

## Opening Credit Sequences: Audio Describing Films within Films\*

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### ABSTRACT

*This article aims to analyse existing audio descriptions of opening credit sequences to raise awareness at the function and role played by these brief film introductions. It will pave the way to suggest possible ways of dealing with the overload of information provided by the credits. The first section presents an overview of film credits: five main historical phases are identified, and four categories are proposed. The manifold functions and constituents of opening credit sequences are also presented. The second section presents an analysis of a corpus of twenty opening film credits and highlights the various strategies adopted as well as the many problems faced by audio describers.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The opening credits of films have developed from simple credits on a black frame to artistic typography or stylish complex narrations in its own right. In recent years, and depending on the budget or the director's choice, credits have become a sophisticated opening of films which set the genre and give away many of the features which will be developed during the film. When converting the visuals and sound of film credits into a narration, audio describers have to juggle with many elements, trying to convey not only the written information but also further visual information along with sound: a multimodal text.

This article envisages film credits as a paratextual feature of films, as an intermediary complex zone (Stanitzek 2009) which accompanies the audience into the film. The aim of this paper is to analyse existing audio

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descriptions of opening credit sequences, and suggest possible ways of dealing with the overload of information provided by the credits. The first section presents an overview of film credits with special emphasis in the American tradition: five main historical phases are identified, and four categories are proposed. The manifold functions and constituents of opening credit sequences are also presented. The second section ponders the difficulties of conveying all the information contained in the opening credit sequence in an audio description, and analyses a corpus of twenty films trying to encompass all genres and audiences.

## 2. FILM CREDITS: SHORT FILMS WITHIN FILMS

Film credits are nowadays often part of the film, either because they are an integral part of the storyboard or because they are simply projected on top of the film, with no apparent function: be as it may film credits are deictic texts. Using a term born in literary studies (Genette 1997) and later transferred to film and television studies (Metz 1994; Stam 2000; Kreimeier & Stanitzek 2004; Stanitzek 2005; and Böhnke 2007), opening film credits can be considered a type of paratext, as many other paratexts like: trailers, teasers, intertitles, directors comments, formatting issues and all types of promotional material (Matamala, forthcoming). Film credits, according to Straw (2010: 154), perform a mediatory function and “organise the spectator’s passage from the extratextual to the textual world,” but they also function as marketing devices which enhance the value of films – for certain potential audiences –, and they can also be analysed within a broader history of design.

Film credits have evolved in parallel to technological and aesthetic developments and possibilities, not forgetting fashions, and various phases can be differentiated in the short history of film credits, as pointed out by Rocamora (2002) and Inceer (2007):

- a. **Silent cinema.** This is the departing point of films, and in this period it seems that no film credits were included in the first silent movies, as can be seen in the short clips by the Lumière brothers. This first presentation may clash with our present understanding and memory of film credits in silent movies, since we all have seen these seminal short films with credits. The reason being commercial remastering for the DVD version with opening credits, the title and filmmaker name were sometimes added (Inceer 2007: 6). When silent films evolved and incorporated intertitles and live music, a title card was shown, with the title of the film and the name of the filmmaker. As industry grew and technology improved, credits became more sophisticated, resembling the information offered in books, as can be seen in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915, D. W. Griffith) (Figure 1). In this early film opening credit, there is already a primitive

credit design where the surname of the director Griffith is included in the main frame. Some credits also began to depict formal and expressive innovations as a result of the influence of the art nouveau in typography: two examples are *The Kid Brother* (1927, Ted Wilde) (Figure 1) and *Das Kabinnet des Dr. Caligari* (1919, Robert Wiene).



Figure 1. *Silent cinema film credits*

- b. **Sound cinema (30s and 40s).** The sound revolution and Technicolor changed the way stories were told and interpreted, film language had to be reinvented. Opening sequences changed, intertitles disappeared and film credits gained importance, reinforcing their expressiveness generally through the soundtrack. As cinema production became a more complex industry credits followed suit, gaining a new status. They were designed and created by artists – usually graphic designers – in teams and studios, since they were more related to typography and layout. They were independent from the film director and the budget allocated to these “short films within films” marked the quality and artistic value of the product. Credits became lengthier: they displayed the title and director, presented actors and acknowledged some crewmembers, and on occasions they showed certifications, sometimes with signatures – beginning to resemble a paper more than a film (see Figure 2). They were so lengthy that curtains would stay down, and were only pulled back when titles ended (Inceer 2007: 8). To be in line with the content of the film, or the director’s intentions and personality, filmmakers went onto to elaborate more interesting title sequences (Alfred Hitchcock, Jean Renoir or John Ford are good examples). They also adopted other approaches such as enumerating the credits orally as in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) or omitting an extended title sequence. This was the case of *Fantasia* (1941, Walt Disney), where only a title card and the credit “Color by Technicolor” appeared, or *Citizen Kane* (1941, Orson Welles), with a single title credit. Director’s aesthetics also encompassed the credits in their presentation of the final product, every little detail was controlled.



Figure 2. A certificate from the British Board of Film Censors for Hitchcock's *39 Steps*

- c. Cinema and TV (50s and 60s). The birth of TV and the growth of Hollywood industry meant the beginning of a war for audiences: cinema *versus* TV. Private and public broadcasters also competed for a share of the audience. Audiovisual entertainment had by now established itself as the mainstream form of entertainment. The industry flourished and unions gained rights such as union-based crews being acknowledged in opening credits. A key author who reinvented opening title sequences was graphic designer Saul Bass, author of memorable opening sequences such as *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955, Otto Preminger) or the kinetic typography of the film credits of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) (see Figure 3) or *North by Northwest* (1959). Other well-known credit designers are Maurice Binder (*Charade*, 1963, Stanley Donen; *Doctor No*, 1962, Terence Young) or Pablo Ferro (*Dr. Strangelove*, 1963, Stanley Kubrick).

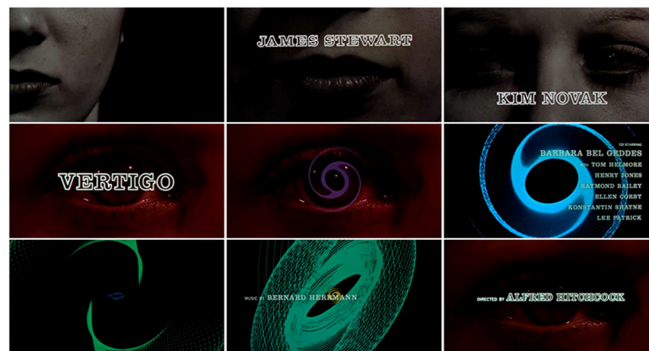


Figure 3. Opening credits for Hitchcock's *Vertigo* by Sam Bass

- d. **Aesthetic and technological changes (70s and 80s).** As with any art form, the pendulum effect made that in the seventies many directors returned to the austerity of early film titles, as can be seen in *Annie Hall* (1977, Woody Allen), whilst in the eighties the influence of surrealism and pop was evident, as in *Casino Royale* (1967, Val Guest) (see Figure 4). The introduction of advances in computer technology changed film credits and *Star Wars* (1977, George Lucas), with film credits by Dan Perri, became a clear example. *Superman* (1978, Richard Donner) was the first film to create titles with digital technology, its author being Bob Greenberg.



Figure 4. Opening titles for Val Guest's *Casino Royale*



Figure 5. Opening credits for Sam Liu's *Superman/Batman: Public Enemies* (2009)

- e. **Digital era (90s):** The digital revolution meant new and improved art forms. Some icon graphic designers such as Sam Bass, who signed many Scorsese's films, returned with a more sophisticated style, and went more daring, and so did Ferro (*Good Will Hunting*, 1997, Gus Van Sant). Other film credit designers who adopted digital technology include Randy Balsemeyer (*Short Cuts*, 1993, Robert Altman; *Dead Man*, 1995, Jim Jarmusch), the studio Bureau NW (*The Ice Storm*, 1996-97, Ang Lee) and Kyle Cooper (*Seven*, 1995, David Fincher, see Figure 6). According to Inceer (2007: 16) film credits have to adapt to new audiences, and since the new generations were brought up in the audiovisual world, rather than the paper format and books, they are used and enjoy fast editing and have a short attention span. Title sequences are edited at a faster pace and the importance of information diminishes while the importance of the overall effect is amplified. Extensive lists of credits are generally included at the end of the film, whilst the opening credit tries to capture the audience's attention by resorting to various strategies which kept on defying and breaking conventions for maximum impact. Some filmmakers even eliminate opening credits (*Batman Begins*, 2005, Christopher Nolan).



Figure 6. *Opening credits for Fincher's Seven*

- f. Technology at present continues to look for a better image, with the introduction of High Definition or Super High Definition, and the revisiting of 3D, which may be a fade or may stay. Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954) was shot in two-camera 3D process, but was not released in 3D until 1980. However, it might well be that the first decades of the new century witness a boost in this format, and it remains to be seen how opening credit sequences will be presented in these cinematographic new products, along with the incorporation of 3D sound. Figure 7 presents the opening credits for one of the first

titles available on 3D DVD. It is interesting to note that in one of the films we analysed, *Evan Almighty*, the AD describes “depth” as can be seen in the description offered for both the Universal and Spyglass logos (see Table 1).



Figure 7. *Opening credits for Coraline one of the first titles to be available in 3D DVD*

As it can be easily deduced from the previous historical overview, opening credit sequences are manifold. According to Inceer (2007: 19), from a stylistic point of view four overlapping categories can be identified:

- a. Titles superimposed on a blank screen: these are the simplest titles and use various typefaces, usually in white over a black background, as in Figure 1, or most of Woody Allen’s films.
- b. Titles accompanied by still images: this was a way to make title sequences more appealing and the plain background was replaced with various images, as in Hitchcock’s *39 Steps* (1935) (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *Three credits from 39 Steps where titles are projected on the same background*

- c. Titles accompanied with a series of moving images, usually with accompanying music. The array of possibilities is extremely wide and ranges from “a simple view of clouds moving in the sky, like we see in the opening sequence of *The Wizard of Oz*, to a more intricate sequence of images that incorporate camera movement, like the opening sequence of Robert Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962)” (Inceer 2007: 21) where the graphic designer Robert O. Frankfurt achieves a highly symbolic sequence, see Figure 9. These credit sequences can coexist with a narrative thread, especially in action movies, and dialogues can be included.



Figure 9. *Opening sequence of To Kill a Mockingbird*

- d. Titles built around animation and motion graphics. From classical animation film with well-known credits such as *The Pink Panther* (1968, Edward Blake) to more recent releases such as *Spiderman 2* (2004, Sam Raimi) or the James Bond *Casino Royale* remake (2006, Martin Campbell) where animated title sequences are quite common nowadays. Figure 10 reproduces an example from *Casino Royale*.

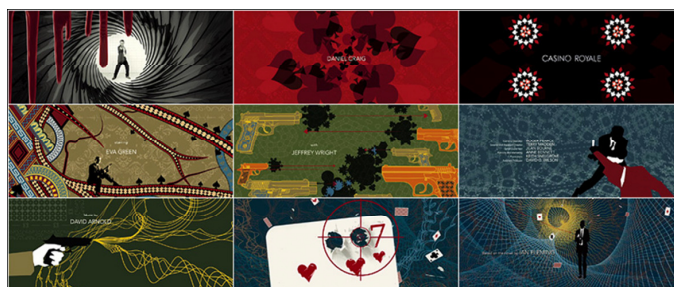


Figure 10. *Martin Campbell's Casino Royale (2006) opening sequence*



All in all, as with the film which they precede, opening film credits can include elements to be watched, to be read and to be heard, and hence become the filmic place of Mourgues' "livisaudible" (Mourgues 1994: 96).

We can conclude this section pointing at the main constituents of film credits:

- **Superimposed written texts:** they generally include logos, titles and subtitles, main production and cast members (an extensive list is included in the end credits) and sometimes other features such as dedications, prizes won, epigraphs, censorship indications and further specific remarks (when saying that a film is based or not based on real facts, for instance).
- **Visual elements – not texts:** many opening credit sequences include images which show some actions, characters or places relevant to the plot.
- **Audible elements:** these include incidental speech, comprehensible dialogues or monologues, and music or songs. Songs can have meaningful lyrics, relevant to the plot, or can be used to set the atmosphere. Sometimes there can be lyrics in a foreign language, conveyed in the language of the film by means of subtitles.

All these elements can coexist in opening sequences whose purpose has gone beyond displaying the title and acknowledging the filmmaker, main actors and crew members. It is often the case that these sequences are also used for further purposes such as setting the place, setting the time, defining the genre and creating audience expectations, introducing relevant characters or explaining a story, among others. The function of the film credits is an interesting issue, which should be address when drafting an audio description, and transferring this wealth of information into an audio description is the first challenge professional describers meet when they start working on a new production.

## 2. AUDIO DESCRIBING CREDITS

Audio description is "the visual made verbal" (Snyder 2008) and allow users to enjoy cinema and television productions – and many other cultural eventsB – only by listening to them. An extra narration is added between the dialogues in order to help the audience construct meaning and understand what is happening on screen. Depending on the modality (live *vs.* recorded AD, planned, spontaneous or hybrid AD, see Matamala 2007) and on the source product (film, theatre, TV programme, opera, etc., see Orero 2007), there are various challenges to overcome.

This article focuses exclusively on the opening credit sequence of films, in other words, the planned and recorded audio description of the first minutes of feature films where credits appear. It is our hypothesis that the problems posed by these sequences will be manifold. Various types of elements (superimposed written text, visual elements and audible elements) as well as various types of constituents (logos, title, cast members, images, songs, etc.) will probably coexist and a selection will have to be made. Typography (font type, colour, texture, size, etc.), graphic design (moving or static images, illumination, etc.), filmic language (shots, camera movements), and film editing and montage will also play a significant role and the audio describer will have to decide whether rendering this information is relevant to meaning making. Additional challenges might be the presence of credits written in a foreign language, incomprehensible to the target audience. Or even meta-credits which comment on the credits. This is the case for *Monty Python and The Holy Grial* (1975, Terry Gilliam & Terry Jones) whose credits are a send up to foreign languages and a wink to their translation through subtitling, as can be seen in Figure 11. Several stories are told through the credits, both as subtitles, and as the credits itself, as can be seen in Figure 11.



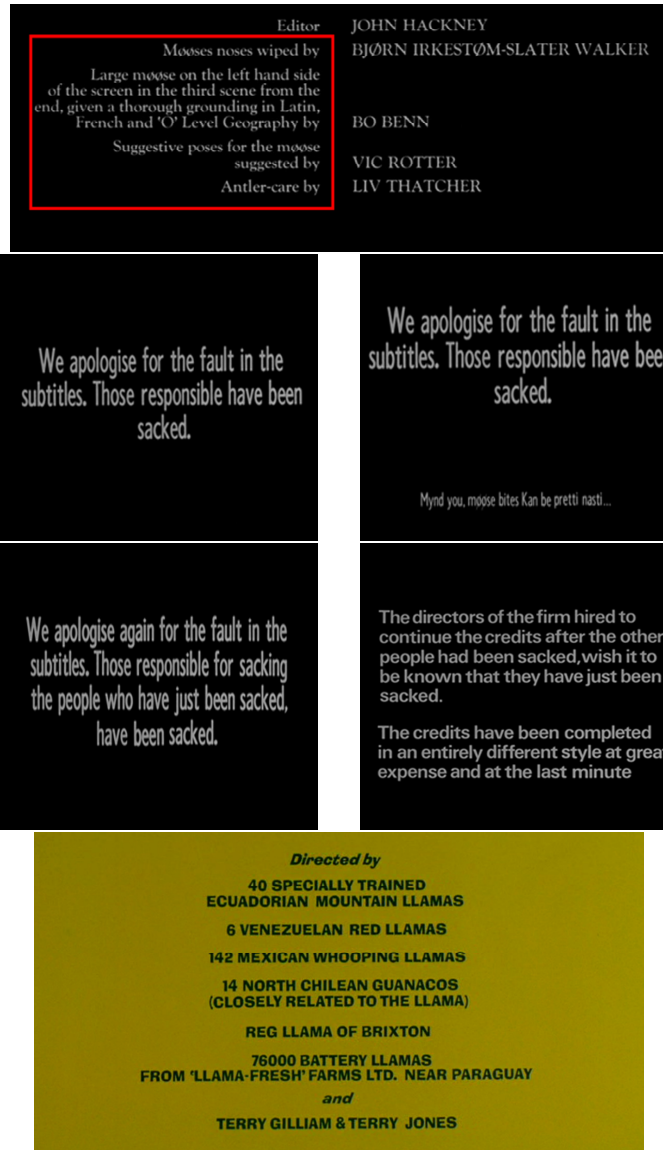


Figure 11. *Frames where credits play a further role*

### 3. FILM CREDIT SEQUENCES IN AD

Some references are found in the literature on AD concerning opening credit sequences: Orero (2011: 246) makes reference to the logos of the film *Be With Me*, whilst Chmiel & Mazur (2011: 287) pay attention to logos and other written features in Polish audio described films. Orero & Wharton (2007) analyse the film *Torrente 3* and comment on the credits and the approach that was finally adopted in order to deal with the wealth of information provided by the Bond-like opening sequence. Orero & Wharton also refer to the absence of recommendations in Benecke & Dosch (2004) on this specific issue and they reproduce Benecke's opinion, which basically proposes to find a middle way in which the optimal combination of what happens and the credits is sought although it is not always possible.

Vercauteren (2007: 143) lists logos, opening titles, cast lists and credits as on-screen texts that should be part of the AD, and ITC guidelines acknowledge the importance of reading the credits (ITC 2000: 23), and give specific instructions. Some excerpts are reproduced next:

Some opening titles [...] can move too rapidly for any helpful description to be given. A popular alternative is to provide the viewer with some useful information about the programme [...]. In other cases, the musical theme tune can be enjoyed for its own merit [...]. But with American programme material there may be a contractual obligation to describe the opening logo. [...] Reading the credits at the beginning and end of films and television programmes is an important function of audio description as it is an area in which visually impaired people feel they particularly miss out. However, most of the people questioned, [...] are not too interested in the names of production teams and technical crew.

With described film video releases, many American movie companies insist on every credit being read out at the end of a film, even if this means a voice reading the names over a blank screen. This is unlikely to be acceptable in the context of television because airtime is too valuable.

The opening credits often appear over an important action sequence and it may be necessary to compress them into a shorter space or to read them in advance of their actual appearance on screen.

Further references are found in LARRS guidelines <<http://www.larrs.org/guidelines.html>>, and Remael & Vercauteren (2007). It can be seen an agreement regarding credit AD in guidelines, though the crucial issue of prioritising information is a pending and thorny issue.

#### 4. CORPUS ANALYSIS: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

AD guidelines are a useful source of information for basic principles of AD in general, but films belong to genres, and their opening credits vary greatly, and the wealth of information they can offer are almost endless, in fact they defy classification.

This was the first aim in the study: to gather films from different genres within a short span of time to aim at a classification for further analysis and study. Mainstream English and US produced films were chosen, available in DVD. Focusing in general public and popular films, it was hoped to find a reasonable corpus of common elements which would lend themselves to a taxonomy which would help in its study. This first exercise did not produce the expected results.

The corpus of twenty English-language productions, released between 2000 and 2008, and encompassing various genres (horror, science fiction, action, comedy, children films, and drama) were: *The House of Mirth* (2000, Terence Davies), *Evan Almighty* (2003, Tom Shadyac), *Finding Neverland* (2004, Marc Forster), *The Ladykillers* (2004, Joel and Ethan Coen), *A Lot Like Love* (2005, Nigel Cole), *Festival* (2005, Annie Griffin), *The History Boys* (2006, Nicholas Hynter), *Stormbreaker* (2006, Geoffrey Sachs), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006, Richard Linklater), *The Punisher* (2006, Jonathan Hensleigh), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006, Kevin MacDonal), *Enchanted* (2007, Kevin Lima), *Beowulf* (2007, Robert Zemeckis), *The Water Horse* (2007, Jay Russell), *Wild Hogs* (2007, Walt Becker), *Get Smart* (2008, Peter Segal), *Pathfinder* (2007, Marcus Nispel), *Resident Evil: Extinction* (2007, Russell Mulcahy), *Rockandrolla* (2008, Guy Ritchie), and *Taken* (2008, Pierre Morel).

Opening sequences where film credits appear were watched while gathering information in an orderly manner. An ad hoc table was drafted with information regarding written features (logo, title, crew members, written texts, etc.), visuals (action, characters, location, etc.), audible elements (songs, music, delivery) and other relevant issues.

##### 4.1. Logos

Various written features were found in the films analysed: logos, titles, names of crew members, written texts setting the time and location and further information such as the play on which a film is based.

Logos, which is perhaps the first written text found in the film, are of many types, and even when there seems to be a standard image, it changes. The first logos to be seen are usually of the producer, which given the films chosen in the study are mainstream majors. But even majors' logos change both across time and according to individual films. An example of the former is that of Metro Goldwin Mayer head of a lion across time. As

for the latter we can see the substitution of the lion's head for a vampire or Tom from the cartoon series *Tom and Jerry* (See Figure 12).



Figure 12. Logos from Polanski's *Dance with Vampires* (1967) and *Tom and Jerry* cartoons

But not only images can change in classic logos, which can lead the audience to unexpected reactions. Classic sound can also go under some changes, as for example in *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1981, John Derek) Tarzan's yell is in place of the MGM lion's roar. In *Strange Brew* (1983, Rick Moranis & Dave Thomas), the lion, which is clearly not the standard fifth MGM lion, belches instead of roaring. In Robert Altman's *O.C. & Stiggs* (1985), the lion speaks the names of the title characters, in a "surfer-dude" voice. In *The Pink Panther* (2006, Shawn Levy), the standard studio logo was again modified; after the lion roaring, an animated version of the character Inspector Clouseau appears, and an animated panther also appears. Following this the lion reappears against the screen, bewildered. What may be seen as a stereotyped image and a simple AD issue, with no further implications it may turn into a challenge, since logos may also play a role in defining the atmosphere of the film, with a wink to the audience, which should be described in the AD.

This logo deviation from the stereotype is increasingly popular, with many examples in recent from Warner Brothers, to name one major. AD examples of these adapted logos can be found in films such as *V for Vendetta* (2006, James McTeigue) where the Warner Brothers shield is seen on what appears to be grainy, black-and-white footage, in tune with the film's central focus on fascist totalitarianism. In our corpus two examples of this type are to be found: in *Get Smart* where the Warner Bros standard logo changes into a safe vault, the cogs turn and churn and the shield is opened (see Figure 13); in *Rocknrolla* the logo is scratched out on a brown wall, along with the Dark Castle Entertainment logo (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. *Standard WB, Get Smart and Rocknrolla adapted logos*

As for the rendering of the AD, logos can be described simultaneously as they appear on the screen without indicating their true nature (*A Lot Like Love, Enchanted*), they can be explicitly defined as a logo (*The Ladykillers, Evan Almighty*), and sometimes a reference is made to the fact that written words appear by means of expressions such as “letters spelling out”, “the words” or “repeated letters” (*The History Boys*). Uneven treatment of logos is what has been found in this study. Thorough descriptions as in *Evan Almighty* where information about “depth” and time is given: see the beginning of each description in Table 1. In this film descriptions follow a narrative, starting with “now” for the first logo, “the second logo” followed by “in another logo” for the third logo, the fourth logo is also introduced by “now,” and the start of the AD also begins with “now.” This very complex narration is found next to brief references to logos without descriptions (Scottish Screen logo in *Festival, Stormbreaker*) or films that lack a logo (*The House of Mirth*). And even different descriptions of the same logo are found (Touchstone Pictures). Some examples are reproduced next:

Table 1. *Some audio descriptions of logos in analysed films.*

Film	Logo	AD
<i>Enchanted</i>	Walt Disney Pictures	A star shines brightly in a dark blue sky that's tinged with streaks of lilac. Below a wide river c the countryside. A coat of arms is printed on a white flag which flatters at the top of a beautiful animated fairy-tale castle. Fireworks explode from the castle illuminating the sky. One arcs over the top of it. Walt Disney Pictures.
<i>A Lot Like Love</i>	Beacon	In a framed black and white cityscape a beam of light shines forth from a skyscraper. Beacon.
	Touchstones Pictures	A flash of golden light freezes on a silver globe. Touchstones Pictures.
<i>The Ladykillers</i>	Touchstones Pictures	A jagged diagonal flash of light superimposed on a pale sphere. The logo of Touchstone Pictures.
<i>The History Boys</i>	Fox Searchlights	Against a background of the hills and street lights of Los Angeles, searchlights illuminate a

	Pictures	huge art-deco sign of sculptured letters spelling out Fox Searchlights Pictures, a News Corporation Company.
	BBC Films DNA	An asteroid splits apart to reveal the words BBC Films. A film's spool spirals in a double helix with repeated letters. DNA.
<i>Evan Almighty</i>	Universal	Now, on a black sky a slither of sunlight press the Earth where rays of light shine from the continents and a three dimensional word orbits the planet: UNIVERSAL. A web address appears <www.universalstudios.com>.
	Spyglass	In another logo a brilliant sunburst brightens a cloud free horizon of rippling water. The view is reflected in the lens of a raised golden spyglass that a man focuses away from us. A square graphic frames the man in rippling waves against a black background: Spyglass entertainment.
	Original Film	Now in a third logo a silvery letters roll onto a black background spelling Original Film.
	Shady Acres Entertainment	Now by a calm river green grass turns to gold, and autumn leaves drift by. Falling snow veils the sea which lies inside a giant snowglobe with a single and round deck chair facing it. Spring flowers grow in the see and words appear. Shady Acres Entertainment. Now at a TV newsdesk.
<i>Festival</i>	UK Film Council	Streaks of blue light herald white letters on a black background. UK Film Council.
	Scottish Screen	The logo for Scottish Screen. Lottery Funded.
	Film Four	Black and white letters on a red band. Film Four.

#### 4.2. Font type and lettering in titles

Another feature which can also create the mood and raise expectations is font types in film credits in general, and in film titles in particular. Celtic fonts in *The Water Horse* (Figure 14) are omitted in the AD, while it reinforces the setting of the film. In the case of *Beowulf's* (Figure 15) the font is mentioned: "Gothic stone letters glide onto the rock face: Beowulf" which is a shame because it is clearly a mistake. The logo has invented letters based on Roman font where Grendel's sword is used for the first stroke in the initial B. These relevant characteristics which can be either omitted from the description, as in the first case, or included but misleading, as in the second example show the care that should be taken from the very start of the film.





Figure 14. *Celtic font in The Water Horse*



Figure 15. *Beowulf's title not in Gothic letters, as mentioned in the AD*

Other types of detail concerning title and credits special effects are given in many descriptions. For instance, in *A Scanner Darkly* the AD reads: "Words flicker on the screen." In *The History Boys* and *A Lot Like Love*, titles are also described in detail, as shown next:

Letters jump out of a couple of lines of scrolling text set against a black background and assemble themselves as the title at the bottom of the screen:  
 The History Boys.  
 White and yellow titles appear against a black background. A lot like love.

Still concerning titles, their appearance is sometimes integrated in a wider description, as indicated next:

...American producer greets the arriving audience on the steps of a theatre in... *Finding Neverland*  
 The title of the book is '*Enchanted*  
 Touchstones Pictures presents Tom Hanks, Irma P. Hall, Marlon Wavans, J.K. Simmons, Tzi Ma, Ryan Hurst, George Wallace, Diane Delano, Stephen Root, Greg Grunberg in *The LadyKillers*.

#### 4.3. *Written captions*

Written captions can also present information mainly concerning the time and setting of the action, but also referring to other issues (“This film is inspired by real people and events,” in *The Last King of Scotland*, or “Based on the play,” in *The History Boys*).

There are many examples of written captions in our corpus, which are transferred in the AD by means of four main strategies:

- captions read before they actually appear. For instance, “Seven years ago/ Los Angeles” (*A Lot Like Love*);
- captions read as they appear. For instance, “Yorkshire, 1983” (*The History Boys*);
- captions integrated in the AD. For instance, “London, 1903” appears as a superimposed text as a curtain rises and the AD reads “The curtain rises, it is London, 1903”. (*Finding Neverland*);
- captions spelled out as such. For instance, “A caption: A true tale it is” (*The Water Horse*).

#### 4.4. *Other credits: Crew members*

As for the rest of the credits, concerning crew members, strategies vary enormously in the various film credits analysed. Taking into account whether they are rendered – and if so, when –, it is our belief that the strategies summarised in Table 2 could be found:

Table 2. *Strategies in rendering the crew member credits.*

(a) Omission	–	–
(b) Literal rendering	(1) Synchronic	
	(2) Non-synchronic	Combined
		Posterior
(c) Condensation	(1) Synchronic	–
	(2) Non-synchronic	Combined
		Posterior

- Various circumstances can impel the describer to omit this type of information such as the relevance of the action going on or even the role of sound or music. This strategy, called omission, is found in *Festival*, because the action of the films starts simultaneously as the main actors (eighteen of them) and crew members (eleven) are acknowledged, hence the choice of AD of the action rather than reading the credits has been prioritised.

- b. Literal rendering – that is, reading all the crew members acknowledged in the film credits – can be either synchronic or non-synchronic. The latter can be sub-classified in combined, previous and posterior in the latter group. No examples of synchronic literal rendering have been found in our corpus, probably due to the many elements that appear in the opening sequences.

As for non-synchronic literal rendering, *The House of Mirth* belongs to the combined group, because all crew members acknowledged in the opening credit sequence are read out but not synchronically. The two first ones are read after the credits pop out because a brief description is included before, two are read synchronically and the rest – five – are read out after appearing on screen. This is possible because the first seconds are not packed with action and the number of actors acknowledged is very limited. The same happens in *The Last King of Scotland*, where all nine actors and actresses are read out by the describer although not always as they appear on screen.

*The LadyKillers* belongs to the previous non-synchronic literal rendering group because the ten crew members acknowledged in the credits are read out before their name is actually shown on screen.

- c. The third group encompasses those credit sequences where only some of the main actors and crew members are read out by the describer, hence the name “condensation.” This condensation can be delivered synchronically or non-synchronically. Again, no examples of synchronic condensation have been found in our corpus. As for non-synchronic condensation, three scenarios can be envisaged: combined, previous and posterior. Combined non-synchronic condensation means that only a selection of the credits is read, both before and after they appear. An example is found in *The History Boys*. In a long opening credit sequence all actors’ names are read by the describer, three of them before they actually appear and twelve either synchronically or afterwards. After some action where no credits appear, more credits are shown on screen. A selection of them is read by the describer, who explicitly indicates “More cast names appear” so as to differentiate them from the action being described.

*Finding Neverland* belongs to the group of previous non-synchronic condensation because the main superimposed captions are read while the logo is shown, at the beginning of the opening sequence, before action begins and before the credits actually pop up. The AD reads: “Miramax Films presents a FilmColony production. Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, Julie Christie, Radha Mitchell and Dustin Hoffman. Based upon the play *The Man Who Was Peter Pan*, by Allan Knee. And inspired by true events.”

Finally, in *Evan Almighty*, for instance, a conversation is heard while credits appear on the screen so they cannot be read. Later on, when there is some time, credits are quickly read, as a form of compensation. This would be an instance of non-synchronic posterior condensation.

It must be stressed that some films do not include a list of crew members at the opening film sequence – only names or logos of production and distribution companies and/or title –, hence they go straight onto describing the film, as in the case of *Resident Evil: Extinction*, *The Punisher*, *Enchanted*, *The Water Horse* or *A Lot Like Love*.

#### 4.5. Other written indexic elements

Apart from the list of written elements strictly related to the captions, opening credit sequences can contain written elements which are part of the action, that is indexic texts: for instance, written words on a posted note, on a television, on a mobile phone screen or on a to-do list, just to put a few examples found in the *Get Smart* opening credit sequence, see Figure 16.

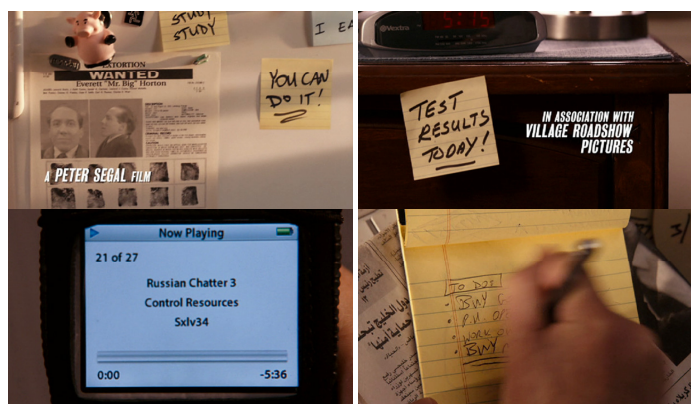


Figure 16. Some indexic written texts within credits in *Get Smart*

#### 4.6. Caveat

Though not being a part of the written information, nor an image, reading AD with one intonation or other plays a key role (Holland 2009). This issue is one of the elements which can change the perception and reception of a narrative, still no research has been performed as yet. In the 20 films analysed two were read with some intonation: *Evan Almighty* is read in English with US accent, in *The Water Horse* James O'Hara the audio describer puts on a slight Scottish twang. Should AD blend with the original production to create an epigonic multimodal text? In that case, the accent of the AD should match that of the film. This accent matching has been already made in some

productions such as *East is East* (1999, Damien O'Donnell), where AD is read with a Mancunian accent, and *Sexy Beast* (2000, Jonathan Glazer) with cockney English. In this case not only the accent is different from the rest of productions, US style is also different, as can be seen in the AD of the logo in Table 1, though given the scope of this article we will not look into it. Again, these issues deserve some further attention.

Recording the AD and mixing the final product is yet another key issue, and special attention should be paid to avoid not only overlapping, which is a basic principle, but deep confusion (Braun 2008). When captions are read along the AD of the action it creates a strange feeling: an example from *A Scanner Darkly* illustrates the problem: "A Richard Linklater production. Seven years from now California." This effect observed in the *Girl with Pearl Earring* by Braun (2008) has a high incidence in credits, since the saturation of information offered in different formats lends itself to overlapping and nonsense.

#### 5. AUDIBLE ELEMENTS AND VISUALS

Most movies include visual information whose relevance for the plot varies. Depending on the film, some of the items which are presented in this introductory sequence are: locations, time, and characters. And also action, in other words, previous sequences in which the film action begins or which triggers the action in the film (cause), flash-forwards and flash-backs. This information is usually packed in a relatively short sequence which also includes written elements (described in the previous section) and audible elements, such as:

- Dialogues: in many films dialogues between characters in the film are heard. *The Last King of Scotland* or *Stormbreaker* are just two examples.
- Incidental speech: for instance, in *Finding Neverland*, the opening credit sequence shows how the audience gets into the theatre and many background voices are heard.
- Music in a wide variety of forms, and functions, with the aim of setting the atmosphere: Celtic tune (*The Water Horse*), horror music (*Resident Evil: Extinction*), rock-and-roll (*Rockandrolla*), an orchestra playing classical music (*Finding Neverland*), a combination of various types of music (march/lyrics/other types, in *The History Boys*), an extremely characteristic and "annoying" music (*A Scanner Darkly*), heavy metal (*Beowulf*), bagpipes (*Festival*). The source or origin of the music is sometimes described in the AD (orchestra playing in *Finding Neverland* and bagpipes in *Festival*).

- Songs with meaningful lyrics: this is the case of *Enchanted*, where a typical Disney song is heard.
- Various sounds such as: car horn (*A Lot Like Love*), raven, seagulls (*The LadyKillers*), amongst others.

The combination of the abovementioned elements produces a wide variety of scenarios in our corpus, where detailed and summarised, synchronous and non-synchronous ADs are to be found. Just to show some of the possibilities encountered, five different examples will be briefly summarised.

In *A Lot Like Love* there is a three-minute opening sequence where AD is combined with dialogues and visuals which set the action (girlfriend who argues with her boyfriend before catching a plane, another boy sees the girl, the girl sees the boy, they get on the same plane, the boy gets into the airplane toilet because a drink drops on him, the girl knocks on the door and they lock themselves inside), presents the two main characters and describes three locations (outside the airport, inside the airport, inside the plane).

In *The LadyKillers* many visuals are shown in this two-minute sequence next to written credits but action does not really happen. It is more a situational sequence rather than an introduction of the action. However, many sounds are heard and thanks to the AD they can be understood in context (raven, seagulls, boat under a bridge). There is also a song with comprehensible lyrics and the AD, read with at a calmed pace, leaves adequate silences so that it can be heard by the audience.

*The House of Mirth* opening title sequence devotes all its attention to the main character and sets the historical atmosphere, accompanied by classical music and a calm rendering of the AD by a female voice.

*Rockandrolla* presents a very interesting AD because rock music is heard and is combined with the description. Instead of reading the names synchronically, the describer groups them so that music can be heard. Many characters intervene in the opening sequence, next to an *off* voice, but no much space is available for description.

Finally, *Stormbreaker* depicts first of all the distributors' names and, afterwards, a long opening sequence in two different settings: a school hall, where Alex, the main character, talks about his uncle. And a fast-paced action sequence by Alex's uncle, which ends with his death. Many noises are heard: arms (explosives, machine gun, etc.), car brakes, a mobile phone. AD is also combined with different types of music: action music during the race, music in the car stereo, what could be called "danger" music when a helicopter approaches Alex's uncles to kill him, and a more calmed and different type of music when this action sequence finishes and the proper credit sequence begins. Then, the describer focuses on an aerial view of London and intersperses this description with the reading of many crew member credits.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

A close analysis of the function of the opening credits should be taken on board when drafting the audio description. Describing logos and credits – never mind how accurate – as they appear on the screen as if they were still pictures does not provide as much information as the sequence is intended. Film credits blend with the film which they precede, but they usually have a function beyond mere information regarding the cast and the working team responsible for the production. A close analysis of the many elements present, their relevance in the film narrative, and time will determine the strategy used in each case, which as with any cultural product, does not follow any norms beyond common sense and decorum in: style, vocabulary, register and syntactic simplicity. A good voice and intonation will also be determinant to create the right atmosphere and set up for the film to begin.

All in all, our analysis has proven the obvious: situations differ enormously and depending on the time slots available information will be prioritised and included in the audio description. However, it has also confirmed that opening title sequences are becoming key elements which often set the atmosphere and introduce the audience to the film.

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