EASIT

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

ELEMENT 1. PROCESSES

EASY-TO-READ FACILITATES AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

External Video Transcript

Slide 1

This is unit 3B, E2U and AD; element 1. Processes, other video "Easy-to-read facilitates Audio Descriptions". This video is reproduced with permission of: Ulla Bohman.

Slide 2

In this external video, you will watch and listen to the presentation entitled "Easy-to-Read facilitates Audio Descriptions" and given by Ulla Bohman at the 9th International Media for All Conference held online in January 2021 and organised by TransMedia Catalonia.

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The presentation focuses on the benefits of applying easy-to-read language to audio description.

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Media for All conferences provide a platform for all stakeholders in the realms of audiovisual translation and media accessibility,

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and enable them to interact, share knowledge and expand their horizons while demonstrating the true potential of multidisciplinary work.

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Ulla Bohman has been the director of the Easy Language Service from 2001 to 2014, and she has been an employee at the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media from 2015 to 2018.

Since 2018 she has been running her own business: Boarve konsult AB.

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Ulla Bohman offers training and lectures in Easy Language, accessibility and human rights, and editing services in Easy Language.

She has expertise in intercultural and accessible communication and has been invited to present keynote addresses, presentations and workshops at several international conferences.

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You can contact her at: ulla@boarve.se or visit the website www.boarve.se.

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The language used in audio descriptions must be understood by the audience. But who is the audience? What knowledge has the audience and what frames of reference? This presentation is about how useful the concept of Easy-to-Read Language can be for audio descriptions.

My name is Ulla Bohman. I´ve been working with accessible information and Easy-to-Read Language for about 20 years in Sweden.

I will start with some clarifications:

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So far there is not an international consensus regarding what word to use in English – Easy-to-Read or just Easy Language. This is important to point out.

Each country who works with Easy-to-Read or Easy Language has its own word in their native language.

In Sweden it is called "Lättläst"– which translated into English means Easy-to-Read.

Since Sweden took a leading role internationally with making texts accessible for people with reading difficulties, the Swedish word was translated and become Easy-to-Read in the English language.

At first ER referred to written texts only. But today the ER concept covers text, as well as easy-to-read verbal language, and both the verbal language and the written language must be easy to understand; otherwise, it is not ER.

In this presentation I will use "Easy-to-Read". But if you come across the word "Easy Language" you should know that it is the same as ER. One other thing that is important to point out is that ER is not to be be mixed up with Plain Language.

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Plain Language is a language without bureaucratic words, with a simple but correct construction of sentences.

Plain language do not focus specially on a target group with difficulties." Easy-to-Read is therefore a complement to Plain Language. ER focus on a reader and an audience that has difficulties and challenges with reading. Plain Language focus on a reader of the general public with no specific challenges. Exactly where the line between ER and Plain Language is, is very difficult to say. Both are needed. And as I said, they complement each other.

Okay, so what does ER have to do with audio descriptions?

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The Core Principles of Easy-to-Read Language covers: content, language, presentation.

Regarding the content: The target group should get all the inform ation they need to understand the information from the information.

Does it sound complicated?

This means that you have to add information and explain things that might not be common knowledge for your target group.

Regarding the language: the language should be easy to understand

for the intended target group.

Regarding the presentation: the presentation should be well-structured, with a clear layout.

So what has this to do with audio descriptions?

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The whole concept of ER focus on: what previous knowledge the target group has about this content/topic.

That has an impact on the language, and the words that we can use. What frames of references the target group have. This also has an impact on the language, the words that we can use.

I will give you some examples.

The novel "The People of Hemsö" written by the Swedish author August Strindberg in 1887 starts with "Carlsson arrives to the farm in the Stockholm archipelago with a Höganäs bottle around his neck…".

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The slide shows a Höganäs bottle. Is this the image you get when you hear the word Höganäs bottle?

Very few people today know what kind of bottle this is – their knowledge is limited.

Höganäs was an old factory in the south of Sweden which started their production of different household items in ceramics more than 100 years ago.

The brown color was very typical for their products.

In an ER version of this novel, the sentence might instead be like this: "Carlsson arrives to the farm on the island with an old ceramic bottle for alcohol around his neck."

This principle can be used for audio descriptions as well.

One other example:

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The slide shows a Gotlandic Medieval church. In Easy-to-Read we might say instead:

This is a typical church of the Swedish island of Gotland. The church is about 900 years old. It is made of limestone, has a wooden roof and a tall bell tower.

Not everyone knows what Medieval is, that it was a time period in our history. Not everyone knows where Gotland is located. They might not know it is an island in Sweden.

The ER text will give this information. It doesn´t take for granted that the reader has this background knowledge.

One more example, and a very current one:

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The slide shows a picture of the corona virus.

If you know that corona means crown, maybe you can get the image that the virus looks like a crown.

Maybe we need to describe it like this: "The Corona virus looks like a red or orange ball with needles stuck into it. The tip of each needle looks like small flower.

In Sweden it might still work to describe the Corona virus as a classic Christmas decoration which is the citrus fruit orange decorated with the spice cloves.

This brings me to the importance of sharing frames of references:

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The slide shows an old reel tape-recorder. My three children are born in the 1990´s. We have never had a reel tape-recorder at home, and I don´t know if they have ever seen one.

That means: they don´t necessarily relate the word "reel" to something with wheels. "Reel" – spelt R E E L is another word for wheel or role.

My kids have never heard what it sounds like when you are operating the tape-recorder. They don´t have the experience of how the tape can get tangled up and break. My kids haven't experienced the smell of the tape.

All these kind of firsthand experiences add to our frames of reference and how we interpret words, information, text.

Without seeing the picture, a description would help my kids to interpret the concept correctly. But for everyone that has gone to school in Sweden in the 1960's and 1970's a reel tape-recorder is well known. There was one in every single Swedish classroom.

So our frames of reference are crucial when we interpret texts or things around us.

Our frames of reference are depending on what generation we are and our cultural background.

Another example:

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At Christmas time in Sweden the Swedish television always shows some Walt Disney cartoons. One is when Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy are on a camping trip. The picture on the slide shows when Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck are eating corn on the cob.

The sound effect in this scene of the cartoon movie is an old-fashioned typewriter.

Every bite Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck take of the corn is illustrated with the sound of someone typing on the keys the old typewriter.

When Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck reach the end of the corn of the cob, there is a "pling" sound in the cartoon, just like the sound when you have reached the right margin of the paper in the typewriter and manually need to change line.

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It is the sound of a typewriter like the one shown in this picture. That is the sound effect in the Walt Disney cartoon.

But the majority of the kids today have never seen an old-fashioned typewriter. Therefore, they do not have any references to what it sounds like. They don´t relate the sound illustration with the image of a typewriter.

Just some trivia: the name of this old typewriter is Corona. I think it is amazing how the word Corona keeps popping up in so many different context nowadays. I was not aware of that old grandpa's typewriter was a Corona!

To know how an old-fashioned typewriter sounds is an example of how important it can be to have the same background knowledge and the same frames of reference in order to make the same understanding or intended interpretation of something.

This you have to be aware of when working with ER. These are core principles of writing ER information.

So the target groups knowledge and frames of references are always taken into consideration in ER information. This is also valuable for making audio descriptions.

I've said earlier that the principles of Easy-to-Read also refers to the language:

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The ER Language use: common and simple words, words with a concrete meaning and no expressions or metaphors. I will give you some examples:

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There are several synonyms to many of the words we use in our native languages. In ER we always try to use the most common word, the word that is most simple or easy.

An easy word does not have to be a short word or a word that is specifically easy to spell. If it is a common word it can be well known and therefor easy to understand even if it is long and somewhat difficult to spell correctly. Working with ER we try to choose the most common word. Here are some examples: "invoice" and "bill", "emancipate" and "release" or "free".

Sometimes there are no exact synonyms consisting of one word. In those cases it might be better to use several explanatory words instead, like: "xenophobia" and "fear or hate of strangers" or maybe, depending on the context the word "racism" could work. "Cutlery" and "forks, knives and spoons".

Working with ER we are cautious about words with double meanings.

Actually, the word "bill" as I just used as an example, can also mean "a document related to a law". But I think that interpretation is more unusual.

We always must keep in mind our target group when choosing the words we use in ER. Many words have a double meaning or a very wide meaning. This sentence for example:

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"Communications in Spain are bad!".

The word "communication" has several different meanings.

If I mean the public transportation system, I will specify that in the ER text instead of using the word "communications": if I mean buses and trains, I will say so.

Bad is also a word that can be interpreted in different ways. Do I mean that the buses and trains are old and that they are often breaking down, or do I mean that the buses and trains never are on time?

I will specify this in ER. I will be concrete!

Finally a few word about expression or metaphors:

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Most languages use expressions and metaphors. Often, we don´t even reflect about the individual words in an expression. Every word can be a common, easy word. But in a specific combination in a sentence they might start meaning something else.

Here is one example: in Swedish when we want to start the TV we say "Slå på TV!"

Which literally means "Hit the TV". In English the expression is: "Turn on the TV!".

If you interpret this sentence word by word, you should go to your TV-set and turn the set around.

In ER we try to avoid these kind of expressions since they can be misinterpreted by persons who are new to the language or by persons who for other reasons have a limited knowledge about different expressions.

It is important to remember that expressions are something you must learn. It is not enough to know the individual words in the expression. Put together the meaning of the words will be something different.

Remember also that expressions are the last thing you learn when you conquer a new language.

So, to summarize:

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If a person who is doing audio descriptions knows the basic principles of ER, he or she can do audio descriptions that are comprehensible for a big target group of different generations and of different cultural backgrounds.

In that way Easy-to-Read can facilitate Audio Descriptions.

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If you want to know more about the Easy-to-Read principles and how to write or speak ER, please contact me!

Thank you for your attention!

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Ulla Bohman's video "Easy-to-read facilitates Audio Descriptions" was produced by Tiger Brisius in 2021.

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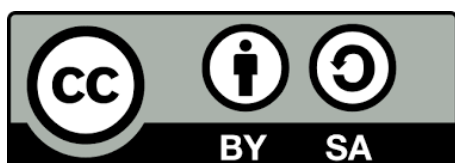
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