

Benecke Bernd. (2014) *Audiodeskription als partielle Translation. Modell und Methode* [Translatorische Forschungsbeiträge 4]. Münster: LIT Verlag. vi + 197 pp.

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This book presents a user-centered model and method for audio description. Audio description is a communicative aid that translates images and other visual elements using language and speech. It is aimed at enhancing the participation of blind and partially sighted persons in visual and audiovisual culture and communication. Translation Studies in the 21st century has actively engaged with audio description, studying it from various perspectives. One focus has been the reception of audio description, and various studies have set out to answer questions such as what visually impaired audiences expect from audio description (cf. Chmiel and Mazur 2012). The present book by Bernd Benecke also focuses on the audience, but places them at the very center of the process of creating audio description. The book advocates that by involving the user in the translation process, the resulting translation is more enjoyable and understandable for the target audience. To this end, the book explains how audio description can (and should!) take into account the ‘blind experience,’ which builds on the auditory reception of an audiovisual text. If, for instance, an action in a film can be deduced from the soundtrack (e.g., a phone ringing or a door closing), it does not need a verbalization in the audio description. Accordingly, Benecke’s book defines audio description as partial translation (*partielle Translation*), since the translation actually occurs in one part of the material (visuals into verbal) while another part remains untouched (the soundtrack). The two words in the book’s title, *Modell* and *Methode*, boil down its double contribution to good effect: the book presents a comprehensive theoretical model for audio description and describes a step-by-step method for putting the model into practice.

The book is based on the author’s doctoral dissertation. Bernd Benecke is one of the European pioneers in audio description, with long experience in writing, editing, and performing audio description, as well as teaching it in various contexts. The method presented in his book has roots in the practical work that the author and his colleagues have been carrying out since the 1990s at Bavarian Broadcasting in Germany (cf. Dosch and Benecke 2004).

Being a publication of a doctoral dissertation, the contents of the book follow the typical structure of a scientific monograph. After a short introduction, the research problem is cast in the first section. It is proclaimed that the purpose of audio description is “to enable the blind spectator to perceive and experience a film scene like a seeing spectator” (5; my translation from German), and that this can be accomplished by following a systematic procedure which answers the questions of What, Why / To What End, How, and When to describe (8). In particular, the question of Why helps the translator / audio describer to resolve what kind of effect or experience should be evoked in the audience. The second section introduces the practical context of audio description: this includes information on the historical development of audio description in Europe and the United States, a brief overview of different audio description processes, and a discussion of audio description guidelines. The third section describes relevant previous research, and the fourth section explains the theoretical framework for the work. The major part of the book (43–140) is dedicated to elaborating the model and method (section 5) and applying them in a practical case of film audio description (section 6). The work concludes with a summary and an afterword. References are listed at the end of the book, and the entire audio description script created in the case study is attached. Instead of summarizing the contents of all of the sections, in the following I shall review some key points of Benecke’s model and method, discussing their scientific and practical significance. In addition, I pay attention to the form in which the book is written and evaluate it as a reading experience.

The theoretical framework of Benecke’s model originates in the translation methodology developed by Heidrun Gerzymisch-Arbogast and Klaus Mudersbach (1998) (for an English description of the methodology, see Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2005). From this perspective, a text is considered to be any expression that is intended to be translated (33). Thus, non-verbal texts can also be translated, as is the case with audio description, and instead of ‘source text’ we can talk about ‘source material’ (*Ausgangsmaterial*). Another focal aspect is the systematization of the act of translation and its phases of understanding, transfer, and re-production. This is realized by approaching the source material from various perspectives which uncover the elements that are essential for understanding the material and, thus, for re-producing them in translation. These ‘perspectives on text’ are divided into three: the holistic, the atomic, and the hol-atomic perspective. The holistic perspective (33–34) means identifying the general idea that the material represents, be it cultural phenomena or the representation of particular values. By combining this general theme with his or her own background knowledge, the translator, or audio describer, constitutes systems of knowledge that are needed in understanding this particular source material. An example of this can be found in the case study (88), as Benecke holistically analyses the film to be audio described: the

film, *The Lives of Others* (dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006), thematizes Socialist Germany and the theater as particular cultural spheres. By contrast, in the atomistic perspective (34–35), the translator’s eye is on the details. At this stage, the peculiarities of the source material are considered and assessed, such as individual film scenes and their temporal constraints for audio description (91). Finally, the hol-atomistic perspective (35–36) combines the general and detailed approaches and reveals how the theme is concretized in the material. In the case of audio description, these materializations can be visual (e.g., objects that are typical of the Socialist era) and auditory (e.g., the ‘Officialese’ of the DDR).

Benecke models audio description as communication which involves various participant roles (sender, receiver) and modes of communication (visual, auditory, verbal-written, and verbal-oral). His “ADEM” model (*Audiodeskriptions-Entwicklungsmodell*) illustrates the kinds of communication that exist between different participants and how these modes should be handled in audio description (47). For instance, while a film has a sender (i.e., the author or *auteur*, typically the director) and a receiver (audience), these roles become multiplied in audio description and translation: the translator also becomes a sender, and audio description involves the describer(s) and the speaker or the voice talent who performs the audio description in speech. The receiver is specified as the blind and visually impaired audience. Whereas the film’s author communicates to the audience using images and sounds, the film describer communicates to the target audience using language, and the speaker or performer of audio description communicates via speech. Benecke emphasizes the need to analyze the audience, and from this results the profile of the intended audience which in turn determines strategic choices in audio description: different source materials have different audiences (e.g., a children’s program versus a film adaptation of a work of literature) and thus result in different expectations of background knowledge (60).

After explaining his model, Benecke sheds more concrete light on the audio description process by demonstrating the application of the ADEM to a practical audio description task. From page 58 to 135, the book takes its readers by the hand and instructs them on how to prepare an audio description script for a film. The instructions are detailed and explained in a step-by-step manner. The reader is often directly addressed with the imperative form: for instance, “Check whether information from previous scenes is important to understanding [the present scene]” (102; my translation from German). The book also includes numerous diagrams and tables which all support the reading by summarizing important content and showing concrete procedures in the translation process. For example, ways in which problems in the description of characters and locations can be solved are illustrated on p. 82. At the same time, however, the compressed style of writing and the abundant use of theoretical concepts and acronyms render the text somewhat

heavy to read and grasp, or at least it requires substantial cognitive work from the reader to memorize or check the theory repeatedly.

Besides extensive theoretical understanding, the ADEM requires its users to be familiar with film analysis in its various approaches. This means that audio describers, in dealing with the source material in the holistic, hol-atomistic, and atomistic perspectives, must take into account different social, structural and narrative aspects of cinema (or other media they are describing). They must, for instance, be capable of deconstructing the soundtrack of the film (e.g., defining the length of dialogue pauses) and understanding the thematic progression of a story and its components (e.g., in what ways the characters develop and how these developments become concretized in the plot over time). Moreover, Benecke's ADEM, which is based on Karl Bühler's Organon model from 1934, can be seen as slightly outdated, at least in the light of current understandings of cinema and audiovisual communication. Among the problems with the model are that communication is seen as unidirectional (from author to audience), which places the receiver in a passive role, and also that it regards the (one) author as the original sender. More recent theories of cinema, for instance, consider the audiovisual communication more as an interaction between the filmic discourse and the audience or spectators, who actively engage in making their own meanings of the film (see, e.g., Bordwell 1985). In the light of such approaches, it is questionable whether a film can be said to have a/one author, let alone an intention. In fact, it is questionable whether we need to even take into consideration the original author's intention if our aim is to re-evoked the receiver's experience, which can also be produced unintentionally. According to Benecke himself, the central task of the describers, in terms of re-producing the original experience, is to analyze one's own experience during reception.

As it happens, Benecke postulates a twofold purpose for audio description: not only does it verbalize visually represented *information*, but it also produces a similar *experience* for the visually impaired spectator to the one which the source material provides for the sighted viewer (39). This purpose is defined as a "(re) experienced impression" (*erlebter Eindruck*) of the source material, which is based on the conception that what should be verbalized in audio description is the material that produces a certain effect in the perceiver, not the effect itself (44). I have elaborated a similar idea of two contrasting strategies in audio description (Hirvonen 2013).

All in all, the book places the translation users – the blind audience – in an active role. In this respect, the method presented in the book connects with contemporary Translation Studies, in particular with the model of *user-centered translation* developed by Tytti Suojanen, Kaisa Koskinen, and Tiina Tuominen (2014). In Benecke's method, the user constitutes part of the "inner circle" of translating

and revising as s/he forms part of the team which prepares the translation (cf. Suojanen, Koskinen, and Tuominen 2014, 4). The blind team member brings in her/his user experience in terms of both using a non-audio described film and an audio described version of it. This experience includes, among other things, the auditory perception of the film on the basis of its soundtrack and the user's preferences for the elements that should be verbalized and how (25). The user's role is also important in defining how the script will be performed in the spoken form (e.g., what kind of intonation and pace are desirable). Engaging the user is thus beneficial in many ways: not only will the product be more functional and cognitively appropriate (effortless, easy-to-use, etc.), it also fulfills aesthetic aspirations, and perceptual and emotional aspects (*ibid.*), just as Benecke's method proves.

To conclude, the main contributions of the book are the detailed way in which the process of audio description is systematized and the user-centered approach to audio description. Given the high applicability of the method to practice – as a handbook to audio describers – I would be delighted to see a second edition, preferably in English and with less scientific jargon. While Benecke's book adds to other current works of audio description guidelines (ADLAB n.d.), it is unique in providing a holistic model and a comprehensive method for audio descriptive translation.

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