The Birth of Audio Description in Israel

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Parallel Session: Services for the blind
The Birth of Audio Description in Israel

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Population

• In Israel 24,000 people are registered legally blind.

• In addition, estimations indicate that over 200,000 people have low vision.

• 60% of Israel’s blind population live in the periphery and the 40% are in urban areas in the country.
Legislation

• We do not yet have a law and regulations to enforce Audio Description on Cinemas, TV, VOD and Cultural performances.

• We are in the process of making it happen but it may still take a few years to achieve it along with the Commission of People with Disability.
Our Audio Description Story

After years of no such services, at the end of 2014, Audio Description first training course took place in collaboration of 3 organizations:

• Social Security Funds that sponsored the Project
• The Central Library for the Blind
• The Department of Communication at Hebrew University
Training Course

• The course took place at The Department of Communication at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

• With international experts from UK and USA.

• Fourteen people were trained as Audio Describers, out of whom 10 are active today in describing at theaters, cultural events, and movies.
The Audio Description Project

• In 2014 The National Insurance Institute of Israel Funds took the challenge to develop the AD service. It included:
  • Training professional narrators/describers
  • Providing equipment to 11 theaters that responded to a call for action and met the prerequisite criteria.

• The Central Library For the Blind was the preferred NGO to operate the project.
Equipment

• The equipment to narrate and transmit AD is based on the infra-red system that situated on the venues

• In addition portable kit was purchased including mixer, transmitter, receivers and headphones to provide AD at site which have not received the permanent equipment.
Our work Sequence

• Internship - As a direct continuation of the course, each participant (with a partner) described 2 shows.

• Cooperation with Repertory Theaters - we contacted theaters in advance for the play script, DVD, and an advance viewing by describers for the purpose of general impressions, note taking and script writing.

• We chose Shows that were planned to be running for a long period around the country.

• Performances in which the visuals are dominant and the verbal interaction allows insertion of the audio description.
Our work Sequence

General rehearsal - Before each show, using the DVD of the play, we rehearse with blind volunteers whose feedback help us to fine-tune the audio description.
Our work Sequence

• We communicate with theater staff in advance to assure their cooperation.

• Headphone sets are distributed as early as patrons arrive to the theater’s lobby.

• Touch Tour – Blind patrons come to the theater an hour before show time. They get on stage to explore the sets and meet the actors and become familiarized with their voice.

• Pre-show notes – the describer writes and records the pre-show notes, which include (in brief): the plot of the play, the characters, important components that may help to visualize the actions and a sketch of the settings on stage.

• The pre show notes are available at few venues:
  - On the library website
  - As a link by mail
  - Few minutes before the show on MP3
Publicity

• In December 2015, we launched the project with a grand event Showing a popular musical to which 100 blind and visually impaired persons were invited.

• In the audience were ministers and parliament members as well as celebrities and social activists.

• The event was promoted and reported with on national TV channels and all printed and spoken media.
Marketing

• Large posters and signs were placed by the theaters doors and box offices indicating that the shows are audio described, directing the audience to the audio equipment stand.

• An Audio Description information page was added to the library website with updates about described events.

• In addition, all social forums and blind social networks were informed.

• Patrons were offered reduced price tickets to accessible performances.
Continuing Education Seminars

- We hold seminars to discuss issues relevant to AD, led by local and international professionals.
- Topics such as description of movies, opera, musicals, dance, and visual arts are discussed and skill practiced.
Audio Description in the Movies

• In 2014, the Library began to include an AD recorded soundtrack for Hebrew-speaking Israeli movies.
• Special screenings were held.
• Library subscribers have the option to borrow Israeli films with AD just as they borrow talking books.
Audio Described Special Events

- So far we have narrated a number of special events such as:
  - National Independence day ceremony
  - Street parades
  - Conferences
  - Musical
  - Opera
  - Museum tours
Success in numbers

• To date, 70 theatre shows and cultural events have been audio described and more than 1,000 people enjoyed the performances.

• 110 Israeli movies were narrated

• 70 theater shows were audio described

• 20 special events were described

• 1200 blind patrons enjoyed accessible events
87% said that the service encourage them to go to shows and performances with AD
One reaction as an example

“Once again I am amazed at how easily the appropriate access makes me forget all about my disability, on this occasion at the play ‘The Handicapped’.

Wearing the headphones, with the narrator from the Library for the Blind whispering to me what is taking place on stage, I laugh, I cry, I identify, and above all enjoy this wonderful service. It is just a shame that I can’t keep the headphones on permanently, and listen to the audio description of life.”

Iris Ratzabi ‘s reaction to the play The Handicapped The Handicapped, Played at the theater in Rishon Lezion February 9, 2016
Conclusions and Future Plans

• The service of AD has enabled blind and visually impaired people in Israel to participate in theater performances and cultural happenings from which they were previously excluded.
• There is a need for ongoing financial support.
• It is important to cooperate with Centers for blind people and organizations to create awareness.
• Logistic arrangements are crucial to the success of the program.
• It is important to expend the service to other local spoken languages.

• Research – It is important to continue with studies to further learn about the impact of AD in various cultural medias.
• Legislation – It would be important to implement audio description in all visual medias, by forming a special Audio Description law, to match the existing law of caption for people with hearing impairment.

The very existence of the service, greatly increases the legislator's willingness to enact the necessary amendments to the regulations of The Right of People with Disability.
The End

Thank YOU

for your attention