

UNIT 4. THE PROFESSION

ELEMENT 1. PERSONAL SKILLS

INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONALS: AUDIO DESCRIPTION, PART 2

Other Video Transcript

THE NARRATOR

Welcome to Unit 4: The profession, Element 1: Personal skills. Interview with professionals: Audio description, part 2. The video was produced by the University of Trieste in cooperation with Zavod Risa.

This is the second part of the video featuring interviews with esteemed experts in the field of audio description - Bernd Benecke, Louise Fryer, Joel Snyder and Christopher Taylor.

The interviews were conducted by University of Trieste.

The experts explain how they see the future of their profession and whether they think that implementing easy to understand strategies in audio description would become a part of their profession.

How do you see the future of your profession?



BERND BENECKE

I think audio description is going to increase. We see this already with all the streaming services coming up and in this time of pandemics, of course, everything gets streamed. Conferences are streamed, and of course lectures at universities. All this is material that should be audio described, so I think audio description is really going up.

LOUISE FRYER

How do I see the future? The need for trained audio describers is currently increasing, especially as more and more content is streamed. I expect this to continue. There are moves to introduce automatic visual recognition. Progress is slow because artificial intelligence can identify static images reasonably quite well, but it can't yet link continuing characters or locations. So, it might say "there's a woman on a beach" but won't be able to identify that it's the same woman on the same beach in the next shot. Humans are very good at picking up contextual clues to make a coherent whole. I expect workflows will be designed where artificial intelligence can do some of the work and a human describer does the rest, but it's still a long way off.

JOEL SNYDER

I often talk about 2 aspects that are on the horizon for audio description that I think will be very important. First one is a technical aspect, really. Soon enough, the use of smart phones, if it



is not already, will be ubiquitous. Everyone will have a smart phone. It will be like a home telephone or having home address, if you will. And I think apps now, and there are half of dozen of them around the world, apps that you download and then that app allows you to pair the downloaded audio description script with whatever is on your television right then...

Or in the movie theater, it listens and it automatically syncs the description. I think this is significant. And some of those apps have the capability of including captions, including sign interpretation, enhancing sound for people who are hard of hearing... not just turning up the volume but also download of an alternate language track so that grandma, who only speaks Spanish can go with the family to see a film in an American movie theater.

The film is playing in English but she's using that app and hearing the dub in Spanish. Or perhaps reading subtitles. So that's the technical aspect that has already begun to take hold but it's still in its infancy.

I think it will become huge within the next 10 years. That's my prediction.

The other aspect is more of a programmatic aspect. I think that sooner or later, to a certain extent... ...not totally by any means... audio describers are gonna go out of business. What I mean by that is that more filmmakers, more



videographers, more people dealing with the arts that are described will become aware of description and start using it as an aesthetic innovation, building it in from the get-go. Maybe there's a narrator character who speaks descriptively, actually describes as the program continues in a way that is not jarring. It seems as though it's part of the program. It is built in from the beginning so that it's no longer description... is no longer considered some sort of post-production activity that we don't need to worry about that we're making a film and the localization folks will deal with that. No, it can be used as an aesthetic innovation. It can be used in ways that will make for more significant aesthetics in the production of film, in the production of video.

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR Well, firstly, technological. The personalization revolution, as I already mentioned, will continue to break new ground and depending on market demand and awareness of the involved stakeholders it will bring in unknown possibilities for the blind and sight-impaired community. Secondly, the question of accessibility... and this movement towards universal design... This will see a change in attitudes about how audio description is considered among the public at large and among persons with sight loss. As regards screen AD, the introduction of audio description and the assistance of end-users at the beginning of the filmmaking process will turn AD from being an



addition to a film product to being an integral part. The same logic applies to the museum, where layout and directionality will form part of the museum design process. So as museums change their role in society, which they have been doing for some time now through hands-on exhibits, attractive layouts, technological enhancement... the provision of AD will be considered just a normal part of the plan.

Thirdly, there are some ethical considerations. A recent publication describing diversity points out how even the most well-meaning describers fall foul of political incorrectness misuse. So this manifests itself for example in the description of characters in terms of race, gender, age, disability, etc. This publication refers specifically to theater AD, though its recommendations can equally apply to all kinds of screen products as well. For example, it was noted that white as a skin color was never highlighted whereas black was, women's appearance came into much more description than men's, and so on. So, we can thus expect that describers in the future will be coached on how to handle description in a non-discriminatory way.

THE NARRATOR

Do you think that implementing easy to understand strategies in audio description will become a part of your profession?



LOUISE FRYER

Easy to understand strategies in AD could be useful for some types of audience and for some types of content. I'm not ruling it out, but some blind or partially blind people revel in word pictures and I wouldn't want to deprive them of that.

JOEL SNYDER

Finally, do you think that implementing easy to understand strategies in description will become a part of the profession? I think so. You know, listenability, easy to understand, that's going to be a plus for really anybody listening to description. And again, it can be a sighted person who is experiencing an audio movie. They love that film they saw last week and they're going on a long car trip. They want to experience the film again. They're not going to have a television playing or a screen, hopefully, while they're driving the car but if they hear the original audio track with description and it's done in a way that is easy to listen to, I think that makes all the difference in the world and allows them to vividly experience the movie once again. It increases the reach of audio description and that's going to be good for all of us.

CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR Well, they should, because the aim is always to provide the best possible description to be understandable by most people and the highest number of people. So, if concision and clarity are the name of the game, then what you're doing



with EASIT should definitely become a part of the logic behind any other description.

BERND BENECKE

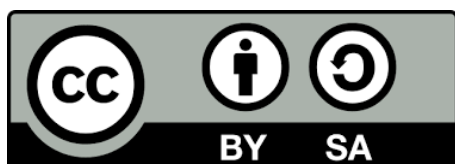
Well, I don't know. What I do not think is that we get an easy to understand description additionally to the normal audio description because that would mean you would need more money and there is no money in the field. But if this project can offer us some strategies on how to make audio description easier to understand... I would be grateful to use this.

THE NARRATOR

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