

4) Making films accessible is an added cost for film makers, broadcasters and the audiovisual industry in general. Today, the use of synthetic voices for both AD and AST is promoted as a cost cutting factor. It may well be the only way forward. In other words, the "voice" of the industry will also make itself heard in the accessible product, contributing to the game of gain and loss. Might the feasibility of relying on synthetic voices be connected to the complexity of scenes discussed under 1)? Might it be better to diversify the use of synthetic and other voices, depending on the film genre, type of scene, number of characters and the number of multilingual scenes in a film? Might a completely different cost-cutting option that also improves the accessibility of the target product be provided by research that identifies the variables at play, or the losses and gains in the way films combining AD with AST function?

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Audio Description as an Accessibility Enhancer

Cláudia Martins, Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal



Audio description for the blind and visually-impaired has been around since people have described what is seen. Throughout time, it has evolved and developed in different contexts, starting with daily life, moving into the cinema and television, then across other performing arts, museums and galleries, historical sites and public places. Audio description is above all an issue of accessibility and of providing visually-impaired people with the same rights to have access to culture, education and ultimately social life. It has to do with making them feel part of society.

Museums are highly visual institutions, where sight has traditionally been the sense in use. One has only to consider the etymology of the word *mouseion* – or temple of the muses (Simpson 2007) – to understand that the primary historical concern of museums was not even to exhibit artefacts or heritage, but simply to store them, to keep them away from curious eyes and hands. Therefore, bringing the concerns of accessibility into museums has been a rather thorny issue, since tradition meant also 'do not touch' or 'do not ask questions'. However, museums have had to open up in order to survive and this meant, in the words of Dodd and Sandell (1998), developing new audiences and removing all types of barriers to access.

Barriers to physical access are related to the need to ascertain if the museum building is physically accessible, whether it has ramps, handrails, lifts, seats, turning points for wheelchairs, (adapted) restrooms for disabled people. Access to information consists of the effective advertisement of activities, exhibitions and services, communication with local communities and new audiences, the handing out of brochures with information and guidance or the development of learning services. As for cultural access, collections and exhibitions should attempt to reflect the interests and life experiences of their audiences, to develop an exhibition policy that reflects the stories of the community or even the repetition of exhibitions with appropriate mediation. There is also the need to promote emotional access, making the museum environment welcoming and friendly, and train the museum staff to be open-minded towards diversity, such as being able to receive people with special needs. Financial access should also be considered in terms of the affordability of museum admissions, the cafeteria and the shop, and of the offer of free days, community activities or even occasional free transport. The last three dimensions of accessibility comprehend less frequent aspects, namely access to the decision-making process, intellectual and sensory access. Access to the decision-making process encompasses the engagement of museum visitors and external stakeholders in order to appreciate their input, enquiry of regular and potential audiences, the creation of a volunteer bank and the establishment of partnerships with other institutions. Secondly, intellectual access covers work done to allow people with learning difficulties or simply with limited background knowledge to have access to the museum and its exhibitions, preventing the exclusion of certain groups, and also their involvement in the design of new exhibitions. Finally, sensory access is related to the adequacy of museum exhibitions, events and facilities to the needs and requirements of people with sight and hearing impairments and whether the museum provides a variety of mediation means, such as hearing induction loops, audio guides, touch tours, information in Braille or large print, subtitled audiovisual materials or interpretation in sign language(s).

Returning to museum audio description, this is believed to promote mainly sensory access, because it allows to “make images verbal”, to make art come alive for those who do not actually see, combining hearing with other senses, especially touch and smell. Nonetheless, audio description, because it makes use of the verbal-auditory channel, can also enhance other types of access, namely physical, emotional or information access. For instance, physical access is enhanced if audio description describes the building and its facilities, mentioning the lifts, the adapted restrooms or simply the seats. Audio description may also make visually-impaired visitors feel more welcome and safe, knowing that the museum staff do not fear their needs and are prepared to handle them, as well as provide them with information about what is going on at the museum, increasing the sense of belonging and participation.

In line with this, Louise Fryer, who spoke at SITAU (International Seminar on Translation and Universal Accessibility) in December 2011, emphasised the importance of describing aspects such as the following: the outside of the museum, since it is a way to open visitors’ appetite for the visit and builds up expectations and excitement; the layout, for orientation purposes; the atmosphere, e.g. the light, décor and even changes of temperature. All these references are an ingredient of the utmost importance in audio description and can facilitate the enhancement of accessibility in museums.

Additionally, we should mention the usual confusion between audio description and audio guides, despite the variety of names, which is not our purpose to discuss. Audio guides consist of a means for cultural mediation offered by museums and other institutions so as to make the museum visit more autonomous (Deshayes 2002). According to Vilatte (2007), audio guides are portable equipment similar to a mobile phone, carried around by visitors, providing them with commentaries and descriptions on the exhibitions and rooms of the museum and aiding on interpretation. As a result, the purposes of audio guides may be equivalent to those of audio description; however, the latter aims at visually-impaired people, whereas the former is destined to sighted visitors.

Bearing all this in mind, this presentation will then focus on this particular form of intersemiotic translation to be found in Portuguese museums, as a result of our ongoing doctorate research project. In Portugal, there are 343 museums (INE, IP 2010), despite the existence of a few hundred more museums scattered throughout the country. From these, and according to our research, less than 30 museums offer audio guides: 5 in the north of Portugal, including Porto; 5 in the centre of the country; 11 in the area around and in Lisbon; 2 in Alentejo and 1 in Algarve; only 2 in the Archipelago of Azores and none in the Archipelago of Madeira. These statistics exclude city tours, aquariums, churches and cathedrals and interpretation centres, which are a different matter altogether.

Our project aims at gathering information about these audio guides, preferably by listening to them and obtaining access to the texts, and analysing them according to their adequacy to the needs of the blind or visually-impaired. Secondly, we intend also to categorise these guides according to a set of criteria, namely institutional, technical, usability and content-based criteria, partially based on Gebbensleben, Dittmann and Vielhauer’s (2006) criteria. We shall finish the presentation with a comparison between extracts taken from the audio guides of two Portuguese museums – with clearly different purposes – and a brief analysis of their texts as far as audio description is concerned.

All in all, as Abade de Baçal¹ said in the 1st quarter of the 20th century, museums are true scientific institutions, schools of moral and artistic education. We must then strive to make them accessible to all.

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¹ Abade de Baçal was the curator of the Museu do Abade de Baçal (Museum Abbott of Baçal) in Bragança, Portugal, between 1925 and 1935, and an important figure in the development of the museum and acquisition of its artefacts.