Module 1

Unit 2: Defining audio description

Core video transcript

Module 1

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Transcript

Slide 1

Hello. I'm Gert Vercauteren from the University of Antwerp in Belgium. In this ADLAB PRO video I will explain what Audio Description (AD) exactly is and how it ensures that the target audience can fully understand and enjoy the multimodal text in which it is integrated. This is Unit 2 (Defining AD) in Module 1 (General Introduction).

Slide 2

Although many of you probably know what audio description – or AD – is, it may be a good idea to refresh your memory. Not in the least, because the concept has been defined in quite a few ways and not all existing definitions mention all the relevant characteristics. So let me first give you an overview of some commonly used definitions, and then formulate my own.

Slide 3

In 2004, Piety defined AD as "the practice of using language to give persons who are visually impaired […] access to movies, television programmes, and live events" (p. 453).

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Slide 4

One year later, Matamala (2005) defined the service as "providing a narration of what is seen, i.e. giving an oral description of visual elements such as actions, costumes or props found in cultural events" (p. 9)

Slide 5

Still a few years later, in the collection of articles published after the first Media4All conference, Greening and Rolph (2007) defined AD as "the addition of a descriptive narrative to accompany the key visual elements of theatre, television, cinema and other visual media" (p. 127)

Slide 6

Based on these three definitions, we can already gather a few basic characteristics of audio description. First of all, as pointed out by Piety, it is an assistive service for people with sight loss. Second, it is in fact a two stage process: it is – as mentioned by Matamala – an oral service, but one that is usually rendered on the basis of a written text. And third, as becomes apparent from the last definition, it is service that can be added to any kind of audiovisual product, both static and dynamic, pre-recorded and live.

Slide 7

However, a more recent definition by Reviers and Vercauteren (2013) shows that AD includes more dimensions. They define the concept as: "a service that makes audiovisual products accessible and enjoyable for the blind and visually impaired by transferring images and unclear sounds into a verbal narration that interacts with the dialogues and sounds of the original text with which it forms a coherent whole."

Slide 8

A first element this last definition adds, is that it should not only make a product accessible, but that the description should also be pleasant to listen to. Furthermore, while the previous definitions say it is a description of visual images, Reviers and Vercauteren rightly point out that it should also pay attention to sounds people with sight loss might not be able to interpret without an explanation. As such, the AD should also frame the dialogues (i.e. make sure it is clear who is talking) and identify unclear sounds. In other words, the AD interacts with all the different modes of the audiovisual text.

Slide 9

Based on all these observations, we can now formulate our own

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definition of AD, namely "a service aimed at making any kind of (audio)visual product accessible and enjoyable to visually impaired people by translating visual and unclear aural information into a verbal narration that increases their understanding and enhances enjoyment of that product".

Well… that's it for this unit. Now that you know what AD is, it should be easier for you to learn more about this access service.

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