

# DEEP FOCUS



## FIFTH EDITION

### ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER

*Deep Focus* is a quarterly publication of the AVD Audiovisual Division (officially established on August 29, 2018), of the American Translators Association, a non-profit organization committed to raising awareness of the audiovisual translation profession. Submissions become the property of *Deep Focus* and are subject to editing. Opinions expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors.



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On the Audiovisual Radar

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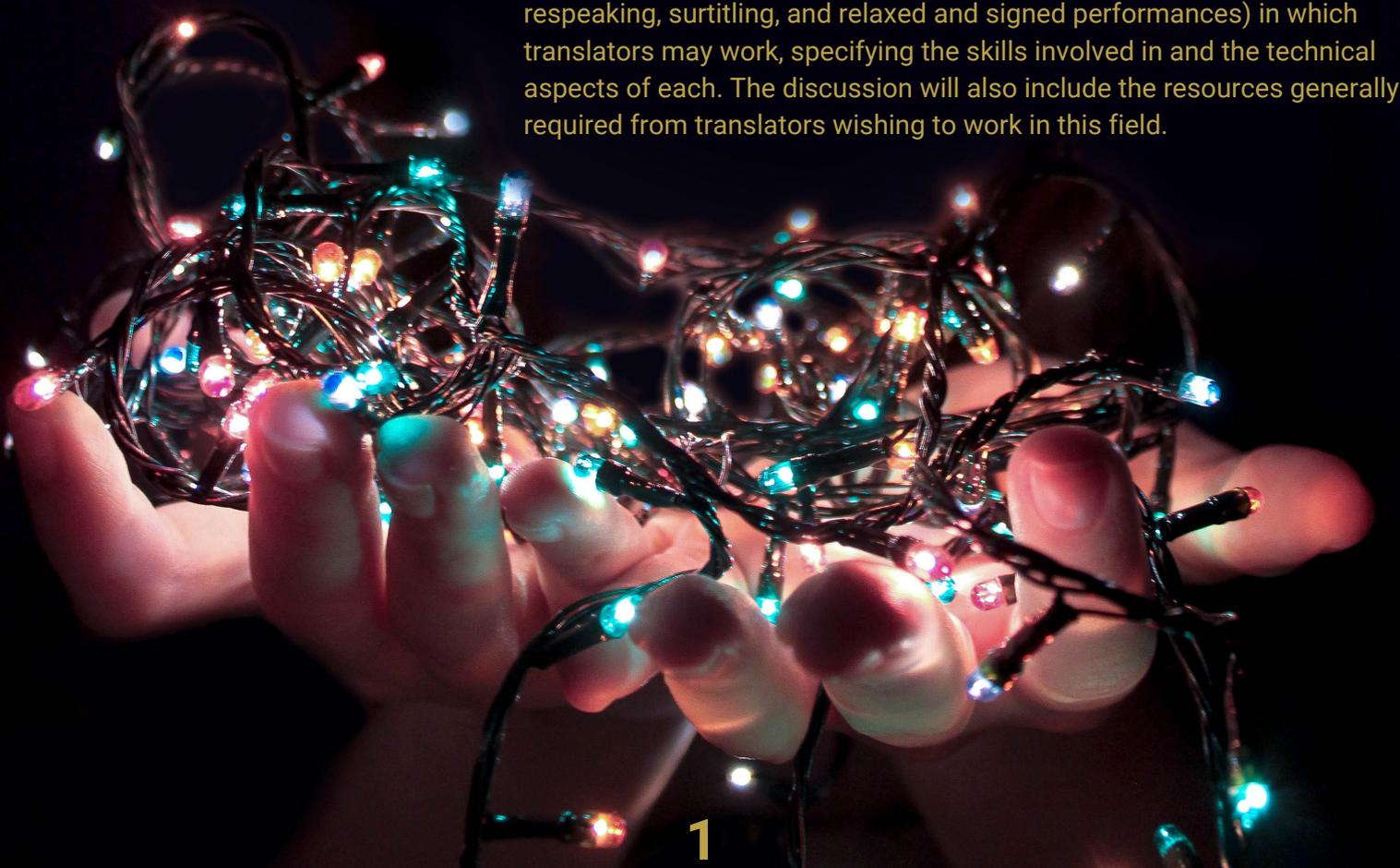
Ever wondered how the character Deadpool, the foul-mouthed and politically incorrect anti-hero, sounds when dubbed into Castilian Spanish? The ins and outs of translating a comedy film that is based on a comic book that bristles with cultural references, intertextuality, quirky humor, and blunt remarks of a sexual, violent, racist, political, and miscellaneous irreverent nature. Learn what strategies were used to make the Spanish audience laugh while living up to the expectations of an established fanbase.

**PAGE 9 BY PABLO FERNÁNDEZ MORIANO**

Desktop subtitling tools have been with us for quite a while now, but what about the cloud? Cloud-based tools are used to create, edit, and translate subtitles. We will analyze and compare them to answer the following questions: Is it possible to complete the subtitling process end-to-end entirely online and with professional results? How well do the current online tools cater to the requirements of professional subtitling? Which tools suit you best? What aspects and functionalities are important in choosing the right subtitling software?

**PAGE 13 BY GABRIELA ORTIZ**

Audiovisual accessibility is being increasingly required by law, requested by audiences, and offered by media content owners worldwide. Translators are the best suited to work in these forms of intralingual (or interlingual) translation, as long as they equip themselves with the adequate knowledge. This session will provide an overview of the types of media accessibility (namely, audio description, closed captioning, respoken, surtitling, and relaxed and signed performances) in which translators may work, specifying the skills involved in and the technical aspects of each. The discussion will also include the resources generally required from translators wishing to work in this field.



**4) Roma: Intralinguistic conflicts -  
In Essence**

**PAGE 16 BY LUZ GÓMEZ**

Harmony has been a desired goal by humanity, but besides economic or political struggles, language is also within those disagreements. *Roma*: Intralinguistic conflicts is an exercise that shows the great differences between variants of the Spanish language, and how problematic they can become when the original dialogue of one film shifts to please a public that speaks the same language but differently! Learning from these unpopular subtitles, translators must value each other's work and contribute by not defaming it.

**5) Audio Description:  
The Visual Made Verbal**

**PAGE 19 BY JOEL SNYDER**

An introduction to audio description, or the process of "translating" the visual aspects of a film into a verbal experience for people who are blind or visually impaired. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative, media describers perform an important service to a significant segment of the population. (It is estimated that about 21 million Americans are visually impaired.)

**Audio Description as an Aesthetic  
Innovation**

**PAGE 21 BY JOEL SNYDER AND DEBORAH FELS**

Appreciation of an audiovisual event is taken for granted by many. For audiences that are blind or have low vision, audio description is a translation of the image that makes all the difference.

**A Different Kind of Audiovisual  
Translation: Intralingual Respeaking**

**PAGE 23 BY DIETLINDE DUPLISS**

Respeaking telephone conversations to assist deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in using the telephone is a lesser-known mode of audiovisual translation. This article describes the framework and reality of working in captioning for phones.

**Demand for Non-English Subtitlers  
Rocketing**

**PAGE 26 BY KELLY O'DONOVAN**

Global streaming giants are shaping the subtitling industry and the need for non-English subtitlers is growing exponentially. How is this affecting Language Service Providers and their workflow?

**Forced narratives? Forced audiences!**

**PAGE 28 BY MARA CAMPBELL AND SEBASTIÁN ARIAS**

New trends in dubbing and subtitling might be jeopardizing viewer experiences, filmmakers' visions, and accessibility of films and shows.



# LETTER FROM OUR ADMINISTRATOR

DEBORAH WEXLER



## LEARNING AND BREAKING THE RULES

After the ATA Conference this year, I stayed in beautiful Palm Springs for a couple of days to see the sights. I wasn't disappointed with the three fantastic places I visited: the Indian Canyons, the Palm Springs Art Museum, and its Architecture and Design Center.

In the Palm Springs Art Museum Architecture and Design Center, I was treated to an amazing exhibit by Barbara Stauffacher Solomon, titled "Breaking all the Rules."

On one of the exhibit walls, there was a video of Barbara being interviewed. She was talking about her work and her process. Suddenly, she said something that really grabbed my attention, "Learn all the rules. If you are brilliant, you can break them. If you are not, at least you will be efficient." I'm paraphrasing, because I did not write down the exact quote, but it stuck in my mind as it relates to our profession.

As an audiovisual linguist, if we are masters of the rules— formatting, linguistic, time management, etc.— we will be well on our way to create great work.



And, after we learn to be efficient, we should strive to be creative. Creativity is a fundamental part of the audiovisual translation craft: it integrates elegance and style into our prose, eliminates the syntactic stiffness and redundancy, and renders a softer, more natural dialogue.

All of us have seen brilliant audiovisual translations: those that do not impede the suspension of disbelief and allow us to remain immersed in the story. One thing they have in common is that the translator either followed all the rules or broke them brilliantly.

I wish all of you a very productive, efficient, creative, and brilliant 2020.

You can check out Barbara's wonderful work here:

<https://www.psmuseum.org/art/exhibitions/barbara-stauffacher>





EDITORIAL  
ANA G. GONZÁLEZ MEADE

**Dear readers:**

During the annual ATA60 Conference, we commemorated our second year attending as one of the official divisions. Yet this time around, for the first time, with the fabulous addition of our very own Distinguished Speaker, Pablo Romero-Fresco, who is a researcher, Honorary Professor of Translation and Filmmaking; author on Respeaking, Subtitling, Accessible Filmmaking, and Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

He is tireless at disseminating AVT functionality and is fun to be around!

So we kicked off our conference participation with a lot of hype.

Therefore, this edition basically revolves around what went down during the conference:

We included five of the AVD-related presentations that our speakers so graciously agreed to share with us. Those of you who could not attend won't feel you missed out as much when you get to read such interesting contributions on our pages. And those who did attend will be able to look through and take in the presentations you enjoyed in much more detail.

Additionally, as with every edition, we have amazing original content in the form of articles written by experienced peers in the field on remarkable and relevant topics to our profession.

As for our specialized newsletter, we are grateful for having launched four issues on 2019, in addition to our 2018 inaugural issue—all the time providing an insight to our field.

And we absolutely loved every minute of it.

*Happy Holidays!*

Ana Gabriela González Meade  
*Deep Focus* Editor

*On the*

# AUDIOVISUAL RADAR

## AVD-RELATED PRESENTATIONS AND WORKSHOPS AT ATA60

**OCTOBER 24, 2019**

### **ARE YOU A CAD (CERTIFIED AUDIO DESCRIBER)?**

**JOEL SNYDER**

This session offered an overview of the fundamentals of audio description and how interested individuals can become professional audio describers.

### **SUBTITLE EDITING: WALKING THE FINE LINE BETWEEN RED-PEN PEDANTRY AND FACILITATING AUDIENCE IMMERSION**

**VANESSA WELLS**

This session aimed to learn more about the nitty-gritties of editing, the ethics and responsibilities of the audiovisual professional, and avoiding common pitfalls in subtitling.

**OCTOBER 25, 2019**

### **ROMA: INTRALINGUISTIC CONFLICTS**

**LUZ GOMEZ**

Discussion of the intralinguistic conflicts in the Mexican film Roma that were caused by variants of the Spanish language.

### **AUDIO DESCRIPTION: THE VISUAL MADE VERBAL**

**JOEL SNYDER**

This session provided an introduction to audio description, or the process of "translating" the visual aspects of a film into a verbal experience for people who are blind or visually impaired.

### **INTERLINGUAL REAL-TIME CLOSED CAPTIONS: WHERE ACCESSIBILITY MEETS TRANSLATION**

**PABLO ROMERO FRESCO**

For the past 30 years, the production of closed captions in real time has enabled millions of people with hearing loss to access live television programs and events through same-language captions. Based on the results of the Interlingual Live Subtitling for Access project, funded by the European Union, this session focused on interlingual real-time captioning, a new development that requires a combination of interpreting and translation subtitling skills. This new method provides access to live foreign-language programs and events for both people with and without hearing loss.

## ACCESSIBLE FILMMAKING: INTEGRATING TRANSLATION INTO FILM PRODUCTION

PABLO ROMERO FRESCO

Film translations are often produced as an afterthought, with limited time and money. Sometimes there is no contact between the translator and the creative team working on the movie. Renumeration for the translator is also low. Accessible filmmaking proposes to tackle this issue by integrating translation and accessibility into the filmmaking process.

OCTOBER 26, 2019

## AUDIOVISUAL ACCESSIBILITY: WHAT TRANSLATORS NEED TO KNOW

GABRIELA ORTIZ

This session provided an overview of the types of media accessibility (namely, audio description, closed captioning, respeaking, surtitling, and relaxed and signed performances) in which translators may work, specifying the skills involved in and the technical aspects of each. The discussion also included the resources generally required from translators wishing to work in this field.

## TRANSLATION GOES FOR BAROQUE: BRINGING LOST OPERAS BACK TO LIFE WITH SUPERTITLES

JOE MCCLINTON

This session provided an overview of the types of media accessibility (namely, audio description, closed captioning, respeaking, surtitling, and relaxed and signed performances) in which translators may work, specifying the skills involved in and the technical aspects of each. The discussion also included the resources generally required from translators wishing to work in this field.

## WHEN YOU ARE THE AUDIO AND THE VISUAL: WORKING AS AN AUDIOVISUAL INTERPRETER

ELLEN SOWCHEK CT

This session focused on the work of the audiovisual interpreter. These professionals might be lesser known but are vital in enabling an audiovisual work to find success with an audience.

## A LOOK AT SUBTITLING AND CLOSED-CAPTIONING SOFTWARE

DEBORAH WEXLER CT

This session reviewed the most important tool for the audiovisual linguist: subtitling and closed-captioning software. The speaker covered the features, pros and cons of the top programs on the market, and glimpsed into the future of audiovisual software.

## TRANSLATING HOLLYWOOD: THE LIMITS OF LOCALIZATION

ELENA CHANG

English and Korean share little common ground, both linguistically and culturally. Therefore, finely nuanced localization is critical when adapting films for a Korean audience. In this session, cases involving film subtitling/dubbing were examined.

## ACCESSIBLE FILMMAKING: INTEGRATING TRANSLATION INTO FILM PRODUCTION

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# ATA 60 RECAP SECTION

## 1. DEADPOOL 2: TRANSLATING AN R-RATED FILM FROM ENGLISH INTO CASTILIAN SPANISH

BY PABLO FERNÁNDEZ MORIANO

When translating a film like *Deadpool 2*, several issues come into play that are determined both by the nature of the dubbing process and the very nature of the film.

### The dubbing process

Spain is traditionally a dubbing country. Although subtitles are growing in popularity, the main localization process for distributing foreign films in Spain is still dubbing, whether for cinema, television or any mode of home entertainment. Dubbing replaces the original dialogue with a dramatized, translated version, performed by professional voice actors who are managed by a dubbing director. In order to convey a sense of authenticity, the translated dialogue must be adapted to the original dialogue for duration and lip-sync. This adaptation is done through a more literal (but by no means 'word for word') first draft translation of the original dialogue. Thus, the creation of the dubbing dialogue is a two-step process that involves first translating and then adapting.

In some countries, like France, this adaptation is always done by the translator. In other countries, it is done either by the translator or the director.

In Spain, although there are exceptions, generally the translator and the adapter are not the same person.

So, the translator is the first link in a chain process — translation, adaptation, voice recording and dialogue mixing.

This process is supervised by someone who, in the case of film releases, works for the distribution company and whose contribution to the translated dialogue is normally marginal. As a translator, being the first link in the chain means that the translation, once you send it, doesn't 'come back' to you, but rather goes through a transformation process. You don't get to check whether the adapter's changes are for better (which normally are) or for worse (which can also happen). This was not the case in *Deadpool 2*, as we will see shortly.

### The film

*Deadpool 2* is an R-rated, Marvel Comics superhero franchise comedy. Let's break this down from a translation point of view. There's ample violence and gore in this movie, but the rating, I fear, is mainly due the extensive use of expletives, which had to be addressed creatively due to *Deadpool*'s peculiar parlance. Being a 'part two' means that I had to watch 'part one' for the sake of consistency, because the translation had been done by a different person, although the dubbing director was the same. The person responsible for these decisions was the supervisor, who in the first part was really invested in making the Spanish *Deadpool* character very special. This helped with consistency, a key concept in this type of project, where one not only must keep in mind part one, but all the comics on which the film is based.

Marvel comics have been officially translated and published in Castilian Spanish by Panini, but also in the Americas by different publishers, so you have to be careful what source to use (in this case, filtering out Latin American versions) when researching character names, catchphrases and so on.

The problem arises when the (Castilian) Spanish publisher uses inconsistent translations throughout the different numbers and series (for instance, 'Domino'/'Dominó').

Also, 'spoken' character names tend to be translated in comics, whereas, only some get translated on the silver screen.

That's the case with the character 'Deadpool', who was always 'Masacre' in Spanish comics but kept his original name in the films.

This decision, like movie titles, is up to the marketing department, whose translation decisions are not always coordinated with those of the postproduction department, who manages the translation of the film.

Working with a comic-based movie franchise also involves pleasing the established base of fans, which is much bigger than either a movie franchise or a comic franchise alone. This is a demanding audience and the producers know it, so they reward them with nuggets in the form of references to not only the original Deadpool comics, but the Marvel universe in general, as well as general pop culture references to connect with non-Marvel geeks; and, of course, leaving some space for the franchise to expand. So, when it comes to translating, another thing to consider is that there might be future titles published in any form imaginable: comics, shows, feature films, video games... Crossovers are to be expected, too.

Additionally, 'big movie' logistics require previews as well as numerous teasers and contextless trailers, all distributed months before the film is even finished, so I started working with preliminary versions of the film which changed several times. This is why the workflow was a bit unusual; not only did the text go forth and back again with every revision (two preliminaries and a final), but the supervisor received my translation before passing it to the adapter, and it went through her again before coming back to me for the next revision, with her comments and suggestions. This meant more work, but it also gave me more time and perspective to work on the text and elaborate on the director's and supervisor's proposals after my initial translation. It was a very collaborative work, with lots of collective brainstorming.

Last, but not least, it is a comedy, so I had to deal with the typical challenges of translating any film (lip-sync, transcription errors, intertextuality, cultural references, presence of target language, presence of different English accents), humor (puns, alliterations, rhymes, homophones, spelled-out words, alphabetical correspondences), plus the added difficulty of reflecting Deadpool's particular style (exaggeration, nonsensical remarks, made-up words and expressions, contradictory terms, double negatives, profanity, sexual innuendos, 'attempted' euphemisms). It was hard work, but also quite fun and rewarding.

## 2. "CLOUD SUBTITLING: AN OVERVIEW"

BY PABLO FERNÁNDEZ MORIANO

Desktop subtitling tools have been with us for quite a while now, but what about the cloud? Is it possible to complete the subtitling process entirely online and with professional results? How well do the current online tools cater to the requirements of professional subtitling? What aspects and functionalities are important in choosing the right subtitling software? Let's try and answer these questions.

First, let us have a quick look at the **processes** involved in subtitling an audiovisual product.

- **Transcription:** it can be done before or during the spotting phase.
- **Spotting** (also known as timing, time-cueing): segmenting the text into subtitle blocks and setting the corresponding in and out time cues.
- **Translation or adaptation for accessibility,** depending on what kind of subtitling you are doing; this includes subtitle styling (italics, colors, positioning, etc.).
- **Proofreading:** checking grammar, spelling and other linguistic aspects.
- **Technical QC:** checking subtitle-specific parameters, such as reading speed, minimum and maximum duration, gaps between subtitles, etc.

- **Review** (also known as rehearse, replay): watching the video with the subtitles on for a more organic readability test, focusing on spotting, text segmentation and wording, all of which can be changed to better accommodate for dialogue rhythm and video editing style.
- **Subtitle file export:** format according to distribution mode.
- **Burning in** (also known as hard-coding): encoding the subtitles onto the video so they are always visible.
- **Final QC:** checking for encoding errors.
- **Subtitle distribution:** sending, uploading or publishing the files, whether it is just a separate subtitle file or a hard-coded video file.

- Characters-per-line limit
- Maximum lines per subtitle (2)
- Minimum and maximum subtitle duration
- Suitable reading speed
- Minimum gap between subtitles
- Shot changes
- Text segmentation
- Italics
- Subtitle position on screen
- Colors (in subtitles for the deaf or hard-of-hearing)

Thus, a good subtitle editor provides functionalities to use and control all of the above in an efficient manner.



### Work modes

Depending on the circumstances, there are different work modes. You can be asked to either create the subtitles from scratch or use a template (a file with previously timed subtitles). Also, the files can be hosted locally (on your computer) or remotely (in the cloud). Sometimes you will be able to choose what software you are working with, while other times the client will establish what software shall be used.

### Evaluating subtitling software

When preparing professional quality subtitles, there are several parameters and standards that must be observed:

A quick way to find about this is to thoroughly examine the settings section and the list of keyboard shortcuts. In other words, it should offer the following features:

- Reading speed control
- Accurate and efficient spotting
- Shot change control
- Frame-by-frame video and time-code handling
- Styling (applying/importing): italics, colors, position
- Support for different video framerates
- Video and subtitle file format versatility
- Error checking (technical and linguistic)
- Keyboard shortcut customization
- As much control as possible over functionalities (fine-tuning)

## Online subtitle editors

Basically, there are three types: client proprietary tools, which are only available when working for a specific client; free tools, like YouTube, Amara—probably the two most widely used— Dotsub or Subtitle Horse; and commercial tools, like Ooona Toolkit or Amara Enterprise. Here's a quick overview of some of them.

### YouTube

YouTube's captioning tool is free. Its collaborative nature means that community contributions can be turned on or off, allowing other users to caption your videos. So the only videos you can create captions for are the ones owned (uploaded) by you and other users' videos with the 'community contributions' option on. It is so easy to use that it lacks basic features like styling (position, italics, colors), reading speed control and frame-by-frame video playback. One noteworthy feature, however, is that it automatically transcribes and spots captions through speech recognition and soundwave-based spotting. It also allows you to download and upload subtitle files in a variety of formats.

### Amara

Amara also offers a free, collaborative platform, and works with cloud-hosted videos which, in its free version, offers zero privacy; videos can only be public, anyone can subtitle them, and they can't be deleted. It is very similar to YouTube in simplicity, although this one shows the reading speed for each subtitle. It can also import several subtitle file formats. There's also a paid version of Amara.

## Subtitle Horse

A free service that, unlike the previous two, offers no video hosting, but it works with video URLs hosted in other platforms like YouTube (not Vimeo, though). Positive differences with these two are that it considers gap between subtitles and frame-by-frame video playback. It offers several useful keyboard shortcuts that are not customizable but still improve efficiency. Although the variety of subtitle file formats supported is limited, we could say that it allows for quality subtitle creation, except for color and position, which cannot be specified.

### Ooona

This is a fee-based service that offers different modules: create, translate, review, convert, transcribe, QC, burn & encode, compare. These are the highlights that, in my opinion, make it a full-fledged professional subtitling tool:

- They have a dedicated server for video hosting.
- The timecode is measured in frames, not milliseconds.
- It considers reading speed, gap between subtitles and shot changes.
- The keyboard shortcuts are customizable, and you can save different setting profiles.
- It provides for accurate and efficient spotting.

Other cloud subtitle editors are Dotsub, Subtitle Edit online, and SubsEdit.

### Pros and cons of cloud subtitling

In conclusion, there are advantages and disadvantages when using cloud subtitling tools.

**Pros:** There is no need to install software locally. You can work anywhere or from any computer. Some platforms offer clients better control on materials and processes.

**Cons:** There is still much room for improvement in the free subtitling platforms, and there is not one single free option that covers all subtitling stages; Ooona does. They require an uninterrupted internet connection, with good download and upload speed. Privacy issues might arise with some clients for storing their material on a cloud service they cannot control.

It even has a comment functionality, which is something really unusual in free subtitle editors.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xE8oqYoUFBQ>

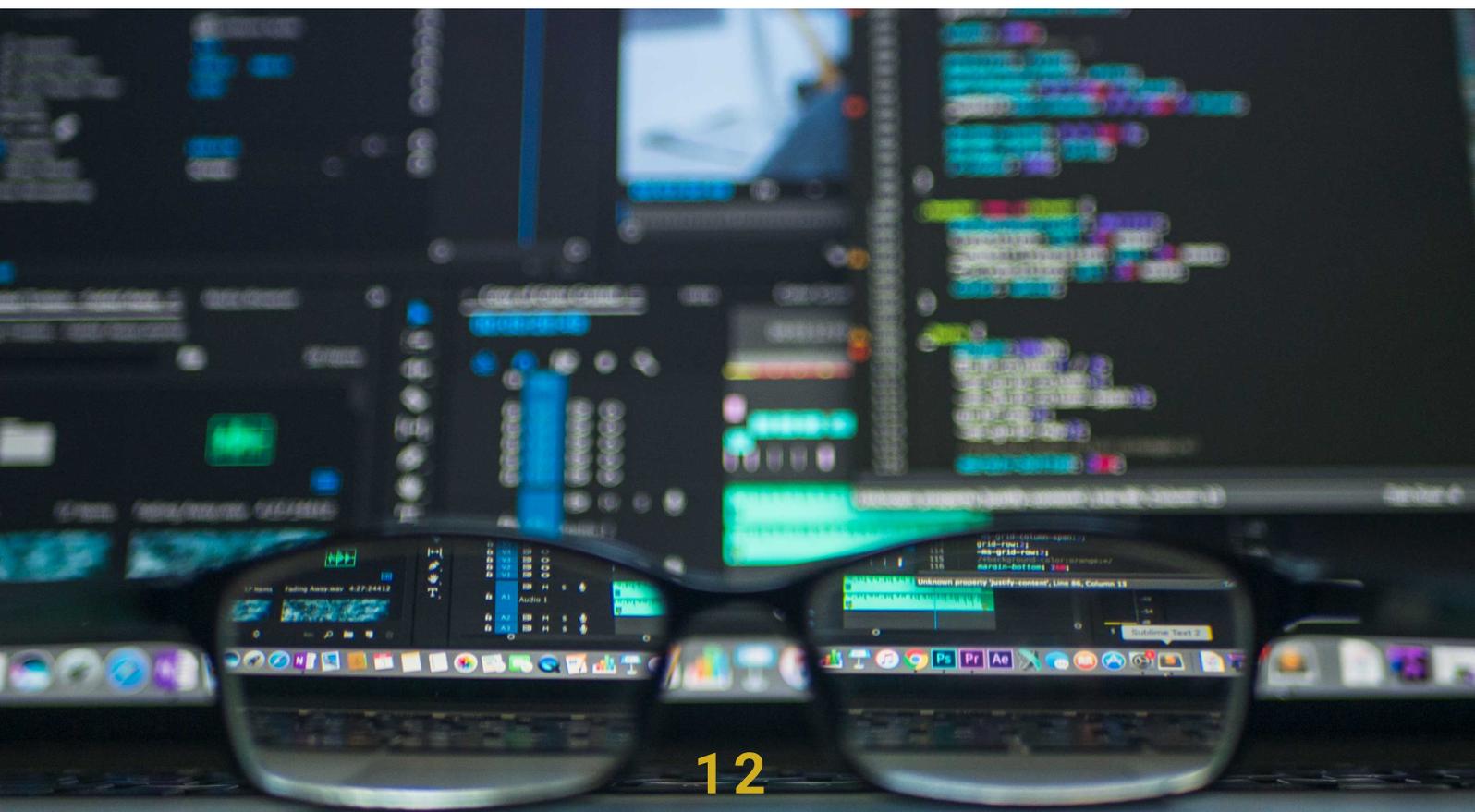
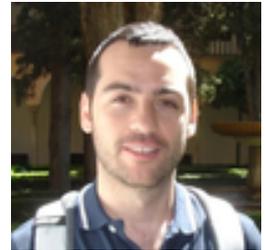
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NxoPqYwVwo&feature=youtu.be&list=PLjdLzz0k39ykXZJ91DcSd5IIXrm4YuGgE>

On the negative side, we could mention that it doesn't generate soundwave or shot change files for cloud-hosted videos. It only does it with local video files, and you need Ooona Agent to do it.

## Other cloud subtitling tools

- Dotsub: similar to Amara
- Subtitle Edit online: simple editor, great variety of subtitle file formats, though not completely updated
- SubsEdit: another simple editor
- Downsub: downloads subtitles from videos
- Captions Converter: converts .sbv (YouTube) subtitles to different formats

In his 19 years of professional experience, **Pablo Fernández Moriano** has specialized in audiovisual translation for subtitling and dubbing, with more than a hundred films translated, such as *Miss Sloane* or *Deadpool 2*, for which he received from the Spanish Association of Audiovisual Translators and Adapters, respectively, the ATRAE Award for Best Subtitling in 2018 and the ATRAE Award for Best Dubbing in 2019. He has also extensive experience in teaching audiovisual translation, subtitling and related tools since 2011.



# 3. AUDIOVISUAL ACCESSIBILITY: WHAT TRANSLATORS NEED TO KNOW

BY GABRIELA ORTIZ

This article is a summary of the presentation at the ATA Conference in Palm Springs and, as the title suggests, it is an introduction to audiovisual accessibility. It is arranged as a series of questions and answers to walk you through this field.

## Why should we care about accessibility?

Two notions are key to understanding accessibility: **universal design** and the **social model of disability**. Universal design aims at designing products and constructing an environment in an aesthetic and usable way for everyone, regardless of age, ability or status in life.

This goes hand-in-hand with the evolution of the model of disability from the early moral and medical models to the **social model**, which considers that disability is caused by the way society is organized rather than by a person's impairment or difference.

Laws and regulations are being issued to provide for these services (in the US, for example, the American with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, FCC regulations, and the 21st Century Video Accessibility Act). Most importantly, this is a matter of Human Rights.

Indeed, Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets forth the right of persons with disability to enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats, including audiovisual materials and cultural services.

The ultimate goal is to remove barriers that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying equal and independent lives. As a society, this concerns all of us.

## Why translators?

Accessibility has long been part of translation studies in Europe. While many of these services do not involve translation from one language into another (except for Sign Language services), all of them involve intralingual translation, i.e., from one medium into another medium. Some accessibility services, such as audio description and closed captioning, require advanced linguistic and technical skills that we translators master. Of course, special training is needed, but we are up to the job.

## For whom?

A simple answer to this question may be found in statistics: according to World Health Organization there are 2.2 billion people with vision impairment or blindness, and 466 million people with hearing impairment or deafness worldwide.

There are other instances in which these services are useful, i.e., for people with learning disabilities or as foreign-language

learning aids (AD), or in venues where sound is not available or adequate (CC) – for example, in silent libraries or the underground CCTV service. A more accurate answer is, therefore, that all of us benefit from accessibility.

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A more accurate answer is, therefore, that **all of us benefit from accessibility.**

**What services can be offered?**

Here is a list of accessibility services. Due to space constraints, I will not be able to refer to each service in full length:

- Audio or video description, defined by the RNIB as a commentary that describes body language, expressions and movements, making the program clear through sound for the blind and for people with vision impairment.
- Closed captions, SDH or surtitles, i.e., same-language renderings of the screen or stage dialogues, and accounts of other aural components (like sound effects and music) in audiovisual materials or the performing arts.
- Signed performances delivered by Sign Language interpreters, which are the only interlingual accessibility mode.

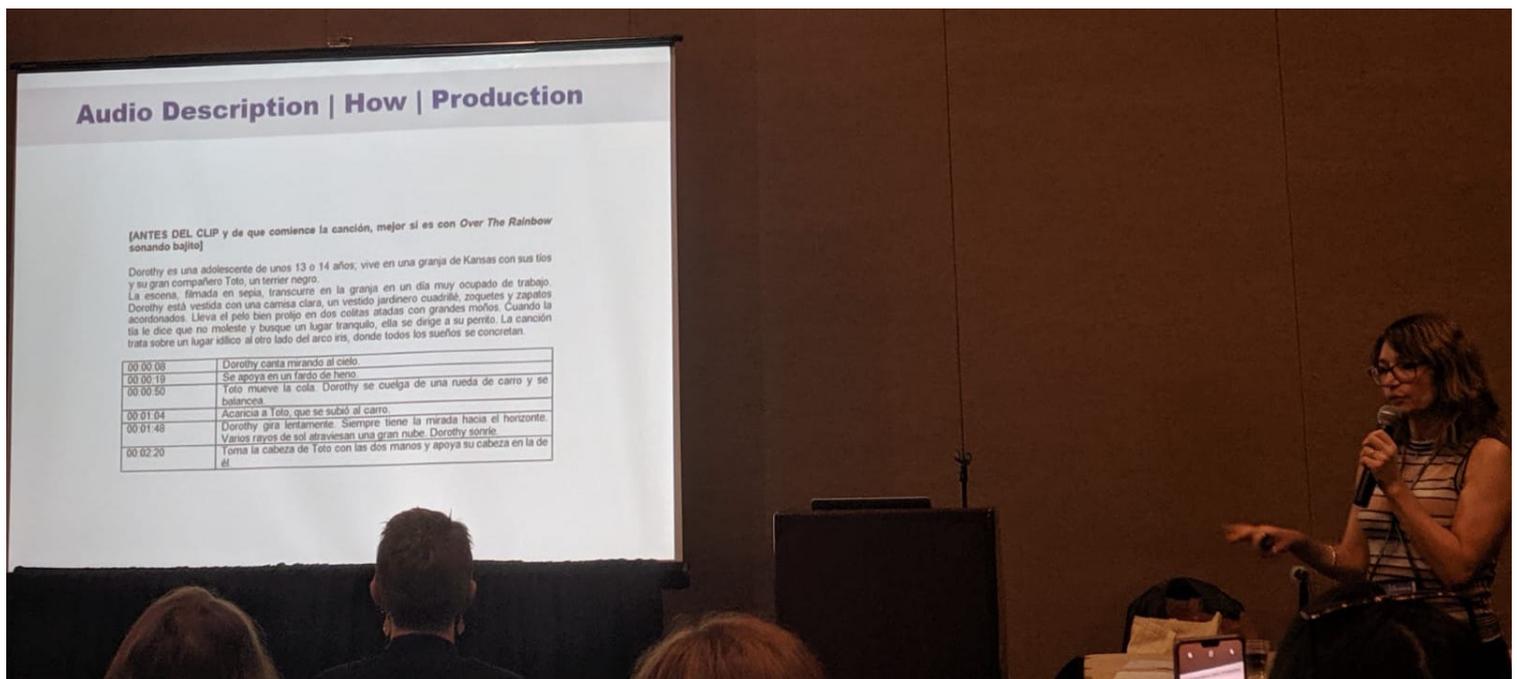


PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE SPEAKER

- Relaxed and chilled events, i.e., adapted performances with minor modifications, like softening music and sound effects and leaving lights dim in the house, intended for people with autistic spectrum disorders, Asperger's syndrome, and mild intellectual disabilities.
- Museum audio guides especially prepared for people with visual impairments. They may be aided with tactile and haptic materials and offered together with touch tours.

**How?**

Translators willing to work on accessibility need to get training and there are many good programs available in Europe and in the Americas. In very broad terms, one may say that accessibility for the audiovisual media is prepared in postproduction and delivered in pre-recorded formats (although there are live subtitling and live audio description services on TV as well), while accessibility for the performing arts is delivered live.

One of the best things about accessibility is collaborating with the creative crew. The accessibility team must always include at least one user of the services to validate our work.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE SPEAKER



- Easy-To-Understand performances for people with mild intellectual disabilities, delivered via secondary audio.
- Live subtitling or written interpretation at meetings, conferences and events, which may involve conventional translation or not.

There are many ongoing research projects in each of these fields (e.g., on the audio description of diversity, the use of the technical attributes of sound in AD, accessible filmmaking from production, accessibility in immersive environments, and the use of easy-to-understand and plain language in AV).

As you may see, this field embraces innovation.

This makes both creative and common sense, and is one of the tenets of the movement known by its motto: "Nothing About Us Without Us".

**The bottom line**

I encourage you to explore this field: it is a fascinating, fairly new area of translation work – an extremely creative one – and there are many opportunities out there.

There are simple ways in which we all can contribute to a more equal society. Why not start describing the pics we post on our social media? We could also suggest conference organizers to include written interpretation services in our next Annual Conference.

My presentation was a last-minute addition to the conference program in Palm Springs. I had only one week to prepare before my trip from Buenos Aires. If it is an indication of a fresh interest on accessibility by our Association, it was totally worth it.

### References

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For more information, read "Writing interpretation: an overview on a fascinating AV discipline", by Mara Campbell, on Deep Focus 4, <https://tinyurl.com/t2arqyn>.

You can learn more about this movement in this HuffPost article: <https://tinyurl.com/s5vyqz9>.

**Gabriela Ortiz** is an ATA Certified Translator (English into Spanish) with +20 years of experience in medical, legal and marketing translation. Following her Postgraduate Diploma on Audiovisual Translation and Accessibility, she has branched out to these services with her company PERCEPCIONES TEXTUALES, which – among others – strives to introduce accessibility best practices in Spanish-speaking Latin America. Gabriela also translates from German and Latin into Spanish.



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## 4. "ROMA: INTRALINGUISTIC CONFLICTS - IN ESSENCE"

BY LUZ GÓMEZ

Interest in this in presentation arose when a variety of media sources focused on the linguistic and cultural angles of the Iberian subtitles in Alfonso Cuarón's film *Roma*, and their subsequent infamy. Although a non-Spanish speaker might consider this matter superficial, it's an excellent example of how two variants of a language differ (and clash) when it comes to audiovisual translation.

Latin American audiovisual translations are created only for foreign language films. In Spain, however, translations are created for Latin American films (e.g., from Mexico, Peru, Argentina and more). Despite what one might think, it is common for Spanish clients to subtitle a Latin American film with Castilian Spanish, and *Roma* was the latest and most scandalous example. The controversy was such that its director demanded Netflix remove the subtitles (something that is not even done in poorly subtitled films). Furthermore, much of the outrage was directed at the translator, who was simply fulfilling a job, and the media heavily reported on this incident.<sup>1</sup>

To fully understand the decision to change the Mexican-based Spanish, one must understand the secondary goal of making *Roma* more identifiable with Spanish viewers. The client achieved this objective by adding Castilian Spanish subtitles, clearly contrasting with the oral statements of the film's characters.

While one may think that Spanish is spoken the same way in all Hispanic countries, each Spanish-speaking culture has a variety of migratory and indigenous influences.

Here were the more important dialogue changes that caused commotion in the translation community, and therefore the media:

- One major shift was the use of *vosotros* (only used in Spain), instead of the common second person plural *ustedes* from Latin America. Although the Spanish understand and sometimes use the latter, the translator changed it to sympathize with the Spanish audience, complying with the client's request. It's important to note that once the subject is changed, the verb morphology changes too, so much of phrase is affected.<sup>2</sup>

- Another change involved the beloved calques (adopted English words) in the Mexican Spanish. Common practice in France and the U.S., Mexico and Latin America have adopted foreign words from their immigrants or power relationships. In the Iberian subtitles, these anglicisms were removed and replaced by Spanish words, because they make sentences sound unnatural, whereas for Mexicans, foreignisms are an echo to their conflictive past and their blended present.<sup>3</sup>

- Likewise, Mexican colloquialisms, informal but true samples of oral expressions, were either changed for Spanish versions or simplified. The problem with this lay in the change of registry. Cleodalaria "Cleo" is a Mixtec woman that is forced to adapt to her surroundings. She's an indigenous woman with a poor background, a Mixtec speaker, with little or no education, and a powerless servant.

Once the registry of her dialogue is modified, the subtitles give her a formal and fluid speech, instead of the choppiness and informality of her poor Spanish.

- Adding to all of this, cultural icons were also modified. For instance: The youngest child in the family is requesting "Gansitos" <sup>4</sup> (a chocolate covered Twinkie); this was changed to "Ganchitos" (cheez doodles), a salty treat. Either the translator confused the name or chose to avoid using a cultural equivalent (Pantera Rosa or Tigretón) to prevent copyright issues, but only the translator knows the reason for this change.

In short, the Iberian Spanish subtitles should be considered localization, and not a mere translation, as it's commonly perceived. At first glance, these subtitles might seem harmless, but on a whole, they change everything, and there is a potential risk of altering the film's message.

In conclusion, in order to translate an audiovisual product, one must break down all the layers of the movie. A film is a guide to understanding people's culture and past. This comes from the director's vision, the movie's identity, cultural icons, time period, and its language, both visual and auditory.

*Roma* is a good example of how translation works and how it can vary. Therefore, one can compare translation to a clock's gear, fitting together so everything works well. This intralinguistic conflict can teach translators that altering one or more aspects in the text for any reason can jeopardize the text's purpose.

A better option would have been transcribing the film's dialogue in the subtitles as they were or using close captions (CC).

Both countries definitely have different views on translating. On the one hand, both Spanish speaking variants prefer to use their own unique linguistic identities in an audiovisual product, Spain applies it to all imported films, regardless if it comes from another Hispanic country.

Clearly, Spanish clients want to adapt the dialogue to make as acceptable as possible for Spanish viewers. In this case, Roma's Iberian re-translation searched for syntax and concepts suitable for its public.

Despite the translator's hard work, the Iberian subtitles were looked down by fellow colleagues, so much so that the translator was harassed on social media.

*Roma's* subtitles represent two perspectives on oral and written communication (mainly Spain's), despite the fact they speak the same language. They reflect these distinctions when subtitling or dubbing audiovisual material.

Therefore, it's best to accept and appreciate the differences in each one because they are reflections of both nations' remarkable societies, and of course, a reflection of their translators.

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<sup>1</sup> Europa Press y Efe, "Tras queja de Alfonso Cuarón, Netflix cambia los subtítulos de "Roma" en español", *El Espectador* (January 10th, 2019), <https://www.elespectador.com/entretenimiento/cine/tras-queja-de-alfonso-cuaron-netflix-cambia-los-subtitulos-de-roma-en-espanol-articulo-833285>

<sup>2</sup> " 'Roma' una película en español subtitulada en español", *El País* (January 9th 2019), [https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/01/08/actualidad/1546979782\\_501950.html](https://elpais.com/cultura/2019/01/08/actualidad/1546979782_501950.html)

<sup>3</sup> " 'Roma': Las 5 traducciones más "ridículas" de los subtítulos al español del film," *El comercio* (January 9th, 2019), <https://elcomercio.pe/tvmas/hollywood/roma-alfonso-cuaron-subtitulos-traduccion-ridiculas-espanol-filme-espana-mexico-noticia-596034-noticia/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**Luz Gómez Fernández** is an English-Spanish translator. She graduated in 2016 with a Masters in Audiovisual and Literary translation, where she specialized in dubbing, subtitling and all literary genres. Her international background has given her the opportunity to work with clients from both United States and Europe. She's a current member of AGIT (Asociación Guatemalteca de Traductores e Intérpretes). She has given other lectures in her home country, for AGIT and high school students.



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# 5. “AUDIO DESCRIPTION: THE VISUAL MADE VERBAL”

BY JOEL SNYDER

Audio Description is a kind of literary art form.

It's a type of poetry—a haiku. It provides a translation—a verbal version of the visual: the visual is made verbal, and aural, and oral. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative, we convey the visual image that is not fully accessible to a segment of the population—new estimates by the American Foundation for the Blind now put that number at over 21 million Americans alone who are blind or have difficulty seeing even with correction—and not fully realized by the rest of us—the rest of us, sighted folks who see but who may not observe.

It's useful for anyone who wants to truly notice and appreciate a more full perspective on any visual event but it is especially helpful as an access tool for people who are blind or have low vision.

I often will ask attendees to let me help them see what description is all about by having them experience a video excerpt with the audio only, unaccompanied by audio description.

What they experience is the original soundtrack of an excerpt from a major motion picture, “The Color of Paradise.” The audio at this point in the film contains no dialogue—only the sounds of birds, rustling, and a disembodied grunt or two.

What can be gleaned about the film when you're limited to listening only? What's going on? Hard to tell!

We then experience the same excerpt again—everyone is still blind, there will be no picture, but this time I add the add audio description which I wrote and voiced for the film when it was broadcast many years ago on ABC-TV. Does it make a difference to have the images translated into spoken words? I ask attendees to see—by listening. The experience is much more clear, of course.

But just from having listened closely to the description of the main character and his interaction with a tree, what can be gleaned about him? (Remember, the character would have been described much earlier in the film.) I ask attendees to consider the words of the audio description carefully and why the images chosen for description were included. Description, after all, is often about what not to describe. Inevitably some folks will pick up on the description of how the character uses his hands and uses his sense of hearing to explore the scene. That's right—he's a blind boy.

What follows is an annotated version of my audio description script (the seven annotations are listed at the end of the script):

1 Mohammed kneels and taps his hands through the thick ground cover of brown 1. curled leaves.

2 ...[CHIRPING/RUSTLING :02]

3 A scrawny nestling struggles on the ground near Mohammed's hand.

4 ...[GASP/CHIRPING :02] 2.

5 His palm hovers above the baby bird. He lays his hand lightly over the tiny creature. Smiling, Mohammed curls his fingers around the chick and scoops 3. it into his hands. He stands and strokes its nearly featherless head with a fingertip.

6 ...[CHIRPING/RUSTLE :01]

7 Mohammed starts as the bird nips his finger. He taps 4. his finger on the chick's gaping beak. He tilts 4. his head back, then drops it forward. Mohammed tips 4. the chick into his front shirt pocket. Wrapping his legs and arms around a tree trunk, Mohammed climbs.

8 ...[HEAVY BREATHING/CLIMBING :11]

9 He latches onto a tangle of thin, upper branches. His legs flail for a foothold. Mohammed stretches an arm between a fork in the trunk of the tree and wedges in his head and shoulder. His shoes slip on the rough bark.

10 ...[SCRAPING :03]

11 He wraps his legs around the lower trunk, then uses his arms to pull himself higher. He rises into thicker foliage and holds onto tangles of smaller branches. Gaining his footing, Mohammed stands upright and cocks his head to one side.  
12 ...[CHIRPING/FLUTTER]

13 An adult bird flies from a nearby branch. 5. Mohammed extends an open hand. He touches a branch and runs his fingers over wide, green leaves.

14 ...[RUSTLING :03]

15 He pats his hand down the length of the branch. His fingers trace the smooth bark of the upper branches, search the network of connecting tree limbs, and discover their joints.

16 ...[RUSTLE :02]

17 Above his head, Mohammed's fingers find a dense mass of woven twigs--a bird's nest.

18 ...[CHIRPING :03]

19 Smiling, he removes the chick from his shirt pocket and drops it gently into the nest beside another fledgling.

20 ...[CHIRPING :03]

21 He rubs the top of the chick's head with his index 6. finger. Mohammed wiggles his finger like a worm 7. and taps a chick's open beak. Smiling, he slowly lowers his hand.

#### NOTES

1 – Color has been shown to be important to people with low vision, even people who are congenitally blind.

2 – Timing is critical in the crafting of description. We weave descriptive language around a film's sound elements.

3 – Vivid verbs help conjure images in the mind's eye.

4 – Description, like much poetry, is written to be heard. Alliteration adds variety and helps to maintain interest.

5 – What to include? This image is important – the adult bird returns in the next scene.

6 – Be specific-- precision creates images!

7 – Similes paint pictures!

In conclusion, I do want to emphasize one point--there is no reason why a person with a visual disability must also be culturally disadvantaged. In the United States the principal constituency for audio description has an unemployment rate of about 70%. I am certain that with more meaningful access to our culture and its resources, people become more informed, more engaged with society and more engaging individuals-- thus, more employable.

Excerpt from "The Color of Paradise"--original audio only, no video: <http://chirb.it/GIsact>

Excerpt from "The Color of Paradise"--original audio with audio description track, no video: <http://chirb.it/Ambh7A>

Excerpt from "The Color of Paradise"--video included with original audio and audio description track: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9RFTKxZqkw>

# AUDIO DESCRIPTION AS AN AESTHETIC INNOVATION

BY JOEL SNYDER AND DEBORAH FELS

In his introduction to the second edition of “The Mastery of Movement”, Rudolph Laban wrote: “What really happens in a theatre does not occur only on the stage or in the audience, but within the magnetic current between both these poles.” (Laban, 1950.)

He suggests that the performers on stage form the “active pole of this magnetic circuit [and] are responsible for the integrity of purpose” (p. 6) in the performance that determines the quality of the “exciting current between stage and audience.” (p. 6)



AD also provides benefits for the sighted audience who may never fully realize all that can be perceived with the eyes—folks who see but who may not observe.

On television, it is for people who are blind or have limited vision and sighted people who want to be in the kitchen washing dishes while the show is on.

The theory of inclusive design describes one common approach to accessibility.

But, what if the exchange is interrupted or incomplete, not by lack of clarity on stage, but rather by an audience member’s lack of access to full perception. In the same light, how can a blind person “see” a film?

Audio Description (AD) is a translation of images to words – the visual is made verbal and aural (he points to his ear), and oral (he points to his mouth). AD makes visual images accessible for people who are blind or have low vision. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative, media describers convey the visual image from television and film content that is not fully accessible to a significant segment of the population (more than 21 million Americans experience significant vision loss - American Foundation for the Blind, 2008).

The main tenets are: 1) the designers consider as many different human abilities, limitations and needs as possible; and 2) these factors should be included from the beginning of the design process (Cremers et al., 2013).

While AD may benefit a wide audience, it is rarely considered from the beginning of the process (Udo and Fels, 2010). As a post-production activity (similar to other localization accommodations like subtitling or dubbing) many filmmakers have limited awareness of the existence of AD and even less understanding of the latest research which suggests how the access technique can be incorporated within the development of a film. It is then not an “add-on” but an aesthetic innovation and an organic part of the work that can benefit all people.

When Dr. Snyder coordinated funding from the Interdisciplinary Arts Projects category of the National Endowment for the Arts, he wrote that “This category encourages experimentation in the area of accessibility as an aesthetic innovation, e.g., interdisciplinary work with sound elements that are visually accessible through the use of computer-graphic technology; visual elements that are tactile or aural; innovative use of signing or audio description; movement involving older or disabled people, etc.” (NEA Inter-Arts Guidelines, 1993, p. 17).

We encourage video producers to consider how projects can be made accessible, including access elements as a part of the whole following the tenets of inclusive design; members of the creative team can take responsibility for accessibility as part of the production process eliminating the need to add a separate layer after the fact.

The production then becomes accessible to a wider audience.

This notion allows filmmakers to meet an obligation for inclusion while incorporating innovative techniques, thus increasing the production’s aesthetic viability. The following media excerpts incorporate alternative audio description from the perspective of inclusive design as well as its use as a novel media production technique:

- Stevie Wonder’s “So What The Fuss”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDVZDcIdjRM>

- Odd Job Jack “Donut Jack”:

<https://vimeo.com/manage/356793205/general>

- Hamlet “Ballroom”:

<http://chirb.it/zfzBCp>

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Laban, Rudolph. (1950). The Mastery of Movement. Plays, Inc. Boston.

Udo, J. P., & Fels, D. I. (2010). The rogue poster-children of universal design: Closed captioning and audio description. *Journal of Engineering Design*, 21(2-3), 207-221.

**Dr. Joel Snyder** is known internationally as one of the world’s first “audio describers,” a pioneer in the field of Audio Description, a translation of visual images to vivid language.

Since 1981, he has introduced audio description techniques in over 40 states and 62 countries; in 2014, the American Council of the Blind published Dr. Snyder’s book, *The Visual Made Verbal – A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description*.



**Dr. Deborah Fels** has a PhD in Human Factors from Industrial Engineering at the University of Toronto. She is currently employed as a professor in the Ted Rogers School of Information Technology Management, and the Director of the Inclusive Media and Design Centre at Ryerson University. Her research interests involve inclusive design, access to media and technology for people with disabilities and older adults, inclusive video game design and inclusive business.



# A DIFFERENT KIND OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION: INTRALINGUAL RESPEAKING

BY  
DIETLINDE DUPLESSIS

Any trained interpreter knows an exercise called “shadowing” which is used to prepare students for simultaneous interpreting. It consists of listening to spoken text and repeating spoken words as exactly as possible. It is harder than it might sound because one must listen and speak at the same time. It helps to use headphones, so your own voice does not drown out the speaker.

This practice – with a few additional requirements – is used under the name of “respeaking” or “voice writing” in captioning applications.

Captioning phones for the hearing impaired. Captioning on TV in the form of same-language subtitles or captions is well-known, but another use of captions that might be less familiar is on telephones. In the US, deaf and hard-of-hearing persons are eligible to receive a free landline phone with a display that shows what the person on the other end said. Different companies regulated by the Federal Communications Commission provide this service, which is also available on tablets via an app. I have not found reliable information about other countries, where a comparable service might be available. In Canada, the Hard of Hearing Association is currently lobbying for its introduction.

While many users assume that the captions are automatically generated, speech recognition is not currently advanced enough to reliably decode and display spontaneously produced language by an untrained speaker.

## Working as a Captioning Agent

Captioning companies run call centers with hundreds of people who turn the spoken word into text. People who perform this job are called Captioning Agents/Assistants or Communication Assistants. You will regularly find these jobs on Internet job boards. But don't expect to make a fortune – in November 2019, job ads mentioned starting wages of \$11-12.50 per hour. To my knowledge, the service is available for English and Spanish as well as for American Sign Language. Bilingual captioning agents can work in English as well as Spanish, but they respeak always in the language that is spoken; it is expressly not interpreting. What might make the position interesting for students or freelancers is the availability of part-time work with shifts at unusual hours and on weekends and holidays, since the centers operate around the clock.



The following description of working conditions is based on my experience in one center, but it might vary for other providers. In the captioning center your workplace is a cubicle with a computer to which you connect your headset.

When a phone call comes in you re-speak what the hearing person says. You must repeat it in such a way that the speech recognition picks it up with the fewest possible errors. Since an error-free rendering is rarely achieved you must at the same time correct the text appearing on your screen and simultaneously on the caption phone screen. When you make a correction, you must pause and only continue re-speaking when you are done typing. This can make correcting mistakes stressful since you have to remember everything that was said while you were typing. No audio is transmitted from the captioning agent to the caller, so there is no way of asking the person to repeat, slow down, etc. What the hard-of-hearing person says typically can be heard very faintly, but obviously is not repeated. During this time, you get a break from re-speaking.

### How to succeed as a Captioning Agent

First, you must be able to understand a wide range of dialects and accents since you cannot repeat what you don't understand. Not every caller will speak slowly and clearly, especially since they might not know they are calling a hard-of-hearing person.



One maybe less obvious requirement is a certain typing speed which will be typically tested before anything else during your interview. You also need good grammar and spelling skills. If the software shows "you're" instead of "your" you must notice and correct.

Keeping information confidential is also crucial. It is prohibited to disclose anything you hear on the phone. Credit card purchases, conversations with banks or the Social Security Administration can reveal a lot of personal information.

The most important skill is getting the speech recognition software to print out exactly what you say. The lion's share of the 1-2-week training period is therefore dedicated to building your profile, which means enabling the software to understand your way of talking. This is done with recorded phone conversations and reading lists of specific words. If you cannot bring yourself to say swearwords, racial slurs, etc., this is not for you. On my very first day, I had to train the speech recognition on all kinds of N-words, C-words, F-words and other nasty expressions. The mandate is verbatim repetition, no glossing over anything.

The software is amazingly good in interpreting context. If you say, "this is my last word period period period", chances are it will type out the correct, "This is my last word. Period." In my case, despite all training attempts, the algorithm never adapted to my accent very well and showed a lot of wrong words that I had to correct on-screen. Probably my funniest misinterpretation was when the dog breed "blue-tick heeler" appeared on the screen as "blue tequila" and the reader had a good laugh.

Lastly, you need to remember to switch back from re-speaker to speaker.

Otherwise, you might come home after a long shift and ask your partner, “How was your day comma darling question mark”. It has happened to me...

**Differences between shadowing/interpreting and respeaking for phone captions:**

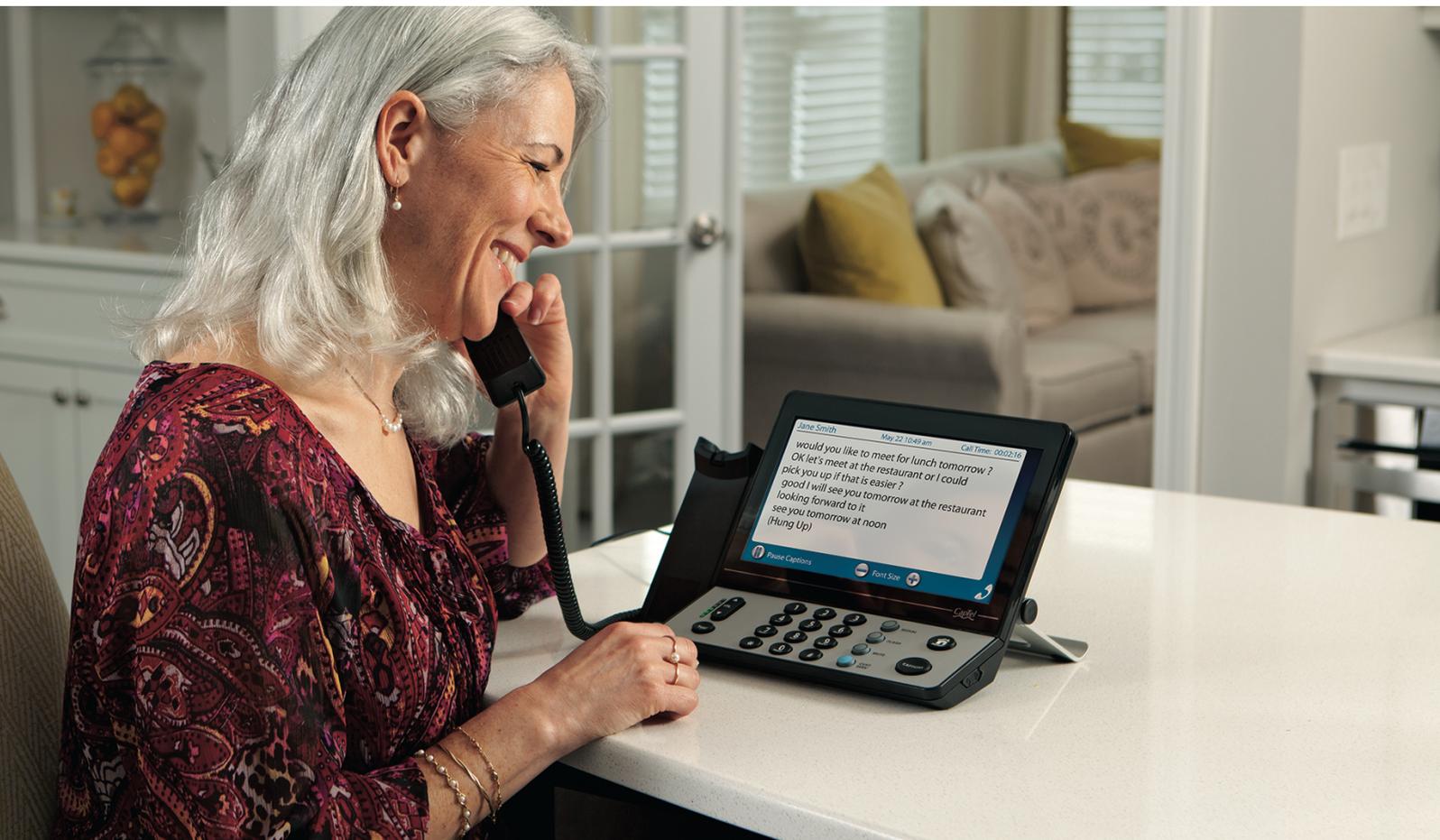
- Repetition needs to be verbatim, no paraphrasing or replacing any words
- You try to stay as close to the speaker as possible, lagging is not a virtue
- False starts are also captioned
- Punctuation needs to be spoken (“comma”, “exclamation mark”)
- Non-verbal utterances like [coughs] or [umm] also must be captioned
- For best results, you need to talk very clearly, and stay rather monotonous
- You simultaneously need to read the outcome on the screen and correct mistakes

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Images are from CaptionCall (iPad, isolated phone) and/or Sprint CapTel (lady on the phone), both of which offer the services and released them expressly for media use.



# DEMAND FOR NON-ENGLISH SUBTITLERS ROCKETING

BY KELLY O'DONOVAN

Subtitles were always a part of post-production, but the demand wasn't so intense until recently. For the most part, subtitled movies and documentaries travelled to film festivals or were distributed abroad.

However, in the last five years, global content streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have exploded the subtitling scene. It's important to understand just how much these streaming services have changed subtitling.

Making entire media catalogues accessible to worldwide audiences has erupted into a huge increase in demand for foreign-language subtitles for films and TV.

A third of the entertainment industry is consumed by the US; but not only does the US send media out into the world, its consumption of internationally produced content is booming. Some of the most popular recent non-English shows on Netflix are: *La Casa de Papel* (Spanish), *Dark* (German), *3%* (Portuguese), *Cable Girls* (Spanish), *Suburra* (Italian), *Marseille* (French) and *Devilman Crybaby* (Japanese).

Not only has the streaming giant's relentless growth forever changed TV watching in the US, it started to generate this same craze across Europe in recent years.

The popularity of foreign language shows has helped the industry see the global potential of non-English language content, and the demand has prompted LSPs (Language Service Providers) to develop scalable subtitling workflows to simultaneously process large quantities of content, in multiple languages, for rapid internationalization.

One major challenge encountered by LSPs is subtitling between non-English source and target languages. There is a lack of foreign language speakers to meet the increasing demand for foreign language content in non-English speaking countries, and LSPs are struggling to find the necessary talent.

For instance, Spain and Latin America are experiencing a boom in Turkish television series. There are only a few qualified and available native Spanish speakers who speak Turkish fluently enough to subtitle all the content from Turkish to Spanish.

Most likely, the series needs to be subtitled first into English and then into Castilian or Latin Spanish. In such a workflow, a timed-English template would be created from the Turkish proxy. The English template is then translated into Spanish, and the in and out times are altered to accommodate the different syntax and idiosyncrasies of Spanish.

**A subtitler normally translates and formulates subtitles in accordance with the visual rhythm of the film as defined by the scenes and shot changes, the rhythm of the actors' speech and the reading rhythm of the target audience.**

It would be exceedingly unusual to have the same in and out cues for the subtitles in English and Spanish due to the intrinsic disparity between these languages and their varying sentence structures.

This workflow consists of **quality and understanding of the content**. Not only that, it adds additional steps to the subtitling workflow process which results in more hours needed to complete the project (possibly quite unfavourable when working against a tight deadline). Additionally, there are extra costs.

As mentioned earlier, the shortage of qualified subtitling resources between non-English language pairs has left LSPs with the disadvantage of having to produce subtitles using this workflow.

That said, with the increase in foreign language subtitling, the demand for qualified subtitles is growing expeditiously and LSPs are in need.

This trend is not only changing the subtitling industry, but also **subtitling as a career and profession**. Judging from the surge in subtitling, I am confident we will see a rise in available qualified subtitlers, and more specifically for non-English language combinations.

Subtitling is an art form on its own. When it is done well, all the distractions of film seem to fade, and results in an incredibly well-told story.

**Kelly O'Donovan** is the creator of [GoSub.tv](http://GoSub.tv)

An Education in the Art of Subtitling.

[GoSub.tv](http://GoSub.tv) specializes in the online training of subtitling, closed captioning and SDH.

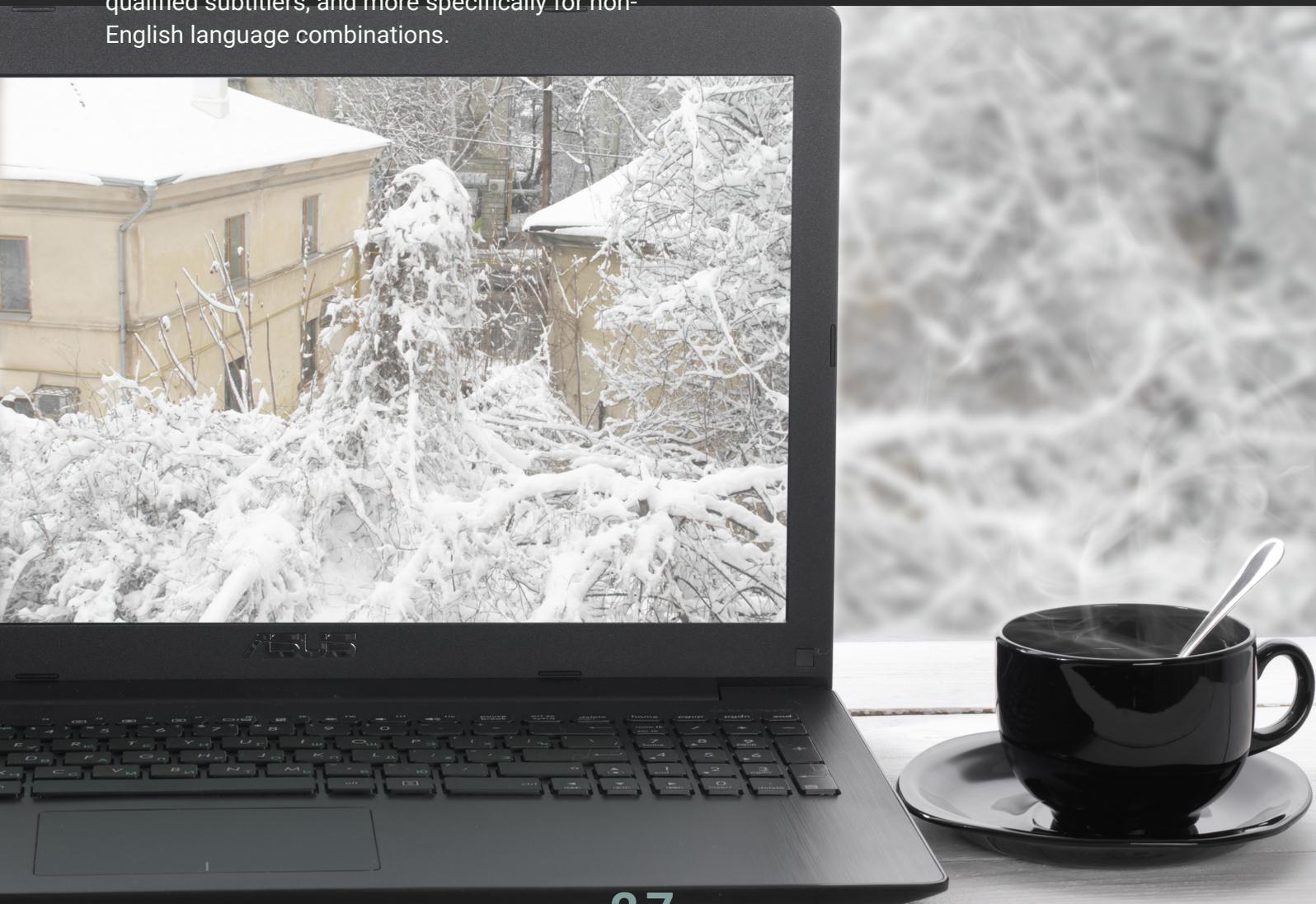
She is also the creator of [Jobs.GoSub.tv](http://Jobs.GoSub.tv) –



A new online directory connecting qualified subtitlers and captioners with agencies and jobs.

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# FORCED NARRATIVES? FORCED AUDIENCES!

BY MARA CAMPBELL AND SEBASTIÁN ARIAS

Sometimes it takes us ages to realize that we have been doing something inefficiently for a long time and nobody said a thing (probably because they didn't notice). Generally, we can't even establish the exact moment it started happening or who began doing it differently.

My colleague and co-author of this article, Sebastián, and I thought that, since we did notice, we should point it out.

This workflow consists of quality and understanding of the content. Not only that, it adds additional steps to the subtitling workflow process which results in more hours needed to complete the project (possibly quite unfavourable when working against a tight deadline). Additionally, there are extra costs.

As mentioned earlier, the shortage of qualified subtitling resources between non-English language pairs has left LSPs with the disadvantage of having to produce subtitles using this workflow.

For me, it started many years ago. I was having trouble explaining to my team what a forced narrative file was, what it would be used for, and what purpose it served. For a few years (yes, years!), I was not completely sure, so I repeated to them the exact words my clients used to explain it. And a few months ago, I finally got it. (See the box for Netflix's definition.)

**According to Netflix:**  
 "A Forced Narrative (FN) subtitle is a text overlay that clarifies communications or alternate languages meant to be understood by the viewer. They can also be used to clarify dialogue, texted graphics or location/person IDs that are not otherwise covered in the dubbed/localized audio. To enable the same viewing experience across multiple countries and devices, FN subtitles are localized and delivered as separate timed text files. [...] Subtitles, both full and FN, are not burned-in over picture.  
 On our service, Forced Narrative subtitles are only displayed if Subtitles and CC are set to "off" in the user's playback settings. When the user activates a full Subtitle or SDH/CC file, the FN subtitle does not display and for this reason, we require that all Forced Narrative [subtitles] are also included in each full Subtitle and SDH/CC file.

**Use Cases**  
 FN subtitles are used in the following cases:

1. Short segments of foreign language, intended to be understood by the audience, that differ from the original language of the show.
2. Translation of original language location/person IDs, dates or other labels (e.g., "White House, December 10"). As a creative element, these text graphics are usually burned into image and are therefore represented as FN's in foreign languages only. [...]
3. Communication that would not otherwise be commonly understood (e.g., sign language, a subtitled dog, Klingons).
4. Transcribed dialogue in the same language, often done for audience clarification (if audio is inaudible or distorted, commonly in documentaries)."

Source: <https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217558918-Understanding-Forced-Narrative-Subtitles>

As adults who lived their teen years during the 80's in a non-English-speaking country, Sebastián and I grew up on dubbed movies.

The norm (dare I say “logic”?) was that onscreen text was always dubbed. Dubbed versions generally are created for people who can't read or are not used to do it, so all written information needs to be voiced in the target language for it to be understood.

Yet, this has changed, and now onscreen texts are consistently subtitled and not dubbed, regardless of the type of movie/show that is being presented in its dubbed version.

Nowadays, in a dubbed movie, if a character reads a newspaper headline, if there is a plot-pertinent street sign, if we get a glimpse of a written love letter, it will be in the original language on screen and subtitled into the target language, even though all the dialogue in the movie is dubbed.

This poses a problem for audiences who can't read, namely, children, but also a few other demographic groups, including some types of disabilities.

We debated about this fairly new phenomenon, Sebastián from his ample dubbing expertise and I from my subtitled perspective, but we could not find an explanation as to why it was like this now (and much less who changed it, when, and why.)

### **In a galaxy far, far away**

Picture the opening of Star Wars, a long sequence of floating words that dissolve into the deepest space.

Imagine a non-English-speaking kid set up to watch the dubbed movie. One immediately assumes that those words, along with the subtitles for countless space-language-speaking aliens, will be dubbed, so that children can understand Jabba The Hutt threatening Han Solo's life if he doesn't pay his debt in A New Hope. Arguably, not many kids these days speak Huttese.

Cut to my eight-year-old daughter yelling at me from the next room, “Mom! Come read these words to me! I can't understand what's happening!” All onscreen text is subtitled, not dubbed, even in children's movies that are dubbed into a foreign language.

### **Just keep swimming**

One could point out that the Star Wars saga might not be specifically conceived to be watched by young children, so, naturally, we turned to animated films, the epitome of kid's movies.

We checked Finding Dory. The approach in that movie and in many other high-profile animated films is to localize onscreen text.

Again, these are written words that young children—the exact target audience of the film—cannot read because... they can't read yet! Cue some more yelling from the next room.

**In the Latin American version of Finding Dory, the aquarium signs (even plot-pertinent ones like these) are localized but not dubbed**



Not to mention that they miss out on important plot twists, like in this image, where the characters need to get to the sea (mar abierto), but they get sidetracked by “the world’s most powerful pair of glasses” (los lentes más poderosos del mundo) and end up going in the wrong direction.

And speaking of plot twists, here is one: the original English-language version of *Finding Dory* also commits the same crime of showing onscreen text with no matching voice over!

This might explain why the dubbing does not include voice-over on text: to emulate the original version’s viewing experience.

That is commendable, logical, and the most probable explanation, but it brings up another point: should we be discussing the industry’s approach to children’s movies in general? That is probably a debate on its own that we can leave for another time.

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#### Outside in

Localizing children’s films can go to very interesting lengths. In the case of *Inside Out*, even the actual animation had to be localized for some regions. In the scene where the protagonist pouts about being forced to eat broccoli, the Japanese version had to get creative and change broccoli for peppers, because broccoli is a loved vegetable by kids in that country. Check out this article for more interesting localization facts about that film: <https://www.businessinsider.com.au/why-inside-out-has-different-scenes-in-other-countries-2015-7>.

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#### Wakanda forever



Another form of forced narratives in all genres of film and television is burnt-in subtitles. Many scenes in *Black Panther* are spoken in the South African language Xhosa and subtitled into English. This poses very different challenges for the dubbing and subtitling into foreign languages.

In dubbing, the only solution is to dub into the target language, which means that both English and Xhosa lines will “sound” the same to the dubbed version viewer: they will all be in the same language. This is where the burnt-in subtitles come in handy, as they are a visual cue that there is a third language in play.

In subtitling, even though the resulting text is all rendered in the same language as well, the third language is noticed by the audience thanks to both the visual cue of the burnt-in subtitles and the audio cue that the spoken language has changed. (For more information on multilingual instances in film and television, check out the TRAFILM Project, that “aims to describe [...] [and] discover professional and social practices along with the norms and criteria of this specific translation challenge, [as well as] validate and refine existing theoretical models on audiovisual translation and multilingualism by describing and analyzing a rich collection of data.” Visit [www.trafilm.net](http://www.trafilm.net).)

### Clueless

This is an ideal scenario, but not the current one, due to another trend that has permeated the AVT world in the past few years: the dreaded textless video. Even though translators (usually) get a full as-broadcast video to work on/from (i.e., with all original onscreen graphics and burnt-in subtitles),

the one that makes its way to our favorite streaming services is actually a “textless” version, which lacks any kind of burnt-in subtitle (it does include diegetic onscreen graphics as signs, letters, etc., sometimes in their original language and sometimes localized, as we described earlier.)

So, in many movies, the visual cue is completely lost, and audiences trying to enjoy the dubbed version find all of the dialogues standardized in the same single target language, which might bring confusion to the audience, because some of the foreign dialogues are spoken in a foreign language on purpose so that some of the characters can’t understand what is said.

As for the subtitled version of such films, the visual cue is also lost, potentially causing the same standardization and loss of viewing experience if the spectator does not pick up the audio cue that the language has changed. Luckily, both languages will be different enough to be set apart, but that is not always the case.

### *Dinna fash, Sassenach*

We find the opposite situation in the show *Outlander*. The main character, Claire, is an Englishwoman who ends up in 1700’s Scotland, captive by some rugged, semi-savage kilt-sporting beefy Scotts who, unlike Claire, speak mostly Gaelic. None of the interventions in Gaelic (including whole lengthy dialogues and scenes) are subtitled in the first season, and just a few are interpreted to Claire by other characters when they refer to her.

To audiences, this feels quite alienating. (In my case, I double-checked to make sure that the Spanish subtitles were still on.) But it is a very deliberate move by the producers: “According to Ronald D. Moore (the TV Series developer), his crew decided to keep the Gaelic words instead of translating them to English. This maintained the first-person narrative by showing Claire’s inability to understand the Gaelic.” It definitely does the trick!

(Source:

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3006802/trivia?item=tr2500453>)



## Chaos in Rome

My personal experience with the Israeli show *Fauda* might be a good example. The show “depicts the two-sided story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict<sup>1</sup>”, centered around an undercover Israeli unit operating in Palestine and their target, a Hamas terrorist. The operatives pose as members of Hamas, so they are fully bilingual Hebrew/Arabic, and the series is spoken in both languages, although there are no burnt-in subtitles for the Arabic (at least not on the video version available on the streaming service.) I personally find that those languages sound quite similar, so the audio cue was non-existent for me. And, since I relied solely on the English subtitles, both languages became one.

One of the show’s conflicts arises when one of the Israeli officers who had been undercover in Palestine is seen by a member of Hamas speaking Israeli on the phone with his wife. All hell breaks loose, and he has to flee because his cover is blown. It literally took me six episodes to realize that the protagonist spoke Israeli with his family and Palestinian when undercover, and that that had been the reason why he was suddenly escaping. Needless to say, I abandoned the show a few episodes later.



This is Colonia Roma, a neighborhood in Mexico City where the movie takes place.  
Photo from Wikipedia: CC BY 2.0. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3372558>

Sebastián and I wondered why the streaming service had decided to go in that direction with *Fauda* while they offered some creative options in other titles, such as the movie *Roma*. *Roma* is spoken in Spanish and Mixtec, an indigenous language which plays an integral part in the plot, because it is used by two maids, one of them the protagonist, mainly when they talk amongst each other. It is a trait of their heritage but also of their social status, so it is absolutely plot-pertinent to clearly identify when each language makes an appearance.

The film opens with a notice in Spanish that tells the viewer that the Mixtec dialogues will be subtitled, unlike the Spanish ones. The first subtitle of the movie—in whichever language you watch it—includes the following notice: “Mixtec subtitles in brackets.”

On the English subtitles for the film *Roma*, the first line indicated the dialogue was spoken in Mixtec and the second one, in Spanish

We find that this is a very creative way of engaging the audience in the movie-watching experience and conveying the full meaning that the director strived to communicate. When it would have been very easy to standardize both languages into one, it would not have served the narrative at all. Even though viewers are probably not used to the use of brackets in a regular subtitle (something more associated with SDH and closed captioning), it was a very effective solution. Another good option could have been subtitles in different colors for each language, as many European countries are used to seeing, but that poses the risk of getting lost in older TVs or streaming players.

Of course, curiosity struck, and we went straight to see what had been done in the dubbed versions of *Roma*. Well, they do not exist<sup>2</sup>. The director's vision was only a subtitled version, which probably explains why there has been so much thought put into them regarding the treatment of the third language.

### **In the beginning...**

Dubbing and subtitling disciplines have been around for decades all over the world, and, for better or for worse, have managed to find workarounds to most of the problems described in this article.

This new tendency we observe seems to be dragging the achievements of these techniques a few steps backwards, potentially posing problems to audiences in many levels, such as missing the point of a whole scene or even a whole plot twist, or, at the very least, the motivation of some characters to act in certain ways, which ultimately jeopardizes the viewing experience and probably the director's intention.

Some of these issues are more easily solved than others, of course.

We noticed that it is more common in cartoon TV shows to dub onscreen texts instead of localizing them, and there are many creative ways of doing this.

In the Latin American Spanish version of the show *Paranorman*, for example, some plot-pertinent onscreen graphics, such as a mean graffiti on the titular character's locker, were dubbed in a way that sounded like an off-screen random school kid was reading them aloud<sup>3</sup>.

Historically, for example in the 80's dubbed movies we watched in Latin America, all texts were read out loud by a narrator, even the opening credits, i.e., cast, producers and director, were also read (with questionable pronunciation, but that is another story.)

In dubbing there is some (small) level of control in the hands of the dubbing experts, but it also depends on the company handling the job. In Sebastián's experience, a few clients leave these decisions to the dubbing director, even going to the lengths of preparing detailed spreadsheets of onscreen graphics instances and offering suggestions, but, ultimately, giving the team the freedom to decide what is better for the movie, since, naturally, each movie or show is a world in its own. But, unfortunately, this is the exception rather than the rule.

### **We have a dream**

Considering that technology allows for so many wonderful things, we dream of a day, hopefully soon, when audiences will have many options to enjoy an audiovisual piece.

Our kids could choose to watch movies with all foreign language dubbed, dialogues and onscreen graphics alike, over textless versions of the video; tweens might want dialogues dubbed but localized graphics, to practice their reading skills; teenagers could watch the same dubbed version with subtitled forced narratives because they can totally manage them; and adults would go straight for full-on subtitles and choose to load the textless or texted version. And going full circle, maybe the elderly could opt for completely dubbed versions even of films intended for adult audiences.

Deaf audiences could choose to watch the texted version with burnt-in subtitles (instead of having the CC/SDH track include those dialogues over textless video), to get the same experience that hearing spectators get. And hard-of-hearing might “mix and match,” depending on their level of hearing loss.

The combinations are endless, and we are sure that the technology is basically there, it just needs some tweaking.

We believe that audiences would engage much more with the material to the point of getting through all of it (unlike the case described previously with Fauda), they will enjoy it much better and, most importantly, understand it fully,

which should go without saying, but it feels like a second thought nowadays, judging by the way things are done.

Moviemakers and directors are probably not aware of these issues, but they should be, considering that “[o]ver 50% of the revenue obtained by most current films comes from translated (dubbing, subtitling) and accessible versions (subtitling for the deaf, audio description for the blind)<sup>4</sup>.”

Hopefully, when directors, screenwriters and producers get wind of this and decide to have a say in how their work is presented to a variety of audiences, then will we see some thought put into this by dubbing and subtitling companies around the world. We look forward to it!



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### **In videogame localization**

If you want to watch a very interesting conference session on similar problem areas in videogames and many ideas to work around them, we recommend this link:

<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1025738/Subtitles-Are-Changing-Don-t>

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**References**

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4565380/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4565380/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)

<sup>2</sup><https://www.inquisitr.com/5249470/alfonso-cuaron-roma-no-color-dubbed-versions-of-roma-on-the-way/>

<sup>3</sup>[https://www.instagram.com/p/BaSxQdUIREa/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_options\\_share\\_sheet](https://www.instagram.com/p/BaSxQdUIREa/?utm_source=ig_web_options_share_sheet)

<sup>4</sup><http://galmaobservatory.webs.uvigo.es/proyectos/accessible-filmmaking-guide>

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She worked in several of the most important companies of Argentina and the USA. She is currently COO of True Subtitles, the company she founded in 2005. Her work has been seen on the screens of Netflix, Prime, Disney+, Hulu, HBO, BBC, and many more. She teaches courses, speaks at international conferences, and is a founding member of the AVD.

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