

Semantic and Pragmatic Aspects of Audio Description

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Introduction

Questions:

How extralinguistic information contributes to meaning?

What are the implications for AD?

Material:

Shrek, How to Train Your Dragon, Megamind

Framework:

Speech act theory (Austin 1962)

Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 2006)

Semantic vs Pragmatic meaning

Leech (1985):

Langue (semantic) vs parole (pragmatic).

Semantic and pragmatic meaning are complementary.

Role of **contextual elements** in interpreting pragmatic meaning.

Where do deictic expressions belong?

Different authors do not agree.

Speech acts

Double illocutionary point:

- horizontal communication on screen
- vertical communication between the original sender (film creator) and the audience
- Pedersen (2008)

Relevance

(a) Other things being equal, the greater the **positive cognitive effects** achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

(b) Other things being equal, the greater the **processing effort** expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

(Sperber and Wilson 2006, 609)

Example 1: Shrek

AD: His jaws set, Shrek paces forward.
The tournament knights step aside.
Farquaad looks down from his
balcony.

Lord Farquaad: What is that? **It's** hideous!

Shrek: That's not very nice. It's just a
donkey.

Example 2: How to Train Your Dragon

Gobber: I thought you'd be carried off!

Hiccup: Who, me? Come on, I'm way too **muscular** for their taste. They wouldn't know what to do with **all this**.

Gobber: They need **toothpicks**, don't they?

[...]

Hiccup: The meathead with attitude and interchangeable hands is Gobber. I've been his apprentice ever since I was little. Well, **littler**.

Example 3: Megamind

Roxanne: You destroyed Metro Man. You took over the city, and then you actually got me to care about you! Why are you so evil? Tricking me? **What could you possibly hope to gain?**

AD: Megamind looks down, then glances up and stares at Roxanne.

Roxanne: Wait a minute. Oh, I don't believe this. Do you really think that **I would ever be with you?**

Conclusion

- The meaning of an utterance is at times highly dependent on the visual context.
- Principle of relevance (effort vs effect) seems to be a useful tool for creating/assessing AD.
- Illocutionary act as quality benchmark.

References

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