DEVELOPING AUDIO DESCRIPTION COMPETENCIES AS PART OF A TRANSLATION EDUCATION PROGRAM

Kora Evangelina Basich Peralta
She holds a PhD in Translation and Interpretation, a Master and a B.Phil in Education . She has worked at UABC for almost 30 years in administrative positions and lecturing. She has been a Fulbright and British Council Scholar. She has an active professional practicum as an interpreter.
Electronic mail: korabasich@yahoo.com

Ana Gabriela Guajardo Martínez Sotomayor
She holds a BA in English Teaching, a Master in Teaching and an Advanced Studies Diploma in Translation and Interpretation. She has worked at UABC for almost 30 years in administrative positions and lecturing. She participated in the design (1996) and the redesign (2006) of the BA in Translation. She is currently working on her PhD dissertation in Translation and Interpretation at the University of Granada.
Electronic mail: anaggms@yahoo.com

Miguel Ángel Lemus (UABC).
He holds a BA in Law, a B Phil Ed in ELT an Advanced Studies Diploma in Translation and Interpretation. He is also certified in Translation Teaching. He was the coordinator of the Translation program at UABC from 2001 to 2008. He teaches law translation and is a certified translator. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation in Translation and Interpretation at the University of Granada.
Electronic mail: lemus25@yahoo.com

Professional Competencies of a Translator

The recurrent complaint, in both national and international levels, that educational programs do not always meet the demands of the work field, have led higher education institutions to redefine their educational models, modifying teaching methods and incrementing practical skills. The work field demands the professional to have more diversified knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which come as a result of the constant changes in the work market and its processes.

The changing modes of work organization, not only demand a new work culture (one that emphasizes collaboration, team work, life-long learning and better work and better pay), but a new educational culture in learning institutions (Hargreaves 1994). These institutions must commit to educate students to develop

competence during their studies and not postpone the development until they have graduated. This is the core of learning by competencies.

In response to the need of producing qualified professionals able to face current work demands, in some industrialized nations[1] that had problems in integrating the educational system with the work fields, education based in competencies emerged in the 80's (Mertens,1997).

Education by competencies was and continues to be the answer, which is an integrated approach to education, as it connects the work field and society at large with higher education and particularly to student professional development (Mertens, 1997).

Changing educational processes to competence development is based on having students become competent in their work field, solving efficiently everyday problems and tasks that arise in their professional practice. That is, to have the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for a particular productive activity (Facultad de Idiomas, 2005).

Colina (2003) states that the main purpose of teaching translation is to enable the development of the competence, which she calls "communicative translational competence". She also defines it as "the ability to interact appropriately and adequately as an active participant in communicative translation tasks". In "Translation Teaching–From Research to the Classroom" Colina (2003) quotes Bell (1991:41) when he says that the translator's communicative competence is:

> "the knowledge and ability possessed by the translator that permits him/her to create communicative acts – discourse – which are not only (and not" necessarily) grammatical…but socially acceptable"

From a holistic point of view, PACTE recognizes one general competence called *translation competence*. From this general competence the following six sub-competencies derive: linguistic, extra-linguistic, instrumental/professional,

---

[1] France, Great Britain, United States, Germany and Australia, to name a few o the first nations to begin with this model.

psychophysiology, transference and strategic. PACTE (2001) describes each one of them as follows:

1. Linguistic Competence in both languages: grammatical, textual, illocutionary and sociolinguistic.
2. Extra-linguistic Competence: Knowledge about how the world in general is organized and about particular fields: bicultural, encyclopedic, topic related and about translation.
3. Instrumental/professional Competence: Knowledge and abilities related to translation practice, knowledge of the work market and translation practice, knowledge and use of every kind of document sources and new technologies needed for translation.
4. Psychophysiology *Competence:* Ability to apply psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources.
5. Transference Competence: Ability to follow transference process from the source text to the final text.
6. Strategic Competence: Procedures in awareness and non-awareness, verbal and non-verbal, used to solve problems that arise in the development of the translation process.

(PACTE, 2001:4)

Both Bell (2001:38-44) and Hurtado Albir (2001:382), state that a translator must not only have a broad linguistic and world knowledge, but also develop vast linguistic and extra-linguistic abilities.

Audio Description and Required Abilities

For people fortunate enough to have the sense of sight, audio description (AD) might be an unknown or little known term. Being able to see, does not always permit to even imagine that the visually impaired might need to have things described for them, things that for someone with visual capacity are natural and ordinary.

Audio description provides for a large number of people with visual disabilities, alternatives to face this limitation and the opportunity to enjoy the details that due to their own disability are not able to appreciate by themselves.

About Audio Description Associates LLC (AADALLC) states that audio description is a new technique of narrative for the blind or visually impaired that provides visual images for the performing arts, media, museums exhibits and other events. The visual image has an aural presentation and also an oral presentation through speech: the visual is made verbal[2].

It can be stated that audio description has existed ever since a person with visual capacity has helped someone with visual disability, by describing verbally what is perceived visually. However, the systematic study and development of this activity is relatively recent. According to the ADALLC in 1964, after listening to the subtitling for the deft, Chet Avery, a blind man that worked for the Department of Education conceived the idea to have films described for the visually impaired. In the 70's, Gregory Frazier was the first to develop the concept of act and art for AD [3] and established the first Audio Vision service. It was not until 1980 that the first formal AD service was offer by the Washington Ear Association in Washington DC.

The development of audio description in recent decades allows AD to be used in a variety of formats and situations for a wide audience in various settings. AD is described by the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC) as:

> "Audio description, intended for persons who are blind or have visual impairments, is the addition of narration that conveys the settings, costumes, body language, and sight gags in a visual presentation or performance. Concise, objective descriptions inserted between portions of dialogue or song can help listeners to understand important visual elements. Audio description is meant to complement a performance, not interfere with it."[4]

Audio description is offered in movies, TV programs, museums, exhibition and other events where it provides a service to people with visual disabilities. AD must not be confused with the audio support available in places like museums. Audio tours for people that are visually able are a complement to what they can

---

[2] Blog: Brave New Words. http://brave-new-words.blogspot.com/2008/08/visual-made-verbal.html

[3] http://www.audiodescribe.com/about/articles/ad_international_journal_07.pdf

[4] http://www.astc.org/resource/access/medad.htm

observe visually while following the exhibition through different museum areas. AD is a different kind of aid designed to help the visually disabled person to experience all that an exhibition has to offer, even the smallest of details. The ASTC emphasizes the difference in a museum environment between the audio tour and the tour with Audio Description and add that:

> There is often confusion about the difference between an audio tour and an audio described tour. An **audio tour** guides visitors through a selected portion of exhibit elements, providing label copy and additional information about objects in the galleries. An **audio described tour** often contains some of the same elements as an audio tour, but also includes vivid, succinct descriptions of objects and orientation and may prompt interaction with exhibit elements.[5]

AD is known by different terms according to the context in which it is used. Normally, it is called Audio Description, however the Audio Description International (ADI)[6], states that in the United States TV AD through SAP (Secondary Audio Program) is called *Video Description.* AD is live mostly on performances like in theaters or other live events. However, for films and television AD is mostly prerecorded.

The quality of audio description depends on the competencies that the audio descriptor develops. Organizations for the visually impaired such as ASTC and Audio Description Associates LLC (ADALLC), have established some competencies that they consider are required in order to carry out AD activity. The ASTC adds that:

> First, you need a trained audio describer. A trained describer starts by becoming familiar with the content of the presentation or performance he/she will describe. For pre-recorded videos, he or she will watch the program and create a script for the audio description. For live performances or presentations, this could involve attending dress rehearsals or reading a script.[7]

---

[5] http://www.astc.org/resource/access/medad.htm

[6] http://www.adinternational.org/ad.html#what

[7] http://www.astc.org/resource/access/medad.htm

Audio Description Associates LLC (ADALLC) [8] defines four essential elements for audio description: observation, edition, language and vocal skills. The following presents a broader description of these four elements.

Observation is an important skill for audio descriptors because their descriptions must complement what the visually impaired cannot see. The audio description must also include even the smallest of details. This skill must be developed in order to capture what an untrained eye might miss.

Edition is another required skill, because audio descriptions must contain enough information and at the same time be short and concise to be included in the precise allotted spaces. The audio descriptor must adequately select the text that will be inserted, so that in a matter of seconds, the visually impaired public receives verbally the information that is originally visual. Editing is essential for the complete understanding of the material.

The ability to translate from visual to oral **language** in a "precise and objective manner, vivid with words, phrases and metaphors that stimulate imagination" is the essence of AD. This is the reason why the audio descriptor must have a wide vocabulary that allows the selection of the most adequate term when required and the descriptor must be careful not to express personal opinion. For example, it can be said that someone is crying, but not that someone is sad. It is through the words of the audio descriptors and their appropriate language that the visually impaired can "see" what is happening in a certain scene.

Vocal skills for audio descriptors should be similar to those developed by interpreters or actors that interpret oral texts or that when performing in a play, transmit message and emotions. Elements such as tone, volume, speed, diction and pronunciation are fundamental for transmitting the message, and these vocal skills must be taken care of and used adequately for each particular situation.

Coincidences Between the two Disciplines

According to Jimenez (2005) "Translation studies have centered solely on interlingusitic translation (from one language to another), but translating from one

---

[8] http://www.audiodescribe.com/about/

code to another is equally exiting, challenging, and it requires the same cognitive process". She also adds that from a semiotic point of view AD is the translation of images into words. The comparison that Jimenez presents about the competencies that must be developed by translators and audio descriptors points out apparent similarities between the two disciplines.

Jimenez (2005) comparing the translation and audio description processes, presents the following:

- *According to Jacobson, AD could be defined as in intersemiotic translation between different codes.*
- *The translation from images into text.*
- *Studies, therefore, tend to get close.*
- *When translating a text to another language; it is also into a different culture that perceives the world in a different manner. Therefore, when translating from one code to another; this is also translating for people with a different vision of the world.*
- *Translation and Audio Description share:*
  - *Producing the same effect in the receptor (visually impaired), that the one that was produced on the visually-able receiver.*
  - *That is the reason why AD is close to translation studies.*
  - *From a translation point of view, AD is a type of audiovisual and subordinate translation to images and to the space between original dialogues in the film or text being audio described.*
- *This translation takes place by substituting images for vivid words.*
- *Language in this new form of translation should reach levels of drama, esthetics, suspense, among others, that the film director intended for every sequence through images.*
- *Imagination, command of the language, knowledge and documenting of the movie itself, and films in general, should be considered by the audio descriptor when audio describing to adapt this movie for the visually impaired. (Javier Navarrete, Audio descriptor.)*

Reviewing the knowledge and skills to be developed by audio descriptors, there is an evident similarity to those to be developed by translators/interpreters.

According to what Jimenez (2005) and the ASTC propose, a comparative table was designed, to point out the coincidences.

Table 1 Coincidences between knowledge and skills needed for Audio Description and Translation.

Audio Description abilities according to ADALLC	Translation competence Bell (2001), Hurtado Albir (2001:381)	GRUPO PACTE	COINCIIDENCES
Language	Command of Source and Target Languages	Linguistic	Command of both languages.
Observation	Decoding elements	Extra linguistic

Strategic | Decision making about transferring the message. |
Edition	Codification elements	Transference	Transfer to Target Language
Vocal skills	Communicative competence with a sense of multi components.	Psychophysiologic	Use of communicative resources
		Instrumental/ Professional*	Use of both information and technological resources

* This competence is implicit in the categories of competencies and skills mentioned by the ADALLC, Bell (2001) and Hurtado.(2001).

As previously mentioned, audio descriptors interpret from a visual language into a verbal one. The translator and the interpreter, translate from one language to another, either in a written or oral form. However, both professions become the link between the message and those who otherwise would not be able to receive.

Including knowledge, abilities and skills of audio description for the blind as part of translator training program, can be an asset, as it will allow future translators to develop skills that complement and reinforce the competencies acquired through their translation training program. These skills will aid them in being more observant of their reality, and in making them skillful in transmitting the sense of the message in various manners, as well as developing communicative skills that will be useful for their translation practice.

Furthermore, and equally important, translators will have the opportunity to value persons with different capabilities, and the manner in which society as a whole can participate into integrating them in a dignified manner.

Another activity that presents coincidence is translation as such, additionally to audio description. This is, to do audio description in the same language, and additionally do audio description in other languages. This will permit the audio described material to have a wider audience, and allow the visually impaired to have the opportunity to receive the audio described material in other languages.

As it was aforementioned, competency-based education strengthens the possibilities of the graduate's entering the work market. This education must include, not only competencies that have traditionally conformed the discipline, but also higher education institutions must take on additional responsibilities. This way, university students will be able to apply the skills and knowledge acquired in order to contribute to social development and at the same time, have access to a greater number and better work opportunities.

Finally, and based on the coincidences previously mentioned, we propose to include in translator's university education, the knowledge abilities and skills

for audio description. This will allow translators to widen their competencies and work in an area that is clearly related to their own discipline.

REFERENCES

Association of Science-Technology Centers. http://www.astc.org/resource/access/medad.htm.

Audio Description Associates LLC. http://www.audiodescribe.com/article1/html

Bell, Roger T. 2001. *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice* [M]. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Colina, S. (2003) Translation Teaching- From Research to the Classroom. Boston, U.S.A: McGraw Hill.

Facultad de Idiomas de la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (2005) *Propuesta de Reestructuración de la Licenciatura en Traducción del Idioma Ingles.* México. Proyecto no publicado.

Hargreaves, Andy (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*. London: Continuum press.

Hurtado Albir, Amparo (2001) *Traducción y Traductología. Introducción a la Traductología*. Madrid: Cátedra.

Jiménez, C. (2005) Apuntes didácticos del curso "Perspectivas de Estudio en la Traducción Audiovisual" en el Doctorado en Traducción e Interpretación, Universidad de Granada.

Mertens, L. (1997). *Competencia laboral: sistemas, surgimiento y modelos.*. 1ª. Ed. México: Ed. CINTERFOR.

WGBH – Media Access Group – DVS Services
http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/services/description/

PACTE (2001) *"La competencia traductora y su adquisición"* Quaderns. Revista de Traducción 6, p. 39-45. Barcelona.

http://www.audiodescribe.com/about/articles/ad_international_journal_07.pdf

http://www.astc.org/resource/access/medad.htm

http://www.audiodescribe.com/about/

Blog: Brave New Words. http://brave-new-words.blogspot.com/2008/08/visual-made-verbal.html