REFERENTIAL OR POETIC? CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF AUDIODESCRIPTION AS AN ART FORM

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Abstract

Since 2007, there has been a systematic research conducted in the field of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) at ISCAP/ Porto Polytechnic Institute. At the time we embarked on a research endeavor focusing on audio description (AD), with the intent of systematizing AD guidelines, improving the AD process and reflecting on teaching/learning methods.

This study presented at the Media For All conference, Antwerp, in 2009, aims to contribute to this project by focusing on issues linked to the generalized view that AD language should be 'objective' and therefore referential in nature, as stated in several guidelines. Indeed, the audio describer is even warned against expressing emotions or personal points of view. How seriously is this advice taken? Is this in fact what we should be teaching and doing? Are there identifiable common language functions in AD and are these clearly portrayed in the existing guidelines?

In order to answer these questions, we assess the BBC Guidelines on the provision of television access services; the Audio Description International's AD Guidelines Draft; the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Standards; the now extinct ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description; the Audio Description Coalition Guidelines for Audio Description, listing and contrasting their recommendations as to the 'how' and the 'what' of AD. Next, we compare these findings with randomly selected audio described feature films pertaining to the genres of drama, action, and suspense, namely *Blindness, Revolutionary Road, The Happening, Body of Lies, The Eye*, and *Hancock*. After analyzing both AD segments and movie clips in terms of visual rhetoric and Jakobson's language functions, we propose that described movies stretch the concept of intersemiotic translation.

Resumo

Desde 2007, tem sido realizada investigação sistemática na área da Tradução Audiovisual no Iscap/IPP. Nessa altura, encetámos um projeto ligado à Audiodescrição (AD) com o objetivo de sistematizar as normas e melhorar o processo de AD, bem como refletir sobre os métodos de ensino/ aprendizagem.

Este estudo, apresentado no congresso MEDIA FOR ALL, em Antuérpia, em 2009, pretende contribuir para este projeto através do enfoque na ideia vulgarizada de que a linguagem da AD deve ser objetiva e, portanto, de natureza referencial, como indicam vários documentos normativos. Em muitos casos, o audiodescritor é até aconselhado a evitar a expressão de emoções ou pontos de vista pessoais. Até que ponto é seguido este conselho? Devemos também nós seguir este conselho enquanto formadores? Será possível identificar funções da linguagem comuns à AD e, se sim, estarão plasmadas nessas normas?

De forma a responder a estas questões, analisamos e comparamos as directrizes de diferentes organismos (BBC, Audio Description International, American Council of the Blind, ITC e Audio Description Coalition) no que diz respeito ao 'como' e ao 'o quê' do processo de Audiodescrição.

De seguida, comparamos o resultado deste estudo com extratos de filmes escolhidos aleatoriamente (*Blindness, Revolutionary Road, The Happening, Body of Lies, The Eye* e *Hancock)*. Após a análise dos segmentos fílmicos e dos audiodescritos, em termos de retórica visual e das funções de linguagem de Jakobson, concluímos que os filmes audiodescritos amplificam o conceito de tradução intersemiótica.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation; audiodescription; intersemiotic; language functions

Palavras-chave: Tradução audiovisual, audiodescrição, funções da linguagem, tradução intersemiótica

AD: Definition and Purpose

At first glance there seems to be no need to provide a definition of AD, given that most are already familiar with the concept. Nevertheless, how we define it significantly determines the way we study it, thus we begin by putting forward the definition that caught our mind's eye and grounded our scientific approach:

To a great extent, audio description can be considered a kind of literary art form in itself, a type of <u>poetry</u> – <u>a haiku</u>. It provides a verbal version of the visual whereby the visual is made verbal, aural and oral. (Joel Snyder, «Audio Description: The Visual Made Verbal», International Congress Series 1282 (2005) 935– 939, pp. 936-937)[1]

There are two aspects to this definition worth mentioning, as we shall see. The first has to do with poetry, more specifically 'haiku'; the second relates to the juxtaposition of the verbal alongside the aural and oral. These two aspects will be broached later.

Then, of course, we must clarify the purpose of AD, which is altogether different from defining the concept. One which we feel touches upon the core issue and directly relates to Snyder's definition is:

> […] to give people […] a more complete picture of what is being shown, enabling them to appreciate and to share in the presentation as fully as a sighted person. ADI/Guidelines for Audio Description, 2009[2]

To appreciate and to share in the presentation- this certainly would not be possible without a connection between describer and viewer[3]. Especially when visual language is so ambiguous, we shouldn't just be content to denotatively describe the objects that pass before our eyes. If denotation were the sole purpose of AD, then it would be a fairly unencumbered undertaking to create and distribute a visual dictionary among audio describers.

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[1] *Apropos* this same definition, see also Snyder, «The Visual Made Verbal», *The Didactics of Audiovisual Translation* 2008, where the poetic form «haiku» is curiously suppressed.
[2] http://www.adinternational.org/ad.html
[3] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJXysdj6svo

Referring to John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* in audio book format, Georgina Kleege, legally blind since age 11, recalls her reaction to a very personal account of works of art, which corroborates both the definition and purpose we have adopted as our own:

> And she [the describer] seems to enjoy describing the images. She revels in it. Her voice becomes excited, even agitated. [...] I'm a bit startled at first. Her enthusiasm is such a switch from the usual "nothing but the text, ma'am" neutrality I'm used to. But then I start to enjoy it. Why should she repress her pleasure? It's infectious.[4]

AD and Communication

So how does all this relate to our main query? During our AD project's initial phase we started out by looking at several guidelines on-line and found it odd that so many would insist on *objectivity* and *what you see is what you get* as two of the main factors contributing to quality in AD. Of course, objectivity seems like a clear-cut, straightforward concept, essential to guaranteeing that the message is sent and understood. However, the first thing we teach in communication theory is that objectivity is an illusion, and that there can only be intersubjectivity: the acknowledgement of the other as different but similar to the self. Communication is founded on this notion, so in viewing AD as a communicative speech act we must accordingly adapt this notion. When we say that cultural factors play a part in AD, and that interpretation is vital, we are actually alluding to semiosis as an intersubjective process. In other words, there is no one right intended message or interpreted message, and the message received is never exactly the message sent. Semiotically, the 'reader', in this case the viewer/listener, is an active participant in the communication process.

We could venture to say that an audio describer is a translator, a communicator, a cultural mediator, a coder/decoder. The script is created, the film is created from the script, and a new hybrid script is written on the basis of the *moving visual images*, taking into account the soundtrack as well (see *Figure 1*). By observing the communication process, we tentatively say that the AD itself is not a new text, but that when the AD and film meet, this generates

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[4] From Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1999, (pp. 185-186).

a new text, the end result of a manifold, complex communicative process that stretches the concept of intersemiotic translation. You're not only verbalizing the visual, you're verbalizing the *visual in motion* fashioned by cinematic language, culture and individual experience. Furthermore, we mustn't actually oppose verbal and visual, for verbal language can be extremely visual and the metalanguage we use to discuss the visual is obviously verbal.
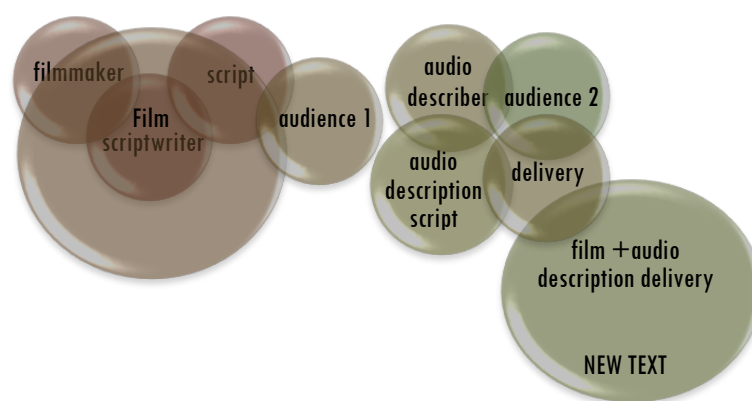

Figure 1

In light of all this, our hypothesis is that denotation is not necessarily the best option when it comes to the "how" of AD. Visual rhetoric makes going to the movies a different experience from real life, as Georgina Kleege so insightfully reminds us:

> On some level all movies are about seeing, which is why I can see better at the
> movies than in real life. The filmmaker shows me what to see and teaches me how to
> understand it. (58)

Clearly we all agree that there is relevant information to the plot that blind viewers are unable to grasp without a verbal rendering, but we can't – better yet – we mustn't give in to the idea that this is the end all and be all of AD. As for Jakobson's language functions, there are several that both complement and surpass the referential. Two of them are directly related to expression: the poetic, linked to the message itself, and the emotive, linked to the sender. Lastly, the appellative function, linked to the receiver, should also be taken into account, not in the sense of *argument*, but *persuasion* toward *suspension of disbelief*, to re-equate S. T. Coleridge's formula.

Without these, meaning would be lost in limbo, for we are reminded that connotation is the veritable semiosis. Everything is connotation and denotation is an illusion: meaning making/receiving is shaped by culture and individual experience. Moreover, in movies visual semiosis (because all images are to a degree ambiguous) is also related to connotation (transformation) through processes like camera movements, angles, framing, props and special effects, as Barthes relates in his «The Photographic Message» and «Rhetoric of the Image» (Cf. *O Óbvio e o Obtuso*). These elements also need to be translated; they are what most intensely account for visual rhetoric in moving images. The poetic function of language can clearly be linked to these transformational techniques.

A Common Framework?

Audio description is still a fairly new field of research in AVT, but over the last ten years several studies have surfaced intending to contribute to a unified code of practice. Among these Gert Vercauteren's article certainly paved the way for a more serious reflection on the viability and practical aspects of adopting common European guidelines.

The existing on-line guidelines seem to be quite inconsistent and vague, not offering the necessary set of rules that could provide common standards for audio described feature films. Vercauteren examines several existing guidelines showing some similarities between them, and the main discussion points can be summarized in this complex question: *What*, *when*, *How* and *how much* should be described? We will now focus specifically on the *how*, considering the *what* first.

What is everything that happens on the screen. «Describe what you see» is a common slogan in most guidelines but we propose a different approach – describe what you perceive. This means the audio describer needs to be able to think and analyze his/her observation, taking into account that not everything can be mentioned in the AD while selecting content on the basis of 'relevance'. It seems that there is a kind of uniformity of opinion in what should be described – the problem seems to be what should be eliminated; the time and space constraints only allow the audio describer to choose specific visual information. What about all those elements that also seem important but must be left out? How should the audio describer make a decision? What are the factors that prevail in this difficult task?

The probable answer would be – *what is most relevant for the full understanding of the plot*.
We are aware that, in certain segments, there are several features that are considered
relevant, however decisions have to be made and there will always be something left out.
Could the audio describer assure a complete objective decision in what is told and what is
removed? This question remained unanswered in our findings mainly because most
guidelines don't refer to this topic (Cf. Table 1).

Table 1

	WHAT is described	WHAT is omitted
Guidelines on the provision of television access services BBC	Relevant to the storyline: characters, locations, time and circumstances, unidentifiable sounds on-screen action and information.	Balance – good judgment in deciding the amount of detail to be used (doesn't mention how this could be achieved).
AD Guidelines Draft - Audio Description International (ADI)	Understand what someone who doesn't see needs to know/describe what is essential in terms of plot development and character.	Prioritize and edit info depending on: • Time • How many times will be heard • relevancy
Audio description standards (2009) American Council of the Blind	• 'What you see is what you say' rule: key plot elements, people, places, objects, unknown sounds; • Details to enhance understanding and appreciation; • Specificity creates images in the minds 'eye.	Less is more – cannot and need not describe every visual image on display.
ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description (2000)	• Setting the scene; • Pick out the key visual clues.	• Omit the obvious- too much detail can dilute the mood of a scene ; • Weed out what is not essential.
Standards for Audio Description (2008)Audio Description Coalition	• What you see. • Key plot elements, people, places, actions, etc. • Concentrate on the most significant and least obvious.	Character's moods, motives or reasoning are not visible, not subject to description.

Gert Vercauteren («Towards an European Guideline»: 146) also points out what he calls a tricky problem such as facial expressions and gestures. If we agree that descriptions should be objective we also know that depicting those paralinguistic features could be influenced by subjective and cultural factors.

In what regards our second question – *How should it be described?* – most documents we've scrutinized mentioned two main aspects; language and style. There seems to be a general agreement on the kind of language that should be used in audio descriptions, as reiterated in most guidelines: language should be *vivid*, *imaginative*, *succinct* and *objective*, but guidelines are not explicit on how to combine these traits. Also, some practical advice is offered by most guidelines, namely on how to use vivid verbs and descriptive words such as adjectives and adverbs. The adjective *vivid* is commonly used in most guidelines when they refer to the language of audio descriptions. According to the etymology of the word, vivid derives from Latin *vividus* meaning "spirited, animated, lively". Dictionaries define *vivid* as the quality of evoking lifelike images within the mind and having the clarity and freshness of immediate experience, for instance, in the phrase «a vivid recollection»[5].

However, how this 'vividness' is to be achieved is not consensual. Upon a closer look, inconsistencies surface concerning the use of metaphors and similes. The Audio Description Coalition points to the necessity of avoiding these figures of speech, whereas the guidelines of the American Council of the Blind's audio description project directly refute this idea by saying that metaphors are useful to compare shapes, sizes and attributes that are familiar to the audience (Cf. Table 2)[6]. This idea contradicts the commonly accepted 'say only what you see' statement.

They also specifically state*: we try to convey our descriptions with a kind of "inner vision" that results in a linguistically vivid evocation of the image being described*.[7] This statement disproves the objectivity principle while emphasizing the need to use a more poetic language in AD.

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[5] http://www.synonym.com/definition/vivid/ accessed 10.09.2009

[6] It remains to be seen what constitutes this 'familiarity'.

[7] American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project, p. 10. http://www.adinternational.org/ad.html accessed 08.09.2009

Table 2

	Referential function	Poetic function
Guidelines on the provision of television access services BBC	▪ Adverbs should not be subjective; ▪ Vocabulary: accurate, easily understood and succinct.	▪ Variety of verbs; ▪ Adverbs useful to describe emotions; ▪ Add emotion, excitement, lightness of touch to suit the mood.
AD Guidelines Draft -(2003) Audio Description International (ADI)	▪ Simply, clearly, concisely ; ▪ Descriptive, accurate and appropriate language; ▪ No interpretation or personal comment.	▪ Work on expanding vocabulary, especially verbs; ▪ Be sensitive to the mood of the scene.
Audio description standards(2009) American Council of the Blind	▪ Resist conveying an emotional state: ▪ Objectively recount the visual aspects of an image ▪ Be clear, concise, conversational	▪ AD: art form, type of poetry- a *haiku;* ▪ Vary verb choices; ▪ Words that are succinct, vivid and imaginative; ▪ Metaphors/similes that are familiar to the audience.
ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio description (2000)	▪ Unobtrusive and neutral but not lifeless or monotonous; ▪ Clarity – avoid ambiguity in the use of nouns or pronouns; ▪ Should not voice a personal opinion or interpret events.	▪ Few well-chosen words can enhance a scene; ▪ Comments on physical attractiveness when is relevant to the issue; ▪ Use of adverbs to support the description of an action.
Standards for Audio Description (2008) Audio Description Coalition	▪ Describe what you see; not what you think you see; ▪ Describe objectively; ▪ Avoid metaphors , similes; ▪ Use common comparisons; ▪ Factual, clear, straightforward commonly used terms; ▪ Dramatizing the delivery is distracting; ▪ Use concise phrases or sentences.	▪ use vivid verbs ▪ use the most descriptive words ▪ describe colors: to share the emotional "meaning" of the color.

Imagism and the Ekphrastic Tradition

Now we go to back to our initial definition of AD and the concept of «haiku». The
word 'haiku' conjured the imagist poem in our minds, because imagism as a modernist

movement was inspired by eastern poetic forms. The idea was for poems to produce a single picture, one unique image. From these examples, we can ascertain as to whether they succeeded:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
>
> Petals on a wet, black bough.
>
> Ezra Pound, «In a Station of the Metro», Lustra/*Selected Poems*, 53

> As cool as the pale wet leaves
>
> > of lily-of-the-valley
>
> She lay beside me in the dawn.
>
> Ezra Pound, «Alba», Lustra/*Selected Poems*, 53

In the American Council of the Blind's Audio Description Project, AD is described as a kind of haiku. This confirms our belief that audio description theory should be developed on the premises of ekphrasis, as Pujol and Orero so rightly state (2007)[8]. Ekphrasis may briefly be defined as the practice of creating vision through words, i. e. where poetry is a «speaking painting», for painting and poetry differ only in their substance and in the 'manner of imitation' (i.e. they are different media):

> Though indeed Simonides calls painting silent poetry, and poetry speaking painting. For those actions which painters set forth as they were doing, those history relates when they were done. And what the one sets forth in colors and figures, the other relates in words and sentences; only they differ in the materials and manner of imitation. («Whether the Athenians were More Renowned for their Warlike Achievements or for their Learning»). (Plutarch, *De Gloria Atheniensium*, 402)

Thus in ekphrasis a fundamental distinction is made between *producing pictures* and *describing*: to produce pictures is to create the illusion of reality, to consubstantiate absent

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[8] «We believe that much can be learnt and put into good use from the observations made by classical scholars instead of developing a new terminology and inventing new parameters for what seems to be considered as a new practice.» «Audio description Precursors: Ekphrasis and Narrators». Translation Watch Quarterly 3 (2): 49-60.

material objects. Lessing's *Laocoon*, the quintessential explanation of the ekphrastic tradition (from the perspective of romanticism, that is), tells us that «a poem may be very productive in pictures, and still not be descriptive itself» (Laocoon: 96), and that «in this moment of illusion, we should cease to be conscious of the instruments, by which this effect is obtained – I mean words» (112). He goes on to recommend that «a poet should always produce a picture» and that «the same impression should be made upon our senses, which the sight of the material objects, that these conceptions represent, would produce» (112).

After having linked imagism to ekphrasis, couldn't these rules presented by Ezra Pound in «A Retrospect» actually be adapted to AD guidelines, with reference to the above mentioned language traits?

Imaginative: Direct treatment of the thing whether subjective or objective. (36)
Objective: To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. (36)
Succinct: Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something. (38)
Vivid: Go in fear of abstractions. (38)

Nevertheless, in AD the limpidity advocated by Pound goes hand in hand with a special kind of rhetoric that surrenders itself to imagism.

Limpidity and Rhetoric/Register and Transformation

In order to relate rhetoric and limpidity, we selected clips where connotation is linked to transformation, from the following 2008 feature films on DVD, covering suspense, action and drama genres of: *Revolutionary Road*, *Blindness*, *The Eye*, *The Happening*, *Hancock*, *Body of Lies*. Ultimately, we chose to focus on two of the movies, *Hancock* and *The Eye*, whose short analyzed clips were placed on Youtube (cf. links below).

In *Blindness* (AD 2009), adjectives and adverbs are sparse and a great deal of relevant detail is lost. Noises go unexplained and therefore may be a source of confusion; images remain silent (for example the bloody hand prints on a window pane at the entrance of ward 3) for no apparent reason – at least not due to time constraints -, and even the original sound track is at times contradicted by the AD. The respect for camera angles and points of view, so crucial to creating and maintaining an atmosphere, seem strangely absent: at the

beginning of Chapter 11 why not instead: «The accountant's white tipped red cane makes its way down the corridor».

In *Revolutionary Road* (AD 2008) the AD proves to be at times irritating, like an intruder, a protruding sore thumb, interrupting otherwise intense and interesting dialogues with short, dry, isolated phrases such as «he frowns»; «he gets up», etc. This, we feel, has to do with the intimate shots that account for the whole style of the movie, where we find few long shots. At the very end, we are finally presented with: «Howard turns down his hearing aid but remains otherwise expressionless. The glow of the firelight flickers across him» (imagism at its best); and «He stares into the distance, lost in thoughts and melancholy» (zeugma).

The Happening (AD 2008) is enriched by an unobtrusive voice that blends in with the rest of the soundtrack, becoming a part of the original soundtrack. The oral verbal rhythm follows the visual one. We have chosen the following as examples of rhetorical tropes:

> Chapter 15 At Mrs. Jones', at the dinner table. «She <u>darts</u> a sidelong glance at them, *cagily*». <u>catachresis</u> / *pun (with cage)*
> Chapter 18 «Dewy-eyed and opened-mouth» (<u>parallelism</u>)

In *Body of lies* (AD 2009) there is actually no need for more emotional input, given that the action sequences are loud enough. For example, in chapter 10 a man is being whipped but the sound of the whip hitting the flesh and the screams compensate for any lack of explicit images. However, an emotional reaction on the part of Decaprio could be interesting, since (in the AD) we remain clueless as to why he has turned away. In the same vein (chapter 16/ 00:58:20), the body language is described, but they don't 'translate' what the gestures mean and forget to contextualize space: «Ferris' brow is pinched as he's driven past the market square».

The Eye (AD Theatrevision 2008) is the perfect example of a whole new text emerging out of the symbiosis of the original film with AD. The AD is involved in the story; it becomes a character, an omniscient narrator, instead of a detached figure. The enthusiasm conveyed by the voice is infectious: the tone adapts to every scene, ranging from a whisper to a loud voice, and speed also varies according to the level of suspense. It creates a certain

mood set by what is happening on screen. Through physical characterization, a step further is taken toward psychological characterization. The AD translates the character's expressions into rhetorical questions, and assumes, as a proper narrator, the character's direct thought/speech:

00:34:43 – 00:34:44 - But she realizes something is wrong.

00:34:45 - 00:34:48 - A look towards the front door shows there is smoke coming from under the door.

00:34:48 - 00:34:51- She turns the television off and rises across the room.

00:35:00 - 00:35:05 - She looks through the peephole to see smoke billowing along the hallway.

00:35:08 - 00:35:11 - The smoke from under the door rises her pass her face.

00:35:12 - 00:35:14 - Is that a person slowly walking through the smoke?

00:35:15 - 00:35:24 As she looks through the peephole, a dark figure launches at the door, she jumps back, her apartment is now filled with smoke as she heads for the kitchen.

(watch the excerpt here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKZzOLTW2NQ)

It also uses appropriate film terminology where needed:

00:05:51-00:06:08

She gets up and walks to the window to listen to the rain. A full screen close-up of her face shows her blind eyes are blank. No iris. The camera pulls back hundreds of yards showing a sea of street lights in the middle of the night.

(watch the excerpt here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VacCMOAHAUo)

The narrator/describer gets involved in the situation, breathing heavily along with the character, seeming to feel what the character feels:

00:47:07 - 00:47:08 She looks back to find him sitting on the window seal.

00:47:09 - 00:47:11 He leans back and drops out of the window.

00:47:13 - 00:47:18 Sydney runs to the window and stop at the glass without thinking that a moment ago the window was open, she hits the window

00:47:20 – 00:47:28 She leans out the window, fifteen stories down, all there is on the pavement below the window is the broken glass.

00:47:32 - 00:47:35 Holding her bleeding arm, she hurries toward her apartment.

00:47:35 - *Have you seen my report card?*

00:47:38 - 00:47:40 The little boy is now following her down the hall;

00:47:28 - 00:47:49 She runs to her door, tucks inside, slam the door in the face of the little boy and throws the deadbolt

00:47:54 - 00:48:06 In a fury, she crosses the room and smashes the lighted lamp on an end table; then breaks another lamp throwing the room in the darkness, she grabs her white cane and breaks the overhead white bulbs in the ceiling.

00:48:10 – 00:48:24 In her bathroom, Sydney rinses the blood out of her arm and wraps it in a towel, then moves into the bedroom and breaks the lighted lamp next to her bed, then closes the 8 foot high shutters in the window.

(watch the excerpt here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VEjihMDe6Y)

This AD script as well as its delivery (which is seldom mentioned in terms of paralanguage) contradicts the golden rule of objectivity and «describe only what you see». The new text leads us again to translation – which involves interpretation. The AD doesn't simply indicate body language: it interprets and translates it (if there is no interpretation, there can be no translation). Indeed, *Theatrevision* speaks of «descriptive narration» rather than audio description, the emphasis being on *narration* as action, rather than on *narrative* per se. Taking us back to imagism, chapter 18's shower scene parallels Pound's «In a Station of the Metro»: «Showerhead, pouring water down on Sydney. <u>Her head leans against the tile, a blank expression on her face</u>.»

In *Hancock* (AD ITFC 2008), though the narration is not as conspicuous, the appellative function is at the forefront, with a comic undertone. The major issue with this movie is the lack of time for AD:

00:27:29-00:28:33 The other prisoners gather around him. He looks round wearily at them.

00:28:13 – 00:28:17 The black guy and the white guy don't get out of his way.

00:28:22 – 00:28:28 He indicates the black guy will be wearing the white guy's ass as a
hat. They still don't move.

00:28:34 – 00:28:51 Hancock does indeed stuff the black guy's head up the white guy's
ass. The other inmates look on in shock; some of them seem close
to retching. The white guy screams in agony at his new anal
insertion. Hancock looks on distastefully as the black guy attempts
to extract his head from his friend's bum.

(watch the excerpt here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPPC-tAglgU)

In this specific excerpt, we find different levels of register, as the humor flows
between the contrast of the use of medical terminology (*anal insertion*) and slang expressions
(*guy's ass; friend's bum*). The irony lies in the disgusting and shocking scenes presented to the
viewer and the apparently serious AD text.

Conclusion

There are indeed language structures that can commonly be found in AD scripts,
namely: subordinate clauses, especially *as/while*, because of the need for the simultaneity
afforded by the image (space). The conjunction *and* also functions in this way. Yet there are
substantial differences related to audience, for instance: «Describers need, also, to really
research their audience, which of course is different for different films» (Raina Haig, "Audio
Description: Art or Industry?"). Audio description is also a form of communication and as
such should depend on a few general rules and a great many variables: textual, situational,
even existential, as well as take into account genre and the stylistic idiosyncrasies and traits
of the film object itself. Verbal language should match not only the genre but the discourse
and style of the audiovisual text. Is it feasible to describe a documentary like the *The Planets*
as you would a Tarantino film? This is the reason why Vercauteren proposes modular
guidelines (147).

Raina Haig, a visually impaired filmmaker, also lets us know that the «describer must
re-create the experience of the film, whilst also knowing the information priorities of blind
and partially sighted people» (Raina Haig, "Audio Description: Art or Industry?"). As we

watch the BBC audio description promotional video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJXysdj6svo), we can't help but wish for the day when guidelines are finally pointless, just as guidelines for translating novels are pointless. Here, we compare audio description to literary translation, in the sense that dictionaries are ultimately useless, in comparison to a comprehensive thesaurus.

Georgina Keege tells us the «blind are a filmmaker's worst nightmare. They can never be viewers, can never be enlightened and dazzled by the filmmaker's artistry» (p. 58). Shall we prove her wrong by focusing on the poetic, transformational function of language, or continue to strive toward the elusive goal of referential objectivity?

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