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Audio description meets Easy-to-Read and Plain Language: results from a questionnaire and a focus group in Catalonia

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Summary: Providing accessible audiovisual content which caters for diverse user needs is one of the challenges of today's digitized society. Easy-to-understand language is currently being explored as a powerful tool to foster accessibility among different user groups, including persons with cognitive disabilities and reading difficulties. Audio description is an access service that provides an aural translation of visuals for those who cannot access the images in audiovisual content. This paper discusses whether audio description could incorporate the principles of easy-to-understand language in order to produce easy-to-understand audio descriptions by focusing on the Catalan working context. Specifically, the paper reports on a survey distributed among experts in Easy-to-Read and Plain Language in Catalonia and a focus group which brought together audio description and Easy-to-Read experts working in Catalonia to discuss the feasibility and potential means of implementation of an easy-to-understand audio description. Both research actions were undertaken in the framework of the EASIT project.

Keywords: easy-to-understand language, plain language, easy-to-read language, audio description

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1 Introduction

Providing accessible audiovisual content which caters for diverse user needs is one of the challenges of today's digitized society.¹ Various access

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services have been implemented to cater for those who cannot access audio content –subtitling for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing (Matamala / Orero, 2010), sign language interpreting (Neves, 2007)–, for those who cannot access the visuals –audio description (Maszerowska et al., 2014; Matamala / Orero, 2016)– and for those who cannot access written text on screen –audio subtitling (Orero, 2007a; Braun / Orero, 2010). Translation modalities such as dubbing, voice-over or interlingual subtitling can also be viewed as examples of access services because they actually provide access to those who cannot understand the language of the source text (Díaz-Cintas / Remael, 2007; Chaume, 2012). However, beyond the realm of established audiovisual transfer modes or access services, there may be access services related to the written word whose application to audiovisual media could be explored. This is the case with so-called Easy-to-Read Language (ER) or Plain Language (PL), which aim to make content easier to read and understand. We will be referring to both modes under the umbrella term of Easy-to-Understand Language (E2U) in this paper.

Bernabé-Caro / Orero (2019) suggest that Easy-to-Read Language could be hybridized with audio description (AD) to provide what they term easy-to-understand or easy-to-listen or easy audio descriptions. In order to provide this new access service, current AD professionals would need to expand their skills and receive further, specialist training. Alternatively, E2U experts should be trained in AD methodologies. This is one of the topics tackled by the European project EASIT (Easy Access for Social Inclusion Training), which aims to define the profile of experts involved in the creation of E2U services in audiovisual media, suggest a curriculum to train them, and create open access training materials.

A necessary first step in the process is to describe current practices and to gather feedback on how professionals from both the AD and E2U fields envisage this innovative implementation. These are the two main aims of this article, which will focus on the Catalan scenario.

The article begins with a short overview of AD, by placing the focus on Catalonia, followed by a short presentation of E2U in Catalan. It then describes the methodology followed, which is based on a questionnaire and a focus group. Section 5 reports on the results of the questionnaire, and section 6 reports on the results of the focus group. Conclusions and future research possibilities close the article.

funding scheme (2017SGR113). Blanca Arias-Badia's participation in this research has been financially supported by the Spanish Research Agency, in the framework of the postdoctoral scholarship program Juan de la Cierva-Formación (FJCI-2017-32064).

■ 2 Audio description in Catalonia

AD provides an additional audio track which allows those who cannot fully access the visuals to understand and enjoy audiovisual content such as a film, an opera, a theatre play or a videogame, to name just a few examples. This is achieved by describing not only the most relevant visuals but also any element which may be difficult to understand without access to the images (Fryer, 2016). In the ADLAB guidelines, Remael et al (2015: 9) define AD as “a service for the blind and visually impaired that renders Visual arts and Media accessible to this target group. In brief, it offers a verbal description of the relevant (visual) components of a work of art or media product, so that blind and visually impaired patrons can fully grasp its form and content.” These components usually include at least where and when the action takes place (spatio-temporal settings), who is involved (characters), and what is happening (action).

Selecting what to describe and how to describe it are two central aspects in both AD practice and research. The wealth of visual elements in audiovisual content is often complex and the time allotted to AD is limited. Thus, the traditional WYSIWYS (what you see is what you say) approach (Snyder, 2014) has given way to thorough analyses of the source content in order to make informed choices regarding content selection, usually by means of narratological tools (Remael et al., 2015). Selecting the right words is as important as selecting the relevant visuals (Matamala / Remael, 2015). Following Taylor (2015: 47), “[c]lear language and concrete vocabulary, unencumbered by jargon, unnecessary pomp and obscure vocabulary help with information processing and visualisation.” At the same time, clarity is expected to be conveyed by means of “[a] vivid language [that] engages the listener and can be expressed, for instance, in verb variation (*chat, gossip, confer* rather than just *talk*), depending on the context” (ibid.). Therefore, AD presents specific linguistic features, as studies on AD corpora have shown (Salway, 2007; Reviers et al., 2015; Matamala, 2018). Research has also demonstrated how diverging strategies impact on user reception (Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013; Fresno, 2014; Fernández-Torné, 2016), providing suggestions for future recommendations.

Regarding AD specifically in Catalonia –the focus of this article–, Matamala (2007) summarizes the origins of its practice. Audio described films in Spanish were first made available on Radio Barcelona in the 1940s (Orero, 2007b), but the first audio described film in Catalan –*The Ten Commandments*– was broadcast on Catalan television on November 25th

1989 (Vila, 2005: 128), a very early date. This first example was followed by audio descriptions for films and series in the 90s although not on a regular basis. After the turn of the century, popular sitcoms such as *Plats Bruts* were audio described, and later released on DVD. In 2006 an interesting project started: audio-describing the weekly film on Friday night on Catalan television, channel TV3: *La Gran Pel·lícula*. After a test AD of *Mystic River* which was not publicized, the first film audio described for the project was *Something to Talk About* (16.02.2006). Many more have followed, and AD has been offered more extensively in many series, both on linear television and video on demand services since November 2018. In cinemas, some isolated shows were offered at the beginning of the 21st century. Matamala (2007: 39) indicates that in November 2004 the Catalan Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired projected the first audio described film at a Catalan commercial movie theatre: *The Motorcycle Diaries*, by Walter Salles. Both the AD and the film's dialogues were in Spanish. In 2011 UAB organized the first Accessible Cinema Series by means of the UAS system (Oncins et al., 2013). The development of apps such as Whatscine®, or more recently Audescmobile®, should allow users, where available, to access cinema AD from their smartphones.

Rovira-Esteve / Tor-Carroggio (2018) provide updated details regarding accessibility services in all television networks broadcasting in Catalan. As far as AD is concerned, current practices far from comply with Spanish accessibility law, which establishes a minimum of 2 hours of audio described content on private television networks and 10 hours for public networks (*ibid.*, 76–77). Only Televisió de Catalunya, the main public network in Catalonia, provides AD to date, and Betevé (a public television network funded by the city council of Barcelona) plans to promote AD for fiction, in the near future (*ibid.*, 75–76).

Regarding scenic arts, opera AD has been offered regularly at the Liceu opera house since 2004 (Orero / Matamala, 2007). Theatre plays are also offered with AD in Catalan theatres, mainly in Barcelona and in dedicated sessions. As far as museums and cultural heritage sites are concerned, an effort is made to increase accessibility through projects such as La Mirada Tàctil² or the accessibility self-assessment project MUSA.³

2 <https://www.diba.cat/web/opc/mirada_tactil> [06.05.2019].

3 <<https://cultura.gencat.cat/ca/temes/museus/dimensio-social/museus-i-accessibilitat/musa/>> [06.05.2019].

■ 3 Easy-to-Read and Plain Language in Catalonia

Easy-to-Read (ER) and Plain Language (PL) are two approaches which aim to make information easier to understand. The former has traditionally focused on persons with intellectual disabilities or reading difficulties and has generally included all types of content. It is sometimes viewed as a functional language variety (Bredel / Maas, 2016). The latter has traditionally addressed the general public and has its origins in legal and administrative language.

Although some initial definitions consider Easy-to-Read as a linguistic adaptation that makes a text easier to read (IFLA, 2010), more recent approaches put the emphasis not only on the easiness of reading but also on understanding. To achieve these aims, the texts need to follow certain rules concerning linguistic features (vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, etc.), design and format. In this regard, Inclusion Europe (2014) provides a set of European recommendations. Although the focus has traditionally been on written text, Inclusion Europe already considers other formats and includes a section on video information in which they explain what AD is and recommend the use of easy-to-understand words in the AD for blind people who also have intellectual disabilities. Other relevant recommendations are those by ILMSH European Association (1998) and IFLA (2012). There is currently also a Spanish standard on Easy-to-Read Language (UNE 153101:2018 EX sobre Lectura Fácil), and there is ongoing work at ISO for the development of guidance on making written text easy to read and easy to understand. WCAG 2.0 guidelines by W3C also indicate that text content has to be “readable and understandable”, and work has been done in this area.⁴

Plain Language, in turn, started to develop in the 1970’s as a response to the difficulty entailed in understanding legal documentation (Mazur, 2000: para. 5–6). Although much work has indeed been performed in the business and legal fields (Bailey, 1990; Cutts, 1995; Garner, 2001) since then, PL has typically related to the clarity of public communications in broader terms today, and has even been subject to legal regulations, such as the Plain Writing Act of 2010, which defines plain writing as writing “that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience” (Public Law

4 <<https://www.w3.org/WAI/RD/2012/easy-to-read/note/ED-E2R-20140123>> [06.05.2019].

111–274). PL involves structure, design and content of texts (Cheek, 2010: 10). For longer than two decades, PL experts have also addressed the graphic presentation and visual aspects of document design “in considerable detail”, as emphasised by Mazur (2000: para. 27). It must be noted that, in fact, some authors prefer to talk about Clear Communication as a way to further broaden the scope of the notion (Montolío, 2013, 2019) and to state that “plain” does not necessarily mean “simple” but “clear”.

Focusing on the Catalan scenario, the Easy-to-Read Association was created in 2002 and has become a key stakeholder in Catalonia. In 2005 it joined the International Easy-to-Read Network. They adapt texts to ER and PL Language, offer training, certification, editing services and also promote Easy-to-Read clubs in libraries⁵ (Silvestre Gusí / Capo, 2004). Apart from books, they also have created ER documents for the Liceu opera house (opera plot summaries), art catalogues and legislation, to name just a few. Turiel (1998) presents an overview of web resources for Easy-to-Read, and Artigas (2009) published a paper in which she defines ER Language, the end users, and the main steps in the production of an ER document. She also presented an overview of the ER work that is currently being carried out in Catalonia. Although much work has been done, there is still the need to enhance this access service and give it more visibility. Regarding PL specifically, there has been work in the legal field (Gelpí, 2006; Gené Gil, 2016), where PL is associated with democracy and text understandability. Cassany (2005) also acknowledges an increase in demand from the private sector and highlights the development of style manuals that set guidelines for clear writing.

■ 4 Methodology

This paper discusses the results of two separate qualitative research actions undertaken in the framework of the on-going EASIT project, i.e. a survey and a focus group. EASIT is a pioneer project in the exploration of E2U as a training specialization and, to our knowledge, there are no specific higher education programs for E2U training in the Catalan context to date.

The aim of the survey was to serve as a first step towards gathering updated data regarding the practice and training of E2U. More specifically, we were interested in the experiences of those considered to be experts in

5 The catalogue of ER books in Catalan is available here: <<http://www.lecturafacil.net/search>> [07.05.2019].

the field. A first survey draft was created and discussed among the project's partners. After pilot sessions with the partners to improve efficiency, the final questionnaire⁶ included 54 questions which were organized into four sections: a) demographic profile, b) educational background and previous training, c) current activity, and d) skills. The specific questions raised in each section were derived from a review of the specialized literature. At the bottom of each section, a box for open comments was offered. The questions were initially written in English, and then translated into the project languages in accordance with E2U principles. Access to the questionnaire was granted via Web Survey Creator. The estimated duration of the task was 20 minutes and there was no compensation in exchange for its completion. Further information was made available to participants during the project. The survey was disseminated through social media and relevant contacts. It was shared with the Catalan Easy-to-Read Association, the Spanish standardization group working on Easy-to-Read and key stakeholders. 128 replies were obtained in total, including all the project languages. In this article we report on the results obtained from the Catalan experts, of which there were 7. Although this number may seem low, it is relevant due to the fact it is a contemporary practice and extensive academic research has not yet taken place. Moreover, when comparing numbers to other languages, a significant participation from Catalan respondents can be seen (English=9, Galician=0, German=28, Italian=19, Slovenian=14, Spanish=26, Swedish=25).

Concerning the focus group, its aim was to bring experts in AD and experts in E2U together to discuss the possibility of developing an E2U AD modality, as recently suggested by Bernabé-Caro and Orero (2019), with emphasis placed on the Catalan context. The focus group was held on January 16th, 2019 in Barcelona and lasted 90 minutes. 4 participants (2 experts in AD and 2 experts in E2U) explored this innovative idea by answering six questions, raised in a semi-structured manner by a facilitator and two support researchers who were responsible for fuelling the debate and taking minutes. The topics under discussion were agreed upon in a previous protocol in coordination with the researchers of the EASIT project: a) the perceived feasibility of the proposal and potential means of implementation, b) the audiovisual genres deemed more suitable for an E2U AD, c) the skills deemed as desirable for a potential new expert in E2U AD, and d) the validation process that this new kind of AD should undergo.

6 <<https://ddd.uab.cat/record/203967>> [09.05.2017].

The data obtained were made anonymous and the research actions were complied with current ethical procedures outlined by Orero et al. (2017). Ethical approval was obtained from UAB's ethical committee.

■ 5 Results: questionnaire

This section reports on the educational background of those considered E2U experts in Catalonia, as well as on their current professional activity. It finishes with an account of the skills that, according to these experts, would be desirable in a prospective E2U expert.

■ 5.1 Educational profiles of E2U experts

Catalan is the mother tongue of all of the participants who stated their mother tongue in the questionnaire – only one did not. They are all female, aged 31–60. 4 of them have been educated at a postgraduate level and 3 of them at a graduate level, their fields of study being either journalism and communication (4) or linguistics (3), in some cases studied in combination with other areas such as teaching, translation, and literary studies.

Most of them (5) have received training in E2U language, either only in ER language (2) or both in ER and PL (3), or indicating that more training has been received in ER language than in PL. Half of the respondents' training followed guidelines for one specific language, whereas the other half followed non-language-specific guidelines. Their training has mainly consisted of workshops and in-house training or internships at the workplace that have amounted to between 10 and 60 hours. However, one of the participants reports being a self-taught expert and another received more extensive training without providing any further details.

During their training, emphasis was placed on printed material in all cases, although 3 of the participants report having also been trained in the creation of E2U digital content. With regards to their domain of specialization, experts' training adopted a generalistic approach in most cases (4), touching on a variety of fields. The most relevant ones seem to have been culture and literature, involving work on content such as books or museum audio guides and booklets. This seems to be in line with existing practices in Catalonia, as reported in the previous section.

Training has focused on the following tasks or services: writing, adaptation, proofreading, and quality control. This is not only the typical chronological order in which the tasks are performed in a text production

process, but also responds to the relevance given to each task in the training of experts, in accordance with the results obtained. The preferred types of training activities in terms of their usefulness in the labor market concern practice rather than theory. They are the following: a) commenting on mistakes in class (4), b) practice with experts (3), c) E2U texts analysis (3), and d) writing exercises (3).

Finally, it is worth noting that all participants report being engaged in continuous learning. Despite that none of them is currently receiving further training in the workplace, most of them report keeping in close contact with other experts (5), talking to users (4), and attending conferences and workshops (4). They further highlight the relevance of actual professional practice to improve their expertise (6).

■ 5.2 Current practices in the E2U job market

The experts currently work as translators or adaptors, although only in 2 cases do they perform these tasks full-time. In both cases, they are the experts with the greatest expertise: they have been working on E2U for 9–12 years. Most participants report combining their current E2U oriented jobs with teaching, writing, and language consultancy. 3 of them are self-employed, and the other 4 work at universities, NGOs, and public institutions. All of them have a professional background undertaking other activities: 3 of them used to work as writers or journalists, 2 used to teach, and 1 was a translator. The last participant did not specify her previous professional experience. Although 4 participants indicate having received a certification for the training described above, only one has actually been asked to show evidence of her training when applying for a job in E2U.

Their professional activity today matches their training in that all experts work with ER language in Catalan (and, in some cases, also in Spanish); more specifically, all of them undertake adaptation, editing, and translation tasks in ER language and in turn write texts using this language modality. Some of them further perform quality control tasks on these texts (3), and validate them (4). 4 of them combine work on ER language modality with PL but, interestingly, none of them reports writing texts in this language modality. Work with PL mainly consists of adaptation, editing, and translation tasks, with only 2 participants working on quality control and validation, respectively. There is a further training-practice match with regards to format: 6 experts report working with printed content, in 3 cases in combination with digital or audiovisual content, while only one of

them reports working with digital content exclusively. Interestingly, for the purposes of this paper, none of the experts works with aural content. A large amount of work on E2U in Catalonia seems to be devoted to culture and literature, followed by work related to public administration and justice (e.g. work on legal documentation).

Participants were asked whether they typically perform their tasks working in teams or individually, and about the contact they keep with other experts and end-users to resolve any doubts. Given that current practices seem to vary a great deal from one professional to another, it is worth commenting on the answers of three specific participants, to illustrate the variety of profiles. Let us use letters to identify them here:

- Participant A (with 9–12 years of experience in the field) always works alone, never gathers feedback from end-users, and never asks for advice or suggestions from other professionals.
- Participant B (with 3–6 years of experience and over 60 hours of training) always works in teams and frequently asks E2U colleagues for advice, although she is never in touch with end-users.
- Participant C (with 9–12 years of experience in the field) works both individually and collaboratively, is sometimes in touch with end-users who comment on her work, and very often incorporates any changes they suggest. She is usually in touch with other E2U experts to resolve doubts.

Finally, the experts report on the usefulness of checking against parallel texts written in E2U to resolve their doubts: all of them find this to be a useful resource, with answers ranging from “very useful” (1) or “quite useful” (5) to “a little useful” (1). Specifically, they use other texts to “solve complex sentences or structures” or to “resolve doubts regarding vocabulary, sentence structure, headings, page layout, figures, etc.” (our translation). One of the participants explains that comparison with other texts was more helpful when she had less experience.

■ 5.3 Skills sought in the E2U expert curriculum

3 of the participants are active as E2U trainers and one had been previously. Therefore, their answers provide invaluable input to inform the EA-SIT project on which skills should be sought for development in an E2U curriculum. One of the items in the questionnaire asked participants to select up to three skills that would be desirable for an E2U expert.

All of them selected familiarity with any available guidelines as a must in prospective E2U experts. The experts report being aware of the availability of non-language-specific E2U guidelines, at an international, national, and private (in-house) level. 6 of them report always using them, and one of them almost always. They also draw attention to the need for unified guidelines for Europe.

Knowledge of languages and linguistics (e.g. familiarity with the principles of textual analysis, of cohesion and coherence mechanisms, of language complexity and simplification methods) is the skill rated second best according to the participants: 5 of them selected this option. As has been explained, most of the participants have an educational and/or professional background in languages and writing.

Awareness of types of disabilities and of end-user needs was rated as the third most important content that should be covered in the curriculum. Interestingly, both experts who are in contact with end-users and experts who are not, rated this aspect as a relevant one: this option was selected by 4 of them.

Familiarity with accessibility standards, the history and applicability scenarios of E2U as well as reading studies is considered important by 1–2 participants. Multimodality and cognitive linguistics are not selected as relevant skills by any of the participants. None of the experts propose skills beyond the ones offered in the questionnaire.

A further item in the questionnaire asked participants to choose one type of service which, according to their experience, should be given most attention in the E2U curriculum. Interestingly, in only three cases the answers are consistent with their current professional practice, i.e. they place value on services such as adaptation, editing, and translation. The other 4 answers are scattered across other possibilities: one of them thinks writing in E2U is the most important service; another thinks it is validation; a further selects quality control, and the last answers “other services”, without further specification.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were also asked to rate the importance of the following aspects in connection with the creation of E2U content: page layout, awareness in vocabulary use, simple syntax, information organization, and multimodality. The results are clear in that vocabulary, syntax and information organization are considered to be the most crucial aspects by experts: all of them rate them as “very important”. Page layout follows closely, with 6 experts rating it as “very important” and one rating it as “important”. Multimodality is rated as “important” by 5 of

them and as “very important” by the other 2. It is thus worth highlighting that all aspects proposed in the questionnaire are considered relevant to a great extent.

With regard to each of these aspects, experts were invited to specify what would be the desirable output in an E2U text. Their answers are rather unified:

- in terms of page layout, 6 experts highlight the importance of a well-prepared organization of the page (wide margins, spacing, paragraph distribution, etc.) and one expert selects short texts and sentence production as the most relevant measure;
- regarding vocabulary, 6 experts select the use of simple lexicon and one expert opts for the definition of difficult or new words as the most relevant measures;
- regarding syntax, 6 experts select the use of simple structures and one expert opts for short structures (interestingly, this answer is not selected by the same expert who highlighted the importance of short sentences in the discussion of page layout);
- information organization should involve starting the text with the most relevant information (5 answers) and offering glossaries (2 answers);
- to cater for multimodality, different accessibility formats would be needed (6 answers) and images should be displayed in large and next to the text to make reading easier (1 answer).

Many of the measures proposed in the questionnaire are not selected, i.e. rated as the most relevant, by any of the participants, such as: labeling information, opting for simple punctuation, or offering summaries.

■ 6 Results: focus group

The focus group began with the facilitator giving a short presentation on AD and E2U. It was followed by an open discussion based on six questions. Next we discussed the input provided by the experts regarding the feasibility of creating AD following the E2U principles, the genres in which this new service could be implemented, as well as the skills required by future experts depending on their current specialization (AD or E2U).

■ 6.1 Feasibility of the E2U AD proposal

The experts in E2U were not familiar with AD guidelines and vice versa. After a brief consideration of the main features of both E2U and AD, E2U experts seemed to encourage the idea of an E2U AD more than the audio describers consulted. According to the latter, current AD scripts are not targeted at people with cognitive disabilities, but only at people with total or partial sight loss. Even though they acknowledge similarities in AD and E2U guidelines, such as the preference for simple syntactic structures or the use of one word per referent only, they believe that the main target group of AD (people with a visual impairment) would be reluctant to be exposed to oversimplified descriptions of audiovisual content when users have already said repeatedly that they do not like to be patronized by having self-evident details specified or being given surplus information which will hinder the imaginative process. To tackle this issue, the audio describers proposed an *audio adaptation* that would cater for the needs of a different target group (people with comprehension difficulties or with cognitive disabilities who are now users of E2U texts). In their view, this adaptation could be offered as an additional option for audiences (in a different track or channel).

■ 6.2 Genres and areas of implementation

Experts from both fields agree that some genres could adopt E2U AD more easily than others. In their opinion, theatre plays, opera, dance or museums pave the way for the implementation of an E2U AD because, in all cases, the viewer has a chance to access additional content, such as an audio introduction (Fryer / Romero-Fresco, 2014) before the show or experience. The immediacy of television and film products, however, comes across as an impediment for an E2U AD, according to the experts. In the discussion, several ideas were proposed, such as the inclusion of the same kind of audio introductions on smart TVs, DVD and Blu-Ray, or cinema theatres; or the insertion of pauses in audiovisual material, so that a longer, more informative AD could be conveyed to audiences with comprehension difficulties.

As far as genres are concerned, the audio describers stated that products with a less complex plot, such as soap operas, films for children, or documentaries, were more likely candidates for audio descriptions that adhere to E2U guidelines. According to them, however, E2U AD would

definitely not be suitable for certain films in which a lot of information is condensed to fit in less than 2 hours. Thus, they reinforced the idea of offering two different types of AD (E2U and non-E2U) to meet the expectations of different audiences.

■ 6.3 Defining the new professional: skills and curriculum

According to the experts consulted, a hybridization of their professional profiles would naturally lead to the potential E2U AD expert, and there would be no need for the creation of a new term in the job market. If, however, that was the case, they would call this new professional an *audio-facilitator*, a *content adapter*, or, simply, an *accessibility expert* (as the participants in the focus group consider themselves).

In their view, the new potential E2U AD expert should be an empathetic professional, able to approach the needs of the target audience. She/he should demonstrate proficient language skills, and be trained in documentation skills for information gathering. Voicing skills were also underlined by the audio describers: the prospective expert should work on prosody and rhythm, and deliver AD using a “pleasant” tone.

Regarding training in validation or quality control, experts view quality control as an aspect to be considered in the curriculum, but are not in favor of a unique approach based on systematic validation sessions with end-users. The E2U experts were categorical in their reluctance to professionalize validators, that is, end-users who take part in guided sessions to evaluate ER content. In their experience, when validators become professionals, they no longer fully relate to the expected target audience, i.e. a professional validator does not empathize with the target audience. However, all the experts agreed that it would be convenient to receive systematic feedback from end-users during the first stages of an E2U AD project. This is, in fact, the current professional practice in their areas of expertise. From their point of view, validation in the form of user feedback could also be received after the AD has been released. In the case of museums, theatres, or any further physical buildings attended by potential audiences, feedback could be gathered by means of a survey at the end of the visit or experience.

■ 7 Conclusions

The accessibility turn in many areas of knowledge as it has been described recently (Greco, 2018) will likely be followed by an increasing demand for experts in E2U content. Current experts in the field of E2U have generally been self-taught or trained in-house on written content but today's society is an audiovisual one and further work on this area is needed. The EASIT project fills a gap in today's training scenario, as it aims to define the skills of the professionals involved in creating E2U audiovisual content, to propose a curriculum design to train them, and to develop open educational materials. This paper has put the focus on the expert who would create easy-to-understand audio descriptions as a new hybrid access service, gathering feedback from current experts in Catalonia through a questionnaire and a focus group.

The results reported in this paper have provided some insights on current practices in E2U in Catalonia, both in terms of practice and training. They have enabled us to map the profile of current professionals, their main tasks, and gather their views on the most relevant skills these experts need to acquire.

When comparing the skills linked to the E2U expert identified in the questionnaire and the skills assigned to a prospective E2U AD expert in the focus group, a vast shared ground is found. A thorough knowledge of the guidelines and a high proficiency in language issues is expected from these experts. Both in the questionnaire and in the focus group, empathy and knowledge of the end-users' needs are regarded as crucial. This is in accordance with the specialized literature, which argues "the final test of whether any piece of writing meets its goal of communicating information comes when humans read it" (US Securities and Exchange Commission, 1998, in Mazur, 2000). There are also specific skills from the field of AD that would need to be acquired by experts in the future such as voicing-related skills. In fact, today's professional practice in E2U is very much focused on written text and the aural channel was not considered by our participants.

Another relevant result is how current professionals envisage the hybridization of E2U and AD: it seems that the specificities of each content and genre will define the approach to be taken, be it an additional E2U AD track, an E2U audio introduction or E2U comments. This last proposal is similar to what has been attempted in the Madrid theatre

Teatro Real, where the so-called “*audio-fáciles*” or “*audio-explicaciones*” offer audio explanations that allow diverse users to better understand the play.

The main limitation of the actions reported in the research above concerns the size of the sample consulted. The focus in this research has been put on qualitative results, rather than quantitative ones. As has been explained, however, the actions contained a significant participation by Catalan respondents when compared to that of other languages. Circumstances such as the fact that the E2U is an emerging field in the Catalan context must also be considered: experts are scarce and lacking visibility. A positive aspect of the actions conducted is, in fact, that it has promoted communication and professional contact between sectors (audio describers and ER experts) who typically operate in isolation in Catalonia.

As indicated in the title, audio description has met Easy-to-Read and Plain Language, and the research prospects are manifold. As part of the EASIT project, and using the qualitative input obtained, the specific skills and curriculum to train the future professional need to be defined. Beyond the EASIT project, both descriptive and reception-based research actions have to be pursued. Corpus-driven studies may allow us to shed light on the specific features of ER and PL texts across languages and cultures, and reception studies will identify user needs and preferences that can support recommendations. Tests on the reception of E2U AD with different user profiles and different content types are also needed in order to better understand how this new access service can become a reality. To that end, an effort will have to be made to define how audiovisual content comprehension can be measured (Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013). Many research possibilities could emerge in this new hybridization process which aims to cater for the needs of a wide spectrum of users. ■

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