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## Audio description as a type of intersemiotic translation

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**Abstract.** With the adoption of a law obliging film producers to supply films receiving state support with audio description, the issue of training specialists in this field arose. However, the existing terminological barrier between the Russian and international practice of audio description (typho commentary) in many ways complicates the exchange of experience between specialists. The article briefly discusses the stages of the development of audio description and the terms that were used to denote the process of verbal description of audiovisual works. The analysis of audio description as a type of intersemiotic translation is given. The evolution of the Russian term “typho commentary” and its convergence with international analogues is shown.

**Keywords:** audio description, intersemiotic translation, interpretation, translation, tiflo commentary

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### Introduction

With the adoption of Law on state support of cinematography national films that receive state support for production or distribution are subject to mandatory subtitling and audio description. In this regard, the issue of training specialists in this field is acute. At the same time, there is a discrepancy between international terminology in this area, which does not allow specialists to get acquainted with world experience. In foreign literature, the process of verbal description is called “audio description”, “video with a description” (described video) or simply “description”. The term “tiflo commentary” is adopted, which, according to its inventor, means “a concise description of an object, space or action that is incomprehensible to the blind (visually impaired) without special verbal explanations”. This word is derived from the Greek typhlos — “blind” and Latin commentarius — “notes, interpretation”.

Translation, in the broadest sense of the word, means the ability to interpret the signs of one semiotic system with the signs of another.

“Translation always involves the operation of certain sign systems, i.e. it has a sign, semiotic essence”. Thus, we can talk not just about the usual translation from one natural language to another, but also about the translation from a verbal language to a non-verbal one and vice versa. For the first time, the problem of translation was raised in such a broad, family-wide, plan by R.O. Jacobson.

R. Jacobson distinguished three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it can be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into a different, non-verbal symbol system. Accordingly, we can talk about three types of translation:

1. Intra-language translation or renaming – interpretation of verbal signs using other signs of the same language.
2. Interlanguage translation, or translation itself – interpretation of verbal signs by means of any other language;
3. Intersemiotic translation, or transmutation – interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems [1].

### **Literature review**

These ideas of Jakobson formed the basis for the definition of translation given by O.S. Akhmanova in 1966 in the Dictionary of Linguistic Terms, where intersemiotic translation is interpreted as follows: “Intersemiotic translation is the transmission of a given content not by means of the same or other natural (verbal) means by means of any non-verbal semiotic system, such as choreography, music, cinema, etc., on the one hand, and information-logical languages – on the other”.

Intersemiotic translation, or transmutation, is the interpretation of verbal signs through nonverbal sign systems, and audio description, in turn, includes a verbal interpretation of visual elements – i.e., it is the interpretation of signs that is the opposite of what Jakobson wrote about. However, it is obvious that this classification requires revision, since it needs to include new information-audio-visual, as in our case.

In modern conditions, taking into account the development of audiovisual translation (AVP) and, in particular, audio description (AD), it should be added that the creation of an audio description should also be attributed to “intersiometric translation”.

### **Materials and methods**

Currently, the audio description is considered mainly as one of the forms of audiovisual translation. In the academic tradition, audiovisual translation is reduced to for movie / video translation. This is due to the name of Yu.M. Lotman, who spoke about film translation back in 1973 and in a series of lectures by Yu. Tynyanova for students of the State Institute of Cinematography in 1978.

Audiovisual translation is a special type of translation activity that cannot be attributed to either oral or written translation. This is a separate type of translation. One of the objects of audio-visual translation is a film text, which is fundamentally different from a literary text. When creating a movie text, not one, but several authors are involved. The translator must convey the point of view of this collective author [2].

Researchers from different countries have noted that “... audiovisual texts are polysemantic. Recipients of audiovisual materials are both viewers, listeners, and readers. They process information at several decoding levels at once. The activity of perceiving an audiovisual work is most often carried out in a semi-automatic mode of continuous semantic synthesis.” [3].

The audio-visual translator (as well as the viewer) processes, analyzes and re-synthesizes data received simultaneously via 4 channels that are equally significant and compete within the cognitive process:

- non-verbal visual flow (image series, frames);
- non-verbal sound series (noise and music accompaniment that significantly affects the emotional perception of the viewer);
- verbal sound sequence (dialogues, voiceover – what text-centricists are trying to reduce audio-visual translation to);
- verbal visual flow (subtitles, meaningful captions in the frame).

Summarizing the above, an audiovisual translator should be able to recreate a work in their native language without losing its meaning, as well as the dynamic equivalence of the work.

Within the framework of audiovisual translation, the following terms appear: Film language is a means of expressing a certain artistic reality, creating an emotionally and ideologically rich author’s space-time unity.

Also, the objects of pre-translation analysis and components of audiovisual discourse are:

A frame is a minimal object of pre-translation analysis.

Movie event – i.e. a scene. Cinema discourse – i.e. the film as a whole.

The frame, scene, and film are analyzed as polysemantic integral contexts. And the verbal component may or may not be present in them, but without understanding their structure as integral units, the translation of the verbal component is impossible.

A movie event is polysemiotic, i.e. elements of different sign systems are used to create it. It follows that in a film event, nonverbal units carry a much greater load than verbal ones, and their ratio directly depends on the genre of the film event (feature, documentary, thriller, or fantasy).

In modern society, the audiovisual principle of obtaining information should be considered a priority, especially if we mean people with special cognitive needs. S.N. Vanshin writes that “with the onset of blindness, a person loses 70-90% of information from the surrounding world”. “Vision loss becomes a tangible information barrier for visually impaired people when they visit museums and exhibition halls, theaters and cinemas, sports and other cultural events, and does not allow them to fully perceive the beauty of works of art, architecture, literature, and what is cultural and historical heritage.”

### Results and Discussion

The audiovisual principle of obtaining information is the basis for obtaining education. Modern research has shown that only combining audio and visual teaching methods contributes to the rapid perception of information, its memorization and reproduction. Audiovisual practices are also used for entertainment purposes. All this means that people who have certain problems on the audiovisual spectrum (the audience of the blind and visually impaired) are at an increased risk of being excluded from the socio - cultural context.

According to Jorge Diaz-Cintas, media accessibility is a form of audiovisual translation, or vice versa-audiovisual translation can be considered as a form of accessibility of information, since the goal of the translator in both cases is to facilitate access to the source of information [4]. Thus, we come to the idea that the audio description refers directly to the audiovisual translation. There are several ways to explain the term “audio description”. Here are some of them:

1. Audio description - an audio recording of a description of an object, space, or action. As noted by one of the largest experts in this field, J.R.R. Tolkien. According to J. Snyder, this description is used not only by people with visual impairments, but also by those who prefer to perceive information by ear.

2. Audio description – a verbal description of significant visual components of a work of art or audiovisual works in such a way that a blind or visually impaired person can fully understand the form and content of the submitted work.

3. Audio description – an auxiliary service that has a set of special equipment, the purpose of which is to compensate for insufficient perception when viewing any audiovisual work by providing the necessary information in the audio version. This can be a translation or explanation written in such a way that a blind or visually impaired person can perceive the work in harmony as a sighted person does.

Translation and its types Although, according to the dictionary definition, translation is basically “the transmission of information contained in a given work of speech by means of another language”, linguists distinguish several of its varieties. The outstanding Soviet (and later American) linguist Roman Osipovich Jakobson proposed the following classification: “We distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it can be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into a different, non-verbal symbol system. These three types of translation can be given the following names:

1) Intra-language translation or renaming – interpretation of verbal signs using other signs of the same language.

2) Interlanguage translation, or translation proper, is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.

3) Intersemiotic translation, or transmutation, is the interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems."

Recently, the definition of the third type of translation (intersemiotic or intersemiotic) has expanded somewhat and it is understood not only as the translation of verbal signs into nonverbal ones, but also as the reverse process. It is the intersemiotic type of translation that also includes audio description, and some authors believe that an audio descriptor (tiflokommenter) can better cope with the task if it takes this fact into account in its work.

Audio description as a type of intersemiotic translation According to the definition given by Pujol, referring to the work of R. Jakobson, audio description is "a form of narration based on the principles of intersemiotic translation with phatic and poetic elements", since, firstly, audio description performs "the function of maintaining contact (phatic function, instilling the blind viewer is sure that he does not miss anything important)", and also "expresses the beauty of the image in words (a poetic function that allows words to compensate for the aesthetic pleasure of contemplating the image)". An audiovisual work is a polysemiotic product consisting of both visual and audio elements. When compiling an audio description, all this diversity must be translated into a monosemiotic text. Thus, the number of semiotic systems in the "source language" and "translation language" differs significantly, which allows some authors to call the audio description "hyposemiotic translation". In addition, audio description does not allow us to translate with absolute accuracy from the "source language" (images) to the "translation language" (words), so some experts also call it the term "inspirational translation". The exact equivalent of this term does not yet exist: it can be conditionally called "translation under inspiration", in which the translation result conveys the original "in a somewhat free form and less predictably than in a normal translation". Thus, an audio description is a type of translation for a special category of viewers (target audience – people with visual impairments, the blind and visually impaired - with a special purpose-to convey the content of an audiovisual work that would otherwise be inaccessible to this category of viewers [5]. Like any translation, the audio description should be as clear as possible for the target audience. At the same time, as a kind of audiovisual translation, audio transcription should follow the "theory of Skopos". If the audio descriptor describes absolutely everything that it sees without highlighting the main thing, then the description will turn out to be accurate (since it describes all the elements), but incomprehensible and unacceptable from the point of view of the end user. Too detailed description "blurs" the scene and confuses the audience [6]. At the same time, too brief description can lead to the same result. Therefore, the audio descriptor should focus on the significance of the information, helping the viewer to follow the plot. It should also be taken into account that if the film was originally shot in another country, the audio descriptor serves as an "intermediary" not only between visual images and people who do not see them, but also between the two cultures. From a practical point of view, the audio descriptor should know "what information needs to be added, changed, or removed during the translation process". However, the fundamental difference between the concept of tiflo commentary and audio description is that its author does not consider tiflo commentary to be a type of translation. In this regard, some experts enter into a scientific controversy with Russian tiflo commentators. For example, M. Motsazh, referring to the classification of R. Jakobson, writes: "In the framework of intersemiotic translation, an audio descriptive translation is considered, in which the narrator-audio descriptor describes in words what the viewer sees on the screen. Thus, the audio description becomes a visual-verbal translation. Therefore, it is considered appropriate to also use the term "typhloper translation", or audio-descriptive film translation. In addition, the term "tiflo comments" itself causes complaints. First, one of the main principles of audio description is an unbiased verbal description without personal interpretations and explanations. At the same time, the word "commentary" contains an element of interpretation, often critical observations". Secondly, according to recent data, more and more people without visual disabilities prefer to watch movies with audio descriptions. Thus, a verbal description prepared for this audience can hardly be called a "tiflo comment" (after all, the Greek root "tiflo - " means "blind").

## Conclusion

Thus, we observe a discrepancy with world practice, which is compounded by the deliberate displacement of the word “audio description” from the Russian-language scientific literature and media space. This has led to the fact that some experts do not know what a similar process is called in other countries of the world. Translated articles use artificial English words typhlo commentary, typhlo commentator. This does not allow Russian-speaking specialists to get acquainted with world experience, and also does not allow foreign colleagues to learn the rich history of adapting audiovisual works for the blind in our country. In 2017, state standard “Tiflokommentation and tiflokommentary. Terms and definitions” was developed. The preface establishes a link between the Russian terms and their English equivalent: “The terms “Typhlo commentary” as a process and “Typhlo comments” as a result of this process are the result of translating the basic concept of “Audio description” from English. The definition of audio description given in this document and approved as a standard differs from the “canonical” one [5]. According to state standard, this is “a creative process of speech description of visual information, taking into account the psychological characteristics and needs of visually impaired people, allowing them to perceive visual information that is not available to them”. In this definition, the word “creative” appears, which brings it closer to the term “inspirational translation”, which we discussed above. This evolution in the definition allows us to hope that over time the existing terminological barrier in the field of audio description and typhlo commentary will be eliminated, which will improve the quality of the finished work.

## Conflict of interest

The article contains no conflict of interest.

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### **Аудиодескрипция интерсемиотикалық аударма түрі ретінде**

**Аңдатпа.** Кинопродюсерлерді мемлекеттік қолдау алатын фильмдерді аудиодескрипциямен қамтамасыз етуге міндеттейтін заңның қабылдануымен осы саладағы мамандарды даярлау мәселесі туындады. Дегенмен, ресейлік және халықаралық аудио сипаттау тәжірибесі (тифлокомментарийлер беру) арасындағы бар терминологиялық кедергі көптеген жолдармен мамандар арасындағы тәжірибе алмасуды қиындатады. Мақалада аудиодескрипцияның даму кезеңдері және аудиовизуалды туындыларды ауызша сипаттау процесін белгілеу үшін қолданылған терминдер қысқаша қарастырылады. Дыбыстық сипаттаманы интерсемиотикалық аударманың бір түрі ретінде талдау келтірілген. Орыс тіліндегі «тифлокомментирование» терминінің эволюциясы және оның халықаралық аналогтармен үндесуі көрсетілген.

**Түйін сөздер:** аудиодескрипция, интерсемиотикалық аударма, ауызша аударма, аударма, тифлокомментарий

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### **Аудиоописание как вид интерсемиотического перевода**

**Аннотация.** С принятием закона, обязывающего кинопроизводителей снабжать фильмы, получающие государственную поддержку, аудиодескрипцией, встал вопрос о подготовке специалистов в этой области. Однако существующий терминологический барьер между российской и международной практикой аудиодескрипции (тифлокомментария) во многом затрудняет обмен опытом между специалистами. В статье кратко рассматриваются этапы развития аудиодескрипции и термины, которые использовались для обозначения процесса вербального описания аудиовизуальных произведений. Дается анализ аудиодескрипции как вида интерсемиотического перевода. Показана эволюция русского термина «тифлокомментарий» и его сближение с международными аналогами.

**Ключевые слова:** аудиодескрипция, межсемиотический перевод, интерпретация, перевод, тифлокомментарий.

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