

University of Theatre and Film Arts Doctoral School

**The theory and practice of theatrical audio
description in Hungary**

Thesis of a DLA doctoral dissertation

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(2018)

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The obligatory legal harmonisation has designated, based on Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, the tasks of the forthcoming years in Hungary as well. This Directive emphasizes that equal access to culture, in addition to the right, should be provided to everyone, including those living with challenges.

I closed my PhD dissertation of 2016 with the thought, that the AD model of audiovisual content is only the first step, in the field of culture, towards the assurance of equal opportunities. A similar model should be set up for the conveyance for the content of creative arts, and also in the field of the performing arts; for the professional conveyance of primarily theatrical and dance performances. Each area, including theatre, requires the setup of its own discipline, since the only way for the verbal description of shapes, forms, images, objects, events, happenings recurring in a three-dimensional space to be created, is in the context of the given artistic field as experienced by the intermediary.

The main purpose of this DLA research of mine is to set up - on the basis of the protocol defined in my PhD dissertation for the audio description of audiovisual content and the system of minimal requirements, essential for quality assurance - the Hungarian *theatrical audio description* (hereinafter: AD) protocol applicable in the field of theatrical performances.

In consideration of the culture-specific elements of *audio description*, I look for answers regarding personal perception, as known in social psychology as the classification of persons, stereotyping, the emergence of the impression, the halo effect support or even prevent the narrator in the theatre in the verbal description of the characters, gestures, the acting and the space of acting, as well as how these assist visually impaired viewers with the conscious perception and understanding of theatrical performances. My research also covered how *audio description* supports the interactive involvement of visually impaired persons in the performance, i.e. in the *autopoietic system of the feedback-loop*, formulated by Erika Fischer-Lichte. What are those fundamental physical, technical laws that need to be taken into account by those Hungarian authors, who work according to the Hungarian theatrical *audio description* standard, so that the performances should provide the fullest aesthetic, cultural and artistic experience, not only at the level of perception, but also as a result of artistic consciousness, to those fellow-citizens, who speak Hungarian as their native tongue and live with challenges, are visually impaired or blind. I would like to set up such a model and protocol in the field of the performing arts as well, which provides to our blind and visually

impaired fellow-citizens, an environment integrated with that of the sighted, the opportunity of equal access to cultural experiences and values conveyed by theatrical performances.

In my DLA dissertation, I consciously use the technical terms applied in English professional literature, while constantly mixing in and introducing Hungarian terminology proposed by me. There are terms for which I found Hungarian equivalents, that reflected the same content, and there are others for which a calque or verbatim translation would distort the meaning, therefore I use the English term, since it cannot be replaced by Hungarian.

After a brief historical overview of theatrical *audio description* (AD), my research begins with formulating its definition and continues with a comparison of AD solutions applied in the field of motion pictures and theatre. A comparison of the two areas helps with highlighting the identical and differing characteristics. The process of conscious personal perception of characters and events, emerging during the interaction of the performance - and explored by social psychology - has a chapter of its own in my thesis. The proper application, practical guide of the theatrical AD protocol is supplemented by the presentation of an audio description training script of a performance, produced by Magyar Theatre (Molière: *The Miser*), illustrating *Conventional* and *Unconventional AD styles*, making the other pillar of my thesis complete.

My DLA thesis refers to the chapter and research findings of my earlier PhD dissertation in several places, thereby supporting those researchers, who are interested in audio description in more detail. This initial collection of English and Hungarian technical terms, intended to be constantly expanded in the future, may be valuable for persons conducting further research on this matter. Once the AD model is to be used on TV or for motion pictures, I have prepared a possible theatrical AD model, which I hope will be soon followed by an AD model suitable for the field of creative arts.

The practice and model adopted and applied in Magyar Theatre has focused our attention on the mapping of the currently unexploited opportunities that lend themselves to application in AD training. AD can be provided successfully not only to visually impaired children, but also to children with unimpaired sight. It may be one of the methods of theatre pedagogy in presenting the world of the theatre, introducing children to it, explaining it, to be used as an auxiliary method in training. This method will promote successful *theatrical reading*, the reception of artistic content, and the usage of the words of Pavis.

While we would like to introduce children with visual impairment to AD at the right time, in order to facilitate their access to artistic content without hindrances, it is our express aim to introduce AD as widely as possible, and importantly, to gain acceptance for the social responsibility assumed by AD.

It is a unique tool, a social catalyst that may help with strengthening the socialization of paying attention to one another. It is quite clear, that the opportunities provided by AD may present far-reaching consequences. The aim is that within a short time, AD should not only be a skilled marketing technique for many theaters, but rather, in addition to its social utility, it should constitute an unquestionable part of the Hungarian theatrical art of the future.

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