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when the patient forgot the technique. Therefore, we reviewed correct sighted guide techniques with her son. He had been guiding the patient from her right side. Although this arrangement placed her left eye (which she reported had “much” better vision) on her unprotected side, her left hemianopia had to be considered. If the patient’s son guided her from her left side, it would place her remaining field on her unprotected side, but she reported that the quality of that remaining field was quite poor in her right eye. It was, therefore, not clear from which side her son should operate. I instructed him to guide the patient from whichever side she reported had the worse field of vision when moving, acknowledging that these preferences might not always be consistent, since she reported that simply walking changed her vision drastically. Given my difficulty with making a definitive recommendation, however, it was doubtful that the distinction would be tremendously significant. In keeping with a primary goal of the low vision exam, I explained this situation to her son thoroughly.

I demonstrated various light-colored lenses and page filters indoors, but none improved subjective vision by reducing visual clutter or decreasing glare. I always demonstrate colors across the spectrum, since there is no correlation between a disease process and the specific wavelengths that may produce bothersome glare. Outdoors in bright sunshine, medium plum sun-wear with side-shields reduced glare and improved comfort.

Providing a better understanding of the idiosyncratic nature of the patient’s vision loss to her son was a primary goal of the low vision exam. The success of that goal was dependent on the patient’s son, specifically on his attention and level of concern. The goal’s subjective nature did not make it less important. The case manager later reported that our discussion did help the patient’s son better manage both his mother’s and his own expectations, and that it was immeasurably benefi-

cial to her vision rehabilitation, because he no longer ascribed her odd visual symptoms to other stroke-related cognitive issues.

## CONCLUSION

I hope to inspire a discussion about the importance of nonmeasurable goals in vision rehabilitation and low vision care. Any such discussion should begin by simply acknowledging that such goals exist, at least on the part of the patient or any professional attempting to pull together the pieces of the patient’s life that have been fragmented through vision loss.

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*Gregg Baldwin, O.D., optometrist and low vision examiner, The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, 397 Azalea Avenue, Richmond, VA 23227; e-mail: gbaldwinod@gmail.com.*

## Creative Description: Audio Describing Artistic Films for Individuals with Visual Impairments

*Agnieszka Walczak*

Audio description is a service aimed at widening accessibility to visual media such as film and television for all individuals, especially for people with sensory disabilities. It offers people who are blind or have low

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vision “a verbal screen onto the world” (Díaz Cintas, Orero, & Remael, 2007, p. 13). The oft-quoted golden rule when preparing audio description for film is, “What you see is what you say” (Snyder, 2008, 2014). It is required that the text be “as objective as possible”; subjective or qualitative judgments are deemed “unnecessary” or “unwanted” (Rai, Greening, & Leen, 2010, p. 76). Employing technical terms in an audio description script, such as camera angles, “is discouraged and should only be used very sparingly” (Rai et al., 2010, p. 8). However, literal and supposedly “objective” descriptions may not present blind and visually impaired users with an “experience that is equal or equivalent to that of sighted persons” (Udo & Fels, 2009, p. 179).

In order to give the audience a more engaging and entertaining experience, in this report I propose a new type of audio description for describing artistic films: creative description. By including emotive vocabulary and film terminology in the audio description script, “the feel of the scene” (Udo & Fels, 2009, p. 181) can be better recreated, and can thus increase people’s immersion in the film.

### CREATIVE DESCRIPTION

Creative descriptions have already been employed in a wide variety of media genres, including television (TV) programs (Fels, Udo, Ting, Diamond, & Diamond, 2006a), films (Matamala & Remael, 2015), theatrical plays (Udo, Acevedo, & Fels, 2010), and fashion shows (Udo & Fels, 2010). Studies have shown that participants are in favor of the unconventional solutions proposed by the describers, be it a first-person audio description narrative (Fels, Udo, Diamond, & Diamond, 2006b), audio description with elements of film language (Fryer & Freeman, 2012), or audio description based on a screenplay (Szarkowska & Wasylczyk, 2014). Many individuals have expressed a preference for creative descriptions, claiming that “juicy and vivid descriptions” were more entertaining

for them and enabled them to gain “a better understanding of the motivations of the characters” (Szarkowska, 2013, p. 386).

This report examines a creative description prepared for an artistic drama, *The Mighty Angel* (2014), a Polish-language production from the acclaimed Polish director Wojciech Smarzowski. The film is said to be “a powerful and skillfully crafted tale of alcoholism,” that portrays “the Polish reality with grim, gritty, social-realism” (Larsen, 2014, p. 1). Smarzowski does not spare the viewer nauseating images. According to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb, 2015, p. 3), “you get to see all the puke, soiled underwear, bar fights and pissing in the street of real alcoholics” (IMDb, 2015). Such graphic images should not be inaccessible to visually impaired audiences.

What follows is a presentation of the creative description for *The Mighty Angel*, which was written by the author of this report after discussion with a visually impaired audio description consultant. In order to prepare immersive audio description that would sound credible to the audience, the elements of the original screenplay written by Smarzowski were incorporated in the script. It was not copied, but served as a point of reference. The challenges encountered in the process were grouped under two categories: the language of the film and the language of the audio description. For the purposes of this report, examples of the creative description have been translated from Polish into English.

### THE LANGUAGE OF THE FILM

In what follows, I provide a brief analysis of film techniques employed in the film, along with examples illustrating how they were handled in the creative description.

The first example deals with a sequence of shots used by the director to emphasize how repetitive the life of an addict may become. His actions are similar, if not the same—the only element that changes is the setting. This

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emphasis was marked in the script by the phrases “a series of shots” or “cut-in shots” inserted before the actual description of a scene:

1. A series of shots. Jerzy drinks successive shots of vodka. Only the background changes: the flat . . . the hospital . . . day . . . night . . .
2. Cut-in shots from hospital life: epileptic seizures . . . therapy sessions . . . canteen . . . breathalyzer . . .

The second example is a closed-circuit video feed, a special camera technique that allows the audience to see the patients from a detox center while they are receiving their treatment. It was directly stated in the creative description:

View from a closed-caption television camera. A hospital room. Jerzy is tranquilized. He is lying on his bed, tightly strapped down with belts.

Other techniques frequently used in the film were meant to highlight the internal dilemma of the main character (“a crane shot”) or to portray the world from his “drunken” perspective (“the camera is spinning around Jerzy’s head”). In one scene, in order to intensify the visual effect and show an addict’s craving for alcohol, the camera simulated an intake of liquor. It was rendered in the creative description as follows:

Jerzy empties the glass of vodka. The camera, together with the liquor, enters his mouth, passes by his teeth, enters the abdominal cavity, and goes into the intestine. Inside there are bottles, cans, condoms, pieces of rubbish, leftovers of food, and cockroaches. Finally, light appears. The camera goes out through Jerzy’s ear and goes high into the air. Jerzy is

lying on the bed, naked, in the fetal position. He’s trembling.

By incorporating the elements of camerawork into the script, the visual style of the film is translated into words for the audience. Although this practice is rather uncommon for conventionally written audio descriptions, it has already been shown that visually impaired audiences respond positively to the use of cinematic terminology in audio description (Fryer & Freeman, 2012).

#### THE LANGUAGE OF THE AUDIO DESCRIPTION

The language used in the dialogues throughout the film is particularly strong and informal, with numerous profane words. What Smarzowski presents to his viewers is a brutally realistic portrayal of alcoholism, often depicted in graphic, unflinching detail. In order to keep to the visual image, vivid, emotional, and blunt expressions are incorporated into the creative description and are used to describe the characters, their actions, and the scenes that are crucial to the plot.

Although a conventionally written script would use neutral descriptions of characters, such as “drunk,” “drunkard,” or “a bit drunk,” the creative description prefers more colloquial language: “tipsy,” “shitfaced,” “wasted,” or “hammered.” Such an intensified vocabulary also added a touch of realism to the actions of the characters: “Jerzy barfs on the floor” or “Jerzy pisses into the closet.” Moreover, the creative description went for an explicit rendering of the scenes:

1. Joanna wakes up smeared in shit, piss, and vomit. She can’t connect.
2. The room is a pigsty. Jerzy is lying on the bed like a wheezing sack, drunk and covered in puke.

This powerful verbal style intensified the visual effect of the scenes and added color

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to the characters and their actions. It presented the audience with the stark and harrowing world of alcoholism, giving them a fuller picture of what was happening on the screen.

### USERS' REACTIONS

The film with creative description was shown to visually impaired users during an informal screening on the premises of the Vega Foundation for the Blind and Visually Impaired in Kielce, Poland. The screening was part of an event called "Days of Accessible Culture," organized by the foundation in 2015. Thirty-six people took part, 15 men and 21 women, aged 21–69 years. All of the participants were officially registered as blind or visually impaired. They were informed that the film would be shown with audio description, but no details as to the "creative" nature of the audio description were provided beforehand (for detailed comparative results on creative description and standard audio description, see Walczak & Fryer, 2016).

In the semistructured interviews carried out after the screening, many people expressed favorable opinions of the creative description. Most felt that the information about camera-work was needed and did not find it too technical. Many people noted that the language of the audio description was informal, even vulgar at times, but perfectly intelligible and suitable for this type of film. A woman with low vision said, "The indecent language of the audio description conveyed the meaning of the scenes, making the whole viewing experience more credible." A man with low vision added, "This juicy audio description was excellent! The language created the right atmosphere and made the story real." All agreed that the creative description was "blunt, but at the same time more vivid than the audio description they are used to"; it allowed for "better visualization of the scenes" and simply "fitted the film." Creative description was new to all the participants.

One of them even commented, "I have not listened to such an audio description before, but if somebody decides to watch this film, this is the type of audio description he should expect." Although the men liked the creative description better than did the women, overall a majority of the participants (72%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to have creative descriptions for such artistic films.

### CONCLUSIONS

This report has discussed a new approach to describing artistic films called creative description. Its aim is to create an engaging audio description by adding vocabulary from the film and unsavory descriptions of the main elements—characters, actions, and scenes—to the script for audio description. Such audio description is intended to allow the audience to appreciate the film's inherent cinematic style and fully immerse themselves in the story. Judging by the comments we received, participants were enthusiastic about the creative description, since it made their film-going experience authentic and, above all, captivating. Their reactions confirmed that not only visually colorful films, but also dark and realistic cinema, which is shocking rather than diverting, lend themselves to creative description.

Audio description standards (Remael, Reivers, & Vercauteren, 2014; U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2010) note that the describer should not subjectively interpret the images, but should instead be like "the faithful lens of a camera" (Udo & Fels, 2009, p. 179). However, this rule does not seem to be applicable to artistic films. In the case presented above, creative description added flavor to the story, made it more realistic, and thus, presumably, more congruent with the director's artistic vision. Therefore, creative description is advocated by the author as an alternative way of describing films belonging to artistic cinema genres.

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*Agnieszka Walczak, Ph.D.*, researcher, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Edifici MRA 126 - Campus UAB, 08193 Bellaterra, Barcelona, Spain; e-mail: [agnieszka.walczak@uab.cat](mailto:agnieszka.walczak@uab.cat)