Module 1

Unit 6: The target audience of audio description

Core video transcript

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Transcript

Slide 1

Hello. I'm Gert Vercauteren from the University of Antwerp in Belgium. In this ADLAB PRO video I will tell you more about the target audience of audio description. This is Unit 6 (Target Audience) in Module 1 (General Introduction).

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Many existing definitions describe audio description as a service aimed at people with sight loss. This is bit of an oversimplification. As you will learn in this Unit, 'people with sight loss' constitute a very heterogeneous group. Moreover, in addition to this primary target audience, there is a very large and diverse secondary audience.

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So, let us first zoom in on the primary target audience. According to recent figures of the World Health Organisation, 253 million people worldwide are visually impaired. 36 million of these people are blind and 217 million have moderate to severe vision impairment. Moreover, it is estimated that these numbers could triple due to population growth and ageing.

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Within the group of blind people, some were born blind, while most became blind at various stages later in life. This is important for audio describers,

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because it means that most people do have visual mental representations of concrete concepts, and only a small minority does not. In other words, most audience members do know what colours look like, to give just one example.

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The group of partially sighted people, can also further be subdivided according to the type and the degree of sight loss. Some conditions, such as cataract, lead to clouded or blurry vision, others, such as damage to the optic nerve, lead to tunnel vision and thus the loss of peripheral sight, and still others, such as defects in the retina, provoke the loss of central vision. Conclusion: THE primary target audience member does not exist.

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Moreover, there is a very large and diverse secondary target audience. Indeed, audio description has the potential to reach far more people than just those who suffer from any kind of sight loss.

A first secondary audience that can be identified, are older people. Not only do these people tend to lose (part of their) eye sight, often their mental capacities weaken too, and they may find it increasingly difficult to follow TV programmes, theatre performances, etc. As such, audio description can offer them an additional explanation and help them understand the programme or play.

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Second, younger people can benefit from audio description too. Recent research showed that adding audio description to educational materials,

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helped guiding school children's attention to important elements in audio visual content.

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Another recent study – with mixed results – showed that people with mental impairments such as autism, could benefit from audio description too, particularly from explanations of emotions and from more explicit contextualisation.

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Finally, according to the ITC guidelines, "potentially the largest audience to benefit from audio description, are sighted people who do not wish to direct their visual attention to the television screen." As an extensive survey showed, 4 out of 10 people sometimes 'watch' television when performing other tasks inside the house.

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So… what kind of audio description do we want or need then? It is clear that there can be no such thing as a 'one size fits all' audio description, and that 'a golden mean' will never be golden for everyone.

Unless specific instructions tell you to do otherwise, it seems safe however to cater for the needs of the primary target audience and make sure that people with sight loss can understand and enjoy the audio visual product.

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So that was it for Unit 6. I hope you now have a better image of the different audiences that can benefit from audio description.

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