EASIT

UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 5. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 1, Media Accessibility; element 5, Media accessibility services, video lecture Sign language interpreting. I am Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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In this short lecture I will be talking about sign language interpreting.

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When you don't understand a language, interpreting can be a useful access service. This interpreting can take place from an oral language into another oral language. For instance, Swahili into Portuguese. But also from an oral language into a sign language, for instance from Catalan into Catalan Sign Language. In this case, it is an access service for those who cannot hear the original but communicate in sign language. Of course,

interpreting can also happen between two sign languages and from a sign language into an oral language.

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Sign languages are the main means of communication for Deaf people, and I write Deaf with a capital letter in this case to point out I am referring to a community. Sign languages are natural languages as any spoken language. The difference is that sign languages are visual-gestural languages: they use hands and arms, facial expressions, eyebrow positions, mouthing, head tilts, shoulder and torso positions. It is important to highlight that the same way there are many spoken languages, there are also many sign languages, not just one.

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Interpreting into either spoken or sign languages can be useful in many settings: radio programmes, television, scenic arts, cinema, live events, etc. The interpreting can be simultaneous, that is happening at the same time the source content is delivered, with a slight delay; consecutive, in which source content and interpreting alternate; and liaison, in which interpreting happens when needed, in a less structured way, generally in social contexts. Interpreting can be live or recorded, with or without preparation, and the interpreter can actually be in the place where the event is taking place or can be interpreting remotely.

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Focusing exclusively on sign language interpreting on screen, the interpreter can be shown differently. I will give you three examples. First

example: the image of the interpreter is inserted in the main image, what is called a picture-in-picture. Second example: the image of the interpreter is integrated with the background image using chroma. Third example: the screen is split in two. You can find many more examples on the website signlangtv.org.

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Apart from human interpreters, there is now research on automatic interpreting in which avatars or virtual characters are used, and speech recognition, machine translation and sign language synthesis (or text-to-sign technologies) are being used. This does not come without controversy, but I would suggest you keep an eye on these developments.

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In 2017, HBB4ALL, a European project that researched access services in HbbTV, produced some very interesting guidelines on sign language interpreting which I invite you to read. The guidelines stress some important factors you should be aware of for a successful sign language interpreting:

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When filming, special attention should be paid to aspects such as illumination, the size of the signing space or the shot type.

The interaction of the visuals and the screen layout with the sign language interpreter should also be considered. We are asking users to

split their attention and we should make it as easy as possible for them to process all the information on screen.

The colour combination is also important. Some colours may cause eye fatigue and affect perception.

The shape and size of the sign language interpreter on screen is normally considered one of the main features to be taken into account. If the signer is not visible enough, signing will not be accessible.

Its position is also important. In this regard, user personalization and customization may be the way to go: user content is personalised to their needs, and they are also offered the opportunity to customise it.
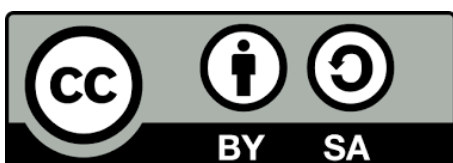
I invite you to learn more about sign languages through additional readings and by paying attention to how sign language interpreters are present on different types of audiovisual content.

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This video lecture has been prepared by Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. You can reach me at anna.matamala@uab.cat.

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