



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

ELEMENT 3. TECHNICAL ASPECTS

E2U AD PRINCIPLES, GUIDELINES AND CONVENTIONS

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 3B, E2U and AD; element 3. Technical aspects, video lecture "E2U AD principles, guidelines, and conventions". This is Elisa Perego, from Università degli Studi di Trieste,

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and in this video lecture I will tackle the most relevant technical aspects linked to the AD production process. I will also link them to the E2U context and emphasise those aspects that can contribute to making an AD easier to listen to.

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Overall, the technical principles, aspects, and conventions that are applied in the standard AD production process should also apply to the production of E2U AD. In a nutshell, these comprise:

- mastering specialized AD software, or even subtitling software which are often used to generate time codes and to measure the time available for the AD between dialogues and sound effects – this, by the way, is called “spotting”;
- identifying the appropriate time code (or a keyword) when the voice talent reading your AD must start speaking;

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- providing a legend, at the beginning of your script, where you define instructions (an F for “fast”, for instance, might invite the voice talent to speed up the reading pace a little);

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- noting when the voice can or cannot go over the soundtrack, or, again, giving some advice on the intonation depending on the source material;
- and finally writing down in the AD script, in brackets, special pronunciation.

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This set of recommendations, listed by Benecke and Volz in the 2014 ADLAB guidelines, suggest that, in an E2U context, the AD script might be easily

enriched with instructions that can enhance the comprehensibility and the listenability of the AD in question – be it a screen or an art AD.

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Exploiting a slow pace more often than in standard AD, emphasising words that are particularly relevant to the comprehension of the AD and of the source text, clearly articulating long or complex words, making frequent pauses, might just be some simple hacks with a huge impact on the listenability of the final text.

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Moving to a more technical level, Benecke and Volz remind us that, once finalized, the AD script is transformed from a written to an oral text. This implies the selection of the type of AD delivery: will it be human-voiced or a text-to-speech AD? In the former case, the most appropriate voice talent should be selected, usually by genre.

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The recording is often done at a recording studio, where the sound director might be sight impaired - or involve a sight impaired colleague - to make appropriate user-centred decisions on intonation and speed.

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In this respect, if we have to create an E2U AD, we might consider adding an E2U user or expert who can further validate the AD quality in terms of simplification and comprehensibility. Team work is in fact a good practice

in both the AD and the E2U contexts, where the opinion of users and the implementation of their feedback is a backbone.

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After the recording session, disturbing noises will be cleared by a sound technician or designer before mixing the AD with the original soundtrack in the case of audiovisual products.

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In E2U AD, optimising the reception of AD to make it *easy to listen* is paramount. In their recent chapter entitled “Easier audio description”, included in the volume edited by Sabine Braun and Kim Starr “Innovation in audio description research”, Bernabé and Orero offer invaluable food-for-thought on the subject.

The authors insist on the need to intervene on the technical aspects of AD delivery to improve its reception. They claim that interventions might be applied also to the original version in order to improve it, for instance by

- reducing noise and enhancing speech, relying on audio engineering technology to highlight dialogue and improve its intelligibility, especially when it is relevant;
- and by modifying those sounds (normally with a simply aesthetic rather than diegetic function) that interfere with the reception and accessibility of the dialogues.



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Reading speed is another key factor when it comes to easy-to-listen products.

Although setting a unique delivery rate is impossible given the massively diversified abilities of humans in processing speech, studies on the subject seem to point to the overall need to diminish the number of words per minute as a safe way to ensure improved listening comprehension.

So, as a rule of thumb, E2U AD might consider *avoiding* the standard 180 or even 170 words per minute.

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Finally, it would be useful to enable users to personalize their E2U ADs and to choose their preferred setting according to personal requirements or the situation. This means that they would be able to set a different AD volume according to their needs or depending on whether they are listening to an AD on their smartphones or at the cinema, at home or at an open event.

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Don't forget that ADs are used in a variety of settings, and they cater for the accessibility of a variety of products: screen products, live exhibitions, external environments such as gardens, museums and galleries, opera, theatre, dance, concerts, and many more.



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It will be up to you to mix and match the recommendations that you have learned, find new ones, and determine whether their efficacy depends on what you will be describing with comprehensibility and listenability in mind.

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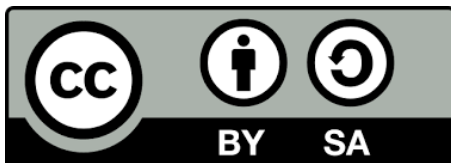
This video lecture was prepared by Elisa Perego and produced by Andreea Deleanu, from Università degli Studi di Trieste.

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