Module 1

Unit 8: Central audio description issues

Core video transcript

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Transcript

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Hello. I'm Gert Vercauteren from the University of Antwerp in Belgium. In this ADLAB PRO video I will tell you a bit more about what some of the most important issues are when it comes to creating an audio description. This is Unit 8 (Central AD Issues) in Module 1 (General Introduction).

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A good starting point to determine what are considered to be the most important issues in AD creation, are the earliest documents published on this translation modality, namely national guidelines and early articles in translation journals.

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Basically, all these documents agree that there are four essential questions that have to be addressed:

a) What should be described?
b) When should it be described?
c) How should it be described?
d) How much should be described?

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Let us first briefly look at what should be described. Ideally, that should be "everything there is to see on screen". But it goes without saying that

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describing everything there is to see, is simply impossible. Moreover… you should describe much more! A contradiction you say? Non necessarily. Let me explain.

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First of all, you have to describe the images. This includes describing characters, their actions and the setting, this means the time and place, in which these actions take place. In other words, you describe who does what, when and where.

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Second, you also have to describe certain sounds. Indeed, people with sight loss may have difficulties identifying ambiguous sound effects and as such, they should be explained. In addition, describing sounds also includes translating foreign dialogues through audio subtitling, dubbing or voice-over.

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Finally, text-on-screen such as logos, opening and closing titles, text on signs in the film, etc. have to be "read" or described too.

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The second question, when should it be described, refers to the moment when the description is heard. Ideally, this is when the production is "completely silent", but that hardly ever occurs. As such, the general guideline says you should never describe over dialogues – since these are the first source of information for people with sight loss – and avoid describing over sound effects as much as possible, particularly if the sound is relevant for the story.

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The question of How to describe, deals with the language and style of the description. A few general rules of thumb, are that:

- The description should sound natural, since it is meant to be read out loud.

- This means the language cannot be too complicated and that sentences should be simple. This does not mean that metaphors or descriptive words enhancing the text, should be avoided. On the contrary…

- The describer should use a vivid and varied language, that is clear and precise.

- He should also make sure that the description matches the style of the film or TV programme, and that the wording and phrasing matches the audience.

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The question of **how much** to describe, has not been fully answered yet. Existing guidelines say that you should "not describe too much" because this may be exhausting, or that "describing a lot just because time allows should be avoided".

If you use software to create your AD, you can set a value of about 17 characters per second or 180 words per minute. However, this is just an indication. Here, your own judgement comes in and you should try to gear your description to the programme and scene at hand. A slow, panoramic shot may need less description, an action-packed scene will need more.

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Well, this is it for this video. As you will have noticed, we barely scratched the surface of what is important in AD, and there is a lot more to learn.

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