

**Master's theses in Barrier-free Communication**

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Susanne J. Jekat

**2020**

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**Carrer**, Luisa. "Translating into Easy Italian. An analysis of health-related texts and their impact on comprehension by people with intellectual disabilities." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2020.

**Abstract**

Recent studies show that low literacy affects large segments of the adult population, both in Switzerland and Italy. Easy Language is an essential instrument of inclusion for people who would otherwise be excluded from access to written information and full participation in society. In Italy, high readability and comprehensibility of texts of public interest have been the focus of academic research since as early as the mid-1970s. Nonetheless, in recent years, little experimental research has addressed the impact of Easy Italian on text comprehension by people with intellectual disabilities (ID). This thesis aims to fill this gap. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to address the following research questions: (1) What strategies do translators employ when translating from Standard into Easy Italian?, and (2) Do translators' strategies facilitate reading comprehension of Easy Italian texts to people with ID? Three health-related texts in Easy Italian are analysed in the context of their adherence to the European standards for Easy Language. A reading comprehension test is then conducted to assess the degree of readability and comprehensibility of the texts. The test is administered to 26 participants with mild to moderate ID. The analysis shows that all texts contravene several European guidelines. Furthermore, the test results suggest that non-compliance with guidelines hinders respondents' comprehension of the texts. It is concluded that, on the one hand, standards for Easy Language are essential to guide the translator's work. On the other hand, high comprehensibility can only be achieved through a careful consideration of the target communicative situation.

**Häberlin**, Daniel. "Thiel und Boerne im Hörfilm. Die Darstellung stereotyper Charaktere in der Audiodeskription zum Tatort Münster." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2020.

**Abstract**

Portraying the characters of a television series in an audio description involves many challenges. Not only are the describers confronted with the lack of space in the original soundtrack, as it is also true for the audio description of a film, but they are also confronted with the unequal state of knowledge within the target audience about the respective series and the characters appearing in it. This raises the question of how the characters of a television series can and should be described in an audio description to enable every listener to perceive them correctly. Within the framework of this master's thesis, the audio descriptions of two episodes of a German crime television series have been analysed in terms of how the two central main characters of this series are represented in them and, more specifically, whether the relevant information about those two characters is conveyed by the audio description. The results show that the two characters are described quite poorly in the two audio descriptions and that some of the relevant information which is conveyed by the picture in the original versions of the two episodes is lost, even though the contrast between the two characters becomes clear. Therefore, it would be advisable to compensate the information which is not transferred by the audio description with an audio introduction to this series, although it still has to be examined how and to what extent an audio introduction has an influence on how the listeners perceive the respective characters.

**Merani, Silvina.** "Intersemiotic translation in the Fine Arts. An analysis of audio descriptions of sculptures in museums and in open public places." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2020.

**Abstract**

With increasing recognition of the need for cultural inclusion of all sectors of society, how to generate universally effective audio description (AD) for the fine arts has become an object of research enquiry. This Master's thesis aims to contribute to that on-going research and scrutinizes a corpus of five ADs of sculptures in order to identify the textual and linguistic features they exhibit and, in turn, to examine which of those features appear to facilitate access and inclusion to blind and visually impaired individuals. The corpus analysis revealed that the ADs of sculptures installed in public places incorporate a higher number of the guidelines considered beneficial for the creation of effective ADs of artworks when compared to ADs of sculptures in museums. Notwithstanding, a significant departure from those guidelines was identified in the high degree of subjectivity they embody. Complementing the analysis, a reception study was undertaken with a group of blind and visually impaired individuals and a second group with sighted participants. The findings revealed no significant differences in AD reception across groups, other than the importance attached to tactile references. Most respondents appreciated subjective audio describer's intervention while also acknowledging the importance of receiving objective information. Given that audiences of AD are almost invariably heterogeneous collectives, further research in this field is needed to contribute to an enhanced and more universal understanding of AD users' needs and preferences, thereby satisfying the indisputable social demand for cultural inclusion.

**Parli, Michelle.** "Mit Bibi und Lola die Welt verstehen: eine exemplarische Analyse zur Audiodeskription von Kinderfilmen." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2020.

**Abstract**

People with visual impairments and blindness benefit from audio description, a tool that aims to reduce communication barriers. While the field of audio description has been increasingly explored in the last couple of years, it remains a rather unknown territory. Despite the publication of several guidelines for the creation of audio descriptions, these guidelines remain not congruent and are challenged in particular by the heterogeneity of the target group. In this paper, the 2019 guidelines for the creation of audio description for children are discussed. In a first step, the audio description scripts of two different children's films are compared with the guidelines' principles. While one script was created by an author without any experience in the field of audio description, the other script was written by an expert. In a second step, an holistic perspective on the source text is used to isolate meanings (*Sinngebungen*) that are typical of children's films, and the corresponding concretizations (*Konkretisierungen*) are checked and compared in the two audio description scripts. The results indicate that experienced authors tend to underlay the source text with a *Sinngebung* which consistently concretizes throughout the audio description script and is reflected in the word choice even if the storyline does not explicitly refer to it. Inexperienced authors, on the other hand, tend to create an audio description whose concretizations are always synchronized with the action. The creation of an audio description suitable for children needs to be further researched.

**Riedi, Martina:** "Unverständlich\*. Wie sich Anpassungen in einer Fernsehsendung auf die Qualität der Untertitel auswirken." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2020.

**Abstract**

Live subtitling is essential to enable people with a hearing impairment to access up-to-date information on television and entertainment programmes. By using the exemplary television show "Zäme dihei", a production of Schweizer Fernsehen, this thesis aims to investigate how adjustments to the broadcast format affect live subtitles. The programme was produced during the Corona pandemic in Spring 2020. To comply with social distancing regulations, interviews with guests were conducted via video instead of in person. The programme is broadcast live in Swiss German and was

chosen to take account of the special language situation in Switzerland and the associated transfer processes during the respeaking process. Following an overview of the theoretical framework of this work, the quality of the subtitles is analysed according to three criteria: reduction, core message and consistency. Reduction is determined in a quantitative evaluation, while both core statements and consistency are assessed on the basis of qualitative criteria. The selected sections from “Zäme dihei” are compared with face-to-face interviews from the news programme “Schweiz Aktuell”. The results of the comparison seem to indicate that the poorer sound quality in the self-recorded videos poses serious problems and has a noticeable effect on the subtitles. The potential for improvement in this area and possible suggestions for action are discussed in the conclusion.

## 2019

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**Storner, Monika.** “Deskriptive vs. interpretative Audiodeskription: Eine empirische Untersuchung mit Blinden und Menschen mit Sehbehinderung.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2019.

### **Abstract**

Access to cultural activities for people with disabilities is required by law and is to be further improved in the future. Audio description (AD) is becoming increasingly important for the implementation of this requirement. In this context, the fundamental question arises as to how AD should be designed. Guidelines from the German-speaking countries recommend objective descriptions with no interpretations, which corresponds to descriptive AD. Recent studies, however, point out the advantages of a more flexible interpretative AD and show that the target audience, i.e. blind and visually impaired people, welcomes this type of AD. The goal of this Master’s thesis is to contribute to this discussion. To this end, two reception studies are conducted with heterogeneous groups of blind and visually impaired people. The studies examine descriptive vs. interpretative AD from different perspectives. Results show that most participants prefer interpretative AD. In addition, the findings suggest that interpretative AD tends to enable blind and visually impaired people to better understand the contents – emotions, in particular – of feature films. In order to obtain more significant results, reception studies involving more participants, especially blind people and regular AD users, should be conducted.

## 2018

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**D’Agostino, Dario.** “Der Deutschschweizer Mediendiskurs um die Leichte Sprache. Eine linguistische Diskursanalyse.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2018.

### **Abstract**

In 2014, Switzerland signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The objectives of the CRPD are to establish equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and to prevent discrimination against them. The concept of “Leichte Sprache” supports the implementation of the CRPD. However, “Leichte Sprache” has up to now only been scarcely investigated, especially from a discourse analysis perspective. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the Swiss-German media discourse on “Leichte Sprache”. This study adopts qualitative and text analytical methods, which are triangulated with methods from corpus linguistics. Using a qualitative approach, three key texts were analysed to establish the reality they construct. Using a quantitative (corpus-based) approach, a keyword and a collocation analysis were conducted in order to investigate patterns of language use within the discourse. Results show, for instance, that the term “Menschen” (especially in collocation with “disabilities”) is a keyword in the discourse on “Leichte Sprache” and creates a demarcation between affected and non-affected social actors. “Leichte Sprache” is evaluated either as complementary or opposite to standard German. As the analysis is based exclusively on written texts, in further research the results should be complemented by a multimodal discourse analysis. Moreover, a corpus-driven approach could generate findings inductively using methods from corpus linguistics.

**Gerster, Marina.** “Softwaregestützte Audiodeskription mit Frazier.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2018.

**Abstract**

Against the background of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and within the paradigm of social inclusion and participation, audio description enables blind and visually impaired people to experience a variety of visual media. The conventional method for the production of audio descriptions – that is in a team of three and without any supporting software, as employed by many television companies – is extremely costly and time-consuming. Current technology allows the opportunity to produce audio description by means of synthetic voices. *Frazier* is a web-based software application with integrated text-to-speech technology. One goal of this Master’s thesis is to create a manual of *Frazier*’s beta-version as well as develop its unique selling proposition. The audio described film *Wie immer*, which was produced with *Frazier*, serves as the basis for the investigation of the target group’s assessment of the audio description synthetic voice and what future prospects they ascribe to it. The target group is pleasantly surprised by the good quality of the synthetic voice but stresses that it would still have to go through a further development stage. Since the production process using *Frazier* is associated with time savings and reduced costs, synthetic voices offer the opportunity to make audio description more widely available. The application of synthetic voices seems to be particularly suitable for YouTube videos and educational films, where the listening experience is not of primary importance.

**Krähenbühl, Maria.** “Informationsveränderung durch Übersetzung aus Standard- in Leichte Sprache. Eine quantitative und qualitative Analyse von Bundestagswahlprogrammen am Beispiel Flüchtlingspolitik.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2018.

**Abstract**

Easy Read Information gives people with disabilities barrier-free access to information and thus participation in society. In this context, election programmes are translated from standard to Easy-to-Read Language (“Leichte Sprache”) in order to facilitate political participation. Resolving the complexity of the source texts poses a major challenge for translators. This paper examines the translation of electoral programs into Easy-to-Read Language and identifies changes in information transfer. Election programmes for the German federal elections in 2017 by the parties DIE LINKE and FDP are analysed. The study focuses on refugee policy. On the basis of a quantitative keyword analysis, tendencies towards changes in information are determined. In a further qualitative text analysis, topic development patterns and designations of social actors are examined. The analyses show that considerable changes in information have occurred as a result of translation. There is no differentiation in the names of social actors in the simplified texts, which leads to misinformation. The content shows that very little information has been translated. Numerous chains of arguments are completely omitted, some bear no reference to refugee policy anymore. The results show that translation into Easy-to-Read Language can lead to a significant loss of information and thus call into question the political participation of those affected.

**Lintner, Alexa.** “Personenkennzeichnungen und -beschreibungen in der Audiodeskription von Dokumentarfilmen. Eine exemplarische Analyse am Beispiel des Dokumentarfilms *trust WHO*.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2018.

**Abstract**

This Master’s thesis aims to identify strategies to name and describe characters in audio description (AD) of documentaries. Since existing AD guidelines were mainly designed for feature films, this study examines whether those guidelines can be successfully applied to AD of documentaries. Firstly, the AD of “*trust WHO*” (Franck 2017) was analysed and relevant strategies to name and describe characters were identified. A test was then carried out in order to assess the consumers’ understanding of the film as well as the adequacy of AD. The test was attended by persons both with and without visual impairments. The results showed no significant differences between the two groups’ reception of the film. Participants with visual impairments rated the AD as positive. Hence, the

strategies used to name and describe characters can be evaluated as suitable for “trust WHO”. However, given the complexity of the film genre under investigation, the application of existing AD guidelines to documentaries requires further research.

**Nüssli, Nathalie Dominique.** “Übersetzen in die Leichte Sprache: Übersetzungsprobleme, Übersetzungslösungen und Auswirkungen auf das Textverständnis von Menschen mit Downsyndrom. Eine qualitative Analyse am Beispiel von Texten zum Thema Gesundheit.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2018.

#### **Abstract**

Readers who are not capable to read and understand standard language texts are limited in their participation in society. Research shows that this problem affects large sections of the population in Switzerland and Germany. “Leichte Sprache”, a highly simplified variety of German, has the potential to resolve this situation as it is writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. Although “Leichte Sprache” has been legally established in Germany several years ago, little research has been conducted on it and there are hardly any standardised rules or suitable tools for translators. This master thesis deals with the translation of standard language texts into “Leichte Sprache”. The following questions are examined qualitatively and empirically: How do “Leichte Sprache” translators solve translation problems and what impact do the chosen approaches have on the reading comprehension of people with Down’s syndrome? For this purpose, a standard language health brochure and its “Leichte Sprache” translation are analysed at different linguistic levels and compared with a set of rules for “Leichte Sprache”. A questionnaire is used to check how the “Leichte Sprache” translation is understood by Down’s syndrome subjects. The analysis shows that the “Leichte Sprache” translation does not consistently adhere to the “Leichte Sprache” rules and, according to the results of the questionnaire, impairs the target group’s understanding of the text.

## **2017**

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**Dorigo, Raphael.** “Audiodeskription von Fussballspielen in der Schweiz. Untersuchung von Theorie und Praxis eines jungen Barrierefreiheits-Angebots.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2017. [Co-Supervisor: Dr. Martin Kappus]

#### **Abstract**

As countries are increasingly expected to meet requirements regarding accessibility for the disabled, measures are being taken in a number of areas to grant visually and hearing-impaired people access to art, media and culture. One of these measures is the Audio Description (AD) of football matches by “Radio Blind Power”, a Swiss radio station aimed at blind people. This thesis analyses this practice (a) by analysing whether AD theoretical standards are adhered to in a case example and (b) by investigating whether there is a higher number of problems in the description of scenes that are potentially difficult to describe than in the rest of the description. In addition, a survey is conducted to collect data on how well listeners are able to comprehend descriptions. For the scope of this study, a comparison with the coverage of the same match by an ordinary radio station is also made. This thesis shows that AD theoretical standards are largely adhered to and that fewer problems as expected are found in the scenes deemed potentially difficult to describe. However, one specific type of problem, namely omissions, is found often. Both the analysis and the survey results suggest that “Radio Blind Power” broadcasts more accurate and comprehensible audio descriptions of football events than ordinary radio stations do.

**Dreier, Nathalie.** “Zugang zu Musiksendungen für Menschen mit Hörbeeinträchtigung. Beschaffenheit und Rezeption von Musikuntertiteln im Schweizer Fernsehen.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2017.

**Abstract**

This master thesis aims to analyse the characteristics and reception of music subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing in music shows on Swiss television by employing a combination of methods. First, a corpus of all music subtitles from the five-session television music show “Ich schänke dir es Lied” (I gift a song to you), which was broadcast live on the SRF 1 channel in 2017, was created and a content analysis of those subtitles carried out applying qualitative and quantitative methods. The results were compared with an earlier existing corpus from the 2016 casting show “Die grössten Schweizer Talente” (The greatest Swiss talents). Moreover, the subtitles produced in practice were assessed against the subtitling guidelines set out by SWISS TXT, the provider of subtitles for SRF. Parallel to this perspective, the production approach (pre-prepared, live or semi-live) of the subtitles was taken into account and contrasted. Discrepancies between the subtitles produced using the different approaches were identified and these constitute a core topic of this study. The second method employed is a survey of the target audience, which is based on the results of the corpus analysis. The results of that survey reflect the extreme heterogeneity of the target audience and show that music subtitles are important to them.

**Gassner, Madeleine.** “Live Untertitelung und Schriftdolmetschen im deutschsprachigen Raum. Eine Untersuchung der Ausbildungen in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2017.

**Abstract**

Real-time speech-to-text conversion of acoustic information for people with impaired hearing is an area that has become increasingly important in the German-speaking world in recent years – not least as a result of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. Among other things, it commits the signatory states to ensuring access to media and education is as barrier-free as possible. Various methods such as respeaking or speech-to-text interpreting via computer keyboard can be used for real-time speech-to-text conversion. In Germany, Austria and Switzerland, various institutions offer corresponding training courses: editorial departments for live-subtitling of television content, and educational institutions for other written interpreting services. Both types are examined and compared in this master’s thesis. The focus lies on the training in speech-to-text interpreting as offered by the IUED of the ZHAW and pro audito schweiz, which is analysed in detail. To this end, data collected from five candidates at three different points in time to document their progress in terms of writing speed, accuracy and the use of interpreting strategies was evaluated. The study findings show that a significant increase in writing speed can be achieved comparatively quickly, but they also suggest that the focus should be placed on teaching interpreting strategies, particularly in the somewhat special case of Switzerland, where German and Swiss-German dialects coexist.

**Schüpbach, Alex.** “Verständlichkeit von Abstimmungsunterlagen. Ein Vergleich der Erläuterungen des Bundesrates und der easyvote-Abstimmungshilfe mit dem Kontinuum Leichte Sprache – Einfache Sprache – Bürgernahe Sprache.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2017.

**Abstract**

At time of elections, several publications help Swiss citizens with information aimed at voters. This Master thesis compares the comprehensibility of the official “Explanation from the Federal Council” with the most popular simplified publication “easyvote”. Three different methods were used and compared to investigate comprehensibility. Firstly, different quantitative figures, such as the average letter count per word and the average word count per sentence, “LIX”, “Flesch” and “Flesch according to Amstad” were calculated to compare the two publications. Secondly, the guidelines of the publications, if any, were compared to the guidelines for “Leichte Sprache” (Easy-to-Read Language), “Einfache Sprache” (Plain Language) and “Bürgernahe Sprache” (Citizen-oriented Language) and were classified in these three categories. Thirdly, passages taken from the popular vote of 12 February 2017 were prepared according to the cloze procedure. These cloze passages were

presented in an online survey, to which 56 survey participants answered. The survey results show that political participation in voting has more influence than age on the comprehensibility of such texts. The comparison of the methods shows mixed results. The quantitative figures and the comparison of the guidelines suggest that the easyvote publication should be easier to understand. However, survey results show a different outcome: two of the three proposals put to the vote yielded better comprehensibility results for the publication "Explanation from the Federal Council".

**Wohlgensinger, Céline.** "Wie leicht ist Leichte Sprache? Eine Masterarbeit über das Verständnis von Texten in Leichter Sprache für L2-SprecherInnen des Deutschen auf den Sprachniveaus A1, A2 und B1." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2017.

#### **Abstract**

Plain Language is writing designed to ensure the reader understands as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. This paper shows, however, that it is not necessarily aimed at learners of a foreign language. Plain Language texts written by the Austrian organisation capito at specific language learning levels (A1, A2 or B1) have been compared with the standards set by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and *Profil deutsch*, i.e. a standardised framework initiated by the Goethe Institute and the Council of Europe. This comparison has shown major discrepancies in at least one of the texts between the levels set by the latter organisations and the ones suggested by capito. In addition to this theoretical comparison, learners at each language level have been given the relevant text and a questionnaire concerning it. Their answers have shown that Plain Language does not always fulfil its scope, i.e. to facilitate understanding. In conclusion, it can be suggested that Plain Language may help readers in some cases. For learners of a foreign language, however, there are other aspects to consider – such as the topic of a text – and Plain Language alone may not be enough to facilitate their reading comprehension.

## **2015**

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**Walti, Christian.** "Korpuslinguistische Erfassung der Leichten Sprache. Methode zur Erstellung und Analyse eines linguistisch annotierten Parallelkorpus für die Leichte Sprache mit freier Software." Master's thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2015.

#### **Abstract**

This Master's thesis seeks to contribute to research on Plain German ("Leichte Sprache"). Adopting a computational linguistic approach, the thesis aims to achieve two main objectives: (1) to develop an automated method to mine parallel texts in standard and plain German from the Web, and (2) to develop a method to compile and analyse an annotated parallel corpus. In order to ensure accessibility, both methods are to be based on free software. The first part of the thesis provides the theoretical background and outlines the main concepts. After an overview of the research field under consideration, relevant aspects of corpus linguistics are described. The second part of the thesis describes the development of a method for mining parallel texts from the web and presents a method for compiling and analysing an annotated parallel corpus. The primary aim of compiling an annotated parallel corpus for Plain German is to contribute to its linguistic analysis. An annotated parallel corpus can serve as the empirical basis to study the phenomenon and thus pave the way for a corpus-based grammar of Plain German. In addition, the data can be used to build a machine translation system.

2014

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**Kiser, Roland.** “Respeaking in der deutschsprachigen Schweiz. Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Schweizerdeutsch und Standarddeutsch.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2014.

**Abstract**

This master thesis deals with the particular conditions under which Respeaking – a method for the production of live subtitles – takes place in German-speaking Switzerland. The linguistic situation in German-speaking Switzerland is illustrated, including a description of the particularities of the three varieties existing there: Swiss German, Swiss Standard German and Standard German. This master thesis also examines whether the linguistic situation in German-speaking Switzerland should be described as diglossia or bilingualism, and what consequences this issue may have on respeakers’ job requirements in German-speaking Switzerland. Furthermore, the method for the quality assessment of respoken live subtitles in Switzerland is subjected to a critical review. This master thesis focuses on the question of whether (and why) the respeaking of programmes in Swiss German can be considered as an act of interlingual translation rather than an act of intralingual translation. Therefore, an exemplary study was conducted with the aim to identify Swiss German text specifics in a programme broadcasted in Swiss German and to reveal the challenges that such specifics can cause during the process of respeaking. Finally, this work sheds a light on further improvement and research possibilities related to Respeaking, particularly in Switzerland.

2011

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**Perruccio, Francesco L.** “Audiodeskription ganzheitlich betrachtet: von den rechtlichen Rahmenbedingungen über den Entstehungsprozess bis zur Informationsgliederung in dieser mehrdimensionalen intersemiotischen Translationsform.” Master’s thesis, Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), 2011.

**Abstract**

Audio description (AD) is a technique that makes movies and other audio-visual media or events accessible to blind and visually impaired individuals by describing visual information through spoken words. The process of producing AD is equivalent to a multi-dimensional, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation. After a brief overview of the legal frameworks in various countries, along with a description of the target groups and their needs and a summary of AD’s origin and developments, the present work portrays professional audio describers and the requirements they must fulfil. This is followed by a description of the steps involved in creating and recording AD scripts in order to implement and broadcast the AD itself. A special focus is placed on the standards and guidelines for AD creation and on questions like “What should be described, and when and how?”. The work concludes with an explanation of how AD is transmitted and received and a description of the current state of research. This is portrayed through publications, a comparison of various existing European guidelines with a proposal for a future standardisation, and an example that shows how the sequencing of information can be improved in the AD by using translation tools for structuring the production process.