditionally separated working backgrounds such as administrative staff and lecturers have come together to apply, obtain competitive funds and implement media access solutions. Different physical areas of Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona are now fully accessible, such as the Sala de Graus in Rectorat, Aula Magna in the Faculty of Communication, and the cinema or the theatre are now offering some special sessions for the blind, the deaf and in three different languages. Also at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona researchers from far fields such as Veterinary, Engineering and Translation have joined the student's welfare office to design applications which will allow for face to face courses to be accessible, while also developing a speech recognition application in Catalan, which at the time of writing this abstract is still the only one available. Teaching media accessibility has also been embraced at UAB in different scenarios, with different students, and at different degrees of specialisation.

Within this context, as stated above, the aim of this paper is to present three experiences related to the teaching of media accessibility at the UAB. Each of these scenarios presents challenges worth discussing at three different levels:

(a) a newly-created MA course on Accessibility and Interactivity within the MA in Multimedia Ambient Intelligence, taught by lecturers from various departments (Translation/Engineering/Psychology/Communication) in a face-to-face format to a reduced number of students coming from various backgrounds and distant geographical and social realities, interested both in technical and humanistic aspects. More information about the MA can be found here: <http://mmai.uab.cat/content/master-program>;

The aim of this specific course (not the whole MA) is to train students in interaction design and accessibility. More specifically, students are given lectures on various topics (interaction design, accessibility, reception, etc.) and they have to develop a project in which they integrate all their knowledge. They develop a cross-media content and they carry out three short investigations based on this content: (a) a report on accessibility aspects, indicating how to overcome communication barriers and implementing some of the solutions, (b) an attitude measurement study which allows them to test the reception of their content by end-users, and (c) an eye-tracking study to test again how the content is perceived by users.

(b) an online MA in Audiovisual Translation, with a 10-year experience and taught by lecturers from both an academic and a professional background to students with a similar academic background located in various geographical places, and

This MA is addressed to students who want to get into the professional world of audiovisual translation and media accessibility. Therefore, courses focus on the main traditional AVT transfer modes such as dubbing or subtitling but also approach new formats and modalities such as videogames, respeaking or audio description.

(c) and undergraduate course in Audiovisual Translation and Localisation in a face-to-face format with a large group of 60 students.

This is a newly created course in which BA students are given 14 2-hour lectures on AVT. The aim is to give them a short introduction to the three main modalities (dubbing/subtitling/voice-over) and give them some hints on accessibility transfer modes (subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing/AD). For curricular reasons, the language pair involved in this case is Catalan<math>\leftrightarrow</math>Spanish.

Each of these courses tackles media accessibility teaching but the approach is totally different: for instance, whilst at the MA in Audiovisual Translation students take a full course on Audio Description because the final aim is for them to be professionals in this field, the undergraduate course only offers a short overview with a professional approach. Similarly, the Accessibility and Interactivity module addressed mainly to engineers offers a short overview with a focus on more technical aspect. This is just one example of the many that can be highlighted.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, our paper will briefly discuss three case-studies which approach the teaching of “media accessibility” differently and will put forward the main challenges related to the organisation of teaching content and student interaction. Issues such as employability, quality both in training and learning, performance and outcome satisfaction will be the core concepts brought to the fore.

## **Aspects to be debated**

The three courses mentioned above approach the teaching of media accessibility differently due to the differences in student’s profile (level/background), course duration (full MA/MA course, BA course) and format (online/face-to-face). This heterogeneity has put forward relevant issues which will hopefully generate a lively debate, namely on:

- Content multidisciplinaryity: from technological aspects to humanistic aspects. How to integrate them? Beyond the content: raising awareness in media accessibility.
  - In the course addressed to engineers, the main interest is in developing content or tools. Therefore, the main focus regarding media accessibility is giving them the tools to create more accessible products and, additionally, raising awareness. On the contrary, in BA and MA courses in the field of translation the focus is to actually do audio descriptions for the blind or SDH. However, students need to be made aware of technological limitations or specificities so that they know what can be really implemented in the market.
- Students’ heterogeneity: international students with different background knowledge and interests.
  - Teaching a small group of six students from four different countries in English (as in the MA in Ambient Intelligence and Multimedia) and with various training backgrounds presents different challenges than teaching

a homogeneous group of 4-year students who have received exactly the same training in Translation.

- Lecturers from various departments (Translation/Communication/Engineering) or from various backgrounds (professional/academic) approaching the topic differently: how to integrate various approaches to the same topic when designing the courses.
  - The MA in Ambient Intelligence and Multimedia has been especially rewarding because it has allowed for an enriching cooperation in which not only students but also lecturers have learned. Lecturers have had to share information and communicate to colleagues in order to design a well integrated course in which the same topic is approached differently. Similarly, the on-line MA in AVT presents the challenge of integrating active professionals as lecturers.
- Assignments to students: cooperative work and reproducing real-life scenarios.
  - All the courses under analysis put an emphasis on cooperative work because, once in the market, students will have to interact with other professionals. This is why assignments are usually based on reproducing real-life tasks, adding always a component of discussion. The aim is that students are aware of the process, the product and the impact on society.
- Online vs face-to-face communication: how to enhance interaction and create a lively community of students.
  - Our ten-year experience in both on-line and face-to-face format has allowed us to build up strategies to enhance interaction in both settings. Students' profiles and ways of interacting changes and some thoughts on this aspect will be put forward in our presentation.
- Technical aspects: dealing with software in the class, at home, and on online platforms.
  - Apart from deciding the platform and applications used to interact, specific decisions concerning the software used to subtitle, for instance, have to be made.