UNIT 6

Element 2 – Learning Outcome 1

TRANSCRIPT:
TURNING VISUAL VERBAL ELEMENTS INTO VERBAL

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This video lecture is aimed at letting you know how to produce coherent text while typing by extracting and combining the information conveyed with the speakers' material. First of all, I will try to recap the notion of text according to text linguistics in terms of its relationship between its different structural components, and its relationship with the context. Then, I will also try to recap the semiotics of the audiovisual text and identify verbal and non-verbal components, as conveyed either visually or acoustically. This will allow me to provide examples of strategies to concretely combine the speech made by the speaker with all the materials that he or she may make use of, in order to come to a coherent target text.

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This is the agenda of this presentation.

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Text linguistics.

7   Slide 7

In the first Element we have seen how to repeat the words of a text. However, a text is not just what a speaker actually says in terms of words that are grammatically combined to create sentences. According to De Beaugrande & Dressler a text is a communicative occurrence, which has to meet 7 standards that correspond to 7 textual characteristics.

Cohesion refers to the way words are related to each other. It is the grammatical relations between words. When subtitling, the speaker may make use of other tools to make a text cohesive, grammar mistakes included, which are automatically filtered by the audience. If repeated word for word, non grammatical sentences, for example, result in a more difficult text to understand compared to a speech. This means you always have to keep an eye to the text you produce to make sure cohesion is kept in the subtitles.

Coherence is the way concepts are related to each other. It is the semantic relations between concepts. When subtitling, it is important that coherence is kept in the subtitles as you as a subtitler may have problems understanding a text. In case of doubts, if you manage to follow what the speaker says, it is going to be easier to correctly report the speech. If an incoherent subtitle is produced, it is very possible that the subtitler has made a mistake in the understanding process.

Intentionality is the meaning the speaker wants to convey. This may be different from the word-for-word reproduction of a text. If you think of irony, for example, you always need to keep in mind that it is clear to understand when listening to an ironic speech, but it may be not that evident when reading the same text written in the subtitles. In this case, you may think of translating the source text into its corresponding meaning, or make use of exclamation marks or of all caps to signal it.

Acceptability is the way the text satisfies the receivers needs. This refers to technical and linguistic aspects. Technically, reading speed is sometimes binding, especially if the text unfolds on two-liner subtitles. This means that if the speaker speaks rapidly you may think of reducing the number of words in the subtitles by omitting words or summarising concepts. Or you may be required to use tags to identify a change of speakers. Or again you may want to simplify the text or explain some parts of a text if you know your audience misses some knowledge the speaker gives for granted and that is shared with the hearing audience, like sounds or other acoustically conveyed information.

Informativity is the way information is provided. It is strictly related to the notion of acceptability. It is the way information is provided to the audience. If the speaker has planned his or her speech, information is normally provided according to the theme-rheme pattern. This means that known information is used to introduce unknown information. In this case repeating the speech word for word is not a problem. It will effectively convey information. However, if the speaker makes an impromptu speech, it may happen that the pattern is broken. The subtitler may think of providing more information in the subtitles to make the text more acceptable to readers.

Situationality is the relevance of a text in a situation. If a text cohesive, coherent, intentional, acceptable and informative, situationality is met. However, it may happen that more speakers speak at the same time in a talk show or political session, or the speaker may speak over a video during a conference or a class. In this case, the most relevant utterance is to be reported, the other one or ones may be disregarded.

Finally, intertextuality is the way the text relates to other texts. This refers to similar texts but also to other sources of information used in the live event. In the case of a speaker using slides to support his or her speech, it is always important that the subtitles are coherent with the slides or other types of on-screen text. In case of a mistake by the speaker, if the subtitler is super sure the speaker has made a mistake, can reproduce it word for word. However, in case of doubts it is always wise to go for solution that is more coherent with visual elements. Similarly, if a speaker reads a slide, it may not be wise to repeat something that is already there as written text. In this case, the subtitler can send a caption to audience telling them the speaker is reading a slide.

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A text alone, however, does not work if it is not used in the right context. According to Halliday and Hasan, text is not the only element that creates meaning. Meaning is also created by something that accompanies it, the context. This includes the way something is said – also called paraverbal components, and all the non-verbal signs that help the text provide its overall meaning. Without a context, the concepts expressed in a text cannot be understood. That is why, it is very important to understand its peculiarities.

According to the authors, the context is composed of the field, the tenor and the mode. Field is the shared experience of participants. When a doctor talks to other doctors he or she gives for granted they know some things which he or she does not explain. The opposite would happen if the same doctor spoke to a wider audience. Tenor is the role and relationships among participants. If our doctor explains a strategic plan against a pandemic during a live broadcast, his or her words will have a different impact on the audience compared to the populist leader opposing it. The mode is the way the text is organised and its function. This is strictly related to the previous two. While explaining the strategic plan against the pandemic during a live broadcast, our doctor will organise his or her speech in a very logical way, making sure that nothing is given for granted, word choice included. He or she will speak clearly and slowly, as what he or she says is going to play an important role in the citizens lives.

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The semiotics of the audiovisual text.

10   Slide 10

Any audiovisual product communicates through the combination of many semiotic components. Be they TV programs, conferences, parliamentary sessions, meetings or school classes, they are all made of acoustic and visual elements, that are either verbal or non-verbal. This picture shows the semiotic components of a film, but the same features can be found in any of the events I have just mentioned.

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In particular, acoustic elements can be of verbal or non verbal nature. The most relevant acoustic element of verbal nature is the speech to subtitle and its paraverbal characteristics, such as the speaker's tone, pitch, and volume of voice. In the case of elements of non-verbal nature, we can differentiate between sound effects like applauses from the audience, a bell announcing the voting time, the stop signal of an assessment, a special effect, etc.; and music, like the national anthem being played at the beginning of every parliamentary session, a music to be guessed by a quiz participant, the jingle of a presentation, the lyrics of a song to be transcribed in class. In some cases these non verbal elements are super important, like the one just mentioned. In other cases they are absolutely meaningless and can be disregarded, like the footsteps of an MP, a sound accompanying a visual element on screen, the music of a mobile ringing, the noise of a pen falling from the speaker's table or the shuffling of documents. It is the duty of the subtitler to decide whether to subtitle them or not.

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With visual elements, we keep having the same verbal and non verbal dichotomy that we have seen in the case of acoustic elements. The most relevant visual elements of verbal nature are graphic elements like a question written on screen in a quiz or talk show, the results of the voting in a parliamentary session, the content of slides in a conference, an exercise instructions. Other visual elements are of non verbal nature, like pictures in a talk show, in a school exercise, in a session commemorating an important political figure, or in the PowerPoint presentation of a conference speaker. In case a video is played during these contexts, the film code is also present. Worth a last mention are also the way a person dresses, the role of a speaker in the context, the movements participants make and so on. Compared to what happens in the case of acoustic elements, the subtitler here is not called to decide whether to render them or not in the subtitles, as they are visible. However, he or she has to decide whether to care about the audience noticing them and having the time to watch at them, or not.

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In Element 1, you have seen how to type a speech, which is the verbal acoustic component. In case the speaker also makes use of verbal visual resources, it is important to avoid redundancy. So, for example, if a speaker is reading a slide containing a lot of text, avoid repeating the text in the slide. Prefer a caption, instead like one saying [reads the slide]. This guarantees a smooth transition between the subtitles and the slide the speaker reads. However, some problems remain. For example, the reader will not know when the speaker has finished reading the slide. Or the slide may only contain a few words of the quoted text. What to do to solve these issues? To let the reader know when the speaker has finished reading the slide, much depends on whether the subtitles appear as two lines bottom of the screen with the slide, or if they appear as full text on a different screen. In the first case, which is the most common one, the subtitler will start typing as soon as the speaker stops reading the slide and starts saying something else. By doing this, the reader's attention is attracted by the subtitles re-starting popping up or scrolling in the periphery of their view. In the second case, which may not be rare in conference subtitling, it is always recommended to «educate» both the speaker and the audience before the event starts. In particular, the speaker should always change to a new slide once he has finished reading the slide. The audience should always keep an eye on the screen with the subtitles to check whether new text is appearing. In case the slide only contains a few word or sentences of the quoted text, better to keep subtitling, thus avoiding non-effective captions. A final tricky situation is that of a video played during an event and the video contains dialogue. Here, there is not consensus in the professional community about whether to subtitle the video or not, as the speech may not share the same characteristics of the event you are subtitling, like a fictional video in a conference, or a song in a school exercise. Some colleagues prefer asking the client to think of pre-recorded subtitles before the event starts otherwise they would not subtitle the video so as not to provide low-quality subtitles. If the client does not want to provide pre-recorded subtitles, we suggest using a disclaimer like [the video is not subtitled]. Some other colleagues try to subtitle the video for the sake of accessibility, despite the audio input may not be good or difficult to subtitle.

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The summary.

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In this video lecture we have analysed the text and its relationship with the context and the different essential characteristics it is made of. This has allowed us to introduce the main semiotic characteristics of an audiovisual product, be it a parliamentary session, a conference speech, a TV program or other events that require a personalised access. We have seen how much all of them make the event heavily dependent on the verbal visual component of the subtitles. This makes the job of the real-time intralingual subtitler much more complex than simply repeating what is said. It implies the real-time intralingual subtitler has to provide subtitles that manage to smoothly provide information, and avoid the audience get lost with all the inputs they receive. To better understand this, for each semiotic element, we have seen some strategies that allow for the subtitler to provide information that is consistent with the intended message of the speaker and with the expectations of the audience. In the homework session, you will be asked to try and provide solutions for each situation where a mismatch between the verbal acoustic and the other semiotic elements may occur because of a wrong strategy being used.

16   Voiceover

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