

The evolving status of audio describers in Poland

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Point of departure

- Who is an audio describer?
- What gives one the right to call oneself an audio describer?
- ... and how have the answers to these questions evolved?
- Historical and sociological analysis from the perspective of practisearchers

Some historical background

- End of 1990s, first, analogue, screenings of films with AD
- 2006: screening in Białystok
- Lack of experience, lack of debate
- 2010: first Polish AD standards
- Followed by discussion on AD standards and publication of subsequent Polish AD standards

Our framework

- Mona Baker: framing, resistance, activism, narratives
- Pierre Bourdieu: theory of capitals, symbolic violence, status, field, habitus, legitimizing authority through position within the field, consecration

2010 AD standards – rationale (quote)

Over the past few years we can observe the development of AD market in Poland. This is expressed, among other phenomena, by the adaptation to AD norms **binding** in other countries and **different ways of interpretation and adaptation of those norms**. As a result, in the AD scripts one can notice **the breach of the most basic requirement** which is the description of what one can see. (...) Having considered the above-mentioned phenomena, the “Audiodeskrypcja” foundation **has decided that it was indispensable to** implement AD standards and a **code of conduct** for audio describers.

What was the situation?

- No standards or good practices
- Inexperienced AD script writers
- Separation between AD script writers and AD target audience
- Prevalence of medical model of disability in Poland
- Imposition of 2010 AD standards

2010 AD standards (1) – quote

- **The cradle of Polish audio description is Białystok.** It was there that Barbara Szymańska and Tomasz Strzymiński for the first time in Poland screened films with AD in the cinema, produced AD for theatre and art galleries, as well as conducted first trainings for AD scriptwriters.
- The standards constitute a set of **systematised rules and principles**, as well as **professional norms** for audio describers who describe AV content. They have been compiled by Barbara Szymańska and Tomasz Strzymiński, **pioneers of AD in Poland and the founders of “Audiodeskrypcja” foundation.**

2010 AD standards (1) – comment

- Establishing the 'correct' narrative (doxa, symbolic violence)
- Legitimising the position in the newly created field (from initiation to consecration)
- Endowing oneself with symbolic capital

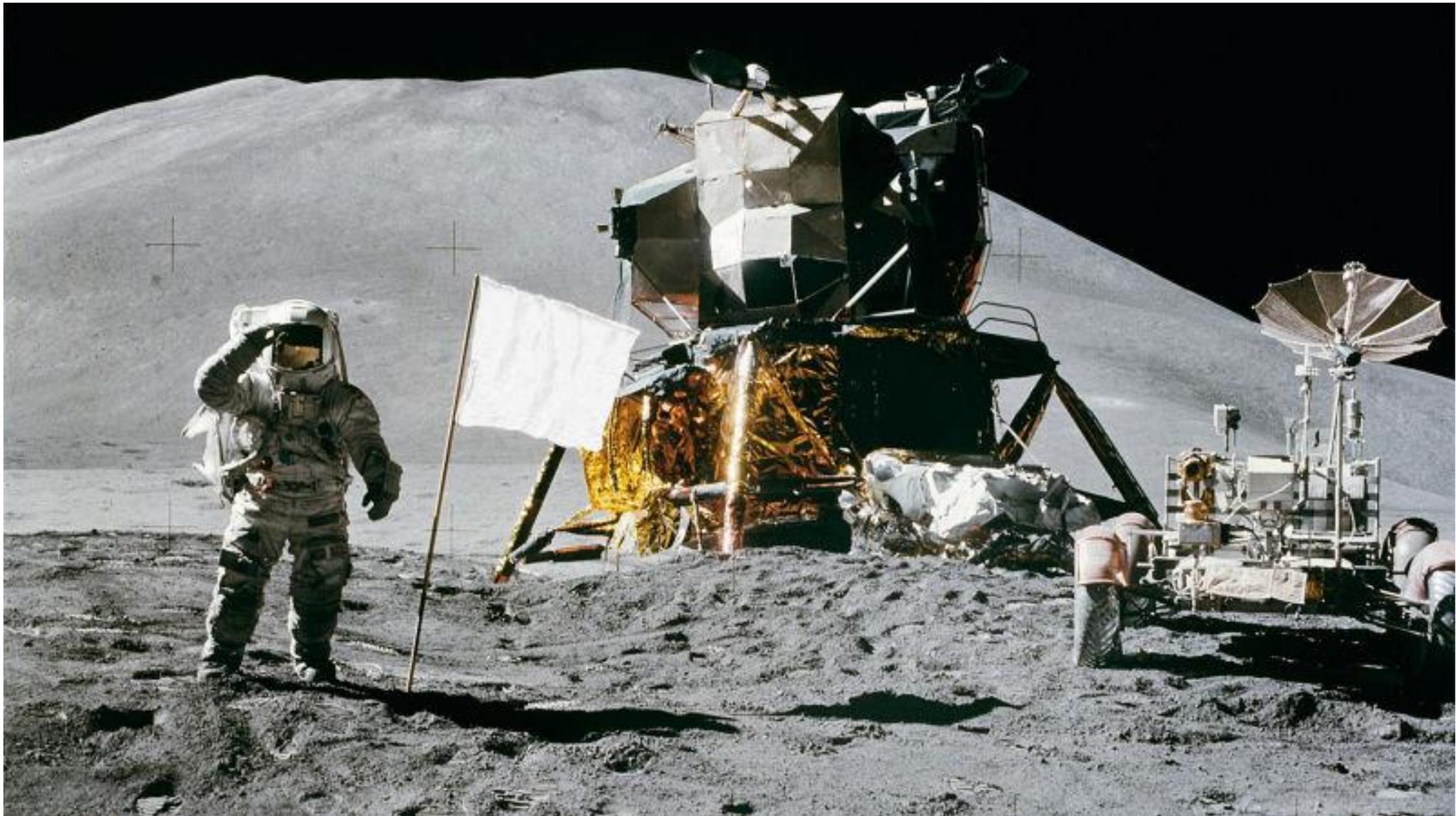
2010 AD standards (2) – quote

The aim of the standards is to:

- **unify the professional practice of AD script writers;**
- **harmonise norms** regarding the creation of AD and **principles for their implementation** by Polish AD scriptwriters with those that are **generally binding** in other countries;
- promote **standardised rules of conduct** that are binding for the **community of AD scriptwriters**, which will shape their **professional responsibility;**
- **define the requirements and expectations of AD target audience** towards AD script writers, and, on the other hand, **formulate the frames within which AD script writers can influence AD;**
- **secure the interests of AD target group** through the formulation of **conditions** that have to be met by a **properly made AD;**
- framework for **assessment of audio describers and voice talents**, using **objectivised criteria** constituted by the standards.

2010 AD standards (2) – comments

- Drawing from the symbolic value of recognised AD standards (relevant to AD target audience), as well as the representation of the VI community (relevant to audio describers)
- Creating ‘them and us’ dichotomy
- Guaranteeing one’s own position in the field as the keepers and priests (guardians of canonised values)
- *Illusio* and professional habitus (see also next quote)



2010 AD standards (3) – quote

- A person who wants to become a freelance audio describer **has to be trained by an experienced AD trainer**, their audio describing skills need to be **tested and assessed**.
- **The frivolous creation of AD scripts is a non professional conduct.** It is the ability to use the AD standards that allows for a **proper appreciation** of the contents of AD. [...] The ability to use AD standards indicates whether one belongs to **the circle of seasoned audio describers**.

2010 AD standards (3) – comments

- Shape professional habitus
- Constitute what is legitimate and what is not
- Establish the stakes in the field (rules of the game, illusio – see next quote) and its hierarchy

2010 AD standards (4) – quote

Although the described materials vary, just as the solutions used for their description, **the principles for the creation of AD shall always remain the same. Failure to properly use AD standards will always have a negative impact upon the content of audio description.**

2010 AD standards (4) – comments

- Formulating rules of the game and *AD illusio*
- Establish sanctions (and, as we have seen above, rewards)
- Shaping primary professional habitus which influences subsequent development of the profession
- Prescriptive tone throughout the Standards

Who is an audio describer?

- A good audio describer is able to become **invisible**, making thus visible the images that he describes with words.
- **The frivolous creation** of AD scripts is a non professional conduct
- **Does not interpret** [...] ('Instead of naming the emotions, describe cues that indicate them')
- **'Does not tell a story**, but describes the scenes out of which it is composed. He **does not present his own conclusions, nor the motivations** behind the actions of described characters'.
- '(...) has a good grasp of **language** and its rules.
- **Trained and assessed** by experienced audio describers and target audience

Consequences for the status of audio describers

- Shape the creation and assessment of AD in Poland in the following years
- Juxtapose AD scriptwriters against AD target audience (lack of trust)
- Create orthodoxy and heterodoxy
- The field of forces is created and the struggle for domination begins
- Change was brought about, among other factors, by academic agents endowed with huge volumes of cultural and symbolic capital (coming from translation studies)

The present and the future

- Baker: narratives
- ‘Private views and preferences of audio describer should not influence on what and how will be described’
- Audio describers should have freedom to create diverse narratives and to choose from a variety of stylistic and linguistic solutions

Thank you for your attention

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