This is a transcript for Isabelle Lundin et al.'s "The Making of a MAB: Composing a Multimodal Annotated Bibliography and Exploring Multimodal Research and Inquiry," published in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, 28(2), available at https://praxis.technorhetoric.net/tiki-index.php?page=PraxisWiki%3A_%3Amultimodal-annotated-bib

Transcripts of Antonio Verrelli's MAB Videos

The director Timur Bekmambetove turns film's subtitling into an art

This is a fascinating New York Times article written by Alice Rawsthorn on May 27th, 2007. It's titled *The director Timur Bekmambetov turns film's subtitling into an art,* and begins with Rawsthorn gushing over the English captions in a new Russian horror film—at the time—called "Day Watch."

So, In Russia, she says, it's a huge hit—somewhere in cult classic territory. But it's the international version that's been the reason for all of this attention: its subtitles are, and I quote, Some of the cleverest and most ingenious subtitles to ever grace the cinema screen.

What she means is that, compared to the "illegible subtitles/captions that drift on and off screen, often at the wrong moments, lurking so low that the bottoms of the letters are often chopped off," and that overall ruin the harmony of a beautiful scene, Day Watch tries to do something different. This is really important, because it seems every other movie art has a proud heritage, except subtitling.

Rawsthorn tells us that technology has made it much easier to digitally produce subtitles—in the past, film reels had to be coated in wax and bathed in bleach. But even now that it's easier, film makers are hesitant to take advantage. The public still believes captions and subtitles are only used for function, not art. Something added for function is often given the bare minimum amount of effort. It is often that if someone compliments a movie's subtitles, Rawsthorn says, which would be really surprising, it's because they haven't screwed up the dialogue.

So what Bekmambetov, the director, has done is make his subtitles "another character in the film, another way to tell the story. So the result is text that, for example, glows red when a character is angry. Or text that disintegrates into a puff of smoke after an explosion.

The article makes a good counterpoint to all this eye candy: that a subtitle "should never be obtrusive" if done right. The director of Day Watch, of course, disagrees, saying his

are not the kind that obtrude. In fact, most of them are still standard typeface captions, with sans serif lettering.

But I'll let you be the judge. Here are a few screenshots from Night Watch, the prequel to Day Watch, which is found on the Kairos website. So, what's the deal with me showing you Night Watch instead of Day Watch? They're basically doing the same thing with captions.
So, there are a few.

So, overall this is a very interesting article, in my opinion. It's actual evidence—not theory, not having conversations, not having panels—of filmmakers making a difference in the field. Again, the question is, do you feel these are distracting and maybe overly sentimental or could you see yourself enjoying them?

Video Captions Benefit Everyone

So here's a psychological take on captioning. This research was published online (at the National Center for Biotechnology Information) in 2015 by Morton Ann Gernsbacher, a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It's called *Video Captions Benefit Everyone,* and, basically rephrasing at this point, it starts with "Video captions, also known as same-language subtitles, benefit everyone who watches videos (children, adolescents, college students, and adults).

But, as Gernsbacher says, video makers are often naive to the laws and the benefits of captioning.

This research looks at empirical studies of children and adults who watch videos with captions on them. Gernsbacher says captions are particularly beneficial to "persons watching videos in their non-native language, children and adults learning to read, and persons who are deaf or hard of hearing…"

So this first chart is comparing comprehension scores between deaf children and hearing children. The experiment uses four conditions, which are Video+audio, captions only, video with audio and captions, and the control of not watching anything at all—in that order. But what's surprising is not that deaf children benefit from captions of any kind, we know they do, but that videos with captions also score the highest with hearing children.

So, below, this next chart shows that hearing children learn to read better with captions. The idea is, when having words on the screen, they will map their meaning with whatever object they're describing.

And, uh, here are the results.

Lastly, this study talks about how secondary language instructors and subtitlers copied what same-language captioners have been doing decades. The result is that "second languages—so, obviously not your native language— benefit hearing persons learning that second language even more than captions in the persons' native language."

So, on the bar graph here, Japanese university and college students recall more from videos that have English subtitles than ones in their own language.

So, the problems going forward are that (a) research like this is always published under separate literatures—so deaf literature, second language learning, adult literacy, children education, etc—and (b) many teachers and content creators think captions are only for deaf people. And, there's a quote I really like about captions being curb cuts by using elevators as an analogy:

"Indeed, the overwhelmingly vast majority of persons who benefit from elevators are not persons with disabilities, and the same could be true for captions."

So, the other big problem is that not all videos are captioned even though they legally have to be, and that most people that do use captions are using the spotty (at best) auto captions.

So, I'm wondering, how do we increase awareness of the benefits of captions? I like how the article talks about the influx of second-language learners (and second-language speakers) into our country and universities, and that this creates a need for more subtitles. But, you know, that's just one example. I think we just need urgency and more pressing from advocates of captions to continue.

Best Practices for Implementing Accessible Video Captioning

So, this is a webinar that I found on the 3play media website. It's hosted by Josh Miller, the website's co-founder, which is to say he's also the moderator and the one that starts the video—the topic being *best practices for implementing accessible video captioning*.

This video talks more about the legality and laws of captioning and how businesses are using them, which can mean a lot of technical talk that can get sort of boring. But I actually found it interesting—at least the parts that I could understand.

Basically, he talks about accessibility laws—section 504, for example, which talks about anti-descrimination. But super importantly he mentions the CVAA (Communications and Video Accessibility Act), and that it broadens the caption laws for television to cover internet videos—So, for instance, any tv show, movie, or even clip that was once on television now has to have captions if you want it to be on YouTube or not. So what's also interesting is that certain kinds of clips, like outtakes, don't have to be captioned. It's odd that they draw the line there, and I'm sure in the future YouTube will make it so that captions do have to be captioned. But for right now, they don't.

The webinar also mentions how 1 billion people today have some type of disability, and about 56 million in the US. About 48 million people have some type of hearing loss—probably because of our aging population. This is all to say, accessibility has never been more important.

Going forward, he introduces the panel of speakers. There's a Youtube project manager, a manager of multimedia at Dell, and a web designer at T-Mobile.

So this video really focuses on the youtube project manager, with questions like how can content creators use captions in their videos, how can subtitles help the multilingual community—which, amazingly, is about 80% of YouTube's viewers.

Some of my favorite takeaways from this video are, for example, when the Dell manager talks about how the speaker matters when transcribing—so people with heavy accents may not be right. At Dell, they're actually starting to caption all of their newer videos for their employees, but their legacy videos aren't typically. This is like what we've been talking about all semester with older archive content being left to degrade, forgetting to be updated.

Something else I liked was when the YouTube manager talks about auto captions and manual ones. So auto captions are an option for those who didn't add captions to begin with. This is for the sake of being universally accessible. Obviously, they're far from perfect. Goal is to help people, to encourage them, to add high quality captions of their own. The thing is, you have to add the captions yourself if you want them to be indexed. That's assuming you use a site like Google that looks at captions to help people find your video.

There's this neat analogy in the video that speaks to the virtue of captioning your videos. It goes, a newspaper is the perfect kind of media if you're looking to be found: it has a headline, a title, subtitles. If your video doesn't have any of that—or any captioning—it's practically impossible to be found. At least by Google.

Near the end of the webinar, the Google manager talks about the problems with mobile captions. About how small screens often have captions that obstruct too much of the picture. So that's a long-term issue that they're working on, but I'd also like to know how caption technologies are going to be able to adapt in the future with so many different technologies and versions of software out there.

A rhetorical view of captioning

So, most of us live in a pretty caption-free world. When we do notice them, we see them in two-dimensional ways that, let's be honest, aren't really challenging. It's easier just to say they record sounds and put them into words. But, when you think about it, you can't just record any sound—there are too many and in too many contexts. Not to mention, some sounds are rhetorically effective when captioned while others don't add anything. You have to understand the affordances and constraints of captioning to really understand what I mean.

This book, Reading Sounds, by Sean Zdenek, goes over the newest ways in which captions are being used in film and media. This specific page, written in October of 2015, is actually a supplemental website used to promote Zdenek's book. It's a summary, more-or-less, of the book's major topics and all of its media references.

He starts the four new principles of closed-captioning, which are: Every sound cannot be closed captioned, captioners must decide which sounds are significant, captioners must rhetorically invent and negotiate the meaning of the text, and lastly, captions are interpretations. You can think of these as early definitions that he's getting out of the way and which will apply in different contexts throughout the chapter.

So, every video example in this chapter is showing a different way captions can be used in films. For example, how *do* captioners decide which sounds are significant. How would you even know? Zdenek gives an example of a dog bark being captioned in both the 2009 film Extract and the 2011 NBC series Grimm. The movie has a dinner scene where a dog, somewhere outside in the background, is captioned. This distracts the caption reader with unnecessary information. When done right, like in Grimm, a dog

barking is captioned as important background information, as it’s important to the action that’s happening in the plot.

He also mentions the gendered nature of captioning, which isn’t a major problem holding back captioning but still something to keep in mind. Using words like “chattering” to describe a group of women talking is simply reinforcing a stereotype that all women gossip. It’s more damaging than it is rhetorical.

Captions also formalize speech, which is another way of saying they use only basic but understandable language to describe sounds. You might hear a caption saying “drunken slurring” or “Said slowly”—so very direct, quick speech identifiers. The problem here is that captions like this can sometimes be inaccurate or needing more context. It’s a tradeoff between accessibility and accuracy, but one that’s becoming seamless over time.

Captions can time-shift, too. They have a knack of coming either before or after whatever it is they’re describing. For instance, adding a dash at the end of a sentence tells the audience, before the actual thing has happened, that something is about to interrupt. There goes your tension, right?

In other cases, a caption might give up an entire plot when used in the wrong way. If an audience is early in a movie and isn’t aware of a character’s name, and that secrecy is important, what the movie is trying to do, essentially, a caption might come along and say something like “Gina screams.” This is what Zdenek coins “Captioned Irony,” a pun off of dramatic irony. The captioned viewer knows important plot information way earlier than the non-caption audience.

So, what I really love about Zdenek's work is that, for example, with the website, he speaks in such plain English when explaining his concepts that I’m right there with him the entire time. I could be a newcomer to captioning, I could be a software employee from a big company—it’s accessible to everyone. After reading this, and now that I have a good idea of how captions are and should be used, I feel confident that I can actually caption something. I think it’s a great skill for anyone to have.

YouTube is ending community captions

So, You may or may not be familiar with YouTube’s community captions feature, which, when still in place, allowed viewers to subtitle other people’s videos. Whether you knew

about it or not, YouTube has decided to end this feature for reasons some consider a little suspect.

This article from The Verge captures the outrage felt by many deaf or hard of hearing viewers in the YouTube community. The article was written by Kim Lyons, published July 31, 2020, just months before the September 28th deadline. As you can imagine, this news caused quite a stir with content creators on the site, most of which are reacting with confusion and just plain disbelief. Without community captions, many have said, YouTube will deaf people's accessibility (and even non-deaf people, like foregin language watchers).

Community captioning is when fans of a channel write and upload their own subtitles to a video — whether in the same language as the video or in a different language.

Deaf YouTuber Rikki Poynter is leading the charge to keep community captions around. On her YouTube channel, she says that community captions were an "accessibility tool that not only allowed deaf and hard of hearing people to watch videos with captions, but allowed creators that could not afford to financially invest in captions."

The cost of having a professional captioner subtitle your videos can run up quickly depending on how long your video is, depending on how much you upload, and depending on which company you choose. That is to say, most small YouTubers can't afford this expense. They need community support.

YouTube, on the other hand, highlights the downside of community captions. The fact that caption abuse is rising, where volunteer captioners will add harmful and demeaning subtitles to public videos. The fact that it was "rarely ever used" and probably not worth the cost of maintaining it.

Youtube still allows all of its users to access its auto-captions and to sync your own captions (or a third-party's) to your video. YouTube said it would also provide certain community caption users in the past a free 6-month subscription to the subtitling service Amara.

However, many in the deaf community considered community captions a poorly promoted feature. That YouTube didn't make this feature apparent enough for anyone to catch on.

There's a petition out there to reverse YouTube's decision that, to date, has over 500 thousand signatures. That's up from forty-nine thousand at the time of this post.

So I’m of the strong opinion that YouTube is making a mistake by completely getting rid of the community feature—even if they intend on bringing it back in the future. The whole point of subtitling and captioning is, first and foremost, accessibility for the deaf and hard of hearing. Captions have great secondary benefits, but accessibility and the functionality of them is the most important. By getting rid of community captions, you’re not considering the people who rely on them to watch your videos. People who, might I remind you (I.e. YouTube), pay for premium subscription services and are active and profitable members of the community. Customers who spend money on your platform and make that platform money shouldn't be phased out of enjoying its content, without having to spend hundreds on captioning services or hours of their time for one video.

DP Project Reflection

There’s a thread that seems to run through all five of the sources I chose for this project. The thread is, people, in general, are ignorant of the affordances of captions, even as we’re living in the age of accessibility. There’s still a two-dimensional, purely functional idea of captions being used only for the deaf people who will occasionally stumble upon their videos. Captioning is an extra cost which, when done well, by a credited subtitling company, will cost a hefty amount. It’s no wonder there’s no incentive to revolutionize the art of captioning. You can make captions yourself, but if you’ve ever made captions for a video, you know how time consuming it is—and forget about it if your video is over ten minutes. The only positives I’m seeing are that YouTube seems to be taking the charge in making captions as easy and accessible as possible and that artists everywhere are innovating our boring conception of captions.

The great news is that articles and books like these are being published at all. For example, the researcher of Captions Benefit Everyone gives us empirical evidence that captions not only benefit deaf viewers but the hearing audience as well. This should say a lot about caption use in general, and hopefully educators will start implementing caption on classroom videos for children, for teens.

The other great news is that I now know, more-or-less, how to use captions in different rhetorical situations. Before I had not the slightest idea. But it’s really a fine-tuned craft, and like any craft, it takes subtlety and knowledge of which sounds to caption and which to leave as uncaptioned background noise.

Okay, so this project had a bit of a learning curve as it went on. What I mean is that, with the first two bibliographies, I wasn't sure how I should use YouTube affordances to make my project look interesting. The result is two rather plain looking YouTube videos with just a screen recording of me scrolling through an article. With my next three, I was a little more ambitious. Just adding some stock footage and some images to play while I was talking made the project instantly more vibrant and watchable.

The other thing I was worried about was how my voice would sound—my nasally, Michigan voice—and if that would turn people off. Not to mention, when you're reading off a script and trying not to sound scripted, it often doesn't work. I can tell I was a little clunky in places, because I jumped over the script a few times. But it was a perfect opportunity to use YouTube's built-in caption-syncing feature, which worked like a charm. But given the time frame we had to work on this project, I'm overall very satisfied with what I produced.