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Extended abstract:

Research in media accessibility has been gaining momentum over the past years, so much so that the techniques and practices which revolve around it have been regularly expanding. For the blind, the now mature study of audio description has been joined by interest in audio commentaries for cultural spaces and events, audio-subtitling for different contexts and purposes, web navigation through text-to-speech technologies, audio introductions for cinemas and phone applications, and so on. Amongst these, audio introduction (AI) has recently gained the attention of a few scholars, although the activity itself has been practiced for a number of years, especially in countries like the United Kingdom. An audio introduction is a commentary which is normally provided through a portable device and made available before a film or a performance begins. Its aim is to supply the audience with all the necessary information to fully understand what they are going to enjoy (if not see). The very nature of the AI makes it enjoyable and useful for the blind and the non-blind: it works as a guided introduction to whatever audiovisual experience the audience is about to have. The main problem rests with the amount and type of information to be provided through the AI: decisions as to what has to be included in the AD have to be taken bearing in mind the time and text type constraints, but also the audience needs. To date, research has tended to focus on the process of creation of audio introductions rather than their reception. This paper seeks to address this issue by reflecting upon the results of a reception study carried out in Italy. The project is modelled on a pioneer experiment designed and carried out by Prof. Pablo Romero Fresco and Dr. Louise Fryer in the United Kingdom. Therefore, besides presenting the results of the Italian experiment, we shall also draw a comparison with those obtained by the study carried out in the United Kingdom. The audiovisual text employed for this project is “Slumdog Millionaire”, a 2008, award-winning film which was audio described in the UK for home video distribution. For the purpose of this research project, an audio introduction was drafted by Fryer and Romero- Fresco. Both texts were translated into Italian and presented to a group of blind individuals, who were then administered two questionnaires. The overall aim of the (English and Italian) project is to determine how, and to what extent, audio introductions enhance the enjoyment of an audiovisual experience, especially if complementing and interacting with an audio description. The discussion

will revolve around the main topics of the study, i.e. the information provided in the audio introduction about the visual style of the film, the plot, the descriptions of the characters and the locations, the camerawork and the production. The amount of information given to viewers will be also discussed in the light of the results of our study and in relation to those gathered by Fryer and Romero-Fresco.