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UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 5. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

AUDIO SUBTITLING

Video Lecture Transcript

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

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In this short lecture I will be talking about audio subtitles. They are also called spoken subtitles.

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Audio subtitles, as the name indicates, are subtitles converted into spoken words, converted into an audio format. Why would this be necessary? Well, imagine you are watching a movie in Chinese subtitled into Catalan. You are a Catalan speaker and don't understand Chinese. Subtitles can

help you. But what if you are a slow reader or a person with sight loss? In this case, you need the subtitles to be read out loud.

Audio subtitles can be an independent access service or they can be integrated in an audio description. If you are a slow reader, you can already see the images: you only need audio subtitling. If you are a person with sight loss, you will need both the audio subtitles and a description of the images, that is an audio description.

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Audio subtitling is a lesser-known access service: there is less research and there are fewer countries where audio subtitling is offered, especially as an independent service. According to a survey launched by EBU in 2016 eight television broadcasters in Europe out of 36 were offering audio subtitles as an independent service: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, in this latter case in Catalan television. The presence of audio subtitles integrated in audio descriptions is wider, and you can find them in films which are fully or partially subtitled.

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In a 2019 book on audiovisual translation and accessibility, I classified audio subtitles according to different parameters.

Depending on the time in which they are created and delivered, one can talk about recorded or live subtitling, with or without planning.

Depending on the creation process and the voice, there are audio subtitles voiced through a text-to-speech system and human-voiced

subtitles. When a human voice is used, audio subtitles can be read in an acted way or in a less emphatic way.

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These prosodic features (the intonation) together with the synchronization of the audio subtitles with the original give place to two effects identified by Sabine Braun and Pilar Orero: a voice-over effect, in which the audio subtitles overlap with the original, and a dubbing effect, in which the audio subtitles replace the original dialogues.

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Sometimes a single voice is used to read the audio subtitles and the audio description. So one single voice for both. Sometimes different voices are used. Here you can find different situations. For example, a single male voice could be used for all male characters and one female voice for all female characters. Or you could have one voice for the audio description and only one voice for all the audio subtitles.

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Another categorization is related to synchronization. Audio subtitles are synchronous when they are read at the same time they are shown on screen. They are asynchronous when they are read before or after.

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When audio subtitles are integrated with an audio description, it is important that users can identify the audio subtitles as such. This can be

achieved by different means: using different voices, changing the intonation, or adding a label before the audio subtitles are voiced. For instance, "Subtitles read:"

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It is also very important that users know who is speaking. Again, this can be achieved by: using a different voice for each character; adding an indication of who is speaking before the subtitle is read (for instance, "Mary:"); using reported speech, or using a voice-over effect, in which, as I mentioned before, the original voices can be heard and hopefully the characters can be identified.

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Synchronisation of audio subtitles with the original dialogues is one of the most critical problems. Imagine you need to read out a number like 1,234. It takes quite a long time, longer than reading it on a written subtitle on screen. In this case, either you speak a bit faster or you edit the subtitle.

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In fact, audio subtitles can be read literally as they appear on screen or they can be edited to make them shorter or to add some oral features. You need to take into account that an audio subtitle corresponds to spoken words in a language A that are translated into written words in a language B that are then transferred into spoken words in the same language B.

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You can find recommendations about audio subtitles in some audio description standards, but I would like to draw your attention to an ISO standard which provides guidance on the audio presentation of text in videos, including captions, subtitles and other on-screen text. It is a technical specification that not only deals with audio subtitles but with other types of on-screen texts that need to be translated into audio texts.

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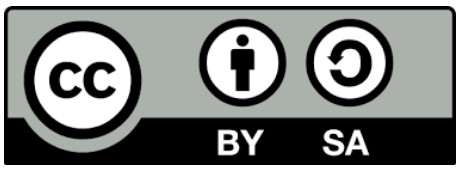
This video lecture has been prepared by Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. You can reach me at anna.matamala@uab.cat.



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