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### **Abstract**

This paper, using studies on accessibility (Perego, 2005; Diaz-Cintas, 2005) as its starting point, presents the results of a research project on audio-description techniques for films, so that blind people can enjoy them.

The aim is to contribute to the definition of methodological and technical criteria for these kinds of productions. The experimental part of our research is carried out on the 1998 feature film *Kirikou and the Sorceress (Kirikou et la sorcière)*, written and directed by Michel Ocelot.

The audio-visual medium is a multi-code, intersemiotic text (Lavour and Şerban, 2008): a fusion of sound and visual components. The technique of voice-over audio description for the blind was chosen for our project.

The work is based on research into the benefits of audio description for teaching and learning processes for students with special educational needs (Snyder, 2006; Ferrell and Siller, 2006; Palomo, 2008), literature on social inclusion and the European Concept for Accessibility (© 2012 ECA). The latter is based on universal design principles aimed at creating products and environments that are accessible to both people without disabilities and people with disabilities in order to avoid social exclusion and eliminate divisions between people without disabilities and those with disabilities.

### **Main findings**

Audio description promotes social integration because it allows blind and sighted people simultaneously and autonomously to use the same audio-visual film. If carried out according to the principles of clarity and non-invasiveness, audio description may allow blind people fully to understand a programme or film. Thus, in addition to generating a sense of independence for people with disabilities, it also creates a feeling of equality by allowing them to discuss a programme or film with sighted people, on an equal footing of knowledge. In this way, people with visual impairment can participate in society and feel part of the community in which they live (Packer, 1996). Cultural integration in its broadest sense is closely linked to social integration. This means that it is not sufficient to provide people with visual impairment with historical, artistic and scientific knowledge: we must allow them to develop their communication skills, which are essential in today's information society.

In addition, audio description can contribute to developing or acquiring new, 'visual' knowledge, especially for those who are blind from birth. For example, it may describe habitual gestures – like placing a finger on one's lips – and other cultural conventions related to the visual world – such as physical appearance and clothing style. In this way, blind and partially sighted people can easily learn the meaning of these conventions and use them in daily life, thus improving their capacity for social interaction (Packer, 1996; Gonzalez and Iorfida, 2002; Hernández Bartolomé and Mendiluce-Cabrera, 2004).

The elimination of sensory barriers through audio description allows people with visual impairment to appropriate the cultural and artistic heritage that characterises the society they live in. It also helps them enjoy natural beauties, such as parks, landscapes and seascapes that would otherwise be denied to them. The guarantee of equal participation



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by all individuals in both social and cultural activities within their community helps to uphold the democratic principles that are the basis of civil society.