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06 | 01
2020

Translation and Translatability in Intersemiotic Space

EDITED BY
Evangelos Kourdis & Susan Petrilli

Accessible paratext: actively engaging (with) D/deaf audiences

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the importance of paratext – theoretically and practically – in getting D/deaf audiences to engage with theatrical performances. Our notion of 'accessible paratext' necessarily involves multimodal forms of translation, and intersemiotic interactions, to provide a crucial point of access for D/deaf members of the public who often feel that theatrical performances are 'not for them.' The article focuses on intersemiotic multimedial translation in the form of creative captions for the theatre and, more specifically, for paratextual video material created as part of a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (United Kingdom) to showcase integrated captions in live performances.

The widespread perception that the theatre is not for D/deaf audiences appears to be driven by several factors, including the fact that many members of the D/deaf community have neither heard of nor seen integrated theatre and because access to integrated performances is not forthcoming. Information about such performances, in the form of what we here define as paratext, either does not exist or is not communicated in a way that makes the accessible nature of the performances tangible to members of the D/deaf audience. We demonstrate the extent to which several semiotic systems (sign language, spoken words, and written captions) interacting on the stage or a screen can provide a much-needed gateway to theatrical performances, bringing marginalized audiences back to the theatre and improving the shows' accessibility.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, countries and institutions have become increasingly aware of the importance of promoting and embracing diversity, placing accessibility high on their agendas. The European Accessibility Act was passed by the European Parliament in 2015[1] as part of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and has introduced regulations to provide improved access to products and services. In its opening section, the European accessibility act states that "accessibility prevents or removes barriers to the use of mainstream products and services. It allows the perception, operation, and understanding of those products and services by persons with functional limitations, including people with disabilities, on an equal basis with others." (2015).

In the United Kingdom, where the project this article stems from has taken place, accessibility policies in the arts have emerged during the last decade. Relevant guidelines are driven by the Arts Council, who put out their Creative Case for Diversity in 2011. The Creative Case invites the arts sector to engage with a "new and different approach to diversity and equality" (2011: 3) and generally argues that diversity and equality are, in fact, crucial in sustaining artistic practices. While the Creative Case considers minority ethnic backgrounds, gender, sexuality, age, class, and faith, it also focuses on disability. It caters specifically to how artistic productions are both created by and made accessible to people with disabilities. These policies have borne fruit, and Johnson (2018: 102) argues that "mainstream theatre companies are paying more attention to accessible practices, particularly initiatives such as sign language interpretation, relaxed performances, audio description, and amendments to physical infrastructure, all of which increase accessibility to for audience members." The term 'disability theatre'[2] is often used to describe performances created by artists who self-identify as disabled, performances that portray disabled characters or present disabled actors, or engage with a disability as a core theme (Johnson 2018: 103). We could extend this definition to include performances for which accessibility practices are aesthetically integrated into the creative process, precisely because these do not discriminate between different subsets of the audience. While the meaning of 'disability theatre' is continuously under renegotiation, it can be argued that disability theatre aims to challenge established taxonomies and dominant aesthetics in the face of perceived ableist ideologies and practices.

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[1] The European accessibility act aims to support Member States to achieve their national commitments and other obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) regarding accessibility. It is interesting to note that, on the European Commission website, the European accessibility act is accompanied by its very own paratext in the form of a short video that summarizes its main points, featuring a sign interpreter in the bottom-left corner of the window.

[2] For an extended discussion on disability theatre, see Johnston (2016).

However, while many companies now include open captions or sign interpretation in their theatrical productions to increase access and cater to broader audiences, these practices are often approached "from a utilitarian, rather than artistic perspective" (Davis-Fisch 2018: 100). What is perhaps more surprising and concerning is that the democratization of these accessible practices does "not necessarily […] provoke changes to artistic processes" (Davis-Fisch 2018: 100), especially as far as integrating these practices into performances is concerned. Accessibility practices, consequently, while aiming for greater inclusivity, are often found guilty of being anti-immersive. They are seen as forcing some members of the audience to split their attention between the performance and the captions or the stage interpreter, either of which is typically placed at the top or on the side of the stage, respectively, often away from where the action takes place. In short, while accessibility has been a growing concern recently, its implementation continues to disappoint the very people it is supposed to serve and even has the counter-productive consequence of leaving some members of the audience feeling that the theatre is 'not for them' (Wilmington 2017: iv).

D/deaf audiences[3] often have to overcome many barriers before they can fully engage with theatrical performances. These barriers may be "informational, economic, geographic, social, and psychological" (Wilmington, 2017: iv). Despite the growing number of performances available with captions or on-stage interpreters, one issue is that D/deaf audiences do not always know what theatres offer, or do not see theatre as essential or relevant to them. There is a "perceived reluctance on the part of many D/deaf people to attend theatres or art centres, apparently based on a belief that the programme is not for them/not in their language" (Wilmington, 2017: iv). The reasons for this state of affairs are individual, institutional, and metaphysical, but they all amount to what Bauman (2004: 240) describes as audism,[4] "the discrimination against individuals program hearing ability." In his seminal – yet still unpublished – essay, Humphries (1975) demonstrates that audism manifests itself in the form of acts of dis-

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[3] The earlier distinction between Deaf and deaf was initially formalized by linguist James Woodward. According to Woodward's distinction, Deaf with an uppercase 'D' refers to people who identify as culturally Deaf and carries the sense of a robust and close Deaf community with its own culture and sense of identity, based on a shared language. It is generally distinguished from 'deaf,' with a lower-case 'd,' which refers to the 'audiological,' or physical, understanding of hearing loss. The latter usually is (but not exclusively) used by those who use speech and lip-reading as their primary channel of communication. The lower-case 'deaf' is nowadays used more and more to refer to a "broader and more diverse group of people who exemplify ways of living other than the ways of Deaf culture" (Myers & Fernandes, 2009: 43). We should note here that while the term 'D/deaf' remains in widespread use, it is increasingly challenged within academia, with the binary opposition between cultural and audiological deafness no longer considered a viable approach, as it flaunts the fluidity of deaf identity as well as intersectionality within the deaf community. In the present article, for lack of a more credible option, we will use 'D/deaf' but are adopting, alongside other scholars such as Anglin-Jaffe, an understanding of D/deaf identity that is "fluid, plural and constructed" (Anglin-Jaffe, 2015: 93).

[4] The term 'audism' is widely considered to have been coined by Tom Humphries (1975), in a still unpublished essay in which he proposes the following definition: "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears."

crimination – opinions and conscious or unconscious behaviors. Bauman (2004: 240) observes that "Humphries's definition of audism would be roughly analogous to the notion of 'individual racism,' in which an individual holds beliefs and exhibits racist behaviors ranging from jokes to hate crimes and low expectations in the classroom." Such individual acts of discrimination are fostered by larger systems of oppression,[5] in societies and cultures where educational and medical institutions "have assumed authority over Deaf persons, claiming to act in their best interests while not allowing them to have a say in the matters that concern them the most" (Bauman 2004: 241). By the same rhetoric, these audiences are sometimes described as 'hard-to-reach.' More specifically, in this article, we are interested in the way in which so-called 'hard-to-reach' audiences engage with theatrical performances.

For our project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (United Kingdom),[6] the authors collaborated with Red Earth Theatre, a production company based in Derby (United Kingdom). Red Earth Theatre (2000) define themselves as follows on their website: 'we are pioneers of integrated theatre and develop new techniques for accessible storytelling that test convention and advance inclusive practice. We […] aim to use creative captioning and audio description to enhance access'. The approach taken by Red Earth Theatre for their productions combines British Sign Language, Sign Supported English, Visual Vernacular[7] as well as surtitles. While neither the company's artistic directors (Wendy Rouse and Amanda Wilde) nor their marketing material uses the term 'disability theatre,' their performances – especially their recent adaptation of Russell Hoban's *Soonchild* – deliberately embed accessibility into the shows' aesthetics. In practice, this involves multimodal approaches that combine several semiotic systems which, rather than working independently from each other, complement and inform each other, and we will see in this paper that the semiotics of accessibility can productively be discussed in light of the broader context of reception – a context that transcends the performance itself.

As a threshold into Red Earth Theatre shows and into their creative vision for integrated theatre, the authors designed and created an accessible paratext in the form of a short film (Esteban & Mével 2019), to be distributed widely and encourage audiences

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[5] For an in-depth analysis of systemic audism, see Lane (1992).

[6] The initial project's title is 'Making accessibility accessible: maximizing the impact of the integrated immersive inclusiveness project' (award reference AH/S010599/1). The principal investigator for the project is Joanna Robinson, from the School of English; the co-investigators are Paul Tennent from the School of Computer Science and Pierre-Alexis Mével from the School of Cultures, Languages, and Area Studies. The researchers were awarded follow-on funding for the subsequent project 'Integrated, immersive inclusiveness: testing immersive technologies in the creation of inclusive and integrated theatre for deaf audiences' (award reference AH/R00983X/1).

[7] British Sign Language (BSL) is a visual language that uses hand shapes, facial expressions, gestures, and body language. While BSL is a complete language with a unique vocabulary, construction, and grammar, Sign Supported English relies on BSL signs but follows the word order of English. Visual Vernacular is more specific to theatrical environments and is a theatrical and physical form of storytelling with strong body movements, signs, gestures, and facial expressions.

to go and see the show. The film needed to feature sign interpreting and creative captions alongside the images and the soundtrack to illustrate and promote the showcased multi-modality in Red Earth Theatre shows. Creative industries often think about accessibility *post hoc*: that is, they add captions after the creative process and unto the finished product (Romero Fresco & Fryer 2018: 35), while sign interpreting often takes place independently from the performance on the side of the stage (Gebron 2000; Richardson 2018). By and large, captions and sign interpreting have been ancillary and supplementary: they are additions that are more or less welcome by the audience (as evidenced in Wilmington 2017: 33), rather than an integral part of a film or performance. Although there have recently been some reasonably prominent examples of more creatively integrated captions both in movies and live performances,[8] this remains a fringe practice despite growing political and societal impetus in favor of integrated accessibility.

In practice, designing and creating this short film means that we had to think about how the different semiotic systems were going to interact, not as a result of the presence of captions added to the footage, but rather in an integrated way from the beginning of the creative process. The film was created while Red Earth Theatre's adaptation of Hoban's *Soonchild* was in production. The film aimed to support the launch of *Soonchild* by showcasing creative captions of the kind that would be used in the production and manage audiences' (D/deaf but also other audiences) expectations with regards to Red Earth shows' aesthetic integration of captions and accessibility practices. The broader ambition was to educate audiences on the nature and potential of creative captions in cinematic and – crucially for our project – live media.

This article consists of three sections. The first section introduces the project and its protagonists in more detail. Building on Genette and Batchelor's work on the paratext, the second section examines the basic theoretical tenets of accessible paratext. We start by defining our notion of accessible paratext and demonstrate that Batchelor's functional definition can be extended to access beyond the language barrier. Paratexts are not only a gateway or threshold but an opportunity to think about accessibility and about how accessibility is made accessible, to begin with. In particular, we examine the extent to which paratexts can operate beyond topical or purely textual functions and may be used to present and showcase the modalities through which texts are accessed and received. In the third section, we illustrate the theoretical principles introduced in section 2 with a case study. As part of our project, we created an accessible paratext in the form of a short film to advertise performances by Red Earth Theatre and showcase their accessibility model of designing performances. Since our paratext aims to show-case modes of accessibility provided live in the theatrical performances, we examine

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[8] See, for instance, *Man on Fire* (2004), *Nightwatch* (2004), the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017), the John Wick series (2016-2020), Patricia Rozema's 'Desperanto' in *Montréal Vu par…* (1991), or even *Austin Powers in Goldmember* (2002).

in detail the semiotics of each medium (live performances on stage as well as post-synchronized film captions) before exploring the porosity and potential cross-fertilization between the two. This section illustrates the principles described in section 2 and provides a roadmap that can be used by content creators who want to engage with accessible performance and paratext creation. The conclusion of the article takes the form of a call to arms. Accessibility and accessible design cannot be limited to texts and performances. It is crucial for thresholds into texts to be also accessible for access to be truly universal, and for accessibility practices to be more than afterthoughts in the creative process.

2. Making accessibility accessible

Starting from the premise that accessibility is too often a *post hoc* consideration in the production of theatrical performances, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers at the University of Nottingham (United Kingdom) set out to explore and test a range of cheap and easily accessible immersive technologies to create captions for inclusive immersive theatre, integrated in terms of both access and aesthetics from the beginning of the creative process. The central premise is that the captions should function as a fully-fledged component of the theatrical narrative, combining with the other theatrical semiotics to generate meaning, rather than as mere ancillary, added to the already existing product considered complete to make it accessible. Rather than treating captions – and more generally accessibility practices – like an afterthought, our ambition was to demonstrate that treating captions as fully-fledged parts of the narrative can lead to greater immersion levels and accessibility for audiences. The project team designed and tested new technologies capable of achieving these goals in full touring production (Red Earth Theatre's adaptation of *Soonchild*).[9] It was also crucial for the technologies to be affordable (a different yet ultimately relevant form of accessibility) to enable similar small- to midsize companies to start integrating them into their workflows.

We should note that, as far as captioning is concerned, one need not reinvent the wheel. Academic discussions on captioning in other – specifically, audiovisual mediademonstrate a significant degree of consensus about how captions should best be formatted. As we will see below, the most crucial difference between film and theatrical captioning is that the timing of film captions is determined in advance of viewing while theatre captions have to be triggered manually to follow the rhythm of the live performance. As a result, the two rely on technologies and software that are inherently different. Yet there are some important but relatively unexplored so far areas of

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[9] For more information on the kind of technologies developed and tested, see the project's website here [accessed August 5, 2020].

cross-fertilization between the two. We, therefore, adapted examples of best practice for readability from cognate fields of audiovisual translation (and mostly accessible filmmaking) regarding how to display captions (size, font, color, contrast, amount of information) and how to embed them into the narrative, to make the captions fully accessible for audiences on the spectrum of D/deafness both in terms of visibility and cognitive loads.

On the other side of the disciplinary divide, the point about readability is supported by work currently being carried out in the area of accessible filmmaking and film captioning. There is good evidence that creative captions for material in a foreign language allow subtitling viewers to split their attention between different semiotic systems more efficiently (Fox 2016, see also Romero Fresco and Fryer 2018). Romero Fresco and Fryer (2018: 13) define creative captions in the context of films as captions that "respond to the specific qualities of every film, giving the subtitlers and filmmakers more freedom to create an aesthetic that suits that of the original film." More importantly, these captions are "part of the image and contribute to the typographic and aesthetic identity of the film" (ibid.). Such captions often play on the typeface, font size, placement, and various visual and audio effects that further cement their integration into a film's aesthetics and narrative. To a large extent, this idea can be adapted to theatrical performances, with the set or even the actors used as an area of projection for the captions. Captions are thus integrated further into the performance's aesthetics with the bonus that the distance across which the audience's gaze has to travel between the captions and the action can be controlled, and indeed even used as a framing device.

It was also part of the project's remit to reach out to potential audiences and work with them to create trust and knowledge to figure out the potential of integrated immersive captioning for audiences on a spectrum of hearing loss. We also wanted to support companies and venues in explaining embedded captioning to their potential audiences. To address these issues, we worked with Red Earth Theatre and local and national Deaf societies (in particular the Nottinghamshire Deaf Society) to produce accessible marketing material that showcases the novel and immersive techniques we implemented in the production. We also disseminated them in such a way as to make sure they would reach target audiences. We identified that the missing link that can make audiences reachable by the inclusive theatre is accessible paratext.

3. Paratext made accessible

In *Palimpsestes* (1982), where he examines different types of textual 'transcendence' (Macksey 1997: xviii; Batchelor 2018: 7), Genette (1982b: 3) defines 'paratextuality' as the "relationship that binds the text properly speaking […] to what can be called its paratext: a title, a subtitle, intertitles; prefaces, postfaces, notices, forewords, etc.; mar-

ginal, infrapaginal, terminal notes; epigraphs; illustrations, blurbs, book covers, dust jackets, and many other kinds of secondary signals."

In his subsequent book, soberly titled *Seuils* (1987),[10] Genette "carries out an extensive study of the paratext" (Batchelor 2018: 8) and provides myriad examples to demonstrate and illustrate the relationships between a text and its paratexts. Through the lens of paratext, then, Genette's work contributed to our understanding that texts do not exist in a vacuum and are not read in isolation from one another. The role of paratext is to '*présenter*' (Genette 1987: 7) the text. With this verb, which does not translate very smoothly in English, Genette shows that the paratext presents or introduces or provides a way into the text in a conventional manner, but perhaps more importantly, that it makes the text present ("*rendre présent*," ibid.) in that it ensures that the text is brought to existence in the world: that it is seen, that it is read, that it enjoys some reception – one might say, that it is accessed.[11] For Genette, paratexts always influence the reading of a text – in essence, they provide access points into the text. This idea of access can be productively extended to encompass accessibility. Batchelor's definition (2018: 12) of the term paratext provides a starting point for building the notion of accessible paratext: "the paratext consists of any element which conveys comment on the text, or presents the text to readers, or influences how the text is received." We will see below that accessible paratext meets the three criteria identified by Batchelor and has a metatextual function that is crucial in complementing its paratextual one.

Further in her monograph, Batchelor (2018) provides a more definitive definition of paratext in functional terms: "a paratext is a *consciously crafted* threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which we receive a text" (142, emphasis added). This idea that paratexts are gateways into texts and that they are deliberately designed to act as such can productively be applied to the context of accessibility. Batchelor's work is first and foremost concerned with translations and explores paratexts' relevance for translation studies. Yet, Batchelor proposes a theoretical framework applicable to accessibility more broadly and certainly beyond the language barrier as traditionally understood (i.e., the barrier between official or national languages). That was profoundly influential in shaping our understanding and actual creation of accessible paratext, like in the case study presented below. Building on Genette and Batchelor, we coin the term 'accessible paratext' to refer to thresholds into performances (and, by extension, into any art form) that follow the principles of accessible de-

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[10] The title of the English translation of Genette's book is *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. We note that this translation of the title is somewhat more explicit, more technical, and less poetic than the original title (which literally translates as 'thresholds' or 'doorsteps'). In essence, this is a paratext (in the form of the title in this case), raising somewhat different expectations in French and English as far as the tone is concerned.

[11] Genette's focus is on reception (*réception*) rather than access as such. Notwithstanding this choice of terminology, the idea of access is a pervasive – albeit unspoken – one throughout his work.

sign and employ forms of accessibility that give audiences a sense of what they can expect from a work of art. As we will discuss below, accessible paratext is inclusive – it does not discriminate between different subsets of the intended audience – and integrated – since accessibility is incorporated in the creative process and the performance for which it acts as a threshold.

As is evident in *Seuils*'s table of contents, Genette develops a typology "allowing paratextual elements to be classed according to their spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and functional qualities" (Batchelor 2018: 17). Although we cannot possibly engage here with all these parameters, we need to define the boundaries and limitations of what we have defined as accessible paratext. On the spatial level, accessible paratext is typically epitextual, i.e., separate from the text, "at a more respectful (or more prudent) distance" (Genette 1982b: 4), rather than a part of it, like a title or a table of contents might be. While it is sometimes claimed that epitexts differ from peritexts (introduction, notes, front covers, etc.) in that they are not within the text creators' control, in our case study, we will see that this is not necessarily the case. Accessible paratext appears in anticipation of the theatrical performances, and an audiovisual delivery that combines semiotic systems traditionally in audiovisual media (images, soundtrack, and captions) will be the most inclusive. Accessible paratext, therefore, contributes to the creation of a broader constellation of texts and does not need to be considered solely in relation to one single primary text. Accessible paratext does not merely provide a threshold for the interpretation (as in Genette's work) but acts as a threshold for access – one that distinguishes itself by its semiotic richness. We argue as a result that it is in its functional qualities that accessible paratext stands out.

Genette's notion of paratext has been discussed in the context of audiovisual media, most saliently by Gray (2010) and Batchelor (2018). The relative consensus that emerges is that we need to broaden Genette's framework to "encompass a wide range of material, including material produced by fans rather than by the makers of the product or text itself" (Batchelor 2018: 58). While some of the paratexts of audiovisual media function in the same way the literary paratexts studied by Genette – for Batchelor (2018: 60), "DVD covers and packaging operate in much the same way as book covers and other parts of the publisher's peritext," for instance –, others may enjoy a different relationship with the text. For example, in terms of authorship as already highlighted above, or in terms of the nature of their relationship with the text. Theatrical productions have, by definition, more in common with audiovisual media than with literary texts. Accessible paratext could fulfill the conventional functions of a trailer and consist of footage of rehearsals or even actual past performances. But this is not the definitive feature that makes accessible paratext accessible: its primary function is to showcase the kind of accessibility that the performances feature. Accessible paratext, then, is also metatextual (or, as Genette (1982b [1997]: 1) would put it, 'transtextual'), in that what

it provides a threshold for is a mode of accessibility, and it may not refer to one specific text at all, but rather to a text or group of texts that rely on the mode of accessibility featured in the accessible paratext. What makes accessible paratext stand out is that its focus is on modality and that it may be used to introduce performances or films that share the same modality.

Accessible paratext, then, corroborates the notion that it is increasingly difficult to conceive of paratext in terms of a straightforward correlation to a primary text. Paratexts should no longer be considered just "thresholds for the interpretation" (as in Genette's work): they have to be regarded as separate mini-worlds building up a media 'ecosystem' (Boni 2016: 217).

Accessible paratext, rather than being a threshold of interpretation, is an interpretative threshold. It does not so much orient the understanding of the text or the performance, but, thanks to its semiotic richness, provides a framework through which understanding becomes possible.

4. Making accessible paratext – making paratext accessible

Inspired by recent developments in live performance practices (Johnson 2018) and accessible filmmaking (Romero Fresco 2013; 2019), entailing the integration of accessibility into the creative process, we set out to create accessible paratext in the form of a short promotional film, which captures the essence of creative captioning of the kind we elaborated as part of our project with Red Earth Theatre.

The film we produced conforms to accessible filmmaking principles, as set out in the Accessible Filmmaking Guide (Romero Fresco and Fryer 2018). The Guide opens by stating that a monolingual approach to filmmaking is sure to leave behind vast swathes of audiences – not only foreign and sensory-impaired audiences, which require the production of additional soundtracks or subtitles, but also the viewers of a growing number of films that include more than one language in their original version (Romero Fresco and Fryer 2018: 5).

While the Guide also covers interlingual subtitles and translation in general, its conception of a monolingual approach as detrimental to the viewing experience is interesting because it suggests that a lack of due consideration for language and the way it is portrayed and presented in film media is both discriminatory and counter-productive since it leaves some audiences 'behind.' In the Guide, Romero Fresco and Fryer (2018: 11) also argue that creative captions can help bridge the gap between the experience of original viewers and viewers of accessible (or, for that matter, translated) versions. And yet, creative captions, rather than bridging a perceived gap or compensating for a sup-

posed lacuna, can be fully integrated into a film's aesthetics and can be enjoyed by different audiences, irrespective of auditory impairments. However, designing paratext (whether trailers, promotional videos) that follows the principles of accessible filmmaking is the only rational and effective gateway into films: the paratext provides the threshold while also managing expectations regarding accessibility and, indeed, aesthetics.

In the pre-production stage, the first step in creating accessible paratext is to write a script or a storyboard for the film. While it is relatively conventional for filmmakers to use 'two-column' scripts (with all visual cues in the right-hand column and audio cues in the left-hand column), we decided to add a third column on the right-hand side for captions – both their content and any visual effects related explicitly to captions. This was done mostly for clarity of presentation and decluttering the left-hand column of the script, as will be discussed below. While such a script may give the illusion that the different semiotic systems (images, soundtrack, and subtitles) operate separately from each other, this is not the case. The very nature of creative captions is precisely to create meaning through interaction with other semiotic systems. Table 1 below shows a script extract made at the pre-production stage and shared with the company's artistic directors and the actors for pre-shooting feedback.[12]

First, on the visual level, the spatial organization is relatively simple in this film. The actors are filmed in front of an (at the time of shooting) unfinished piece of set for *Soonchild*, in a performance studio at the University of Nottingham. After an introduction card, the two actors appear side-by-side dressed in black, framed just below the waist in a two-shot. The way the actors are framed does not change throughout the film, but even so, framing – and visual organization in general – was carefully considered: the actors are wearing black so that their hand movements can be seen clearly, especially in the case of Craig, the actor on the right-hand side of the frame, who provides sign-interpreting for everything Mati says. Indeed, there is little point in offering sign interpretation if it not easily visible. It was also important to make sure that the captions would not clash with the sign interpretation, hence the eventual choice of a cowboy shot (from the hips up) rather than a perhaps more traditional medium shot (from the waist up).

In the middle column of the script, the aural channel comprises the background music, sound effects that generally accompany the captions, and the spoken dialogue, which explains what creative captions are and how they work. The background soundtrack was kindly provided by Threaded (who also composed and performed the songs for Red Earth's *Soonchild*). The fact that sound effects support the creative captions is

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[12] This script is better to read alongside watching the actual film (see Esteban and Mével (2019) in the list of references for a link). Any differences between the script and the film are down to technical constraints or, on the contrary, creative opportunity, such as the addition of 'here' over Craig's hand gestures during the final line of dialogue in the extract provided in Table 1.

Table 1. **Extract from the three-column script written before shooting 'Creative Captions –**
      Red Earth Theatre' film

VISUALS	AUDIO, SFX, dialogue	CAPTIONS + VFX
Black screen	Light guitar loop	n/a
FADE IN: (white letters) Red Earth Theatre presents –> FADE TO BLACK	Guitar volume down, still playing in the background	
FADE TO SET BACKGROUND, Mati left side, Craig right side (both wear black, look into the lens), waist shot		
MATI signs CRAIG signs	MATI: Hi, I'm Mati. CRAIG: Hi, I'm Craig.	Standard captions, bottom, center-justified, white w/ black contours
CRAIG signs everything MATI says	MATI: We're here to tell you about exciting creative captions in Red Earth Theatre shows.	Standard caption + RED in red and THEATRE in yellow.
	What are creative captions, you ask? They are for deaf audiences, but also for everyone who can read them. And they're really fun.	Standard captions
	We understand that captions can sometimes be…	
	confusing,	Jumbled letters arrange in the correct order
	or downright annoying.	Standard caption, then moves across MATI's face
MATI waves away caption across her face	**WHOOSH SFX**	
MATI points down	Creative captions are not just in a box at the bottom of the stage,	Caption in ghost box, bottom
MATI points up	or at the top	
MATI points right	or at the side of the stage.	Caption in ghost box, bottom
	They can appear anywhere.	Caption in ghost box, right side
		Standard caption, bottom

perhaps more unusual: while traditional captions are ancillary and extradiegetic, creative captions play an integral part in the narrative and interact with other semiotic systems. In the film, these sound effects are essential for flavor and humor, and further reinforce the links between the semiotic channels – like for instance, when the sound of ice crystallizing can be heard at the same time text explaining that captions can tell us about the weather in a play starts turning into ice, or when the sound of a guillotine can be heard after the word 'decapitated' is seen and heard on screen and sees its final syllable abruptly cut off.

The right-hand side column of the script is devoted to the captions and how they interact with the other semiotic channels visually (for instance, by following the movement of one of the actors' hand) or aurally (when sound effects accompany them). Given that the captions would occasionally be self-referential, we also opted to integrate them narratively and start with fairly standard captions (at the bottom of the screen, white letters with black contours) synchronized with the actors' lines. The captions would progressively move away from traditional norms as we introduce changes in shape, color, size, font, movement, placement, effects, interactions with actors, and the soundtrack.

Visually and aurally, the pace of the film was also significant to consider for several reasons: first, to make sure that the multimodal delivery was not overwhelming: it was also crucial for captions to appear verbatim (as much as possible) and to stay on screen long enough that all audiences would have time to enjoy them, while also being able to view the images correctly and let their gaze travel freely between the images and the captions wherever they appear. Because of the captions' aesthetic and metalinguistic importance, a naturally relaxed pace was essential to prevent 'subtitling blindness' (Romero Fresco & Fryer 2018: 10) that may happen when reading captions prevents the audience from viewing the images properly. Since the interactions between the captions and the images – including the sign interpreting – are crucial to the film successfully conveying its message, a pace that allows such interactions to be effortlessly visible is vital for the intersemiotic playfulness to be enjoyed and fully appreciated.

The production process involved using a filming space (a performance studio at the University of Nottingham that, at the time, was used to develop and test the technologies created for *Soonchild*), two of the actors who would feature in *Soonchild* (Matilda Bott and Craig Painting) and dedicated lighting and video equipment. The sign interpretation was prepared in advance of filming, though some fine-tuning was necessary at the time of filming to adjust timings and interactions with speech. The actual filming was carried out in under two hours.

The post-production stage was far more labor-intensive. It consisted of simple video editing to select and bring together the best takes, and extensive post-editing for the creative captions using dedicated video compositing and animation software. At

the time of writing, there is no dedicated software that allows for creating creative captions 'on the fly' in the way that standard captioning software operates. This is not entirely surprising, seeing that no fully developed taxonomy, never mind a typology of creative captions, currently exists.[13] This makes creating the captions very time-consuming, and it requires a high level of proficiency with the compositing and animation software. The absence of bespoke tools has been identified as an important area of development for creative captioning to become easier to implement and, therefore, to become a more widespread practice. While the development of taxonomy may seem counter-intuitive, as it is quite hard to forecast precisely how creative content creators can get and what creative captions they may want to create (in terms of audiovisual effects, interactions with moving images, or anything that goes beyond more pedestrian cosmetic features such as size, font, color, contrast, and placement), it is vital to the creation of tools that would allow the widespread implementation of universal design in audiovisual media.

Once the film had been edited, and creative captions added, the next stage was to distribute the film. The film was made available on the Red Earth Theatre YouTube channel and widely advertised at academic events and on social media via institutional networks at the University of Nottingham and links with local and national D/deaf societies.

Although designed for and made with the actors who played in Red Earth Theatre's adaptation of *Soonchild*, this film sees its paratextual function extend well beyond its relationship with *Soonchild*. In video format, it introduces a kind of multimodality that has become the trademark of Red Earth Theatre, and that is analogous to the one used in *Soonchild* on the stage. In other words, it presents a type of design where accessibility is built into performances from the beginning of the creative process and can serve on a metatextual level to introduce any performance that is designed in this way. As paratext, it both acts as a threshold into the performance and introduces accessible design, but perhaps more importantly, it does so in a way that is also accessible. Through its polysemiotic presentation, our film provides a new way of relating to captions and a new way of understanding and relating to stage performances. It demonstrates that paratext can be more than a point of access and can make a point about accessibility.

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[13] Rocío Varela at the University of Vigo is currently working towards creating such a taxonomy. Simultaneously, Rebecca McClarty's (2013) article on the topic also provides a basis for how subtitles can be displayed in more creative ways.

5. Conclusion

In the introduction, we have touched upon the fact that accessibility has come a long way over the last couple of decades. Yet, reports such as Wilmington's *Deaf Like Me* indicate that accessible design cannot be limited to the texts – in the Genettian sense – only. For accessibility to be fully realized, audiences need to be reached. Accessible paratext offers a solution and helps reach audiences in a way beyond the traditional remit of paratext while also providing an enhanced film experience.

The case study provided above illustrates our theoretical grounding of accessible paratext. However, it is limited in scope, and more case studies are necessary to achieve critical mass and start devising taxonomies for creative captioning based on empirical evidence and grounded in practice – both for screens and for live performances. The visual organization of films can, of course, be vastly more complex than the example we presented above: one can imagine a myriad of effects interacting with shot changes, camera movements, or a richer visual composition. The creative possibilities are as endless as they are exciting.

Integrated captions of the kind described above force us to question and rethink presentation methods and the relationship between the performance and audiences. Accessible paratext provides a much-needed threshold to performances, but more broadly to the accessible theatre while fighting against discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. It is evident in the case study provided above that the widespread implementations of such captions would stimulate creativity, challenge audist positions regarding accessibility, and have the welcome side effect of boosting literacy. Our work on creative captions, both for the stage and for screens, also brings to the fore that much work remains to be done to involve members from all audiences in content creation and further foster awareness of a more diverse range of human experience.

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AUTHOR

Pierre Alexis Mével is Associate Professor in Translation Studies at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, School of Cultures, Languages and Area Studies, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom.