

The influence of accent familiarity on subtitle processing

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Abstract

Subtitles are widely used to support comprehension in audiovisual media, not only by d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers but also by hearing viewers when the speech is difficult to process. Psycholinguistic research has shown that unfamiliar accents delay lexical identification and that listeners can adapt with brief exposure, yet these findings mainly derive from listening-based measures such as transcription accuracy (e.g., Bradlow & Bent, 2008) and lexical decision tasks (e.g., Floccia et al., 2009), rather than from multimodal, subtitled contexts. While previous research in Audiovisual Translation has examined subtitle reading in the absence of audio or with foreign-language speech (Liao et al., 2021, 2022; Szarkowska et al., 2024), less is known about how accent familiarity within the same language affects subtitle reading.

Using eye-tracking, this within-subjects study will examine the real-time processing of subtitles as native speakers of Australian English watch videos in three audio conditions: familiar-accent, unfamiliar-accent, and no-audio. Prior to the experiment, a transcription task and an accent familiarity rating task will be used to select the unfamiliar accent for the stimuli. The study aims to illustrate how unfamiliar auditory input affects multimodal attention allocation and subtitle reading behaviour, and how the increasing familiarity with an unfamiliar accent alters the balance between auditory and written information. In doing so, it may inform models of eye-movement control during audiovisual viewing.