UNIT 1. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY

ELEMENT 5. MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

SUBTITLING

Video Lecture Transcript

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This is unit 1, Media Accessibility; element 5, Media accessibility services, video lecture Subtitling.

I am Anna Matamala, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

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In this lecture I will be talking about the different types of subtitles you can find.

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Subtitles transfer oral elements of an audiovisual content into written texts, generally at the bottom of the screen. They are displayed in synchrony with the images. This general definition can be further specified depending on the type of subtitles.

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If we take into account the language, subtitles can be intralingual or interlingual. Imagine a Swedish movie is subtitled into Chinese: these would be interlingual subtitles.

Now imagine the same Swedish movie subtitled into Swedish: these would be intralingual subtitles, same-language subtitles.

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Depending on the number of languages in the subtitles, we can differentiate between monolingual, bilingual and multilingual subtitles. Monolingual subtitles include just one language: a Norwegian movie subtitled into Spanish. Bilingual subtitles include two languages, with one line per language or sometimes two lines per language. In Belgium, you can find subtitles in French and Flemish at the same time. In some exceptional situations you can even find subtitles in three languages: this was seen in some films at the Barcelona Film Festival, with burnt-in subtitles in English and electronic subtitles in Catalan and Spanish.

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Depending on the main target audience, one can differentiate between subtitles addressed to those who can hear the content and those who cannot hear it. Although the term "subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing" is the one used for the latter type of subtitles, these subtitles are useful beyond this user group. The expected target audience also allows us to differentiate between subtitles for children—whose reading speed may be slower—and subtitles for adults.

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Depending on the amount of information they transfer, and how they transfer it, one could talk about verbatim, condensed and even simplified or easy subtitles. Verbatim subtitles reproduce the source content literally. Although in certain situations such as language learning verbatim subtitles may be helpful, in other situations this literal rendering makes reading and comprehension difficult, so subtitles need to be condensed, with some elements omitted. This strategy may also need to be applied to the so-called simplified or easy subtitles, where additional simplification techniques may need to be implemented. But this will be the topic of another unit.

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If we consider the aim of the subtitles, I see that some have a translation purpose: you don't understand the language, you need subtitles. Others provide access to an audio content that cannot be heard: you don't hear the audio, you need subtitles. But subtitles may be useful for other purposes: as a didactic tool to learn languages, as a therapeutic tool for speech therapy, or even for fun. Have you ever sung karaoke? Well, you were reading a special type of subtitles.

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There are other elements that can help us classify subtitles. Depending on the moment the subtitles are created and delivered, we can find subtitles which are produced live with no previous planning; subtitles which are sent live but have been prepared previously; and subtitles which have

been recorded, after a preparation process. There is another EASIT video lecture in which we will deal with live subtitles specifically.

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Depending on the author of the subtitles, one can talk about professional subtitles and amateur subtitles, fansubs. It is also possible to generate subtitles automatically by means of speech technologies, sometimes with a machine translation component.

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The position of the subtitles allows us to talk about subtitles, generally positioned at the bottom of a screen, or surtitles, generally found in theatres, at the top. You can even find "lateral subtitles", on the side of the screen.

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The way subtitles appear on screen also makes it possible to differentiate between block subtitles and dynamic subtitles, which may appear word by word or line by line. The first type is usually for recorded subtitles. The second type is usually for live subtitles.

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Still another categorization distinguishes open and closed subtitles. If you go to a cinema and subtitles are present for all the audience, you are watching a film with open subtitles. If you are home and you can activate or deactivate subtitles, you are watching a film with closed subtitles.
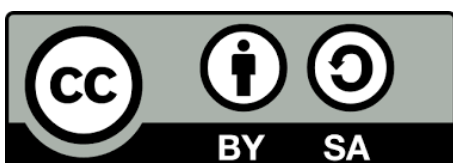
This broad categorization makes it clear that there are many types of subtitles, and each of them may have their own specificities. The next time you watch subtitled content, give some thought to what type of subtitles you are reading.

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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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