

UNIT 3B. EASY TO UNDERSTAND (E2U) AND AUDIO DESCRIPTION (AD)

ELEMENT 3. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSIONALS: JOEL SNYDER

Transcript

Unit 3B, Easy to understand (E2U) and audio description (AD); Element 3. Technical aspects; other video "Interview with professionals: Joel Snyder".

In this video interview, the American AD professional Joel Snyder will discuss some technical aspects regarding audio description, and he will share his ideas on the way these can contribute to making this form of audiovisual translation easier to understand.

Joel Snyder: Hello, this is Joel Snyder and I am the president of Audio Description Associates, LLC, in the United States of America, also the director and founder of the Audio Description project for the American Council of the Blind.

Are there specific technical aspects, adjustments, that, according to me, could improve the comprehensibility, listenability, of AD, in other words, that could make it usable also for people with

cognitive, intellectual and/or learning disabilities, whose processing times might be slower?

I think so. I think there are technical aspects and problematic, or aspects of execution of AD that can accomplish that, that can increase comprehensibility and listenability for people who are dealing with intellectual or learning disabilities. On a technical side, there certainly is a way to adjust pace and I think that is a critical element of listening of increasing listenability, especially for folks dealing with cognitive disabilities, slowing down the pace. But that could be accomplished, of course, in the execution of the audio description through the voicing. For six years I produced, supervised a production of audio description for the American children show "Sesame Street", which is geared towards three to five year-olds. That audience, of course, is an audience that requires a vocabulary level, a reading level, that is going to be lower than the general public, so we were aware of that, certainly, in the writing of the description and I think the same general principle would apply to making description that is more listenable for all people, really, and actually that is a key point. By making audio description more applicable, more reachable by more people, I think we build a visibility of audio description and increase the network of people who understand and appreciate audio description. Certainly the audience of people with learning disabilities is an important part of that, but I think the audience can also include the general public, audio description can be great for them as well: they can be in the kitchen, making a sandwich while the television is on in the living room, they do not miss a bit. So yes, I do think there are technical aspects and problematic aspects, aspects of execution, that can make audio description more listenable.



Do you think that extended AD's could be a good solution with cognitive, intellectual disabilities, whose processing times might be slower?

I do. Extended AD's, as long as the concept and the technique is done in a way so that it is easy to access, easy to understand. Most extended AD involves clicking hyper link of some sort, or switching to another screen or another audio file that supplements the audio description that exists on a base level, as it is. It is important to remember, though, that audio description describers are really about describing, not explaining and I think the explaining, the elaboration on a concept is best left to a teacher, someone who is working with a given student. The audio description itself, I do not think needs to be charged with that aspect. It may provide additional description in the extended AD but it is not a matter of explaining what something is. We do not explain, we describe; we do not tell, we show.

According to me, would TTS AD work better than human-voiced AD for the same audience?

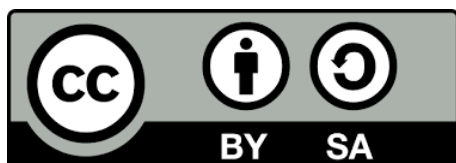
I do not think so. TTS is always improving – text-to-speech – but it is not at a point, certainly not today, November 2020, where it can make the distinctions, provide the nuance that increases listenability. Perhaps for some dry documentaries or the reading of a book, a non-fiction kind of text, perhaps. But even there, you know, we make meaning with our voice and I have not met a text-to-speech engine that can yet provide the same nuance that a trained audio describer can provide. When I train audio describers, we cover vocal skills and we use one example, for instance: “woman without her man is a savage”, that sounds pretty misogynist, does not it? Who would agree with that? Well, say it back just using your voice, no punctuation. A good audio describer can insert the

punctuation themselves because they are making meaning with their voices and it comes out “woman: without her, man is a savage”. I do not know that a text-to-speech engine can be taught to make that kind of distinction and to bring that kind of nuance. The other element, too, is tone. The best audio describers employ something that I call “concinnence”, the tone of voice is in concinnence with what is being described. If it is a happy scene, there is a lilt, there is an upbeat quality; if it is a serious scene, there is a sober quality to the voice. I am not sure that text-to-speech can be aware of what is happening over the through line of a video, to understand that “this part here needs to be in a certain way” because of what is on the screen and because of what comes later. That kind of nuance, that kind of subtlety is important and is something that a good writer of description and a good voicer of description can provide.

This video was prepared by Elisa Perego and produced by Angelika De Markis, Laura Mariani and Annalisa Navetta from University of Trieste. The narrator was Annalisa Navetta.

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