

Crippling Captions: MYSELF AS MOTHER BEAR; THE STUTTER AS UNRULY CHILD

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Description

In this creative access project, I aimed to “crip” captioning by incorporating dysfluency into closed captioning. Stuttering is often erased from audio transcription with the goal of eliminating errors and rendering captioning “clean.” However, for people who stutter, stuttering isn’t a vocal blunder—rather, it’s our natural way of speaking and communicating with the world around us. I experimented with bringing my unique stuttering blocks and repetitions to the forefront by captioning and transcribing a reading I did of my prose poem “MYSELF AS MOTHER BEAR; THE STUTTER AS UNRULY CHILD.” I was inspired by the works of disability scholars like JJJJerome Ellis and Sean Zdenek and, in line with their work, intended to bridge the gap between captioning that erases dysfluency and dysfluent art that lacks modes of accessibility.

I first wrote the poem while visiting my family in Morocco. During my time in a primarily Arabic-speaking environment, my relative unfamiliarity with the language heightened my stutter, making it impossible to be covertly dysfluent. “MYSELF AS MOTHER BEAR” was a reflective attempt at honesty and self-protective disabled joy. I personified my stutter as a wayward child, confident and immune to social norms in the way so many children are. By positioning myself as a protective figure, I accessed a view of stuttering that escapes the medical model of disability and leans into hopeful familiarity.