

## Using Visuals to Communicate Meaning and Emotions in a Deaf Film

There are 11 million deaf or hard of hearing individuals in the UK. (GOV.UK, 2017) With such a large community, it is surprising that most subtitled films are screened on working hours during weekdays when people with hearing loss, like most other working adults, are busy with their careers. 97.5% of Deaf audiences surveyed highlighted that they would visit the cinema more often if the experience was designed to be more inclusive. (Independent Cinema Office, no date)

Although subtitles help with understanding the plot, they do not convey emotions in the same way sounds and music do. Sounds and music have long been used in films to assist in world-building, conveying emotions, and immersing the audience in the story. (Rose, 2013) Without audio in films, viewers will miss the message it conveys. (Burt, 1994) In my research, I aim to use visual means to redirect the effects of sound and music to enable deaf people to have a similar cinematic experience as everyone else.

My research links to the theme of *Creativity* as it explores using conventional filmmaking tools from a solely visual perspective to bring inclusivity to the Deaf community. I hope to provide deaf audiences with an opportunity to be entertained and inspired the same way a hearing person would. In addition to *Creativity*, my project aligns itself with *Justice and Equality* as it promotes equal rights to enjoy arts regardless of hearing condition.

During the first summer, I will use 2 weeks to conduct and analyse approximately 30 written interviews with deaf people to understand their experience when they watch films and what can be done to improve that experience. I will use the next 2 weeks to look into the concept of Accessible Filmmaking and how accessibility for deaf audiences can be incorporated into film production and postproduction workflows, as advised by Romero-Fresco (2019). For instance, a shot slowly tracking into a close up of the subject may create suspense. The final 2 weeks of the research will be dedicated to writing an original story and script that allows me to put my research into practice during the second summer.

After writing the script, my goal is to film and deliver a short film during summer 2. During filming, decisions on cinematography and performance will need to be made in line with the research gathered in summer 1. Likewise, during post-production, editing and adding visuals such as subtitles must prioritise immersing viewers in the story. For example, subtitles may have different colours for different characters or different fonts to denote a change in tone.

By the end of 2 summers, I hope to have contributed towards accessibility to film for the Deaf community. In addition to providing entertainment suitable for deaf audiences, I hope my short film proves to the film industry that this vision is achievable and worth exploring. That, in a few years' time, the world will experience cinematic experiences that are available to everyone regardless of their hearing condition.

## References

Burt, G. (1994) *The Art of Film Music*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, p. 6.

GOV.UK (2017). *Saleem: profoundly deaf user*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-disabilities-and-impairments-user-profiles/saleem-profoundly-deaf-user> (Accessed: 3 February 2020).

Independent Cinema Office (no date). *Quick read on Deaf audiences*. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/developing-deaf-audiences-for-film/quick-read-on-deaf-audiences/> (Accessed: 3 February 2020).

Romero-Fresco, P. (2019) *Accessible filmmaking*. 1st edn. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Rose, J. (2013) *Audio Postproduction for Film and Video, 2nd Edition*. 2nd edn. Burlington: Focal Press, pp. 186, 214.