

1. How and why I use captions.

I use captions as I am deaf, from birth. As I can't fully hear the sound produced, captions provide (potentially) an accurate way to receive the information transmitted in an audiovisual production. This can include news, documentaries, Australian series, weather, emergency updates, movies, sporting events, and any other material that most hearing people take for granted as part of their implicit learning – ever since their birth!

As I am deaf, my family members, who are all hearing, also use captions for their viewing, so that I can partake in their activities.

I access education, at a tertiary level, and a lot of content is used in further learning – whether incidental or intentionally. Privileged people do not have to even think about accessing this content. With captions, I don't have to direct extraneous energy to accessing this content either.

I work in early learning and primary education. Children who are deaf need access to all areas of learning. Just as a baby has not yet learned what words mean, they are exposed to language. Similarly, just as a deaf child has not yet learned to read, they need exposure to language, so as not to experience language delay. Quality captioning is needed on all content -both for young and old.

2. The quality of captions matter

Once upon a time, there was a misconception that Koko the ape could learn sign language. This gave non-signers the perception that sign languages were very basic and could be learned and taught with minimal effort and intelligence required, thereby insinuating that deaf people are not very bright.

When poor captions are presented, that insinuate that it 'doesn't matter'. Imagine if the spoken voice on radio or TV was presented in the same form – whoeee, it would not even make it to the public.

As with the captiview devices offered in cinemas, the quality is so poor they are actively frowned upon, let alone the other issues that accompany it, such as retrieving the device from the front counter, making it balance in the drink holder space, and aligning it with your view of the screen, hoping that the battery lasts for the length of the movie, and that you don't get a migraine from focusing on close up captioning and long range viewing of the movie screen. Why bother? Same as with quality of captions – if they are continuously either not available (e.g. live women's sport on TV) or are poor quality, that is discouraging in the pursuit of equal access to all information/events/material. Consistency is important. People won't buy a particular product if it is consistently defective. We desire the same for captioning.

In some of my assessments, access to broadcasts of different types is required. My access to information needs to be the same as my hearing peers, for example, for me to translate a news item from English to Auslan, or provide an analysis of the Australian film industry and its representation of different diversity groups. I need to know the language used by certain groups or interviewees to gain an understanding of people's perspectives and views.

Access is not an afterthought.

3. How do poor quality captions impact me.

They affect the quality of my life, let alone the desire of others to participate in 'my world'.

I think I have covered many of the issues in my previous section (2).

4. Any new ways to improve captions?

Please undertake research to find out, for example, how can children relate to captions better in children's shows, and how to make them less stigmatising for those who acquire hearing losses due to age.

It is a problem in the cinema industry, that not all film companies release caption files with their films. It is a huge disincentive that operators have to request these files, to having more open captioned movies available.

Make the means of generating accurate captions easier and viable.

Provide scholarships to enable people to actively learn how to produce quality captions.

Susan Bates

susanbat@ozemail.com.au