

# «INFORMATIVE OR EXPRESSIVE?»

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VERBAL AND VISUAL FUNCTIONS IN AD

Media for All 2009: Quality Made to Measure

CML/ISCAP

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# Summary

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- Our project at CML
- Audio description: definition and purpose
- AD & communication
- Guidelines: A common framework?
- Imagism and the ekphrastic tradition
- Clips
- Conclusion

# Our project

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- Master's degree in Specialized Translation and Interpreting
- *Media for All 2007*
- Need to push forward accessibility in Portugal
- Interest shown by teachers and students alike
- Other research projects in visual communication and semiotics

# Defining AD

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«To a great extent, audio description can be considered a kind of literary art form in itself, a type of poetry – a **haiku**. It provides a verbal version of the visual whereby the visual is made verbal, **aural** and **oral**.»

Joel Snyder, «Audio Description: The Visual Made Verbal», International Congress Series 1282 (2005) 935– 939, pp. 936-937.

# Purpose

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«to give people [...] a more complete picture of what is being shown, enabling them to appreciate and to share in the presentation as fully as a sighted person».

ADI/Guidelines for Audiodescription, 2009

# Purpose (cont.)

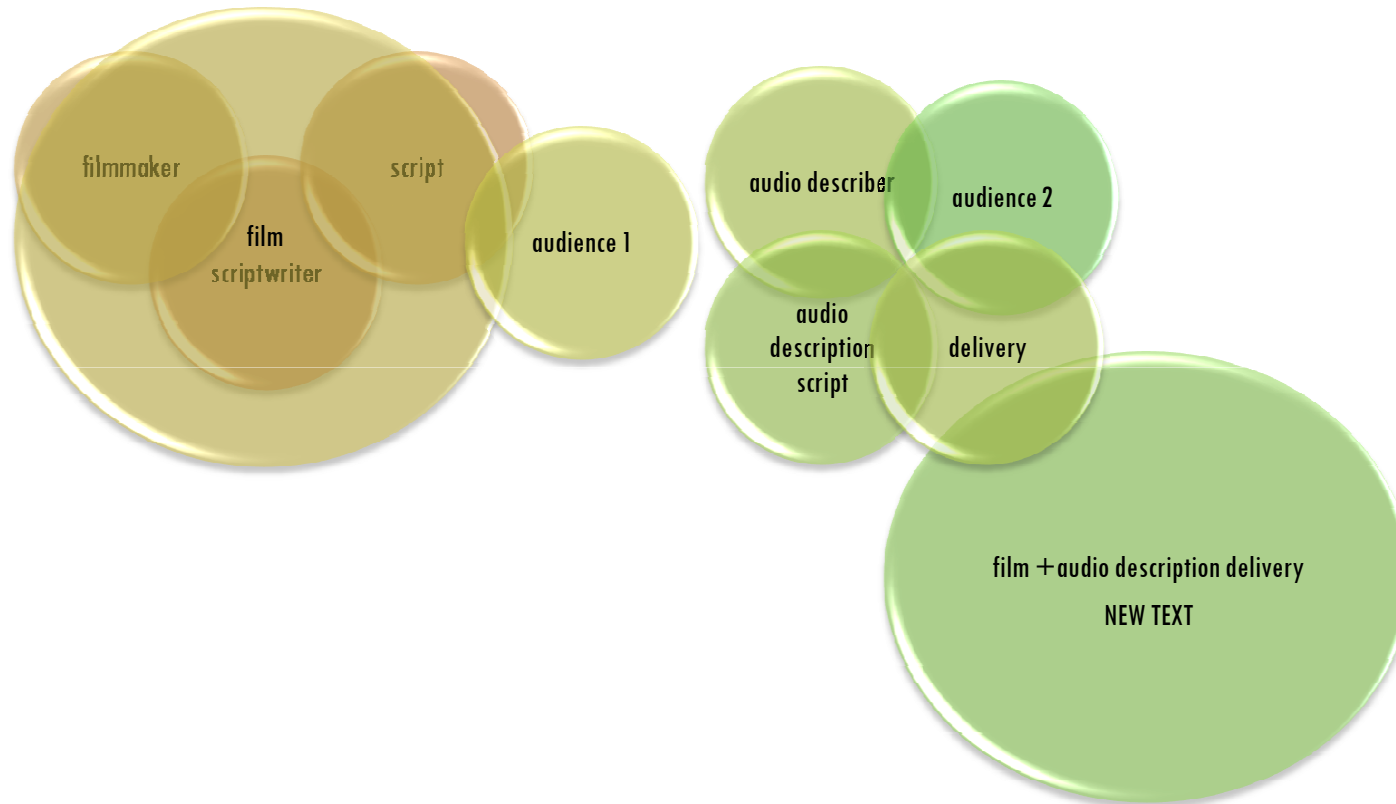
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Georgina Kleege, talking about an audio book  
(Berger's *Ways of Seeing*):

- «And she seems to enjoy describing the images. She revels in it. Her voice becomes excited, even agitated. [...] I'm a bit startled at first. Her enthusiasm is such a switch from the usual "nothing but the text, ma'am" neutrality I'm used to. But then I start to enjoy it. Why should she repress her pleasure? It's infectious.» (p. 185-186)

# AD & Communication

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# AD & Communication

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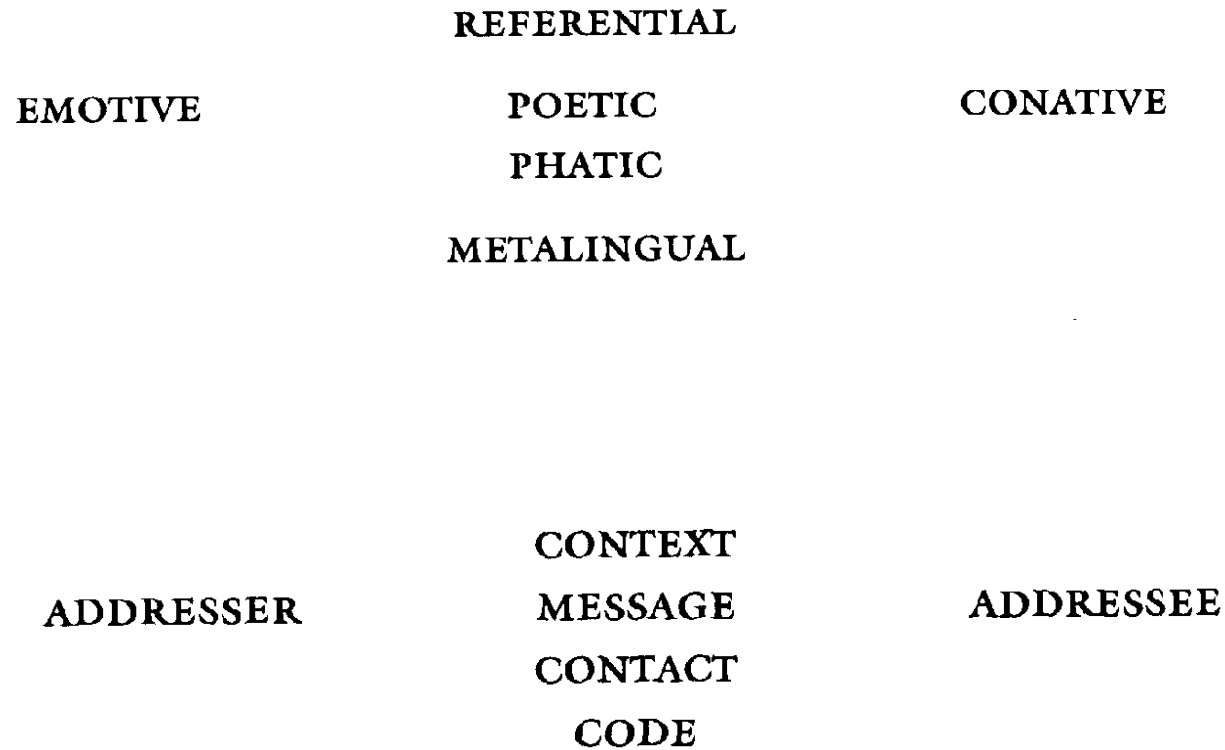
«On some level all movies are about seeing, which is why I can see better at the movies than in real life. The filmmaker shows me what to see and teaches me how to understand it.» (Georgina Kleege, p. 58)

BBC [Promo clip](#)



# Jakobson's communicative language functions

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# Guidelines: A common framework?

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- somehow inconsistent and vague not offering the necessary set of rules that could provide homogeneity and quality standards.
- **What**, when, **How** and how much should be described?
  - Describe what you observe;
  - actions or details that would confuse or mislead the audience if omitted- triage: specific visual information;
  - Agreement on vividness, imagination and objectivity of the language

	<b>Informative function</b>	<b>Poetic function</b>
<b>Standard techniques in AD</b> Joe Clark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is essential to know;</li> <li>▪ Describe as consistently as possible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe any obvious emotional states</li> </ul>
<b>Guidelines on the provision of television access services</b> BBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Adverbs should not be subjective</li> <li>▪ Vocabulary: accurate, easily understood and succinct</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Variety of verbs</li> <li>▪ Adverbs useful to describe emotions;</li> <li>▪ Add emotion, excitement, lightness of touch to suit the mood.</li> </ul>
<b>AD Guidelines Draft - (2003) Audio Description International (ADI)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Simply, clearly, concisely ;</li> <li>▪ Descriptive, accurate and appropriate language;</li> <li>▪ No interpretation or personal comment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work on expanding vocabulary, especially verbs;</li> <li>▪ Be sensitive to the mood of the scene.</li> </ul>
<b>Audio description standards(2009)</b> American Council of the Blind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resist conveying an emotional state:</li> <li>▪ Objectively recount the visual aspects of an image</li> <li>▪ Be clear, concise, conversational</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ AD: art form, type of poetry- a <i>haiku</i>;</li> <li>▪ Vary verb choices;</li> <li>▪ Words that are succinct, vivid and imaginative;</li> <li>▪ Metaphors/similes that are familiar to the audience.</li> </ul>
<b>ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio description (2000)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unobtrusive and neutral but not lifeless or monotonous;</li> <li>▪ Clarity – avoid ambiguity in the use of nouns or pronouns;</li> <li>▪ Should not voice a personal opinion or interpret events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Few-well chosen words can enhance a scene;</li> <li>▪ Comments on physical attractiveness when is relevant to the issue;</li> <li>▪ Use of adverbs to support the description of an action.</li> </ul>
<b>Standards for Audio Description (2008)</b> Audio Description Coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Describe what you see; not what you think you see;</li> <li>▪ Describe objectively;</li> <li>▪ Avoid metaphors , similes ;</li> <li>▪ Use common comparisons;</li> <li>▪ Factual, clear, straightforward commonly used terms;</li> <li>▪ Dramatizing the delivery is distracting;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ use vivid verbs</li> <li>▪ use the most descriptive words</li> <li>▪ describe colors: to share the emotional “meaning” of the color.</li> </ul>

# How?

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*“we try to convey our descriptions with a kind of “inner vision” that results in a linguistically vivid evocation of the image being described”.*

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND'S AUDIO DESCRIPTION PROJECT, P. 10

# Imagism: «limpidity as opposed to Rhetoric»

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The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound, «In a Station of the Metro», *Lustra/Selected Poems*, 53

As cool as the pale wet leaves  
of lily-of-the-valley

She lay beside me in the dawn.

Ezra Pound, «Alba», *Lustra/Selected Poems*, 53

# Imagism and the ekphrastic tradition

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- «Though indeed Simonides calls painting silent poetry, and poetry speaking painting. For those actions which painters set forth as they were doing, those history relates when they were done. And what the one sets forth in colors and figures, the other relates in words and sentences; only they differ in the materials and manner of imitation. «Whether the Athenians were More Renowned for their Warlike Achievements or for their Learning» (*De Gloria Atheniensium*) Plutarch, 402

# Imagism and the ekphrastic tradition

- «a poem may be very productive in pictures, and still not be descriptive itself» Laocoon, p. 96
- «In this moment of illusion, we should cease to be conscious of the instruments, by which this effect is obtained, – I mean words. But a poet should always produce a picture» (Laocoon, p. 112)
- In poetry rather than prose: «[...] the same impression should be made upon our senses, which the sight of the material objects, that these conceptions represent, would produce.» (Laocoon, p. 112)

# Imagism=AD ?

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- Direct treatment of the thing whether subjective or objective. P. 36 (imaginative)
- To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. P. 36 (objective)
- Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something. P. 38 (succinct)
- Go in fear of abstractions. P. 38 (vivid)



# And now...

## for the fun stuff!

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- Audio described clips – [Star Wars](#)
  - Personification – “*the weapon leaps into his hands*”;
  - Hyperbole – “*a tiny figure struggling through the snow*”;
  - Asyndeton – short blunt sentences;
  - Analogy – to create a unique image
    - *a tiny figure struggling through the snow*

# Clips

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- *Blindness*
- *Revolutionary Road*
- *The Happening*
- *Body of Lies*
- *The Eye*
- *Hancock*

# The Eye (Theatre revision)

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- Perfect example of symbiosis of the original with AD-new text
- AD-Omniscient narrator
  - Appropriate film terminology when needed
  - Translates character's direct thought
  - Gets involved in the situation, feeling what the character feels
- Imagism at its best:
  - «Showerhead, pouring down on Sydney. Her head leans against the tile, a blank expression on her face.»

# Hancock (ITFC)

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- Unlike *The Eye*, there is little time for AD
- Narration not as conspicuous, expressive function is at the forefront, with a comic undertone
  - ▣ «Hancock cops an eyeful of blond Mary and smirks.»
  - ▣ «Hancock looks a bit awkward.»
  - ▣ «They regard each other, some chemistry between them.»
  - ▣ «The white guy screams in agony at his new anal insertion.»

# Conclusion

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So...

The 'audio describer' is a translator.

How do we translate without interpreting?

«The blind are a filmmaker's worst nightmare. They can never be viewers, can never be enlightened and dazzled by the filmmaker's artistry.» (p. 58)

## Raina Haig

*Drive* (UK 1997): «the first film ever to generate and record an Audio-Description (or Audio-Vision) track at production stage.»

«The describer must recreate the experience of the film, whilst also knowing the information priorities of blind and partially sighted people.»

«Visually impaired people do have family photos and home movies.» (Interview in 2002) Cf. <http://www.rainahaig.com>

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