

PALGRAVE STUDIES IN TRANSLATING  
AND INTERPRETING

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## RESEARCHING AUDIO DESCRIPTION

NEW APPROACHES

Edited by  
**ANNA MATAMALA and PILAR ORERO**



## Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting

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Anna Matamala • Pilar Orero  
Editors

# Researching Audio Description

New Approaches

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*Editors*

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This book has its origin in the fifth edition of the Advanced Research Seminar in Audio Description (ARSAD) that took place in Barcelona in March 2015. Researchers and professionals from all over the world met to discuss audio description from both theoretical and practical points of view. Some of the ARSAD participants were invited to send a chapter proposal for a book on the topic of audio description. The book proposal was accepted by Palgrave Macmillan and a thorough peer-reviewing process began before this book was offered to the reader.

We would like to thank the contributors for their thorough work on the chapters, which have undergone various revision stages in a very short timeframe. We believe that all the authors have approached audio description from various perspectives, and it is precisely the richness and variety of points of view that make this book especially interesting. We would also like to thank Rebecca Brennan, Commissioning Editor for Linguistics, and Margaret Rogers, Series Editor for Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting, as well as the two blind reviewers who assessed our initial proposal and helped to improve it substantially. Thanks are also due to Elizabeth Forrest, Assistant Editor for Language and Linguistics, who has helped us all through the production process. We are also very grateful to Majid Yar for his thorough language revision and copy-editing. Finally, we would like to thank our colleagues, friends and families for their support while preparing this book.

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# 1

## Audio Description and Accessibility Studies: A Work in Progress

Anna Matamala and Pilar Orero

This book is the second we have edited in English focusing on audio description (AD). Now the scope is diametrically different from the previous publication (Maszerowska, Matamala, & Orero, 2014), where one film was analysed from many perspectives. While the former could be considered to have followed a bottom-up approach, the present publication adopts a top-down approach. *Audio Description: New Perspectives Illustrated* looked at AD from the perspective of the many components in film language and narrative, its production and terminology. The result was an interesting in-depth analysis of 11 building blocks that need to be taken into consideration when embarking upon writing an AD script. The aim in the present book, in contrast, is to open the lens as widely as possible in order to take a panoramic picture of new approaches in current research in AD. The idea is also to set a long exposure time, hoping the photo will not be blurred. To understand fully the resulting image, though, there is a need to know what surrounds this image, in which field it was taken.

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Most researchers contributing to this volume come from audiovisual translation studies, but there are also researchers from communication studies and philosophy joining the discussion, as well as end users. For over a decade we have been working on new audiovisual translation modalities, but both the object of study and its methodology have outgrown the field where they were initially studied. Is it time to define a new field, that of accessibility studies? Building a new academic field is a humble and risky task, but very fulfilling. Articles, chapters and PhDs join together in creating the solid base required for future contributions. Mistakes, errors and good ideas all unite in the definition of the field, its terminology, its methods and approaches. This book could be considered another stepping-stone towards building accessibility studies. It deepens one of its modalities (AD) from a myriad of research perspectives, but it also includes one initial contribution with a different, and wider, approach that can help us think about the need to establish the new field. Gian Maria Greco discusses whether accessibility is a human right per se, but also, as he states in his chapter, whether it is a crucial requirement 'for a more mature definition and development of accessibility studies, the broad field formed by the intersection of all those disciplines whose theories and practices deal with accessibility, such as audiovisual translation, assistive technologies, audience development, Universal Design, tourism management and services, new media technologies and so forth'.

The new research arena, still to be defined and fixed in more concrete detail, would draw on previously established areas such as the ones mentioned by Greco above but also on communication, film studies or perception. All these areas would contribute with their research methods and traditions, and with the added complication of adapting existing methodologies to a new multidisciplinary research endeavour where everything is still to be fixed.

Despite existing research in theoretical, descriptive and technological media accessibility related issues, an important difference for the research methodologies in this new field seems to be the overwhelming focus towards the end user. However, defining the user is in itself an interesting challenge. Living as we do in a society which requires that a thing accounts for its existence, there is a need to create a taxonomy of end users and their needs, regarding access to information. The standardization agency International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has risen to the

challenge (ISO/IECTR 29138-1) in a monumental task.<sup>1</sup> The inventory and groups created depend on previous standards within ISO and other agencies such as the UN, and is in constant renewal so that the classification is adapted to new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) developments and philosophical definitions. While the UN operates with a classification ‘persons with disabilities’ (PWDs) (CRPD),<sup>2</sup> some countries or languages continue to use the term ‘handicapped’, some users prefer ‘persons with special needs’, which has recently been altered to ‘specific needs’. Due to the relevance of this discussion, and following Gian Maria Greco’s discourse, we have asked Gerry Ellis to contribute to this volume with a chapter on the end user and the terminology associated with him or her. Ellis discusses the history of disability-related language, and takes stock of the terms ‘disability/disabled’ and ‘impairment/impaired’, while advocating a more accessible society.

Also talking about the end users, and focusing on South Africa as an example, Greco considers that accessibility should ‘extend to all citizens, not only those with disabilities’. In fact, as suggested by Orero and Matamala (2007), accessibility as a means to overcome physical or sensorial barriers may be an incomplete picture: there can also be linguistic barriers to overcome, although neither the UN nor ISO take language as a challenge to communication and access to information. Any person who does not speak or read Chinese is in need of language accessibility when in China, since neither the written nor the spoken language is accessible to non-Chinese speakers. Therefore, we propose, in other words, that the new accessibility studies field should take into consideration language accessibility, (audiovisual) translation studies and all the related research in the field of language technologies.

World geographical regions, cultures and traditions are also markers in this new field, and with all these ingredients we have tried to gather the latest research in one of the areas within the new field of accessibility studies: AD, preceded, as noted, by two more general contextualizing contributions on accessibility viewed from the perspectives of human rights and the end user.

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<sup>1</sup> The latest version of the user-needs mapping template can be obtained from ISO/IEC JTC1/SWG-A, at [www.jtc1access.org/base.htm](http://www.jtc1access.org/base.htm) (accessed September 24, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), at [www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml](http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml) (accessed September 24, 2015).



With research as its pivoting element, the book gathers 15 contributions from investigators worldwide addressing the topic AD from complementary perspectives. The book is organized into three parts. The first, ‘Re-thinking Accessibility’, presents the context from a human rights perspective where AD is rooted both as research and practice. The second part, ‘From Theory to Practice: Researching Audio Description’, is self-explanatory. Both theoretical approaches to the topic of AD and the methodological implications these approaches may have on research are presented here. The third part of the book, ‘Audio Description Projects’, gathers the latest research funded both at the international (ADLAB, DTVALL, HBB4ALL) and national levels (ALST, ‘De Facto’, OpenArt).

The two opening chapters set the scene in more detail with an attempt to re-think accessibility. In what he terms the ‘Accessibility as a Human Right Divide’ (AHRD) Problem, Gian Maria Greco considers whether accessibility is a human right *per se* or a proactive principle for promoting human rights. Gerry Ellis, on the other hand, discusses in what contexts terms such as ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’ may be appropriate, advocating that disability is not just confined to those with impairments. Although the approach of both contributions is different from the rest of the book, both chapters are a necessary cornerstone with which to frame the AD-specific research contributions that follow.

The second part of the book presents different approaches to AD, from more theoretical contributions such as the chapter by Jana Holsanova to more practical experiences such as the ones described by Phatteera Sarakornborrirak and Kulnaree Sueroj, who explain how AD was born in Thailand—so far away from Western languages and cultures, yet still sharing so many AD traits.

Jana Holsanova tackles cognitive aspects of AD, distinguishing between three perspectives: a production perspective focusing on the describer, a reception perspective focusing on the end user, and a ‘meeting of minds’ perspective focusing on the exchange between the describer and the audiences. What is especially interesting in this chapter is the discussion of theories of mental imagery and embodied cognition as applied to AD which have been used as a theoretical framework for new research initiatives recently developed in Sweden.

Carme Mangiron and Xiaochun Zhang present an overview of game accessibility, focusing on the situation for the blind and visually impaired.

They discuss the barriers faced by users who cannot access the visual content of games, and they present games specifically designed for this group of users. They also explore how AD could be implemented in video games.

Iwona Mazur and Agnieszka Chmiel analyse the way sighted viewers look at films using eye-tracking data in order to create eye-tracking based descriptions. The reception of these ADs by a group of visually impaired respondents is compared to the reception of ADs developed using long-established British standards. The chapter provides insights into the usefulness of using eye-tracking for AD research, as well as interesting findings on the preferences of end users.

Brands in AD is the topic discussed by José Dávila-Montes and Pilar Orero in a chapter in which they provide a qualitative analysis of the strategies used in three feature films. This analysis is framed by a thorough discussion on translation, advertising and ideology, focusing on the role of brands in movies.

Adopting a more psychological approach, Nazaret Fresno, Judit Castellà and Olga Soler-Vilageliu deal with memory operation in AD, devoting their chapter to the reception of film characters. They analyse which physical features of audio-described characters are more frequently recalled and recognized by blind and visually impaired audiences. The researchers also consider how segmentation of information impacts on user recall, and analyse the differences in terms of reception between leading and secondary characters. Resulting data, based on a sound methodological design, will undoubtedly be useful in the development of future guidelines.

Co-speech gestures in AD is the focus of interest of Polish researchers Monika Zabrocka and Anna Jankowska. After a short introduction to the main taxonomies of gestures, and on the strategies generally used to convey them in AD, they analyse the AD of co-gestures (that is, emblems, illustrators and emotional gestures) in a corpus of Polish ADs. Both quantitative and qualitative results are provided, opening the door to future research on this specific topic.

Beyond the analysis of AD features, other researchers in this collection turn their attention to possible applications of AD. In Chap. 10, Agnieszka Walczak presents the results of a study which examines the influence of audio-described films in foreign vocabulary acquisition. Walczak's research was carried out with primary school learners with and

without vision impairment, and aimed to investigate whether AD could be used as a pedagogical tool. The project results seem to indicate that AD can indeed be a useful educational tool and that its application in the foreign language learning class merits further research.

While AD is well-established in some countries, in others the first steps are being taken towards providing accessible media for all. This is why it is especially enlightening to read Phatteea Sarakornborrirak and Kulnaree Sueroj's chapter which presents an overview of AD in Thailand, focusing on Thai television. A wealth of new information is provided, from a summary of Thai media regulation to a discussion of the main research projects carried out in the first years of AD.

The third and last part of the book includes five contributions on national and international projects related to AD. Christopher Taylor presents a chapter on ADLAB (2011–2014), a project funded by the European Union (EU) under the Lifelong Learning Programme. In ADLAB eight partners from six European countries analysed current practices and norms on AD and proposed a reliable set of guidelines, while developing training materials and sensitizing policy-makers.

In Chap. 13, Pilar Orero presents two of the main European projects in media accessibility. On the one hand, DTV4ALL, a completed project funded by the European Commission under the Competitiveness and Innovation framework Programme (CIP) ICT Policy Support Programme, aimed to facilitate the provision of access services, both mature and emerging, on digital television across the EU (2008–2010). On the other hand, HBB4ALL (2014–2016), an ongoing project co-funded by the European Commission under the same CIP programme, addresses media accessibility in the connected TV environment. Orero's contribution focuses specifically on the research related to AD that has been carried out within both projects, which includes technological innovations and end user testing as interesting aspects.

On a narrower scale, Anna Matamala gives an overview of the Spanish-funded project ALST (2013–2015), which aimed at researching the implementation of three language technologies (speech recognition, machine translation and text-to-speech) in the field of AD. A summary of the main tests carried out within the project and their results allow us to observe both the potential and the limitations of existing technologies.

On a different note, Anna Sadowska presents a project developed by the Polish association 'De Facto' in which young sighted volunteers prepared ADs of press illustrations for visually impaired youth. The chapter describes the activities of the association, one of them being the e-Kiosk service, a virtual newsagent for the blind and visually impaired. It also explains how the volunteers were trained, how the work was organized and what the project's results were.

Finally, Agnieszka Szarkowska, Anna Jankowska, Krzysztof Krejtz and Jarosław Kowalski close the book with the Polish project Open Art, which aims to design a multimedia guide app for museum and gallery visitors with and without sensory impairments. Adopting a Universal Design approach, these researchers summarize the main features of the app and present three studies carried out within the project to shed some light on user needs. Information on visiting habits, attitudes towards contemporary art and expectations regarding the description and its format and duration is discussed. They also propose what they consider to be an optimal description of a work of art.

As we indicated at the beginning of this introductory chapter, our aim was to open the lens as widely as possible and take a panoramic picture of current research in AD, without blurring the image with a lengthy exposure time. We are still focusing the image to get a sharper view and our final photo shows a multi-faceted field in which different concepts, methods and applications find their place: from more theoretical proposals in which cognitive models are suggested to psychological approaches in which the end user reception of characters is assessed and linked to memory; from eye-tracking studies with sighted viewers to corpus-based approaches analysing brands or gestures; from innovative didactic applications of AD to new proposals aiming to enhance videogame accessibility; from small-scale projects to wider European projects. And all this with the common aim of generating new knowledge on AD, so that its provision can increase, in terms of quantity and quality, and can have a positive impact on the whole population.

The book was written and been published in record time. All authors closely followed instructions and met deadlines. Palgrave Macmillan editor Chloe Fitzsimmons took care of its safe delivery, for which we are very grateful. There is a special mention we want to make to Margaret Rogers.

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# Part I

## Re-thinking Accessibility