

**Blindness as resource and competence in institutional communication:
The case of blind audio describers in team translation**

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Abstract for a presentation at the panel “Inclusive communication at University and Tertiary Education Level”, 17th IPrA conference “The Pragmatics of Inclusion”

This presentation discusses blindness as a communicative resource and a professional competence in the context of collaborative audio description. Audio description is an access service for television, cinema, theatre, visual art, and the like, that supports the blind and partially sighted persons' participation in visual and audiovisual culture and communication. In audio description, visual content is translated into verbal descriptions which are spoken out loud. Some countries (Germany, Austria, and Finland) have adopted an inclusive working model to produce audio descriptions: the professional practice employs sighted and blind describers as teams to write audio description scripts for TV and cinema (see Benecke & Dosch 1997/2004). Research into these production processes has discovered that blindness – far from being an impediment – is a benefit to the collaborative accomplishment of audio-describing and it plays a key role in the translation process (Hirvonen & Schmitt 2018, Hirvonen & Tiittula 2018, Hirvonen in prep.). Examples of the findings are: a) the blind co-participant supports the sighted co-participant's visual perception, and b) the blind co-participant acts as language and audio specialist.

In my talk, I will first present these findings and then reflect upon their consequences to a wider arena: How can blindness and visual impairment be re-conceptualized as resources, rather than obstacles, for communication and interaction? What kind of professional and interactional competence do blindness and blind-sighted-teamwork implicate, for example in the context of cognitive processing and multimodal communication? The findings and reflections contribute to the theoretical notions of ‘resource’ (in social semiotics, e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, in ethnomethodological conversation analysis, e.g. Mondada 2016), and of ‘competence’ in professional contexts (e.g. in translation, see Shreve et al. 2017). There is also an ongoing interest in the resources and competences of “atypical populations” (Antaki & Wilkinson 2013) in institutional settings, such as disabled students at universities (Moriña et al. 2020) and deaf lecturers in higher education (Holmström & Schönström 2018), as well as a paradigmatic change in the field of dis/ability studies (see Waldschmidt 2017) to which studies my discussion will contribute to.

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