Module 1

Unit 9: Audio description voicing

Core video transcript

Module 1

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Transcript

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Hello. I'm Nina Reviers, from the University of Antwerp, and in this ADLAB PRO video I will discuss AD voicing. This is Unit 9 in Module 1, General Introduction.

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In this unit, we will discuss the following topics:

- Why is voicing important for AD?
- Who voices AD?
- What constitutes good voicing in AD?

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Why is voicing important for AD? Speech is about more than words alone and this so-called para-linguistic information can have a great influence on meaning and enjoyment. Particularly in Audio Description, where time is everything and you only have a few words to get your message across.

As Joel Snyder, US AD pioneer, phrased it, and I quote: 'we make meaning with our voices.'

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As a result, voicing is almost always done by trained and professional voice talents. However, in some contexts, such as live theatre, describers voice

their own scripts, because they are familiar with the piece and best prepared to deal with live timing and improvisation.

Also note that synthetic voices are sometimes used for AD. However, this is still an experimental technique and research is still studying the contexts for which synthetic voices are appropriate, such as documentaries

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But what constitutes good voicing in the context of AD? Aside from a pleasant voice, good articulation and correct pronunciation, voice talents have to take into account specific issues. In this unit, I wil discuss prosody, delivery style and microphone technique.

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Prosody includes tone, pace, emphasis, rhythm, pitch, dynamic range and segmentation.

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For example: Stress is an important tool for describers. The meaning of a phrase can be completely reversed by changing only the stress.

Consider this examples:

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'it's not *having* blue Smarties that makes me cross'

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is different from:

'it's *not* having blue Smarties that makes me cross'.

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Another typical prosody issue in AD is related to tone. Rising intonation at the end of a sentence is typical of questions, but can also suggest that a statement has still to be completed. This type of suspension is common in live description, where describers not lower their sentence at the end of a phrase, because they are uncertain about what is coming next. But, it has the effect of leaving the listener hanging and it is often better to complete the sentence and lower your intonation.

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As well as tone, the pace of delivery can also be varied to suit the scene – a fast-action sequence benefits from a quicker pace, while a slower delivery would be more appropriate for a lyrical love scene.

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What about delivery style? Traditionally, describers are advised to use a neutral delivery style. The ITC Guidance, for instance, says that, and I quote "the delivery should be steady, unobtrusive and impersonal in style, so that the personality and views of the describer do not colour the programme."

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However it can be important to add emotion, excitement, lightness of touch at different points in different programmes to suit the mood and plot development – the style should be matched to the genre of the programme."

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For instance, "where the background music is menacing, the voice should reflect the tension, without becoming melodramatic. In comedy, the narration should be steady but delivered with a slight smile in the voice'.

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Finally, microphone technique also influences the quality of AD voicing. Key elements to remember are to position the microphone correctly and not to project. The microphone does this for you, so try to speak as naturally as possible.

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Finally, it is important to warm-up and train your voice when you will be voicing an AD. For instance, singing exercises, humming, tongue twisters and exercises to release tension in the jaw can all help to ensure that you do not start unprepared. Also, regularly record yourself and read out loud frequently to train your voice.

Also, make sure to listening back when you have recorded descriptions or ask someone to listen to you while rehearsing for a live AD, in order to identify errors or problems.

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The information in this unit is largely based on Louise Fryer's 2016 book *An Introduction to Audio Description.* A must read if you want to know more!

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