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UNIT 3A. EASY-TO-UNDERSTAND (E2U) AND SUBTITLING

ELEMENT 2. LINGUISTIC ASPECTS

SUBTITLING PARAMETERS: VISUAL ASPECTS

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is Unit 3A. Easy-to-Understand and subtitling. Element 2. Linguistic aspects. Video lecture: Subtitling parameters: visual aspects.

My name is Rocío Bernabé from the Internationale Hochschule SDI München, in Germany.

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This video lecture focuses on the visual presentation of subtitles on screen. We will discuss how verbal and non-verbal aspects of a subtitle can be visually adapted to support perception. We are dealing with parameters that support legibility as the ability to perceive and decode information. These parameters are: placement, contrast, lines, and fonts.

The input provided in this lecture has been taken from a peer-reviewed article entitled "Identifying parameters for creating Easy to Read subtitles". You can find the article in the reading list.

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First, placement. The Easy-to-Read guidelines published by Inclusion Europe recommend to position subtitles on the bottom of the screen. That is on lower third. The guidelines also recommend that this position should remain the same throughout the whole video.

While Inclusion Europe emphasises that it is very important to keep the same position, sometimes this might not be possible, for instance, when subtitles overlay relevant information on screen. In such cases, we advise you to follow the guidelines for subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, in short SDH, until more research has been done in this area for Easy-to-Understand subtitles.

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A strong contrast between a subtitle text, or foreground, and the background helps viewers finding and decoding the text. The background of a subtitle can be both a dark box or the film images themselves.

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Either way, the recommended contrast ratio between a foreground, that is the text, or a background, that is the images or the box, should be 4.5:1. This is also the recommendation by the current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines for double AA.

This ratio means that a colour "a" needs to be 4.5 times darker, or lighter, than a colour "b". There are many free tools in the Internet that you can use to test contrast ratios. For instance, I use a programme, or a tool called Colour Contrast Analyzer.

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Different techniques can be used to enable a strong contrast. The most common one is the use of white text embedded in a dark, black box. As you know, this technique is also used in SDH subtitling.

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The size and transparency of a box are not standardised yet. Sometimes the box is opaque and covers the whole low third of a screen, as in this example.

The advantage here is a strong contrast and that the section of a screen remains the same and static throughout the whole show. However, the disadvantage is that the box overlaps with the image to a great extent.

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The boxes can be transparent and smaller, that is they adapt to fit the size of the subtitle lines. Smaller, transparent boxes are also used in standard subtitling and in subtitling for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing.

Inclusion Europe's recommendations also support the use of transparent backgrounds that enable to see the image behind the box.

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Not using a box at all is also a possibility. However, as you can tell from our example, ensuring a good contrast ratio throughout the whole show might be sometimes a challenging task.

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As for the subtitle lines, they should be static, meaning they should not be animated or move around the screen.

The recommended maximum of subtitle lines is two. Indeed, if we consider that Easy-to-Understand subtitles use larger font-sizes than standard ones, three lines may be necessary. However, using three lines overlays the image to a great extent. The suitability of a solution for a specific audiovisual product or even a scene will depend significantly on the targeted audience, on the type of audiovisual content and product, and the message.

Lastly, the two recommendations agree with current subtitling practice. That is: a sentence should start in a new line and that we should use a line per speaker.

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Currently, there is no standardised practice with regards to the number of characters in a line in Easy-to-Understand contexts. This means that some subtitlers use a maximum of 37 to 40 characters per line as recommended for pre-recorded subtitles. But it also means that longer lines are used, especially in intralingual subtitles. Those are subtitles in the same language. This practise is known from real-time intralingual subtitling.

If we lean on empirical data from research in subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, our recommendation would be to use lines of 37 to 40 characters. Overall, it is important that the text and the image are in sync and that the information provided is linked to the images that viewers can see on the screen.

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The use of larger font-sizes is also a visual aspect that supports legibility. Font-sizes of at least 14 points are recommended in Easy-to-Read in print. However, "points" is not a measurement for digital formats. Instead, you can use pixels, or percent, or ems values that enable you to use larger font-sizes.

To give you an example, 14 points in print are 18.66 pixels in digital. Similarly, 18 points in print are 24 pixels in digital.

Typefaces also play a role in legibility. The aim is to use typefaces that allow viewers to recognize letters and words as fast as possible and with the less effort possible. For this reason, sans-serif typefaces such as Calibri, Tahoma, or Verdana, or Open Sans are recommended.

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Text alignment also plays a role in legibility. In Easy-to-Read contexts, left-alignment is always used for written information.

According to this recommendation, a subtitle text that expands over two lines should be aligned to the left.

The implementation of this recommendation is sometimes not possible. For instance, digital platforms, such as YouTube, still do not allow left alignment. This may explain actually why the implementation of this recommendation in audiovisual contexts is still lagging.

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Lastly, the use of subtitles should always be a personal choice. Viewers should be able to turn on and off subtitles at any time. Of course, this is

only possible if we also provide clear instructions about how to do this and follow conventions that are widely used, for instance, the use of the CC button that is often used in multimedia players. “CC” means Closed Captions, and Closed Captions are captions that you can turn on and off, at any time.

In Easy-to-Read contexts, it is also recommended to provide access to the subtitle file itself. This file could be used by users to read the story before watching the video. Indeed, we could also provide what I like to call "extended" subtitle file, which may include additional information and explanations that would support understanding the storyline.

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To recap, in this video lecture, we have seen that a lower position, as well as a good contrast, legible fonts, and shorter subtitling lines can enhance the visual presentation of subtitle events and, ultimately, support legibility.

The fact that visual parameters for Easy-to-Understand subtitles are not standardised yet, underlines the need to be coherent in our choices and to rely on the experience in SDH subtitling.

There is a long road ahead of us in terms of research, for instance, about the number of characters per line and the number of subtitle lines in Easy-to-Understand subtitling. As for now, many thanks for your attention.

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This video lecture has been prepared by Rocío Bernabé, from the Internationale Hochschule SDI München, in Germany, in collaboration with the Universidade de Vigo, in Spain.

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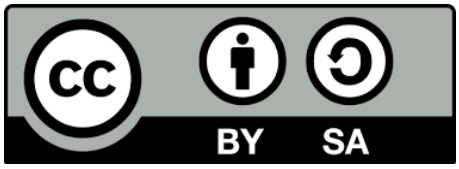

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