

Subtitles and Captions in Digital Cinema

An Open and Closed Case

Digital cinema provides for subtitles and captions, both on the main screen and off. This paper provides a brief description of these capabilities.

Definitions

- **Subtitle** – Text that is intended to be used for language translation. Subtitles are used when the sound track is in one language, but the audience understands a different language. Subtitles include only dialog and do not include descriptions of other sounds.
- **Caption** – Text that is intended to be used for hearing impaired audience members. Captions include the dialog, but also include descriptions of sounds (“phone rings,” “door slams,” etc.).
- **Open** – On the main screen. Everyone in the audience can see the text.
- **Closed** – On a “private display.” Only select audience members can see the text.

CPL Asset List Element Names

The Composition Playlist lists the various assets to be played as part of the composition as defined in SMPTE 429-7. The caption and subtitle assets are described in the CPL as one of the following.

- **MainSubtitle** – Open subtitles: text on the main screen for dialog language translation.
- **ClosedSubtitle** – Text on a private display for language translation.

- **MainCaption** - Open captions: text on the main screen for the hearing impaired. Includes descriptions of sounds
- **ClosedCaption** – Text on a private display for the hearing impaired. Includes descriptions of sounds.
- **MainClosedCaption** – Interop CPLs use this term for ClosedCaption.

Existing Practice

Most, if not all, projectors and servers support open subtitles and open captions. All private display systems (“closed caption” systems) support ClosedCaption and MainClosedCaption. At this time, these systems do not support ClosedSubtitle. ClosedSubtitle support is expected to be added to some, if not all, systems in the future.

There is a desire by exhibitors to use the existing private display devices for language translation purposes. Since none of the existing devices currently support ClosedSubtitle, there is a desire to use ClosedCaption as the resource type. It is suggested that any text identified as ClosedCaption indeed be closed caption (includes descriptions of sound), even if the intended use is currently language translation. The extra content (sound descriptions) should not interfere with the language translation function. The absence of sound description does interfere with the hearing impaired function.

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