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1. Introduction: Audio Describing Objects

This chapter explores the audio description (AD) of brand names in three films, focusing on objects that both play a significant role within the construction of scenes, or even in constructing the plot itself, and are strongly characterized by their nature as commercial brands. The chapter briefly analyses first the function of objects within movies, paying special attention to their meaning-making goal through the construction of a non-explicit symbolic network of visual rhetoric intended to entice specific readings on the original audience. In the second part, the chapter will move on to analyse specific examples of AD scenes in which commercial brands have a visual presence that is successfully or unsuccessfully translated into aural input.

The main function for audio description is to make audiovisual texts available to all. Both in fictional TV content and in film, AD information is described with more or less detail based mostly on the sole parameter of the time available between dialogues or parts of dialogues. In some cases, sounds and music also determine the available time to insert an AD. Objects and their AD should not be a complex exercise as long as their function does not exceed the boundary of their literal meaning: a bag is a bag. Describing some objects, and in particular those with a clear designer imprint or branding, requires more thought and analysis. Deciding on an adequate AD strategy

entails a number of considerations that can be approached from several theoretical stances.

A frequently disregarded aspect of the AD industry is its conceptual ties with translation, either in the form of intersemiotic translation (Braun, 2011; Orero, 2012) or within the range of the more recent and articulate notion of transcreation. AD attempts to reproduce the constitutive semantic interactions of an audiovisual text (aural/verbal and visual) solely by the use of words, or, more precisely, by the insertion of words between dialogues. This insertion of additional, non-dialogical aural input seeks to make up for the lack of a visual input – or a significantly impaired one. AD allows for the intersection of two different cognitive planes that, using different terminologies from the fields of semiotics and neurolinguistics as briefly described below, typically identify the basic meaning-making mechanisms. AD represents the interaction of the iconic and the symbolic: image and sound or, in more classic terms, signified and signifier. However, the procedural and decision-making mechanisms that may link AD as a form of e-inclusiveness and translation are yet to be explored in depth (Benecke, 2014).

An object within a movie may or may not go unnoticed by the describer, but its ultimate relevance in the description will be strongly determined by the describer's ability to identify the narratological function of the object (Kruger, 2010, 2012). Objects can help construct a plot, may function as intertextual references, or may provide endophoric cues that weave certain aspects together throughout the story. For example, the same car coming out of a garage a day later may be an indicator of an implicit love affair, and a superimposed globe of the earth fading in a glass of wine held in one hand may constitute a fairly explicit metaphor characterizing a power-hungry character.

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While some work is already underway in how audio description weaves meaning and constructs narrative (Igareda, 2012; Maszerowska, 2012; Remael, 2012; Vercauteren, 2012; Orero and Vilaró, 2012; Fryer and Freeman, 2012; Maszerowska et al., 2014), there is still much to be done in the area of relating the AD of specific objects regarding the construction of attitudes and working towards the plot of a movie (Kruger, 2010, 2012). Studying aspects of AD at a broader scope, such as consumerism and globalization, Dávila-Montes and Orero (2014: 99) propose:

> Audio description, in its goal to render an interpretation of a multi-channel medium (audio and visual) into a different, mono-channel one (audio only), can take different approaches when describing objects, advertising or design. Towards those, the audio describer can take a stand that presents many shades, from the innocent to the manipulative, and also a possible attitude of actively ignoring objects in audio description as a nuisance to be avoided. All these stands have direct implications at several levels: the narrative level, the symbolic level and the ideological.

Scrutinizing how objects and their audio description construct different readerships is certainly a daunting task, that needs to draw from a multidisciplinary approach and that could benefit from extensive empirical experiment. Narrowing down the study to objects that represent commercial brands in fictional movies may help to establish a more limited set of parameters that could, in turn, provide a more achievable framework of study.

As the previous paragraphs have tried to outline, the audio description of branded objects in movies, and their intersemiotic translation from images to spoken words, is a complex issue that may harbour additional insights into topics of a wider scope.

2. Translation and Advertising

The past decade has witnessed the increased interest of translation studies in the field of advertising. From its first initial approaches during the 1970s and early 1990s (Boivineau, 1972a, 1972b; Boivineau et al., 1972; Tatilon, 1990) to the more recent monographs (Bueno, 2000; Valdés, 2004; Dávila-Montes, 2008; Torresi, 2010), we can trace the establishment of a body of considerations and stances from within the discipline to the translation of advertising.

Commercial brands and branded objects, understood both as a product of and as a tool for marketing, are constitutive elements of a broader genre and discourse: the discourse of advertising. Roger Boivineau (1972a) quotes an advertising agent saying that 'advertising is a sort of combat literature' (our translation) and Jeremy Munday (2004: 207) quotes Cook (1992) highlighting the 'parasitic' nature of advertising: 'Just as the substance of an ad is often stuck to some other significant substance, so its discourse both occurs within other discourse and also imitates it.'

This parasitic depiction of advertising would seem to foreshadow the significant role that branded objects play in movies. In a sense, as narration objects, they participate in the construction of scenes, plot, or character. However, they also hook up with an external discourse (an audiovisual fictional narrative) and generate a reciprocal effect by

which the audiovisual text becomes impregnated with the values, the nuances, and the semantic spaces associated with those commercial brands.

Some authors in the area of advertising studies contend (Zaltman, 2003: 73–101) that deep, true consumer preferences can be elicited from commonalities found in rhetorical (specifically, metaphorical) constructs and patterns that surface from audience interviews, focus groups, and marketing research. They claim that this elicitation may lead to universal insights about consumer motivations, in a process that could be dubbed 'reverse psychological engineering' (Dávila-Montes, 2013). In his work (2003) Zaltman points out how adverts would seek to activate in the audience those very same preferences by the orchestrated use of the very same metaphorical constructs as part of the physical advertising materials, in the form of slogans, images, or logos. Advert-related materials (images, text, and its components – slogan, anchor text, copy, paratext – logos, sound track) can be thus understood as a carefully designed mechanism that pursues the fulfilment of an intrinsic desire for meaning (Williamson, 2004 [1978]: 60):

> What the advertisement clearly does is thus to signify, to represent to us, the *object* of desire. [...] the advertisement is actually feeding off that subject's own desire for coherence and meaning in him or herself. This is as it were the supply of power that drives the whole ad motor, and must be recognized as such.

Lacanian psychoanalysis relates desire with the trope of metonymy (1977) as a permanent displacement by contiguity, and Lakoff and Johnson's Neural Theory of Language (1999) establishes that meaning-making cognitive operations are grounded in

neural relationships established between different neuronal clusters, distinctively located in the sensorimotor and subjective areas of the brain. These distant connections between clusters are identified with symbolic thought, and therefore with the ability to produce metaphors.

Some authors have explored the sub-field of visual rhetoric within the framework of advertising, stressing the prevalence of metonymic visual relationships in printed advertising (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996, 1999). The interplay between words and images in advertising generates in this way a cognitive dynamic that would seem to be the goal that advertising pursues with all its repertoire of mechanisms, in an attempt to emulate the same cognitive circuits that desire activates (Dávila-Montes, 2013) in order to entice the mind of the audience towards consumption.

The importance of the interaction between images and words in stimulating desire in advertising, as well as the orchestration of mechanisms that it actively deploys, would seem to be supported by statistics that show that the amount of money invested in radio advertising (sound without images) is consistently lower than most other media in developed countries.[1] This is so in spite of the fact that radio has a comparatively broader audience than other media that does involve the use of iconic/graphic resources, such as newspapers or magazines. Conversely, radio advertising is frequently characterized as containing dialogical situations, with sound effects and quasi-theatrical scripts that would somehow attempt to compensate for the lack of actual images, by attempting to activate the imaginary (the non-linguistic/non-symbolic) in alternative ways. This may be especially relevant to audio description in the sense that, as in radio advertising, and except in cases of only partial blindness, the visual dimension is completely absent: intersections need to take place between the aural dialogical input (dialogues), and a different aural input (descriptions).

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3. Brands in Audio Description: The Corpus

In order to understand how brands have been described, a sample of paradigmatic examples has been chosen. This chapter is not based on a large corpus of movies and it offers no quantitative data. It limits itself to presenting a few selected instances of AD for brand names to illustrate a first classification of prototypical cases. The analysis of a limited number of cases will be presented linearly (as found in the three movies chosen) and a rough categorization of the strategies found in them will be inductively proposed in the end. The value of the analysis will be eminently of descriptive value.

The first movie chosen for this analysis – *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006) – has been chosen for its abundant and conspicuous use of brands, in this case used even in the title of the movie. Brands also play an important role in characterization, and are an integral part of the plot development. In this movie, a naive young journalist moves to New York to work as the assistant to one of the city biggest fashion magazine editors, the ruthless and cynical Miranda Priestly, played by Meryl Streep. The movie is the most expensive costume movie of all times (Whitworth, 2006) and references to the fashion world are abundant, from garments and accessories to props and cameos. The film was chosen because even with the clear reference to brand names throughout the movie, they are not present in the AD.

RocknRolla (2008) by Guy Ritchie is an action movie located in London, where a crime boss (Lenny), puts the bite on all local real estate transactions. When a wealthy Russian property dealer by the name of Yuri Omovich looks to Lenny for help on a major new deal, Lenny is happy to help for a very large fee. Yuri agrees to pay, and as a sign of good faith, he insists that Lenny borrow his painting. Yuri then asks his

accountant, Stella, to transfer the money to Lenny, but Stella arranges for a band of thieves – known as the The Wild Bunch and consisting of the characters One-Two and Mumbles – to intercept the money before it reaches him and split the cash among the three of them. To make matters worse, the lucky painting has mysteriously been stolen, and the number one suspect is Lenny's estranged stepson, crack-addicted rock star Johnny Quid, who is presumed dead. As Lenny desperately tries to locate the painting, Yuri calls in sadistic henchmen to recover his money. The film was chosen because there is no evident use of brand names with explicit intervention in the plot, but still the AD offers precise descriptions.

The last movie analysed is *The Bucket List* (Reiner, 2007). In this movie, two terminally ill men played by Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson escape from a cancer ward and head off on a road trip with a wish list of to-dos before they die. As with *RocknRolla*, there is no explicitly relevant use of brand names, but on this occasion they are described randomly.

4. Brands in Audio Description: The Analysis

The first movie chosen for this analysis is *The Devil Wears Prada*. The movie is by definition fertile ground for consideration, since fashion brands constitute an integral part not just of the title but of the plot itself. The sheer density of visual references to consumer brands provides a rich field for speculation and taxonomization. Its extreme nature as a 'brand-based narrative' will allow us to test the waters of what can be achieved or missed by different possible AD strategies.

Brand-based characterization of narrative roles will constitute our first case study. In this sort of characterization the audience would see a brand name and understand existing brand values shared by the character. For example, the brand Prada – in the handbag Meryl Streep is carrying in *The Devil Wears Prada*, is used to help characterize the fictional character as a top fashion magazine editor: a fashion dictator. The function of the handbag is to build up a character trait from its first appearance in the film, which takes place five minutes into it. Even before the audience knows her name, or who she is, all the audience knows is that this character carries a Prada handbag and that the Devil Wears Prada. The handbag in the movie opening plays a very efficient, conspicuous function: that of identification and characterization. The audio description, however, simply says 'carries a designer handbag.'

There are two important effects lost: the obvious, structural implicature that refers the main character to the title, and the 'viewer experience', lost to the visually impaired audience, who are rendered unable to establish a reference. It must be noted that the brand is just another contributing element to a characterization that is built upon more details, but it is not the only one constructed on commercial brands. The first shot of the handbag is presented to the audience when Miranda descends from her chauffeur-driven sleek Mercedes Benz. As with Prada, Mercedes is not mentioned in the AD, which refers to the vehicle as an 'executive car.' While it can be argued that eye-tracking experiments could confirm or dismiss the audience's fixation on the handbag, this was obviously unnecessary since the camera follows Miranda for twelve seconds with a close-up on the handbag. Its branding is impossible to miss, since no other object is so centrally visible on the screen. This first cinematic approach to branded objects in the movie is based purely on a visual synecdoche: a part identifies the whole – a fashionable brand characterizes a fashionable character.

A second example in this movie is when visually capable audiences can read 'Dolce & Gabana' on a pair of stilettos. In an explicit relationship of continuity, one foot next to a pair of shoes, the audience gets a visual alignment: the elongated shape of foot and shoes run top-to-bottom and right-to-left in the frame, which leads to a metonymic association by visual contiguity. This is how the take introduces the user of the shoes to the spectator. In the movie, the character who has to wear the Dolce & Gabana shoes is a fashion victim suffering both physically and mentally from her evil boss. The audio description in this case treats the object with the same brand-neutral approach that was applied to the Prada handbag or the Mercedes car: 'a pair of high heels designer shoes.'

There is an underlying symbolic logic to the shot, a 'visual enthymeme' that the audio description omits here – expensive, designer shoes are uncomfortable, so D&G shoes are very chic. There is a hidden clause in the syllogism that makes of it a pleasurable connection-building to the audience. As in 'all men are mortal, therefore Socrates is mortal', there is a 'given', a clause that is taken for granted: 'Socrates is a man.' In the same category of inductive effort, D&G shoes are presumed to be uncomfortable. The actual informational value of the second part of the clause is irrelevant, since it is in the implicature itself (not in its content) that the persuasive value of the enthymeme resides. The trick is that the 'given', the implicature taken for granted, may be true or false: it does not matter. Those are the ways of advertising discourse: the emulation of pleasurable forms generates persuasion, beyond the actual content of the forms (Dávila-Montes, 2008).

The brand name, as in the incomplete syllogism above, is in this case structurally irrelevant at the narratological level, since the intent in this case is to create a contrast between a pair of comfortable clogs worn by the worker and how she changes them for

the trendy shoes only to keep her employer happy: the Devil. The function of these shoes is to establish an explicit visual contrast of comfortable/uncomfortable, and also the tyranny of the employer who forces workers to endure the high-heel torture while at work. There is no characterization either, at least, not one that shapes or reshapes the traits of the character. However, there are relevant implications at the symbolic level that the omission of the brand name in the audio description curtails.

Beyond their contribution to the definition of characters, situations, or relationships between characters, brand names can be also part of the plot: markers of structural turns of events that work not just as exophoric references bringing meaning from outside the story into the story and their character depiction, but also as endophoric ones. This happens in *The Devil Wears Prada* when, at a turning point in the story, and the character's change of fate, Andy decides to put on a pair of Jimmy Choo's shoes. The audio description did not pick on that fact and when, towards the end of the film, her friend Emily says 'you sold your soul the day you decided to put on the pair of Jimmy Choo's shoes', the audience is deprived of the possibility of constructing such anaphoric reference, since it has never been explicated in the AD.

As an analysis of the overall AD of this very particular movie, where the fashion world is not simply ever-present as a background but is also one of the articulating *topoi* of the film, it could be said that the AD of brand names uses the overall hyperonymic strategy of replacing the specific brand name by the generic object: 'shoes' instead of 'Blahniks.' Only when the brand name is clearly voiced by the actors is this picked up by the AD. To be fair, it would require a huge knowledge of mid 2000s fashion to be able to spot the many outfits and their designer labels. Nevertheless, in some cases brand names and logos are clearly seen and play a structural role in the plot.

The overall effect of the AD omitting brands in this film is that of a blunt description, losing in the verbal rendering the constant visual references to designer labels, designs, styles, colours, and so on. The effect of using in alternating mode 'fashionable coat' or 'designer bag' does not do justice to the visual input and renders a diluted or blurred version of the movie and both its visual and symbolic impact.

In contrast with this diluted description, in some cases brands, even models, are unequivocally mentioned in an AD. This could be considered the most objective and faithful rendition of the object but, to some extent it leaves its ultimate function unfulfilled, since the audience has to work out the underlying implicature. Often the brand name is omitted, and it can generally be said that the strategy for brand names is to offer the general category of the object, from a 'Rolex' to simply a 'watch.' While we have chosen only four examples, it can be confirmed as the overall strategy in the audio description in this movie to be consistent: the omission of the brand and generalization to the representation 'designer.'

Objects and brand names find a different audio description treatment in other movies. The next movie analysed is *The Bucket List*, and the reason for this choice is the uneven treatment brand names get in the AD. Cars are described by brand – for example a Morgan – and yet other objects such as computers are not described by brand: a portable Apple Mac is described as a laptop. In this film, the overall strategy seems to be random: some brands are mentioned explicitly, others tend to be described hyperonimically. This seems to be the prevailing strategy in most audio descriptions of branded objects in filmic materials: commercial brands may or may not be mentioned explicitly. The decision-making criteria, however, seem to be far from grounded on any consciously established parameters, which would question the sheer existence of a true, not improvised, strategy.

Another AD sample in this succinct analysis is the movie *RocknRolla*, where a Vuitton bag is used as part of the plot, as an object of desire that is used explicitly for seduction purposes in the movie. The bag also holds a small fortune in banknotes, fruits of the robbery planned by Stella – an accountant – and carried out by a character named One-Two, who in this Vuitton bag scene is bringing her share of the booty. The audio description of this particular scene reads 'One-Two walks into an art gallery carrying a Louis Vuitton holdall.' A precise description of a luxury object, or a car like a BMW, is also explicit in the movie's AD: 'They get into a BMW 7 series.' However, other cars appearing in the same movie, such as a Bentley, or a conspicuous, indisputable Land Rover (with all of its connotations), are not audio described by their brand but simply as a 'car.'

5. The Impact of Audio Description Strategies on its Reception

Having covered some examples on the narratological and symbolic levels in the audio description of brands, we shall move on to issues more related with ideology, globalization, consumerism, and stereotypification. As Dávila-Montes and Orero have proposed (2014: 104), it is not a matter of ideology and the audio description of brands - it becomes a matter of the audio description of brands and ideology:

These questions are not inconsequential and their answers are likely to shape any possible procedural considerations in the audio description of consumer brands. The discussion would not constitute, therefore, a matter of ideology on the one

hand and a matter of audio description of brands on the other, as separate, unrelated notions. It rather becomes a matter of whether brands and ideology are unavoidably, perhaps implicitly audiodescribed in a concurrent way.

Sponsoring plays an important role in the use of branded objects in movies. Years ago Fay Weldon was paid by Bulgari to write *The Bulgari Connection* (2001), which became famous for its commercial tie-in (Rose 2001): Weldon was paid £18,000 from the jewellery company to mention the brand at least twelve times. The book actually shows 34 mentions in sentences such as '"A Bulgari necklace in the hand is worth two in the bush", said Doris.' The same commercial strategy is found in *The Devil Wears Prada*; for example, every time Andy, the main character, goes to Starbucks to collect coffee – many times throughout the film.

This is an interesting case, since a particular coffee brew from Starbucks is requested by the sophisticated trendsetter Meryl Streep/Miranda. Brand-wise, her character is equally constructed by a chauffeur in a silver Mercedes, her expensive Prada handbag, and nothing else but Starbucks coffee. With these associations, and by triangulation, Starbucks becomes a top of the range product, desired by the most fashionable and trendy people, performing with this association (or, again, identification) a persuasive act. Be it in New York, in Barcelona, or in Brownsville, consumers can drink the same coffee as Meryl Streep/Miranda, and through sheer association by contiguity, unleash a process of identification that make the fortunate coffee drinker as divine as the character of Miranda. This potential effect is lost in the audio description: non-sighted audiences will know of Starbucks only towards the end of the movie when Miranda asks Andy to '[h]ave my Starbucks waiting.' When she is by the table about to drink her Starbucks, the audio description reads 'she snatches up

her coffee.' No Starbucks is mentioned in the audio description of the scene, although the overall structural and symbolic reference still stands, nonetheless much weakened, thanks to the explicit mention of the brand in the dialogue by the character.

A significant result of this omission (that is, the brand name is omitted, the object may or may not described) takes place at the purely commercial level: spectators who rely on the audio description for information in this film will not have the same degree of exposure to that coffee brand throughout the length of the movie, and they will also be underbombarded with the embedded Starbucks advertising. As a sponsor, the company may not be quite satisfied with the lack of explicit reference to the conspicuous and repetitive visual input of the brand. While this may fall in the realm of sheer speculation and, at any rate, at a level of really marginal potential sales profit, the omission could bear contractual consequences in that an agreement may exist between the parties about the fact that all products related to the film will clearly have their brand name openly displayed, something that the audio description would be openly infringing.

Brand names, as in the case of Louis Vuitton from *RocknRolla*, may encompass the notion of seduction, or rather the identification of luxury goods with a sexual connotation that contemporary consumerism brings about in a systematic way. In that movie, the character of One-Two, a gangster, wants to impress and flirt with the sophisticated glamorous accountant Stella. He may be an illiterate mobster, but while money can't buy education, it can easily and effortlessly provide a veneer of glamour. In a way, this is the same seduction game played by the accountant herself with both the head of the Russian mafia Uri and the humble London gangster One-Two. By providing the name Louis Vuitton associated with One-Two, a criminal, spectators have an immediate disambiguation of the visual contrast and its narrative function: high

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contrast. Other possible AD renderings, such as 'One-Two walks into an art gallery carrying a holdall' or 'One-Two walks into an art gallery carrying a designer holdall', would have not taken into account the intended character-building strategy sought by the movie's director. However, they would also have averted the reinforcement of the consumerist tradition of associating luxury goods with seduction and sensuality.

While more examples could be analysed, the same casual treatment to brand names and advertising seems to be present in most films. Furthermore, it could be said that, in general and even within every different movie, audio descriptions for brand names do not seem to follow any kind of homogenous treatment.

After describing the different functions and meanings for brand names and advertising, and analysing their audio description strategy, this paper will now move on to briefly propose possible consistent strategies. The analysis performed shows how the audio description of brands works at three levels: the narrative, the symbolic, and, at a more discursive plane, the ideological. The research methodology followed in our proposal is bottom-up, that is, after scrutinizing a number of movies, three were selected that offered good examples to illustrate the strategies used for the audio description of brands. They have been grouped in two opposing extremes: brand omission and literal audio description.

In our first example, the omission of the name 'Prada' right at the beginning of the movie, delays the meaning-making operation that has an immediate echo with the title of the movie by virtue of its identification between the main character and the devil through the accessory: the Prada handbag. Although this prefigures the role of the character in the film from the very first scenes, the omission of the brand name in the AD was the option chosen when, in fact, no time constraints were present in a scene that was silent for several seconds. The precise moments throughout the film in which the

identification between the Devil/Prada and the main character Miranda takes place in the audio described version could be measured, and the foreseeable delay in the identification and the subsequent need for a disambiguation would be sufficient proof of how brand names are structurally relevant. This omission also affects the whole movie, since 'anchoring' the compound Prada/Miranda/Devil – which could be considered as a leitmotif in the movie – establishes an initial positioning in the audience that completely disappears in the AD version. As suggested by Vilaró and Orero (2013, 59–60), anchoring has the purpose of calling

> attention to itself, and provide a clue—which will act as a tag or marker—in order to ease retrieving the reference and act as a memory triggering device. By contrast, the absence of the highlight, or anchoring, may result in redundancy of information at one extreme, or may result in the resolution of the film going unnoticed.

The other strategy discovered in the examples is that of literal audio description. This would be applied to the narrative function of marking some sort of narratological turn in the plot, when the interaction between the brand name and the plot becomes explicit through the immediately co-occurring dialogue. As Dávila-Montes and Orero have discussed elsewhere (2014), in the film *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andy has a catharsis and a change in attitude reflected by her dress code: from anonymous woolly shapeless garments she adopts Chanel clothing, a style which will define her henceforth. However, the brand name is described literally perhaps just because it has been explicitly mentioned in the dialogues when a receptionist asks: 'Are you wearing the Ch…?'. Andy replies 'Chanel Boots? Yes I am.' This could be further analysed in the

fact that the reply is 'Yes; I am' in immediate contiguity to the words 'Chanel Boots':

'Chanel boots, yes I am.' This clearly marks a process of identification of Chanel with

Andy, a style which she will adopt throughout the film. The word choice seems to flag

the very same mechanisms advertising seeks to trigger in its persuasive process:

identification. Later in the movie, a street scene shows the 'new' Andy meeting her

boyfriend. She is then described as '[w]ith the Chanel boots.' In this case, literal audio

description would seem then to be triggered by explicit dialogical mentions, and they

would seem to take place beyond any apparent effort by the AD in order to clarify the

function and role of brand names. This strategy may seem superficially the opposite of

omission, but it has the same negative impact since it fails to reflect the role of brand

names in the movie. The random literal mention of brand names – forced by the

dialogue – in a movie built on clothes fashion shows a lack of cohesive criteria for the

audio description of brands. The lack of attention to overall cohesiveness can be equally

blamed on both strategies: omission and literality. This lack of consistency entails a

similar impact on its reception, since the user is left at a superficial level of intended

meaning.

At the symbolic level, the audio description of brand names or their omission

also affects their reception. Going back to our example, the two receptionists, Emily and

Amy, are characterized not just by their physical looks – which are a reflection of quite

disparate psychological depictions – but also by the brands of clothing they

conspicuously wear in the movie. Emily wears Vivien Westwood and Andy wears

Chanel. There is an opposing symbolism in those brands, Westwood being the founder

of the punk fashion industry and Chanel a stereotype of elegance. The two opposing

styles are in turn part of a double play with symmetries that is enhanced by the

wallpapers on their Apple computers: a picture of a natural landscape and the Eiffel

Tower at night, respectively. As in the very nature of advertising, this is a game of implicit identifications, symmetries, reflections, contiguity by similarity, and connections that have already been established that elicit participation from the receiver in a faux meaning-making process that parallels the basic meaning-making mechanism without actually executing it (Dávila-Montes, 2008). More than sheer narrative objects that are built into the film for a purpose, brands unleash an array of symbolic relationships that should be consequently understood and considered when drafting audio descriptions. A conscious and thorough analysis of the movie should be performed in order to reflect the many layers of meaning originally shown in the movie, which should be reflected in the AD.

As signalled above, there is a third level in this analysis, belonging to the realm of ideology, and therefore to the discourse of professional ethics, translator ethics, and translator agency. In this regard, the many possible discussions could revolve around the issue of how the audio describer, who is nothing less than a translator from images to words, a translator from audiovisual texts into aural texts, is entitled to contribute to general trends in contemporary consumerism by reinforcing stereotypes (Orero, 2012). This debate deserves a more elaborate background, but the following example would seem to illustrate the dilemma quite aptly: James Holt is a fictional character in *The Devil Wears Prada*, where we have seen that brand names are explicitly named orally and visually. The designer James Holt does not exist, and there isn't a James Holt fashion brand either. He is built in the film and plays a major part in the resolution of the plot. The film manages to create a fictional persona who fits with existing designer archetypes. Andy goes to a fashion party looking for him, and she is carrying a handbag designed by him. This is explicitly mentioned in the dialogue, but James Holt does not exist in the real world. Should the AD point out that he is a fictional character? As

Sudjic (2008: 57) notes: 'It is not just how an object looks that is the key to the creation of an archetype. A commanding archetype needs a form that can communicate what it does, and what the user needs to do to make it work.' If AD offers colours to describe objects or emotions, if AD uses designers to describe styles – Vivien Westwood vs. Chanel – what reference will James Holt offer? Should the describer give more information regarding his style, even though he doesn't exist? As Sudjic (2008: 80) states:

> [t]hough the work of a designer will only occasionally make a lasting remark by creating a new archetype, it is much more often based on the exploration and manipulation of existing archetypes. Once an archetype has been created, it lingers in our minds, a memory ready for reuse, sometimes in very direct ways.

The movie is therefore recreating the archetype of a creator of archetypes. Is this conceptual *mise en abyme* something the AD should disregard in its efforts to produce a viewer experience for the visually impaired?

6. Conclusion

There is no prescriptive strategy to audio describe brand names. Far too many elements are in play, beyond the time factor and synchronization, to suggest one strategy over another. Looking at many examples, we have pointed out the main functions which have grouped all instances observed. The first function seems to be related to the construction of characters and hinges on an initial synecdoche, by which a part defines the whole, triggering from there symbolic associations that are only apparently

symbolic, for they connect to stereotypical brand styles and expectations. As it is connatural to advertising, a simulacrum of connection is made and spectators understand who the character is by making it fall into a ready-made category. The second function may stem from the first one, but is triggered when branded objects appear in different scenes or sequences in the movie. While they may initially help in identifying a particular character trait by the same synecdoche-based and symbolically enhanced association mechanism, their subsequent appearances in the movie and their potential interaction with the plot contributes to weave the drama and to provide endophoric references between different scenes. They may also help in constructing changes in character traits and, in some cases, turning points that may only be fully understood through the visual input provided by the branded object. In both cases, the explicit mention of the brand name in the audio description will become substantial for the reception of the audiovisual material in a comprehensive, cogent way.

While specific advice on a coherent strategy throughout the length of a movie may seem a desirable approach, it is possible that time or sound and music constraints won't allow it. This fundamental principle, that can be applied to almost any other feature to be described in a movie, seems to be overlooked by professionals in a rather consistent fashion when considering brand names in their audio descriptions. To understand the brand name function and evaluate the available strategy to be used within the given restrictions is the way forward in this exercise. Choosing to audio describe one function above another has direct implications for the audio described version of the movie, by contributing to a meaning-making process, alleviating the effort in some cases through timely disambiguation. Audio describers should be aware of both values. The resulting response in the audience may become, therefore, an

immediate consequence of this awareness and its incidence in the decision-making process inherent to this mode of intersemiotic translation.

Acknowledgements

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