



MULTIPLIER EVENT 3 | REPORT

5th March 2018

Venue: [Auditorium R.014 \(Ground Floor, Building R, Rodestraat 14, City Campus, 2000 Antwerp\)](#)

AD BEYOND FILM

PROJECT DETAILS

TITLE | Audio Description: A Laboratory for the Development of a new Professional Profile

ACRONYM | ADLAB PRO

EC PROJECT NUMBER | 2016-1-IT02-KA203-024311

NATIONAL PROJECT ID | GU10213041978

FUNDING SCHEME | Erasmus+

SUB-PROGRAMME | Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

ACTION | Strategic Partnerships for higher education

DURATION | 36 months

COORDINATOR | Università degli Studi di Trieste

BENEFICIARIES

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ES)

Universiteit Antwerpen (BE)

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu (PL)

Utopian Voices Ltd. (UK)

Soundfocus B.V. (NL)

Radiotelevizija Slovenija Javni Zavod Ljubljana (SI)

Royal National Institute of the Blind (UK)

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OBJECTIVES

This summary captures a half-day of presentations and discussions convened by the ADLAB PRO Project board and UAntwerpen, the Belgian partner in the project, with the aim of spreading awareness of the European Project on audio description (AD), audio description training and the multiple forms that AD can take more generally. Close to 100 participants attended the event. They included audiovisual translation and translation scholars, theatre studies scholars and other representatives of academia, professional audio describers, audiovisual translators, consultants, members from the Flemish and Dutch media and cultural sector (e.g. broadcasters, directors of circus schools and staff members of theatres and cultural venues), PhD and master students in Translation Studies and Theatre Studies (and related fields) from UAntwerp and UGent, and AD users. They gathered to hear about the objectives of the EU-funded project and current and planned achievements but some local and international experts were also given the floor. Further developments envisaged for the coming project years were discussed along with updates on recent developments in the wider AD field, focusing on “AD beyond film”, the title of the event. The afternoon concluded with a panel discussion whose members included two representatives of the Flemish organisation for blind and visually impaired people, VeBes (Vereniging voor Blinden en Slechtzienden).

ORGANIZATION

Chair and moderator: Aline Remael (University of Antwerp)

Presenters (in order of speaking): Elisa Perego (UNITS), Iwona Mazur (UAM), Chris Taylor (UNITS), Aline Remael (UAntwerp), Elena Di Giovanni (Univ. of Macerata), Roz Chalmers (Eyewitness), Hilde Peeters (Kaaitheater), Maya Van Puymbroeck (Toneelhuis), Hanne Roofthoof (UAntwerp), Geertje De Ceuleneer (VRT, Public Broadcaster), Eric Van Damme (VeBes) and Lesley De Ceulaer (VeBes).

Minute takers: the event was recorded and minutes were taken by MA students from the Department of Applied Linguistics/Translators and Interpreters specializing in Media Accessibility.

Photographer: Laura Simonin (UNITS)



WELCOME

Aline Remael, ADLAB PRO partner for the University of Antwerp welcomed all present and introduced the speakers and topics of the day in general terms, as well as the overall aims of the event. She remained the chairperson for all ensuing sessions.

SESSION 1: PRESENTATION OF THE ADLAB PRO PROJECT

This first session was devoted to the presentation of the project, consisting of a brief survey of IO1 and IO2, followed by a report on the ongoing work of IO3.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ADLAB PRO PROJECT & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: A SNAPSHOT

Elisa Perego (University of Trieste)

Elisa Perego, Project Coordinator from the University of Trieste, thanked those present for joining the multiplier event and summarised the project structure and objectives, indicating that ADLAB PRO is now half way through. It is financed by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, is led by University of Trieste and has eight partners from seven European countries. In addition to the four academic partners – University of Trieste, Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Antwerp, and University of Poznan,



there are four non-academic organisations on board – Utopian Voices Ltd., Sound Focus, RTV Slovenia and the Royal National Institute of Blind People. ADLAB PRO (2016-2019) carries on the work of a previous project, ADLAB (2011-2014), which resulted in European strategic recommendations for audio describers. The current project aims to create a free and open access AD curriculum, composed of flexible modules with customisable learning materials to be used to train audio describers both in academic and in professional (in-house) contexts. A concomitant aim is that of stabilizing the audio describer's professional profile. The deliverables of the project are divided into six intellectual outputs, allocated to different partners. At the time of speaking, IO1 (Gathering best practices) and IO2 (Defining audio describer competences) had been completed, IO3 (Curriculum design) was nearing completion, IO4 (Creating learning materials) was about to start, IO5 (Continuous project evaluation) was ongoing, IO6 (Attributing ECTS/ECVETS) had just started, and the website was fully operational (www.adlabproject.eu). The website contains selected results and reports and was due to be fully accessible in the very near future.

PRESENTATION OF IO1 RESULTS. GATHERING EU BEST PRACTICES

Iwona Mazur (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan) (Lead of IO1)

Iwona Mazur explained that IO1 yielded a snapshot of the current AD training situation in Europe. It was based on research that was carried out in two stages, a quantitative one and a qualitative one. First as many as 192 courses were sampled through an online questionnaire distributed by all the project partners to their respective countries and beyond. Subsequently, selected trainers, some of those who had responded to the questionnaire, were contacted personally and requested to share some of their AD course materials. In subsequent (Skype) interviews they were invited to clarify the learning materials they used and how they fit into the overall structure of the course or courses taught by them. In all five courses were analysed in detail.

The result showed that the difference between courses taught at HEIs and courses taught by private companies or on the job is smaller than expected, the main difference being that voicing and recording is taught more in non-academic courses. However, film AD is taught more across the board, all teachers or trainers also tend to be practitioners and most if not all rely on input from blind and visually impaired persons for feedback. Both teacher-centred and student-centred learning approaches were applied and different learning methods were used depending on the content to be taught, including learning through acquisition, inquiry, discussion, practice and collaboration. Situated learning was also a regular occurrence.



PRESENTATION OF IO2 RESULTS. DEFINING AUDIO DESCRIPTOR COMPETENCES

Chris Taylor (University of Trieste) (Lead of IO2)

Chris Taylor then reported on how IO2 proceeded to define the AD skills and competences needed to train AD professionals. This was done through a fully accessible online questionnaire drawn up in the six project languages, distributed through the channels established for IO1 and more. The questionnaires were tailor-made and aimed at audio describers, AD users and AD providers. 183 responses were collected altogether. A detailed data analysis and report is available on the project website. When pinpointing the skills required there was considerable agreement between the audio describers and AD providers although there were a few differences and the order of importance did not always correspond. When it came to identifying the most difficult skills a (live) audio describer must master, the two groups differed most, with audio describers listing the fight to bring home the need for quality AD, improvising and working under time pressure, and the providers mentioning mixing the AD with the original sound, working with deadlines and selecting visual information. As for the AD users, they stressed the importance of producing a coherent narrative in clear and easily graspable sentences, creating an enjoyable AD experience. Even though the scope of the survey remained somewhat limited, it can serve as a basis for IO3, in combination with the results of IO1.



PRESENTATION OF IO3 RESULTS. AD CURRICULUM DESIGN

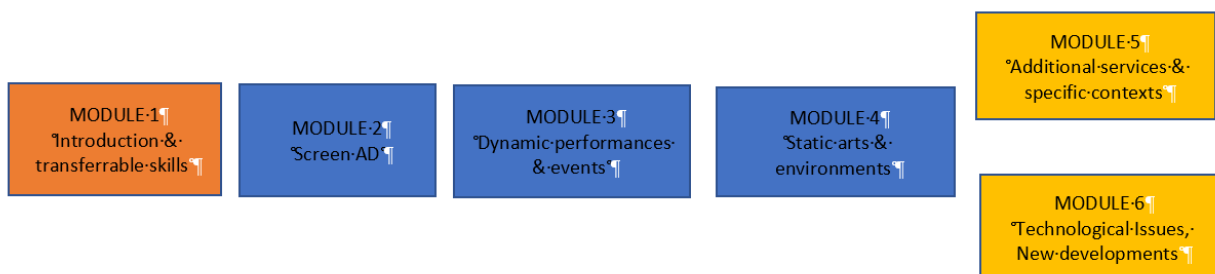
Aline Remael (University of Antwerp) (Lead of IO3)

Aline Remael proceeded with a brief report on the ongoing work on IO3, which was nearing completion at the time of speaking. IO3 is designing a flexible modular AD curriculum, based on AD competences formulated as Learning Outcomes (LOs), and taking into account European accreditation criteria (ECTS). The outcome is to be suitable for different contexts, both universities and companies, as well as different, student-centred, teaching methods, including blended learning.



The challenges IO3 has had to meet include filling the gaps in existing curricula (IO1) while taking into account the recommendations of audio describers & providers (IO2) but also catering for potentially diverse students. It has virtually completed a coherent curriculum with 6 modules that can function independently and that can be adapted to different levels of difficulty and specialization. The curriculum will also be accessible. In order to achieve this, entry requirements were defined, such as basic requirements in terms of previously acquired general competences. It was decided that the curriculum would not be limited to teaching knowledge and skills but that attitudes such as the willingness to work in a team would also be included. First a list of core competences was drawn up, referring back to the findings of IO1 and IO2 as well as relevant literature, which then

served as a basis for the reformulation of these competences as concrete LOs, to be grouped and taught in the different . The LOs have been formulated as concretely as possible, using the well-tried guidelines of Kennedy et al. (2012)¹, which makes them quantifiable in terms of assessment and allows for the identification of skills at different levels, dealing with different aspects of AD, depending on the target audience of the course. These concrete formulations also facilitate the design of appropriate teaching methods, and ultimately teaching materials (IO4). This has resulted in the following course structure with four modules (M1 to 4) of equal weight, focusing on different AD contexts at basic and advanced levels, and two modules (5 and 6) teaching additional skills. Module 1 is to be a compulsory introductory module to be taken by all students and to be combined with one, several or all of the others, as required (see visual representation below).



¹ Kennedy, D., Hyland, A. & Ryan, N. (2012). "Writing and Using Learning Outcomes: A practical Guide." Implementing Bologna in your Institution, C 3.4-1

Ongoing work includes fine-tuning the level and sequence of the LOs per module and across modules, grouping the LOs and assigning hours/ECTS to the modules and suggesting further learning methods and materials for IO4 to develop. Another, final question to be resolved in consultation with IO6 consists in allocating a suggested number of face-to-face teaching and additional student working hours to the LOs of the different modules so that these can be translated into ECTS.

SESSION 2: OPERA AND CIRCUS

This session featured two speakers from Italy and the UK, respectively. The first speaker focused on her research and practical experience in accessible opera, the second speaker dealt with the challenges of rendering circus performances accessible for children.

EXPANDING OPERA AUDIENCE THROUGH ACCESSIBILITY: THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

Elena Di Giovanni (University of Macerata)

Elena Di Giovanni shared her experience as a researcher collaborating with the Macerata Opera Festival (MOF) in making it increasingly accessible and popular with visually impaired (VIP) as well as deaf and hard of hearing people, between 2008 and 2018. After showing a short film highlighting different aspects of the venue and the organisation behind the accessible opera, its touch tours and involvement with users, she focused on the role of accessibility in expanding the opera audience. She stressed the importance of the wide range in accessibility features the MOF offers besides AD, including a new App, launched in 2018, and she sketched the gradual evolution and expansion of the MOF in terms of number of performances, (sources of) funding, and exponentially growing number of users for all services offered. She demonstrated the importance of continued interaction between practice and both local and international research as well as the active involvement of end users. They are involved in the accessible project design, the workflow of the different accessibility services, and they are also the best ambassadors for the MOF. Elena went on to discuss the specificity of the challenges presented by accessible opera, how MOF has been tackling them and how its approach is now being successfully expanded to other venues in Italy such as the Teatro Grande Brescia. She concluded by inviting the audience to the next MOF in the summer of 2018.



CIRCUS WITH A PURPOSE. DESCRIBING FOR CHILDREN

Roz Chalmers (Eyewitness)

Roz Chalmers gave a lively experience-based talk detailing all the challenges in preparing an accessible circus performance for blind children, going into the details for each of the following stages: preparing the company, designing the touch tour, using handling objects, sourcing the description equipment, finding a description style and collecting feedback. She stressed how imperative it is to involve a blind or partially sighted professional trainer when preparing a company that wishes to produce accessible performances and to clarify the different logistical issues such as appropriate communication, the principle and practice of guiding, guiding dog etiquette and the physical properties of the building. She went on to detail all the specificities of designing and operating a touch tour with a clear route and varied activities to be agreed on in advance, with the input of the performing company and involving objects requiring minimal AD, if possible. A sensory box can be offered to the patrons in advance, it is good to have props that can be touched, scents to be smelled, music to be listened to in advance and models of the artists' equipment to be handled. She showed photos of such models and told the stories of some of the children she witnessed having new tangible and exciting experiences for the first time. Roz also stressed the importance of ensuring the right equipment is in place, including the appropriate type and number of earphones, in order for the experience to come across: not all earphones fit all ears. In her comments about the description style to be adopted she stressed the need to allow the performance itself (helped by the pre-performance touch tour) to come into its own and not to over-describe or interpret but to facilitate audience-performance interaction, using a vivid lively and straightforward register that is in harmony with the show. Collecting feedback during the show with recording devices and contacting groups, families and siblings after the show yields valuable information for an even better subsequent performance.



SESSION 3: DANCE, THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S BOOKS

In this session three representatives of Belgian-Flemish theatres and the Flemish public broadcaster shared their experiences in recent accessibility experiments going beyond film.

EXPERIENCING DANCE IN NEW WAYS

Hilde Peeters (Kaaitheater)



Hilde Peeters, represented Kaaitheater, a theatre located in Brussels that, as she said, “presents, produces and co-produces local and international performing arts productions: from the 1980s to the present, from repertoire to experimental, from small theatre to large.” Recently, the theatre has been a partner in a European project titled “The Humane Body” with three other cultural venues: Wiener Tanzwochen (Vienna, Austria), Centre National de la Danse (Paris, France) and The Place (London, UK). The aim of the project was to develop a new audience for contemporary dance performances among blind and partially sighted people. Within the framework of the project the partners created dance performances and organised

workshops and symposia, raising awareness in their target audience about new ways of exploring and enjoying dance. More specifically, Hilde discussed the work of two experimental choreographers, Simon Mayer’s “Sons of Sissy” and Vera Tussing’s “The Palm of your Hand II”, performed at Kaaitheater. The theatre provided tours of the theatre venue, touch tours, audio-introductions and audio description for “Sons of Sissy”, which is a play that invites a fundamentally auditory experience, and is very suited for audio description. During the touch tour the audience was able to meet the dancers and “feel” some of their moves. During the performance, the dancers emerge as musicians on stage and each dancer can be identified through the musical instrument that he plays. While dancing they become a strange kind of folk music quartet and an experimental, ritual dance group at the same time. The original AD was written in French by a describer who is also a performer and the Belgian audio describers were given access to her script for the Kaaitheater performance with Dutch (and French) AD. With Vera Tussing, Kaaitheater has developed a special relationship and she is an artist in residence at the theatre. One could say that her work reinvents theatre as a tactile performance, starting from the question “Can dance be felt?” About her creation “In The Palm of Your Hand” , she says: “...we change the audience's proximity to the action, and introduce touch as the primary sense encounter – along with vision and sound.” In her talk Hilde detailed the creative production process of “In the Palm of Your Hand II”, a fully accessible remake of “In the Palm of Your Hand”. Members of the blind audience were consulted for the remake and the performance itself involves its (blind) audience, which is actually on the stage. Besides an audio-introduction, the performance uses a combination of sound, touch, movement and description of the ongoing movements by the dancers to identify actions, movements, locations and the identification of others. In Vera Tussing’s work accessibility goes beyond traditional AD, it becomes an integral part of the performance.

AUDIO INTRODUCTIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

Maya Van Puymbroeck (Toneelhuis) and Hanne Roofthoof (University of Antwerp)

In this talk, Maya Van Puymbrouck representing Toneelhuis, Antwerp, a theatre known for its contemporary theatre productions and Hanne Roofthoof, PhD student at the University of Antwerp working on audio-

introductions (AIs) and AD for contemporary theatre, joined forces. After introducing the purpose and usual features of audio-introductions for the theatre, Hanne turned to the specifics of AIs for contemporary theatre that is often non-narrative but tries to convey an experience instead. This means that the AI too is “freed” from the narrative to some extent and must try to convey the specific experience of a given play. Hanne says: “I believe that making a performance accessible for B/VIP means making sure that they can experience and enjoy a performance without having to understand it and not the other way around.” The AI (and AD) must therefore focus on HOW things are shown or told rather than on WHAT, and it can be supported in doing this through other means as well: information in the programme, on the website, etc. The ways in which advance information can be given vary greatly and Toneelhuis tries to exploit them to the full. They do still offer live AIs just before the performance but pre-recorded AI’s are available online on the production page and are sent out through mail. Alternatively, a recording can also be listened to on the evening of the performance in the entrance hall. Making the AI available online turns it into an extra service for anyone who is interested in receiving some additional information. People with or without visual impairment can choose to prepare their theatre visit, exploring a verbal rendering of the visual information the play is going to convey, among other things. Listening to the AI can help people to decide whether this is the kind of performance they wish to attend and in some cases the AI can actually stimulate people into attending, even when they initially thought the play would be somehow “inaccessible” for them.

Maya Van Puymbroeck, for her part, sketched the history of AD for theatre at Toneelhuis, which started in 2009 and has evolved into a fully integrated event in the theatre’s programming: all plays are offered with AD during a Sunday matinee. The performances are organised, planned and publicized with the cooperation of the Flemish blind association VeBes. Maya also detailed the logistics behind organising the live ADs at the theatre and gave information about the overall structure of the AIs and the varying amount of information to be included, referring to some concrete examples of particularly challenging contemporary Flemish productions. She stressed the complementarity of AD and AI and the way in which they can and should interact: in some cases a more detailed AI is required, in other cases, much information can be added during the performance itself. Both speakers demonstrated that there is much room still for new experiments and research.



CHALLENGING QUESTIONS FOR A NEW GENRE IN AUDIO DESCRIPTION: CHILDREN’S BOOKS Geertje De Ceuleneer (VRT)

The last speaker of the day, Geertje De Ceuleneer, audio describer at the Flemish public broadcaster VRT, ventured into a form of accessibility that is very new for Belgium and that she has been exploring with the logistical support of VRT on a voluntary basis: making children’s books accessible. Her initiative, developed in collaboration with her VRT colleague Ludo Schats, involves the creation of audio stories for children that do not only tell the story told in words but also include the pictures from the printed book. The two stories they have worked on and recorded so far aim at an audience of five-year-olds: *Op zoek naar Yori* (Looking for Yori) by Winny Ang and Fatinha Ramos, and *De Vliegende Soepkip* (The Flying Soup Chicken) by Atilla

Erdem and Olivia van Trigt. Their recordings make use of two voices, one for the story and one for the pictures and also include some noises and music. After having offered the audience a sample of their work,



Geertje proceeded to detail the many challenges and questions they are up against, inviting reactions and solutions from the audience. She pointed out how different this type of AD is from live AD: the audio-describer is not up against time limits, can choose how much to include and does not necessarily have to fit the description in between other information streams, such as the actors' dialogues. This does not mean, however, that the undertaking is a simple one. One needs to take one's target audience into account in terms of the language to be used and the amount of information to be included. How specific can or should the vocabulary be? The child listening to the story could benefit from hearing new words but the experience must remain enjoyable. Other issues that Geertje offered to the audience for consideration were: are all books are suited for picture-inclusive telling? Where and when does one add the AD of the pictures: in

the middle of the verbal text? Before? After? How much information and detail can one add? Is doubling the length of the book still acceptable? In what context will the books be listened to? Will there be a parent present to supply explanations if the AD turns out to be too complex? What style is appropriate, what type of intonation, how many voices and how much music? An interesting discussion ensued and the talk provided the audience with a lot of food for thought.

CLOSING PANEL: PROFILING THE LIVE AUDIO-DESCRIBER

Geertje De Ceuleneer (VRT), Hilde Peeters (Kaaitheater), Elisa Perego (UNITS/ADLAB PRO), Eric Van Damme and Lesley De Ceulaer (VeBes), Aline Remael (UAntwerp, chairperson).

The closing panel was composed of speakers representing the different types of AD discussed in session 3, the pen holder for ADLAB PRO and two members of the blind association VeBes. They were all invited to express their views on what they thought to be the most important skills live audio describers must have. For Hilde Peeters the most important skill was the ability to tell a story, to give the audience a worthwhile experience. Lesley De Ceulaer stressed that for her live AD only worked when a number of things come together. The provider must think out of the box, like the Kaaitheater dance productions do, offering new unknown experiences to the blind and visually impaired target audience. The telling should be done in such a way that the audience almost forgets that they are listening to additional information, which means that timing and oral skills are very important but also the ability to choose the right headsets and the ability to ensure that everything is working properly. Hilde Peeters thought it was essential for the audio describer to be able to tell a good story and engage the audience. Eric Van Damme stressed the importance of training and professionalism in AD, adding that in some circumstances it was good to have volunteers (due to lack of

funding) but that quality must be guaranteed and that this could best be achieved through professionalism. Elisa Perego thought a perfect command of the mother tongue was crucial, the ability to use the appropriate register for the performance and for the audience, and the ability to improvise, one of the soft skills of audio describers that is, however, hard to train. Another topic that she raised involved the specificity of AD for museums, the ability to include tactile experiences in AD and the ability to display empathy. Elisa also wondered whether in some contexts, such as that of museums, it might be more efficient to train art historians in AD rather than persons with a language background. Geertje De Ceuleneer added that knowledge of the target audience is very important and that she, as an audio describer, sometimes tries to think and experience what she is about to describe as a blind person would.

To conclude, the panellists' views led to questions from the audience and an animated discussion, among other things, about the need for teamwork in AD and the need to integrate AD in the production process and organisation of the venue or institution offering it – leading to truly inclusive experiences for all. And, most importantly the need to think and hence train future audio describers and providers to think outside of the box. The satisfaction of the audience with the entire event appeared from the evaluation sheets collected by the partner responsible for IO5 (continuous project assessment).

NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

The Multiplier Event offered plenty of networking opportunities both before the event, during the welcome coffee, during the afternoon break and during the reception immediately after the event.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This event was organised by the TricS research group, Department of Applied Linguistics/Translators and Interpreters, Faculty of Arts, University of Antwerp. We thank our colleagues from the ADLAB PRO Project who provided support and expertise that greatly assisted the organisation and delivery of the sessions, as well as a number of colleagues from TricS, more specifically, Sabien Hanouille and Isabelle Robert, who assisted with the logistics of the organisation, and the students who helped with the minute taking. We would also like to thank all the speakers and panel members for sharing their insights and best practices with us,

the audience for their enthusiasm and very positive reactions and the members of VeBes for their continued invaluable contribution to accessible practice and research.

DISCLAIMER

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