MULTIPLIER EVENT 4 | REPORT

20th March 2019

Residència d'Investigadors: Calle Hospital, 64, 08001 Barcelona, Spain

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RECORDING, MIXING AND DELIVERING AD

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)

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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OBJECTIVES

The workshop has focused on a crucial stage in the audio description value chain. Recording, mixing and delivering audio description. This second step in the production process of audio description needs to have a careful input from both human voice and sound technology. Sound is a dynamic value, and much of the audiovisual impact depends on sound. Understanding and dealing with sound (both AD and the original soundtrack) in a professional way will secure the quality of audio description and a satisfactory reception.

The aim of this workshop was to give insights in the final step of the production phase creating audio description. It helped audio describers understand the connection between scriptwriting and voice recording and how they can influence this process for better end results. It highlighted the differences and similarities of different types of media and dived into the experiences of the end user.

The workshop was presented during a hands-on session organized in Barcelona in 2019, and collocated with the 8th ARSAD conference, the Advanced Research Seminar on Audio Description. It was led by Mereijn Van der Heijden from Soundfocus, an audio post-production studio responsible for all major AD projects in The Netherlands, with support from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the organisational aspects.

ORGANIZATION

Chair and moderator: Elisa Perego (UNITS) | Merejin Van der Heijden (SF)

Organiser: Anna Matamala (UAB) | Merejin Van der Heijden (SF)

Presenters (in order of speaking): Elisa Perego (UNITS), Mereijn Van der Heijden (SF), Christian Simon (Fraunhofer Institute), Matt Kaplowitz (Bridge Multimedia)

Minute taker: Blanca Arias-Badia (UAB)

Photographer: Jara Duro (UAB) and Laura Simonin (UNITS)

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WELCOME AND ADLAB PRO PROJECT PRESENTATION
Elisa Perego (University of Trieste, Italy)

Elisa Perego, ADLAB PRO leader, gave a welcoming words to participants and provided a general presentation of the ADLAB PRO project, funded by the Erasmus + programme. She highlighted that the project is at an advanced stage, and materials will soon be made publicly available. Perego presented the consortium: UNITS has been the project's coordinator, 8 partners from different European countries have taken part: 4 academic (University of Trieste, Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Antwerp, University of Poznan), and 4 non-academic, service provider partners (Utopian Voices Ltd., Soundfocus, RTV Slovenia, Royal National Institute of the Blind). Perego describes the six intellectual outputs (IOs) that have been developed as part of the project, which have allowed to gather information about EU practices and generate training materials that meet the needs of the audio description market. Perego also refers to the course structure and the attribution of ECTS/ECVETS to course modules.

PRODUCTION PROCESSES IN EUROPE: SOUND IN AUDIO DESCRIPTION
Merejin Van der Heijden (Soundfocus)

Mereijn Van der Heijden presented Soundfocus, based in the Netherlands, founded 8 years ago, as an example of a service provider specialising in accessibility, and more specifically on the production of audio descriptions, in Europe. Van der Heijden stressed the much needed relationship with users, who are very involved in the whole production process. In this regard, some of the professionals in Soundfocus are partially sighted, which contributes to access to enriching views for the audio description process.

The presentation dealt with all the processes that take place after the script has been written. Special emphasis was put on the selection of voice talents and on the production of high quality audio. A discussion

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about the inclusion of speech synthesis and its impact in terms of quality was part of the presentation, with specific examples of audio descriptions with poor audio quality.

Voice talents were given voice through a video in which an actor argued for a model of audio description that matches the pace and rhythm of the audiovisual narrative: "Narrators are still acting, telling a story." Afterwards, another video was reproduced in which a professional voice actress explained how audiosubtitling works. She argued that audiosubtitling is not as precise as dubbing, but the structure and pace is indeed comparable. She made a difference between different characters by changing pitch, rhythm, or accent. According to her, there is more variety of voices in audiosubtitling than in audio description. Van der Heijden showed excerpts of both audio description and audiosubtitling, providing the audience with a wealth of examples of current quality practices.

Next, he discussed sound editing and focused on technical concepts. A video in which a professional sound mixer explains his work phases and how sound layers are added progressively to the soundtrack was projected and served as an illustrative example for the audience. Van der Heijden argued that if so much attention is paid to sound mixing in films, it makes sense to expect audio description sound to be regarded as important. He showed examples of good audio description practices from the Netherlands. At the end of his talk, he presented "Earcatch", an app that enables users to download audio descriptions prior to arriving at the cinema or even to watch audio described films from home. It is fully accessible, and has been validated by end-users. Both the app and the content are free to use.

Van der Heijden closed the session by arguing that it is also vital to create awareness in the general public.

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NEXT GENERATION AUDIO ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES
Christian Simon (Fraunhofer Institute)

Christian Simon, a sound engineer from Fraunhofer Institute, delivered a presentation on object-based audio. The presentation addressed accessibility features of object-based audio, what it can do for accessibility in audiovisual media, and how it works. Simon explained the differences between a standard production process and the object-based audio process, in which audio components are delivered separately to the playback device, audio is rendered as playback device, and it adds metadata to the audio, such as loudness of the components.

Simon explored the notions of interactivity (personalisation of audio presentation, adaptation to user's preferences, changes in the mix), immersion (sound from all directions), universal delivery (play on any type of device), and standardisation. He further presented accessibility features of object-based audio by means of extensive examples and explanation of sound mixing station interfaces. Both attendees and the speaker discussed together the possibilities offered by different brands devoted to audio devices.

A highlight of this presentation was that, despite its very technical nature, the speaker organised the presentation in a very clear and didactic way, so that all speakers, regardless of their background, could easily follow the technical explanations.

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AUDIO DESCRIPTION FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND ADVERTISING IN THE USA: DISABILITY ETHICS AND THE PRODUCTION PROCESSES
Matt Kaplowitz (Bridge Multimedia)

To end the date, the approach taken by Matt Kaplowitz, from Bridge Multimedia (New York), was a more interactive one, with hands-on participation from the audience. Participants were asked to sit in 3-person groups with diverging knowledge: in this regard, it was advised that one professional audio description writer should go into each group.

As a first activity, Kaplowitz proposed 3-person discussion about audio description in advertising: he asked what it means going too far. Each group provided food for thought regarding the audio description of advertisements: some thought most adds do not allow time for an audio description while some came up with creative solutions.

Kaplowitz showed a Chase Bank commercial and asked the audience what they thought audio describers would notice. After explaining the W3C accessibility guidelines and how AAA websites allow for changes in display time, he proposed the audience to think what to add to the Chase Bank commercial to meet users' needs in terms of accessibility. He asked 3-person teams to list key points that should be covered in the audio description. Some of the views expressed are the following:

- What must get across are the name of the bank and the fact that it is an app;
- It must be noticeable that the user is satisfied with the usability of the app, because it is easy to use;
- There are two focuses: the lady, who is happy, and the product –it is vital to emphasise the reaction of the lady.

Finally, Kaplowitz showed the solution provided, both in English and in Spanish, which modified the time duration of the commercial. The audience discussed this solution as well as the accents used in the audio description solution for the Spanish version.

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As a third activity, he showed a different Chase Bank commercial and invited the audience to write an audio description for it. After some time for group work, a group representative read the audio description aloud while the video was being reproduced again. This allowed the audience to become aware about different approaches to the same content.

As a last activity, Kaplowitz showed a third commercial portraying a cook at work. He reflected on the different experience of blind versus sighted audiences in watching advertising of this kind. He invited the audience to spontaneously share adjectives that could be used to audio describe the commercial, and some of the replies included adjectives such as "crunchy", "crispy" or "perfectly grilled". The speaker pushed to audience to go "over the top", and suggestions for description-included words such as "overflowingly delicious" or "a generous pile of flavour".

Participants engaged very actively in this hands-on activity, which allowed learning more about production processes in the USA through the examples provided by Bridge Multimedia.

CLOSING REMARKS
Mereijn Van der Heijden (Soundfocus)

A recap of the presentations was offered to close the event, and participants were encouraged to follow the development of the project and use the materials it will generate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This event was organised by UAB with the support of SF. 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 UAB, 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.

DISCLAIMER

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