The Routledge Handbook of Audio Description

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The question of accessibility

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1. The scope

This text is the opening chapter of The Routledge Handbook of Audio Description. By browsing the collection, readers will learn about audio description (AD), from its history to the various theoretical frameworks and methods, from the current state of research to practices around the world. Audio description is commonly framed as a service (or modality) that provides accessibility. The following sections will discuss some of the reasons, mechanisms and limitations behind the increasing prominence of accessibility and access, as well as the implications for AD and media accessibility in general. Prominent attention will be given to problems more than solutions. In addition, some suggestions for future research will be briefly mentioned in the final section. The overall objective of this text is to encourage readers to contest assumptions, read the rest of the book analytically and approach the question of accessibility and audio description with a critical attitude.

2. Introduction

The question of accessibility has been substantially on the increase in the most diverse venues of human knowledge, from academic research to social debate. This process of intensifying prominence has boomed over the past two decades. A few examples may help illustrate the vastness and variety of this growth.

The idea of a Global Accessibility Awareness Day was born in 2011, with two posts on personal social media accounts. Since then, it has become a global event celebrated on the third Thursday of May that, on its tenth anniversary, included more than 200 activities all over the world. While present in national and international legislation for decades, accessibility has recently been at the heart of a massive regulatory process. This accessibility turn in policy development is especially evident in the case of the European Union (Greco, 2019b). It has been one of the major elements in the revision of previous regulations – as in the update of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive – and in spurring ad-hoc regulations, such as the Web Accessibility Directive and, most prominently, the European Accessibility Act. The accessibility turn in policy development is even more patent in the considerable attention this issue has
been given by national and international standardisation organisations (Matamala & Orero, 2018). They have released a growing body of standards that range from those devoted to specific services to those addressing more general contexts and processes. An example of the former is ISO/WD 24495–1, a standard on plain language currently under development (ISO, Under preparation). An example of the latter is ISO/IEC 30071–1, which provides a Code of practice for creating accessible ICT products and services (ISO/IEC, 2019), which stemmed from the British standard BS 8878 (BSI, 2010). In 2001 – and later updated in 2014 – the International Organization for Standardization and the International Electrotechnical Commission even released the ISO/IEC Guide 71, a document aimed at providing “guidance to standards developers on addressing accessibility requirements and recommendations” in the very development of standards themselves (ISO/IEC, 2001, 2014). Finally, the investigation on processes and phenomena related to access and accessibility has also become a major line of enquiry in a plethora of fields across the spectrum (Greco, 2018). What was once a minor or fringe issue has become a thriving topic, with well-established conferences and journals. International conferences such as Fun for All, Media for All, Web4All and Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction – respectively launched in 2010, 2005, 2004 and 2001 – have attracted an increasing number of speakers and participants at every edition. The first Advanced Research Seminar on Audio Description, better known by its acronym ARSAD, was launched in 2007 as a double hands-on workshop attended by 27 participants. Over the years, it has grown into a full-fledged, two-day conference with over 100 attendees. There are journals entirely devoted to the topic, like ACM Transactions on Accessible Computing, Journal of Accessibility and Design for All, and Universal Access in the Information Society, first published respectively in 2008, 2011 and 2001. Its increasing importance is evident not only in the growth of topic-focused venues and publications, but also in the many special issues and sessions devoted to access and accessibility in journals and conferences in the most diverse areas of human knowledge.

3. Premises

Those are examples of a wide and lively revolution that has access and accessibility at its epicentre (Greco, 2018). In order to discuss some of the mechanisms behind the accessibility revolution, its limits, future paths and its implications for audio description, some premises are in order.

First, broadly speaking, access can be conceived as the general issue and accessibility as the related property of an artefact (e.g., environment, service, or product) that can be more or less accessible, that is, providing more or less access. However, their mutual connection and individual position have come to be less straightforward and more intricate over time. If at a theoretical level the question of accessibility is grounded upon the question of access, at a pragmatic level it has almost become the other way around. Accessibility has acquired a standing on its own, which has then influenced the ways in which access is framed and discussed. Second, access is not a recent concept. Grotius and Marx are but two cases in its long history. Grotius’s Mare Liberum (Grotius, 1609/2004) is considered one of the most influential works in international law, the first to provide a full argument for the classification of the seas as a commons (Straumann, 2015). The legacy of Grotius’s thought even reaches contemporary debate on access and regulation in the digital commons (Greco & Floridi, 2004). One of the central points in Grotius’s analysis is how privatisation of the seas would lead to someone controlling access to them and thus, their use and enjoyment. In Marx’s works, access is pivotal for both analysis and change, for example in terms of access to the means of
production and access to resources. It is the lens through which social structures can be scrutinised, unveiling how dominant groups exercise power over people by controlling access. It is also the instrument through which the oppressed can transform social structures and revert disenfranchisement.

Third, the question of accessibility emerged as central in the process of identification of the medical model of disability and elaboration of the social model of disability. The medical model of disability conceives disability as such to be an individual problem caused by the individual’s impairments that produce a deviation from a condition established by the dominant group as the norm. Individuals are the problem; they are broken, abnormal. Access can somehow be restored by fixing individuals and bringing them as close as possible to normality. Access problems are due to individuals’ impairments and accessibility refers to the degree of deviance of individuals with impairments from an imposed normality. Conversely, the social model of disability sees disability as the result of a mutual process between individuals with impairments on the one hand and material and social environments, structures and relations designed by an ableist culture on the other hand. Access and accessibility are a material and a socio-political matter related to the ways in which society is designed. Addressing access issues requires challenging, contesting, and changing social environments, social structures, social relations and social thinking. They should be fixed, not individuals.

The social model of disability has been a game-changer in the socio-political field, for it has reversed social roles and social rules and called for new political visions. It has changed how the topics of disability and accessibility are framed and engaged. Despite its ground-breaking character, some of the most prominent and influential scholars in social sciences, especially in disability studies, have been drawing attention to the limitations and potential negative implications of the social model of disability. As Ottosdottir and Evans (2016) highlight, criticism towards the social model of disability ranges from being “gender-, race- and class-blind, speaking mainly of the experiences of white middle class men with physical impairments in the global North” to failing to “recognise personal, embodied experiences of impairment and chronic illness as part of people’s diverse experiences of disability” (p. 300). A critical position in the context of the present analysis is that the ways in which accessibility solutions are conceived and deployed within the social model of disability has been somehow dominated by the very ableist culture the model was born to overcome (Greco, 2019c). As will be discussed later in the case of media accessibility, access services run the risk of inadvertently reaffirming discriminatory biases and producing a ghetto effect (Greco, 2019c, 2016b).

Fourth, there have only been few theoretical attempts to investigate access so far. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, they have generally been placed within the field of disability studies (Titchkosky, 2011; Williamson, 2019; Guffey, 2020b; e.g., Guffey, 2020a). Scarcer still are the attempts that have focused on the distinctive dimensions of accessibility. This fact is of great relevance, both in general and for media accessibility. Disability and accessibility have a long-standing relationship. They share a good portion of their histories. In the United States, for instance, “initial efforts to address physical barriers in public spaces came in the 1940s and 1950s, partially in response to the return of disabled veterans from World War II and the well-publicised effects of the polio epidemic” (Williamson, 2019: 2). This historical situation laid down the groundwork for the development of barrier-free design (Story et al., 1998). In the following decades, disabled people’s organisations were pivotal in placing the spotlight on accessibility. They demanded national regulations that guaranteed and protected civil rights for persons with disabilities and lobbied for a specific human rights treaty, actively participating in its writing process (Heyer, 2015). The approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the UN in December 2006 was a major booster to the question
of accessibility, not only in the social and political arenas, but also in academia. In Article 3, the Convention lists accessibility as a principle. It then moves on to discuss specific aspects in Article 9, expressly entitled *Accessibility*. Such an explicit presence in the Convention has been instrumental in further mainstreaming the term “accessibility”, but it has also been a source of confusion, as will be discussed in section 4 with reference to media accessibility and audio description.

### 4. The accessibility stance

The rise of access and accessibility on the world’s stage over the past few decades seems related to a newfound awareness that “anything said about access can be read for how it reflects a host of questions: who has access? Access to where? Access to what? When? Every single instance of life can be regarded as tied to access – that is, to do anything is to have some form of access” (Titchkosky, 2011: 13). The *access stance* is a foundational lens that enables radical and critical readings of history, thought and society as well as radical and critical proposals (Greco, 2013). Given such an entrenched connection with our very ways of living, one would expect the access stance to be at the epicentre of a wide and lively theoretical endeavour. A closer look however, shows that this is not the case:

> despite this, [access] has received little theoretical attention . . . Like inclusion, access has become part of the fabric of our talk about education and community, pervasive and unquestioned . . . The term “access” has not been on this scope of journey and it has acquired less baggage along its way; nonetheless it is used almost complacently at every turn.

*(Seale & Nind, 2010: 4)*

Since Seale and Needle’s remark, theoretical attention to access and accessibility has increased, though still scantily. As said previously, despite a few exceptions, the vast majority of analyses are placed within disability studies. In turn, very few of those few exceptions engage with scholarship from disability studies and other areas of social, cultural and critical studies. The combined results have run the risk of producing echo chambers and missing the opportunity that access and accessibility offer to analyse, interpret, contest and (re)design some of the most essential and pressing issues of society and humanity.

A reason for the lack of an extensive and *polyphonic* reflection on access and accessibility can be identified in a sort of meaning revision process that the two terms have been going through (Greco, 2021b). Access (and thus accessibility) is a polysemic term. As such, it is prone to be used in a myriad of contexts and through a plethora of practices. However, its semantic wealth has been suffering from a substantial cut. Firstly, accessibility has largely been reduced to an issue pertaining exclusively to persons with disabilities. On the one hand, this has limited the scope of access and accessibility within theoretical and social inquiry. On the other hand, it has opened the floodgates for the return of attitudes in line with the medical model of disability. Lurking within the celebration of accessibility as a progressive tool for material and socio-political emancipation is a discriminatory attitude based on the notion of disability typical of the medical model. It is a condition evident in a widely-adopted formula which touts the value of promoting accessibility: that one day anyone could be in need of access services because of health reasons or other unforeseen issues, at the very least because of ageing. This idea can help show how the category of disability can “illuminate
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the fluidity of all identity” (Garland-Thomson, 2002: 20), but it can also become an instrument at the service of ableist and ageist rhetoric (Cherney, 2011; Gibbons, 2016). It can foster the negation of identity and embodied experience and reinforce “the dominant tropes of disability” (Aubrecht et al., 2020: 4). Commonly presented under a positive light, that rhetorical formula hides a warning: promoting accessibility matters because one day anyone could become abnormal too. Secondly, the widespread adoption of several metaphors of accessibility such as “opening the door”, “building a bridge” and others along the same lines, has been reducing access to mere entrance. These metaphors can be found in a large number of documents, from technical reports to scholarly publications. The idea of access as entrance has also been transformed into a view of accessibility as a mere provision of services. Access is much more than entrance and accessibility is much more than provision. Having access means being able to use, interact with, engage and enjoy, just to name a few elements from its polysemic wealth (Greco, 2018). It is emblematic that, in the very first pages of his discussion on the dire consequences of restricting access to the seas, Grotius quotes Latona’s words when she is denied access to a village pond: “why do you deny me water? The enjoyment of water is a common right”.2 Having access to a museum does not end with crossing its entrance door nor in the mere provision of access services. Once inside the building, if people cannot act according to their wishes and needs or if the services do not afford the enjoyment of the museum’s experiences, the museum is still not accessible. It is, at most, partially accessible. If the goal is flying, then boarding a plane that does not fly is not the same as flying.

These are some of the factors that have been leading to the emergence of what can be called the accessibility stance (Greco, 2013). The question of accessibility has become somehow separated from the question of access. Accessibility has acquired a distinctive standing, emerging as a theoretical, social and political crucible on its own. This sort of conceptual independence achieved by accessibility is of major relevance. The question of accessibility draws attention to elements that could risk being minimised by the theoretical density of the question of access. It calls for an analytical examination of how accessibility is conceived and how access services are designed and deployed. It draws attention to issues of empowerment, control, knowledge, creativity, agency and interaction. However, as will be discussed in the following pages, the present accessibility stance is rather controversial. A deeper awareness and examination of the current standing reached by accessibility seems necessary. The mechanisms that led to the formation of the present accessibility stance may have been moved by positive intentions but have created questionable effects, as mentioned in the previous pages. A situation similar to what Marques (2020) points out discussing the general mechanism of meaning revisions: “people can be convinced of the goodness of a purpose while bringing out very bad outcomes” (p. 260). In its present state, the accessibility stance has remained largely unquestioned theoretically, epistemically and politically. A critical analysis is necessary in order to, for instance, unmask the extent to which the current accessibility stance is affected by the limitations of the social model of disability and, as such, expose the reduction of accessibility to the mere possibility of entrance governed by rules devised by those who control the entrance mechanisms. Under the present stance, the question of accessibility has often been reverted to an issue of the deficiency of some individuals caused by their deviance from a socially imposed idea of normality. There is an urgent need to devise a new accessibility stance. Before moving on to a discussion about some future paths, it is useful to unveil how some of the risks within the present accessibility stance have materialised in media accessibility and audio description.
5. Human rights: media accessibility and audio description

The negative effects of the current accessibility stance are evident if one looks at the human rights framework. Soon after the approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the claims “accessibility is a human right” and “accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities” started to appear. The oldest source of those claims seems to be David Onley’s speech at his inauguration as the 28th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (Onley, 2007). It was delivered on 5th September 2007, less than a year after the approval of the Convention. From then onwards, those claims started to make an appearance in social and political debates. They also started to appear, though scantily, in scholarly works in many areas, such as transportation, human-computer interaction, education, and tourism (Lewis et al., 2010; Gullickson, 2014; Gilovic & McIntosh, 2015; e.g., Crichton & Kinash, 2013). All those claims are made in contexts where (a) the object of discussion are persons with disabilities and (b) they refer implicitly or explicitly to the Convention as the source for their justification. Looking at their various instances, the two claims are advanced in such a way that one – “accessibility is a human right” – is often a shortened version of the other – “accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities”.

A few months after the approval of the treaty, the UN released a Handbook for Parliamentarians in order to assist in the comprehension of the mechanisms of the Convention. The document states that the Convention “does not recognise any new human rights of persons with disabilities, but rather, clarifies the obligations and legal duties of States to respect and ensure the equal enjoyment of all human rights by all persons with disabilities” (UN-DESA et al., 2007: 5). This is in line with the interpretations provided by the UN and other international bodies for human rights treaties that deal with other groups (Council of Europe, 2020). For instance, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination does not introduce new human rights based on people’s race. The clarification provided by the UN undermines those who claim that accessibility is a human right specific for persons with disabilities because it is included in a Convention devoted to persons with disabilities. It also undermines those who claim that accessibility is a human right for all because the term is mentioned in a human rights treaty. Despite this, the two claims have found their way into public and, more scantily, scholarly debate and produced a multi-layered conundrum. Greco (2016a) provides the first identification and analysis of the problem as well as its solution. It shows that, if one assumes the current basic tenets of human rights theory, those claims lead to either a contradiction or very controversial effects, including a reaffirmation of segregationist stances. However, the issue can be resolved by showing that access within the context of human rights is a necessary requirement and accessibility is a proactive principle for fulfilling the human rights of all human beings. For a full analysis of the problem and the solution, the reader can refer to the original text. A short summary of some of its points about the claim “accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities” will help show the controversial ways in which accessibility is often handled, not only within human rights. One of the basic tenets of human rights theory, probably the most basic one, is that human rights are rights possessed by all human beings because they are human, that is, because of their humanity. This means that if some right is a human right then all human beings possess it. However, if a right is possessed only by some human beings, it may be another type of right – for instance a civil right – but not a human right. Claiming that accessibility is a human right for persons with disabilities then leads to a contradiction with one of the premises of the argument. The only way to maintain those claims would be to radically revise the basic tenets of human rights theory, that is, the very tenets used as premises of the (faulty) argument. Therefore, at ethical, social
and political levels, the claim leads to a ghetto effect because it grounds the justification of some people possessing such a human right on their disability, not on their humanity.

This brief summary on accessibility within the human rights framework is a useful point of departure to discuss problems about the form taken by the present accessibility stance within media accessibility and audiovisual translation, including audio description. Whilst those two claims can be found in various fields, media accessibility and audiovisual translation are the areas in which they are the most common (Díaz-Cintas et al., 2007; e.g., Díaz-Cintas et al., 2010; Eardley-Weaver, 2015; Matamala & Orero, 2007; Matamala & Ortiz-Boix, 2016; Remael, 2012). One can even find the more specific claim that “media accessibility is a human right” (Luyckx et al., 2010: 1). In those publications, the claims are usually justified by referring to the aforementioned Convention and based on the flawed assumption that the Convention establishes accessibility as a human right, which, as said before, it does not. Similar statements can be found in a 2019 report on the status of audio description in Australia (Ellis et al., 2019). The report states that “audio description is a human right” (p. 71) and that “the UNCRPD recognises access to television as a human right in the same way access to appropriate health care is a human right” (p. 17). The document refers to Article 30 of the Convention to justify those claims. A quick look at Article 30 unveils the defective justification of the claims. The first section of Article 30 reads:

States Parties recognise the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities: a) enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats; b) enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats; c) enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

The right is to “to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life”. Television programmes, theatre, museums, libraries and the other elements mentioned in the article represent examples of contexts within which the right to cultural life can be instantiated. Claiming that audio description (or access to television) is a human right means confusing the means with the end. The report’s comparison between the right to “access to appropriate health care” and the right to “access to television” helps illuminate the fallacious reasoning. Claiming that audio description or access to television is a human right would be like claiming that some medical service, say a cardiologist, is a human right. The object of the right, quoting the formula used in the report, is “access to appropriate health care”. In order to see such a right being fulfilled, one person would need a cardiologist, another an ophthalmologist, a third, a paediatrician and so forth. The human right one possesses is to cultural life, not to audio description, in the same way the human right one has is to health services and not to a cardiologist. Audio description and the cardiologist are but instruments for fulfilling those human rights.

6. The present accessibility stance within media accessibility

Used to refer to so-called media access services, the label “media accessibility” predates its entrance into scholarly research, but became consolidated precisely through its adoption in academic circles. In the mid-2000s, researchers from translation studies began to use the label to refer to the area of audiovisual translation limited to “subtitling for the deaf and the hard of
hearing and audio description for the blind and the visually impaired” (e.g., Orero, 2004: viii). Other variations of this first version include services like audio subtitling and sign language interpreting. All explicitly reduce media accessibility to a few specific modalities defined in relation to persons with (sensorial) disabilities. In time a second account emerged, expanding this first one so as to include linguistic access and making “media accessibility” and “audio-visual translation” as two labels de facto referring to the same area (e.g., Díaz-Cintas, 2005). More recently, a third account has been advanced, which conceives media accessibility in universalist terms (Greco, 2016a).

A brief pause to reflect on the first account is useful because it has proved to be rather successful over the years and has made its way into a plethora of publications. An instance of such is that media accessibility is here understood as various tools providing access to audio-visual media content for people with sensorial disabilities: in the form of subtitles for those who are deaf or hard of hearing and in the form of audio description (AD) for those who are blind or partially sighted.

(Szarkowska et al., 2013: 151)

Such a way of framing media accessibility is in line with the medical model of disability (Greco, 2019c). The initial label “audio description for the blind and the visually impaired” acted as a device of disability branding, to borrow from DePoy and Gilson (2014). Nowadays this label is rather uncommon, and the sober “audio description” is more widespread. The variation does not signify a change in the conception of audio description, but rather, a simple shortening of the initial label. It becomes more patent by looking at how audio description has been and still is largely conceived, as exemplified by the following two statements: “audio description (AD) is an access media for blind and low vision viewers, which tries to mimic the viewing experience of the sighted consumer” (Sade et al., 2012: 270, emphasis added) and the goal [of AD] is to eliminate the barriers imposed by sensory impairment when enjoying an audio-visual product and to place the person with a visual impairment as close as possible to a normal viewer, having the same information and also enjoying the film in the same way.

(Sanz- Moreno, 2019, emphasis added)

This conception of audio description is not limited to scholarly research, as shown by a very recent case related to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The FCC is the agency responsible for implementing and enforcing communications law and regulations in the United States. In October 2020, the Audio Description Quality Working Group of the FCC Disability Advisory Committee released a Recommendation on audio description. The document’s appendix is entitled Resources and Guidance Regarding the Composition of Audio Description. In the document we read:

those [AD] choices seek to convey the intent of the programme’s creator with the goal of providing audiences with description that illustrates the visual elements of a story in a manner that provides a comparable experience to that of sighted viewers.

(Disability Advisory Committee, 2020: 3, emphasis added)
The limits of the current accessibility stance in media accessibility are evident in the terminology used: “mimic”, “as close as possible” and “comparable”. As Kleege (2016) notes, audio description usually appears in lists of necessary accommodations to promote the goal of social inclusion for people with disabilities, along with closed captioning, sign-language interpretation, architectural modifications and so forth. Scholars advocate audio description in specific situations, in public service announcements for emergency preparedness, for example. But for the most part, in this scholarship, as in the literature for producers, there is a kind of tacit acceptance that the foundational assumptions behind the practice are sound and unproblematic.

(p. 90)

The three quotations in the previous paragraph show that the foundational assumptions are far from being unproblematic. They embed an idea of audio description as an instrument of medicalisation aimed at fixing an individual branded as abnormal. Media accessibility has grown under the influence of the social model of disability as a series of practices aimed at fostering the inclusion of those discriminated against and excluded by and from society. Instead, due to the limitations of the present accessibility stance, media accessibility has often become a device of the medical model of disability. Almost 15 years ago, the journal _Linguistica Antverpiensia_ hosted a special issue entitled “A tool for social integration? Audio-visual translation from different angles”. As Remael and Neves (2007) specify in the introduction, they conceive audiovisual translation as a means to embrace media accessibility, including “audio description for the blind and visually impaired” (p. 20) and consider social integration “as the possibility to fully access the cultures of the country and the world one lives in” (p. 12). In the text, they raise the question: “audio-visual translation in its many guises could be a tool for emancipation and social integration, but is it?”. They then go on to recount how the call for papers was titled “Audio-visual Translation: a tool for social integration”, but “the reactions we received in response to our original call for papers . . . have led us to check our optimism, add a question mark to our original title” (p. 12). 15 years later, it is even more evident that, while commonly promoted as tools for social integration, media access services have often been instruments of social segregation. Once based on the current accessibility stance, media access services, including audio description, have been creating what DePoy and Gilson (2014) call a disability park: “designed to define, attract and contain the population segments of eligible persons branded as disabled” (p. 86). They use as an example subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, which they call “segregated captioning” (p. 164). Along similar lines, Kleege (2016) speaks of audio description as “a segregated accommodation” (p. 91).

7. What lies ahead: towards a new accessibility stance

Given the intricate picture drawn so far, it is evident that a new accessibility stance is needed. What are some of the paths to explore in order to change the present accessibility stance within media accessibility? How can audio description contribute to this endeavour?

If access is such a compelling part of our lives, as Titchkosky (2011) highlights, then the matter becomes whether a broader framework is possible; a framework able to embrace the different views on access and accessibility, without dissolving them into a unified position. A framework where a polyphonic inquiry can flourish. A framework where agents, fields, contexts, meanings and methods invested in and by access and accessibility can be uncovered,
contested, entangled and disentangled so as to interact fruitfully. This point has already been extensively addressed elsewhere, in discussing the value of an area of studies focused on access and accessibility (e.g., Greco, 2013, 2018). As observed by Braun and Starr (2020), “the translation studies lens has largely remained the dominant paradigm for research into AD” (p. 3). Moving beyond translation and approaching audio description through the distinctive lens of access and accessibility, the possibility for a dialogue with other disciplines and approaches can emerge and flourish. In turn, audio description can even contribute to further enrich translation studies, consolidating the ground where access, accessibility and translation can fruitfully interact (Greco, 2019a, 2021a).

Looking beyond the translation paradigm would also offer new opportunities in terms of how accessibility is debated in other areas. Once more, audio description provides a suitable example. In the last few years, scholars in audiovisual translation and media accessibility have started to talk about “participatory accessibility” and “participatory audio description” (e.g., Di Giovanni, 2018). However, those proposals and labels are already well-known and extensively explored in disability studies (e.g., Kleege, 2016, 2017; Kleege & Wallin, 2015). In fact, ideas such as “participatory audio description”, “participatory accessibility”, “participatory access” can be traced back at least to a workshop entitled “Participatory Description: The Next Frontier in Accessibility?” held in 2011 at the 24th Annual Conference of the Society for Disability Studies. Unfortunately, in research and practice on audio description carried out within the translation paradigm there is almost no trace of the work and the experiences that emerged from that workshop.

Finally, if “accessibility requires changes to ways of thinking and acting in society” (Moreno, 2014) then education and training become decisive terrain. Accessibility demands skilled experts; therefore, it has gradually entered many education and training courses and has now become a standard subject in education programmes. In many fields, there is a lively debate about how to include accessibility within their specific curricula, with dozens of pilot projects being tested and evaluated. Themes of how to integrate knowledge from other fields, perspectives other than translation and how to provide students with the critical tools to uncover their own biases are flourishing. Audio description is a very fertile ground for furthering the debate, as teaching and learning have been major issues in audio description for a long time. Research and practice could be new avenues, for instance, in involving persons with disabilities in the very design of teaching material as well as in teaching itself.

Those mentioned previously are only a few points within the many paths that can be explored to revise the current accessibility stance. Media accessibility is much in need of such a new accessibility stance able to overcome the limitations and discriminatory traits of the current one. Ultimately, audio description is a privileged ground in this process. It offers numerous opportunities for a collective effort that could expose the complexities of accessibility, further enriching its theoretical and social baggage. In the process, it will also enrich translation studies.

8. **Further reading**


9. Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 A recollection of the origins of the Global Accessibility Awareness Day and data about the 2021 edition can be found at https://globalaccessibilityawarenessday.org
3 See for example Canadian Parks Service (1993) and Moore and Panara (1996).

10. References


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