



The NCI Foundation

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Foreign Language Captioning and Subtitling: Inclusion and Access for Many

By Ericka L. Hoffmann

Maria Blatnik, the Spanish Real-time Supervisor for the National Captioning Institute, knows how important Spanish captioning is. Her parents, natives of Mexico, do not speak English. She grew up translating for her parents, even interpreting their mail for them. Maria starts her day in the Dallas, Texas office of NCI by checking her email for changes in the Spanish real-time captioning schedule. As the supervisor, she is responsible for the important job of making sure programs are scheduled accurately and that Spanish captioners are scheduled to do them.

As one of the leading Spanish real-time captioners at NCI, Maria trains new Spanish real-time captioners. She also goes on the air, captioning live programs several times a day, usually within an hour of arriving at her office. "There's nothing else in the world I'd rather do. I love my job!" says Maria. And her enthusiasm carries over into her work. Maria checks in with the Engineering Department 15 minutes before the start of the program to do the test with the broadcaster, to make sure that all of the audio lines are working and that the broadcaster is receiving her captions properly. Prior to this, Maria has prepared for her captioning by researching the program and its contents. For instance, she captions many soccer games and must make sure that she enters the names of the soccer players and the locations of the matches into her captioning dictionary, so the captioning software spells them correctly. Once all of this is done, the program begins, and Maria captions at the equivalent of over 250 words per minute. She is proud that she is provid-

ing a valuable service for deaf Spanish-speaking individuals and for those who do not speak English, like her parents.

Spanish real-time captioning has proven very valuable to local governments in areas where there is a significant Spanish-speaking population, such as Miami Beach, Florida and Montgomery and Prince Georges Counties in Maryland. Statistics show that there are approximately 35 million Hispanic television viewers nationwide and 28 million Spanish speakers for whom English is a second language. Captioning of an English language live program—such as a city council or school board meeting—makes the meeting a far more inclusive event by providing accessibility to the Spanish-speaking audience. This creates awareness of important current events among the Spanish-speaking residents of the municipality or county and nurtures a good relationship between the local governments and the diverse segments of the population. It also is quite helpful to those individuals who are learning English as a second language.

NCI performs captioning for many Spanish-language television networks, including Telemundo, Galavision, Telefutera and WAPA in Puerto Rico. This provides access to news, sports and entertainment television programs for Spanish-speaking individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Spanish real-time captioning of an English language program involves four basic steps. First, an audio line is sent from the event or broadcast studio to a Spanish translator. The translator listens to the English audio, translates and re-voices the

dialogue in Spanish. The Spanish dialogue is sent via an audio line to the Spanish captioner, who listens to the translator and captions the Spanish dialogue. The captions are sent back to the broadcaster via phone line, and are encoded onto Line 21 of the video signal, to appear on the television screen when the closed captioning is turned on by the viewer. Occasionally, English captioning of Spanish-language programs is needed; these programs are produced in the same manner. Spanish captioning of live Spanish-language programming is performed the same way—except no translation is needed.

The National Captioning Institute's Spanish real-time captioning employs a Spanish stenotype theory and dictionary that is the result of years of research and development. The system is based on the principles of court reporting in which words are transcribed phonetically using a stenographic

Continued on page 2

What's New in Described Programming	3
Court Reporter vs Captioner	4
Digital Television	5
Voice Captioning	5
GoodSearch & GoodShop	6
New Releases	6



Foreign Language

Continued from page 1

keyboard. The computer program developed by NCI converts the phonetic code into readable Spanish captions with proper spelling and grammar. Captions are displayed in upper and lower case characters with appropriate accents. When viewers turn on the decoder chip in their television sets, the captions appear on the screen as Timed Roll-up captions. They scroll onto the screen from the bottom, with approximately three lines appearing at one time. NCI first began using this system for real-time Spanish captioning in April 2001, when they began captioning Deportes CNN, a live Spanish-language sports news television program viewed by audiences in Latin America and Latinos in the United States. NCI now performs over 500 hours of Spanish real-time captioning per month.

Silvia Banales, a native of Uruguay, performs prerecorded Spanish captioning for the National Captioning Institute. Her hus-



Estevan Gonzales, NCI Spanish Real-time captioner, at work using stenographic keyboard

band also does English prerecorded captioning for NCI, and they work out of their home in Maryland, allowing them to take turns keeping an eye on their young toddler. Silvia has worked for NCI since 1992 as a Spanish captioner. Previously, she worked for several years as a translator and has a graduate Certificate in Proficiency in Translation. Silvia explains that, when captioning, she has to use neutral Spanish for her captions, and not use slang or colloquialisms so that the captions can be read by speakers of the various dialects of Spanish.

Spanish prerecorded captioning is the preparation of captions for recorded programming so that, at the time of air or playback, the captions are a part of the videotape or other program storage media. Like English prerecorded captioning, Spanish

prerecorded captioning is available in two styles. Standard Pop-on captions are timed and placed to synchronize with the program. Timed Roll-up captions scroll on and off the screen in a continuous motion. Once they are typed, prerecorded captions are then encoded onto Line 21 of the videotape or married to the video in other electronic formats, such as Windows Media Player®.

To provide Spanish captioning for a prerecorded program in English, the script must of course be translated. The Spanish captioner listens to the program, and one sentence at a time, translates the dialogue into Spanish and times the captions to the video as he or she types them. Because the Spanish language is 20 to 30 percent more verbose than English, careful attention must be given to translate the dialogue so that it fits into readable Spanish captions. An example of this is the word cheerleader, which does not have a Spanish word that is an exact translation. So in order to translate “cheerleader” into Spanish, the captioner would need to use several words to describe what a cheerleader is. Sometimes the producer of the program provides a translated Spanish script, but even then, the script occasionally needs to be edited.

When a verbatim translation is too wordy to time properly into captions, it creates a challenge—especially when the program is fast-paced—because it can cause the captions to be difficult to read, or to lag behind the video and audio. In this case, the captioners need to paraphrase the dialogue while being careful to keep all content, context and information intact. To do this, they use synonyms that are more concise, but convey the same meaning. The captioners will also edit out redundant verbiage or extraneous vocabulary. An example of this is when a speaker says “umm” or “you know” within a sentence. Verbiage such as that would be edited out for the sake of concise, timely and easily read captions.

At time of this writing, captioning is only performed in English and Spanish. Subtitling is available when other languages are desired. The most frequently requested languages for subtitling include Canadian French, Scandinavian languages (such as Swedish, Norwegian and Danish), European French, Castilian Spanish, Italian and Dutch. Subtitling is also available in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Portuguese (both European and Brazilian), Arabic and many others. Subtitling is provided for prerecord-

ed programs only, and is most commonly used with DVD and Web-based media. Subtitling of prerecorded programs provides accessibility to the ethnically diverse segments of the U.S. population, English as a Second Language students and natives of foreign countries. Subtitling is in particularly high demand by producers and distributors of DVDs that are marketed overseas.

When a subtitle format is desired for English captioning, especially for the production of DVDs, Subtitling for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) is often used. This includes the style elements of captioning, such as description of non-verbal sound elements or indication that an off-camera narrator is speaking. But the SDH subtitles appear as a subtitling option in the DVD menu, rather than being controlled by the decoder chip in the television set. SDH is more widely read and recognized by the myriad manufacturers and models of DVD players, which ensures that deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers of the DVD will benefit. This also allows individuals who are viewing DVDs on computers (that do not have closed-caption decoder chips) to have access to the English SDH.

Because of the great ethnic diversity in the United States, foreign language captioning is becoming increasingly important. This important service for the deaf and hard of hearing has also evolved into a valuable tool to provide access and inclusion for the non-English speaking population. □

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What's New in Described Programming

By Jay Feinberg

An exciting variety of television programs are made fully accessible by providing description in addition to closed captioning. NCI's Described Media team provides people who are blind or have low vision with an opportunity to use their ears and imagination as a method of "viewing" television programs. NCI's talented staff provides narration of visual elements when there are pauses in the dialogue. The descriptions are combined with the original sound track on the Secondary Audio Program (SAP) channel of televised programming and accessed on stereo televisions by using the remote control to select the SAP audio option.

Programs described for young children not only help these young people enjoy the same shows as their sighted friends but also allow adult family members who are blind or have low vision to "watch" the programming along with their children. A new captioned and described series from Scholastic Entertainment, the producer of "Clifford the Big Red Dog," is "Word Girl" that helps expand kids' vocabulary through exposing 6 to 8 year-olds to new words in a context they find fun and inviting. Each episode introduces 2 to 4 new words in a variety of contexts – the best way to learn vocabulary as confirmed by research. A new season of "Ribert and Robert's WonderWorld" integrates live action performers into a 3D computer animated setting to help 2 to 6 year-olds feel more curious, confident and knowledgeable about their world. For children who watch Spanish-language programs, a new season of "Plaza Sesamo," the Spanish language cousin of "Sesame Street," is available with Spanish captions and descriptions. Of course the new season of "Sesame Street" is also described.

For teens and adults interested in the arts, NCI is describing many new programs for Ovation, the network with the mission "To Make Life Creative" by focusing on the arts and personal creativity. A broad spectrum of artists is profiled, ranging from "Norman Rockwell: an American Portrait" to "Andy



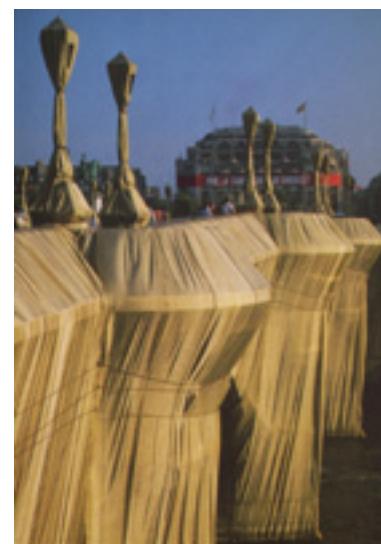
Courtesy of Scholastic Entertainment

Warhol: The Complete Picture." "Rothko's Rooms" chronicles abstract painter Mark Rothko's life and the eventual display of nine of his paintings in a dedicated room at London's Tate Modern museum. "Christo in Paris" looks at how environmental artists Christo and his wife Jeanne Claude fulfilled their dreams of wrapping the iconic Paris Pont Neuf bridge in fabric as an artistic expression that helped Parisians look at their 400-year-old bridge in a new way. Shifting over to musical artists, the jubilant documentary "Old, Weird America: Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music" hones in on a collection of blues and country classics recorded in the 1920s and 1930s.

An eclectic mix of described educational programs for teens and adults is also available on public television stations. "America at a Crossroads" explores the challenges confronting the world post 9/11. "Monarchy with David Starkey" examines the power, politics, religion and extraordinary lives that make up the British Crown, one the oldest surviving governing institutions in existence today. On a similar note, "The Windsors: A Royal Dynasty" tells the story of the current royal family and the turbulent times they have survived. Shifting to another historical topic, "Weapons of World War II" charts the evolution of weapon systems from the outbreak of war to its 1945 climax. If painting is of more

interest to you, then "Plein Air: Painting the American Landscape" presents considerable historical and contemporary information on American landscape painting, while Susan Scheewe, artist, teacher, writer and publisher, communicates her love of painting, her welcoming style, and easy-to-master painting techniques on "Scheewe Art Workshop." Finally, if all this reading is making you hungry, Christina Pirello provides mouthwatering recipes and healthy living tips on "Christina Cooks," and Angela Shelf Medearis presents vegetarian recipes and health information with an ethnic twist on "The Kitchen Diva!"

All of the small sampling of programs mentioned above and many others are described by NCI using funding from grants awarded to NCI by the U.S. Department of Education. These grants cover 100% of the description costs for educational television programs that are appropriate for use in a classroom setting at the preschool,



"Christo's Bridge" - photo courtesy of Wolfgang Volz

elementary, or secondary level. A total of \$1.7 million in description grant funding was made available to NCI during the current year. NCI very much appreciates the Department of Education's ongoing support. ☐

Court Reporter vs. Captioner – Is There a Difference?

By Carol Epperley

Those who have had an occasion to go into a courtroom or even seen one on television will recognize the full workings of the court. You will see the judge, the jury, the bailiff, the clerk, the attorneys representing their clients, witnesses, court spectators. And then there is the court reporter.

Unlike the court reporter you see on television, who is usually portrayed as a bumbling idiot with paper flowing to the floor or worse yet, seated so far away from anyone that how the court reporter is able to hear anything that is going on is beyond imagination; the real life court reporter is usually seated front and center of the proceedings, meticulously transcribing each spoken word to his or her stenotype machine.

Many, who are unfamiliar with the duties of a court reporter, seem to think they make vast amounts of money for the amount of time they work. What they don't seem to realize is that they work long hours, with only maybe a 10-minute break each in the morning and afternoon, and maybe a break for lunch, lasting anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. And when their day in court is done, they go back to their offices or homes to transcribe proceedings either from that day, or trials that have been ordered from attorneys taken days, weeks, months and even years ago.

So what does the court reporter have in common with a real-time captioner?

The captioner has the same skills as the court reporter. They use a stenotype machine to transcribe what they hear. They need an intelligent brain, supplemented with keen hearing to recognize the foreign accent, a southern drawl, and the jargon of today's youth which can puzzle a judge or jury as well as the TV

viewing public, but which the court reporter and/or captioner accurately writes.

Unlike the court reporter, a captioner is invisible to the public. Most of the individuals that depend on captioning appreciate the words on the screen, but few have any idea of the process.

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A captioner usually writes only an hour at a time. And most of the programming will have commercial interruptions which does give the captioner a small break. A captioner's day can consist of writing up to four hours on air in an eight-hour day.

So what does a captioner do when not on air?


First, the captioner prepares for his or her show. He or she does this by receiving information from the station and/or going to a web site and then entering the names of people in the news, unusual places into their computer dictionary; double checking for the odd spelling of any names and checking for conflicts with previously written words. The cap-

tioner may develop brief forms for names and/or words that may come up over and over in a broadcast, entering these as well into his or her dictionary.

Secondly, the captioner may watch a previously recorded program if he or she is unfamiliar with a particular show and practice writing to it, looking out for the nuances of that particular show. If it's a talk show, they may have contests that the captioner needs to be aware of; news programs usually have segments on health or business or on the newest technology.

When doing a program, the captioner is not resting on his or her laurels during commercial breaks. While writing the program, the captioner is also monitoring the screen, watching their writing, and looking out for errors. During commercials, the captioner is correcting those errors and reviewing the notes that they had made before the show of uncommon names and/or words.

When the program is over, the captioner will save the file and will go back to their desk to review it. The captioner will note any other errors they may have missed while on air and again make adjustments to their dictionary as needed.

Whether a court reporter or a captioner, both are highly skilled individuals who take pride in their work. Most in this industry jokingly announce we must be crazy to do this job. However, it is a job we love, and that we all strive for perfection in. 

Digital Television Transition - What's in Store for Analog Television Viewers?

By Mary Presswood

In less than 18 months, the television industry will undergo a major change in the way television programs are broadcast. Every day millions of Americans turn on their television sets to watch the news, sports and entertainment programming. At midnight on February 17, 2009 analog transmissions will cease and TV stations will switch to all-digital broadcasts.

What does this mean for television viewers? It is estimated that 19 million U.S. households do not subscribe to cable or satellite services and rely solely on over-the-air (OTA) broadcasts. There are other households that subscribe to cable or satellite services, but have a secondary analog television set that is not hooked up to the service and receive only OTA programming. Those consumers will be most affected by the switch to digital.

Digital television signals are not compatible with analog TV sets in most American homes, so there is concern that analog television sets will become obsolete. Don't discard your analog television just yet! If you do not subscribe to cable or

satellite services, and receive free over-the-air broadcasts through an antenna, you will need to purchase a digital-to-analog converter box to keep receiving programming on your analog TV. A federally-subsidized program will be available to help consumers purchase converter boxes. Beginning January 1, 2008 through March 31, 2009, consumers can obtain up to two coupons per household, worth \$40 each, from the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) to be used toward purchasing digital-to-analog converter boxes.

A set-top converter box will not turn your analog TV into a high-definition television. It will take the digital signal and convert it into an analog format that your TV is familiar with so you can receive digital programming. However, to experience the video and audio improvements offered by this new digital technology, you would need to purchase a high-definition television (HDTV).

Some retail stores may still have analog television sets for sale on their shelves.



If you find a television set labeled as “analog” or “NTSC,” then it contains an analog tuner only. The FCC now requires merchants to post signs informing consumers that the analog television does not contain a digital tuner and will need additional equipment to receive over-the-air television broadcasts when the digital transition is complete. □

Here are some helpful resources about DTV:

- www.antennaweb.org
- www.dtvanswers.com
- www.dtvfacts.com
- www.ntia.doc.gov

Voice Generated Captioning

By Rick Brooks

Many of us talk back to our television sets, perhaps more often than we'd care to admit. Whether it's arguing a referee's call in a football game, shouting the correct responses during “Jeopardy,” or warning a character in a thriller, “Don't open that door,” we sometimes make watching television a vocal experience.

A group at NCI is making captioning a vocal experience as well. In their offices, a different sound replaces the clatter of continuous typing that comes from other

parts of the building. The Voice Writers use the Caption Mic™ system to produce captions by verbally echoing (repeating) what they hear at their workstations.

NCI's Voice Writers listen to the audio from any of a number of different sources and repeat it into microphones. The Caption Mic™ system uses voice-recognition software to turn their speech into captions. During training, they read aloud to create recorded profiles, or “Voice Models,” which Caption Mic™ uses to respond more accurately to each individual's own voice. Voice Writers also

use a set of standard “dictation macros” while echoing to save time, a technique similar to the use of shortcut keys when typing. For example, the software produces a question mark in a caption when the word “poof” is uttered.


Currently the Voice Writers are working on a variety of projects using this technology. So while talking back to a television program might draw stares or raised eyebrows in public, at NCI it's another way we're providing access by producing captions for a variety of programs. □

GoodSearch and GoodShop Do Good Work for Charities

By Mary Presswood

Do you know that you can support NCI with the click of a mouse? GoodSearch is a search engine that generates a charitable donation every time it is used for an Internet search. Go to GoodSearch (www.goodsearch.com) and enter National Captioning Institute in the area under "Who do you GoodSearch for?" Once NCI's name appears, select "verify" and begin searching the Internet as you normally would. It's a free service to the user, and NCI benefits each time the site is used.

GoodSearch has found another way to give back to the community by forming a service called GoodShop. Over 100 great shops are participating in this program and every online purchase generates a contribution to charity. Are you looking for a gift, a new book, clothing, sporting goods, upgrading your computer or planning a trip? Check out GoodShop! The site is accessible through GoodSearch's home page where you will see a box "Who do you GoodShop for?" Make sure NCI is selected as your charity. Click on the GoodShop box to enter the site of

many well-known stores, such as Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, Dell, The Gap, Macy's, Nordstrom, PetSmart, Target and many others. 

New Captioned DVD Releases

Comedy

Daddy's Little Girls (Lions Gate)
Du Barry was a Lady (1943) (Warner Home Video)
Surf School (Lions Gate)
The Bride Came C.O.D. (1941) (Warner Home Video)

Drama

A Dance to the Music of Time (Acorn Media)
The Long Weekend (Lions Gate)
The Nightcomers (Lions Gate)
Porterhouse Blue (Acorn Media)
Pride (Lions Gate)
Sweeney Todd – Director's Cut (Acorn Media)
Warlords (Acorn Media)

Horror

Pirates of Ghost Island (Lions Gate)

Mystery

Agatha Christie's Miss Marple – Series 3 (Acorn Media)

Sci-Fi

Fire Serpent (Lions Gate)
The Last Mimzy (New Line Home Video)

Television Series

Foyle's War – Series 4 (Acorn Media)
Nip/Tuck – Season 4 (Warner Home Video)
Slings and Arrows – Volume 3 (Acorn Media) 