Putting violence against women into words: May ideology have an effect in audio description?

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Abstract: This paper offers an exploratory approach to the role of ideology in translation and, specifically, in the audio description of a scene depicting violence against a woman. We performed a study in which translation students were asked to audio describe the wedding night scene between Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011). We aimed to find out whether the audio descriptions produced by the students reflected objectively the violence contained in the scene and whether ideology could have any effect on the strategies used to reflect this violence. Results from the analysis revealed that despite a homogeneous sample (women, left-wing and feminist) predicting a tendency to make the violence of the scene visible, participants employed strategies aimed at softening and omitting any element that would suggest to the audience that rape was taking place.

Keywords: audio description; gender-based violence; ideology; translator's agency.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, a growing body of research has focused on the cognitive and emotional processes involved in audio description (AD), especially in its reception (e.g., Ramos, 2015, 2016; Iturregui-Gallardo & Matamala, 2021; Rojo et al., 2021). However, the AD process itself remains underexplored, with only a few exceptions (Ramos & Rojo, 2020; Jankowska, 2021). This study aims to reflect on a potentially decisive factor in audio description—ideology—through the analysis of the final product and self-report questionnaires. Research suggests that ideological (in)congruence can shape translators' strategies when dealing with conflictive texts (Rojo & Meseguer, 2021), but little is known about whether ideology similarly impacts AD creation. Does describers' ideology influence their ability to convey objective descriptions of violent content? To address this question, we designed an experiment that included the audio description of the wedding night scene between Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones*. If the woman's body is a text, the viewer

will have no problem reading between the lines. The visual narrative clearly portrays physical subjugation and suffering: the woman's contorted face, vulnerable posture, and sobs reflect her pain and trauma. How might this image affect the person who is audio describing the scene? According to Lima et al. (2023), translation is not only a cognitive activity but also an emotional and physical experience. Could the objectivity required in audio description suppress the emotions that may arise after witnessing a rape scene such as this one? Have we normalized violence to such an extent that even describers struggle to produce objective ADs? How might ideological perspectives shape their choice of strategies when describing such content? To explore these issues, 107 translation students from the University of Murcia each created an AD for the scene. Our hypothesis predicted that participants' ideological beliefs would influence how they represented the events on screen. Surprisingly, the results revealed a tendency to omit or attenuate the depiction of sexual violence. This lack of objectivity points to a troubling normalization of violence against women, challenging assumptions about neutrality in AD and raising important questions for further research.

This paper is divided into five sections. After this Introduction, Section 2 explores how affect theory highlights the emotional and physical impact that words and texts have on individuals, particularly in the context of translation. It examines the ethical and emotional challenges faced by translators, especially women, when translating scenes of violence against women, –as is, of course, the case with rape–, within a societal framework shaped by rape culture and patriarchal norms. The section also posits translation and audio description as a potential tool for challenging and reshaping normalized narratives of violence, emphasizing the interplay between affect, ideology, and strategic translation decisions. In section 3, we examine how translators' ideological stances inevitably influence their decisions, making translation both an interpretative and political act. It highlights empirical studies demonstrating how ideology and emotions, such as anger or political (in)congruence, impact translators' reaction times and strategy choices. Furthermore, the section explores how translation can serve as a tool of resistance or reinforcement, depending on the translator's ethical stance[1], advocating for critical readings and strategies to challenge problematic narratives and promote social change. In section 4, we examine the principles and challenges of audio-describing violent content, emphasizing the importance of objectivity under the "What You See Is What You Say" (WYSIWYS) (Snyder, 2008) principle. Despite clear guidelines advocating against censorship, studies as the one conducted by Ramos and Meseguer (2023) reveal that audio describers often resort to self-censorship or rewriting to soften sensitive content, especially involving sexual violence. The section advocates for audio description as a potential tool to challenge normalized narratives and promote critical engagement with depicted violence. Our aims and research questions are stated at the beginning of section 5, where we also account for the methodology used in the article, with a description of the procedure for the experiment. Moreover, we discuss the results of the quantitative analysis and provide a qualitative analysis of the strategies identified in the analysis of the audio descriptions produced by the participants: *explicitation*, *attenuation* and *omission*. Finally, section 6 is dedicated to the discussion and closing remarks. Our

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[1] Encompassed in the Bourdieusian key concept of habitus, that refers to a set of enduring dispositions acquired by an individual that guide her/his perceptions, thoughts and actions. Applied to the figure of the translator, the translator's habitus refers to the set of dispositions, skills and attitudes that translators develop and mobilise in the course of their work. This concept helps to understand how translators' choices are influenced by social, cultural, professional and personal factors.

findings highlight the challenges of describing violent content and the influence of cultural norms on AD. While advocating for the use of AD as a tool for resistance, this study highlights the need for more critical AD training to avoid perpetuating minimization or invisibility of sexual violence, the maintenance of the status quo and the reproduction of dominant discourse, and suggests further research on how ideological aspects, cultural backgrounds, and professional experience shape AD practices.

2. Affect, translation and violence against women

Affect theory highlights how words, speeches and texts have a direct impact on our emotions and bodies, shaping both our conscious and unconscious responses (Massumi, 2002). This impact is particularly relevant in the field of translation, where the translator not only interprets a text, but also experiences it on an affective level. The emotions generated during this process can directly influence translation decisions, from the strategies employed to the interpretations of the meaning of the text (Robinson, 1991; Koskinen, 2020). When we, as women translators, are confronted with a scene of violence against a woman, such as rape, no one can deny the brutal effect that it will have on us. Sara Ahmed's (2004) perspective deepens this view by framing emotions not as internal states, but as social and political practices that circulate between bodies and texts. Emotions shape our alignment with certain worldviews and reflect the cultural and ideological structures in which we operate. In this sense, a woman translator's emotional response to a rape scene is not merely personal—it is shaped by histories of gendered violence and the discourses that surround it. This gendered distribution of roles in this interpretation game is self-evident, and responds to a social reality that is sadly backed up by statistics: it is the man, effectively and in most cases, the perpetrator of the aggressions, and the woman, the victim.

According to the "Report on crimes against sexual freedom and indemnity in Spain" (Tomás et al., 2022) issued annually by the Ministry of the Interior, the percentage of women victims of any form of sexual violence currently stands at 87%. These figures, although alarming, might not be an exhaustive representation of this phenomenon: sexual violence is underreported, either because of the stigma of becoming a victim, fear of reprisals from the aggressor or his entourage, or lack of confidence in the judicial systems. But sometimes other factors also come into play, such as cultural or ideological aspects. Cases of sexual violence within marriage are a case in point. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024), approximately 13% of women in relationships have experienced sexual violence by their partner. When sexual violence occurs between spouses, it acquires a complex dimension rooted in the sphere of profound intimacy. This type of violence often remains hidden and unnoticed, sustained by a multitude of underlying factors. These factors include social stigma, economic and emotional dependency, lack of specific laws, but also patriarchal norms deeply rooted, according to which marriage is perceived as a contract that grants sexual rights to the husband. In this regard, it can be acknowledged that the issue at hand represents a social phenomenon that remains a taboo subject, one that is still extremely challenging to articulate, whether from a first-person or third-person perspective. By extension, these cultural and social factors are essential to understanding the complexity of narratives of violence and the ethical challenge translators face in dealing with them.

On the other hand, rape culture is an entrenched phenomenon in patriarchal societies such as the one we are living in. Russell (1989) defines "rape culture" as a set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and support violence against women. Ours is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a constant threat of sexual violence, which shapes their lives and limits their freedom. There is a general consensus that this rape culture has led to the normalisation and even justification of sexual violence, where the blame is placed on the victims and the responsibility of the perpetrators is, to a certain extent, minimised. This culture does not incite the act of rape itself, but considers it as something natural and inherent to the human condition and—particularly, to the human condition of men (Palafox Menegazzi, 2017). It is not surprising, then, that exposure to this type of violence has been and is becoming increasingly common in our society. This is the case in the audiovisual field. Sexual violence has been, from different perspectives, a recurring theme as a narrative strategy or secondary element in television series and films, sometimes in a very explicit, cruel and grotesque way, even reaching hyper-realistic extremes, as in the case of Gaspar Noé's film *Irrevérsible* (2002). Watching Monica Bellucci's nine-minute rape scene without closing one's eyes, shedding a tear or stifling a scream is quite a feat, especially if the viewer is a woman. Translating the perpetrator's monologue as he commits rape or audio describing this scene is not only a professional and technical challenge, but also an emotional and ethical one.

Taking as a starting point the postulates of the theory of affect and placing ourselves before a possible context in which a woman has to face the translation of a scene of this calibre, one question arises: how to translate violence against women in the context of a society that still has rape culture engrained in it? According to Valcarcel (2000), violence against women, along with sexuality, women's health and abortion, did not enter the debate until the third wave of feminism, and sexual violence in the conjugal and family environment did not appear until the first decade of the 2000s. Until this time, the examples of violence against women that reached us, for example, through the media, were rarely, if at all, reflected upon. According to Mulvey (1975), women are subjected to the patriarchal male gaze and can only identify with onscreen characters masochistically. And yet, viewing rape scenes does make women uncomfortable. Translating them, too. And as Koskinen (2020) puts it, affects have an effect on translating in multiple ways. In cases where the focus is on violence against women, translation could serve as a tool of denunciation, shaping discourse to ultimately give voice to silenced discourses through concrete strategies.

The affective impact on translation, however, depends on many factors such as the translator's personal, cultural and ideological beliefs, which in turn influence her/his strategic decisions. Building on Althusser's (1971) conception of ideology as a material force that operates through practices, rituals, and apparatuses, translation can be understood not merely as the reflection of an internal position, but as a material enactment of ideology. In this sense, each decision made by the translator—whether to tone down or emphasize the depiction of violence—functions as an ideological act that reproduces or resists prevailing discourses. Thus, translating is not only an emotional and political act, but also an ideological practice, one that contributes—materially and discursively—to the reproduction or disruption of the dominant narratives that shape our perception of gender-based violence.

3. Ideology and the translator's agency

Translators are never neutral: they take a position at the moment when they opt for a single option and discard those that have been on their mind when faced with a translation challenge. The reasons may be varied and may also hide a social, cultural and ideological background. The ideological factor has attracted the attention of researchers in translation studies who, over the last few decades, have approached it from different linguistic, systemic or discursive perspectives (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; Lefevere, 1992; Fawcett & Munday, 2011). Recently, however, a number of studies have approached the question from an empirical perspective, this time focusing on the process, putting the spotlight on the translator himself and on how ideology can not only have an effect but also drive or determine the choice of one or another translation strategy.

These studies, which investigate how conflicting beliefs can impact both the process and product of translation, have highlighted effects such as influencing the time spent comprehending and selecting an appropriate translation (Rojo & Ramos, 2014; Rojo & Meseguer, 2021) or shaping the use of specific translation strategies aimed at manipulating the text (Naranjo, 2021; Meseguer et al., in press). The studies conducted by Rojo and Ramos (2014) and Rojo and Meseguer (2021) have explored the effects that the (in)congruence between translators' political beliefs and those reflected in the source text may have on the time taken to either produce a translation or choose an adequate translation equivalent. Rojo and Ramos (2014) focused on professional translators, categorizing them into left-wingers and right-wingers. The study measured their reaction times in a translation task under positive and negative priming conditions. Results demonstrated a significant effect of the ideology of the primes on the time participants took to produce a translation. Words with valence opposing the participants' political stance led to longer reaction times compared to words consistent with their beliefs. Furthermore, the study uncovered differences in the effects of primes on each group: only left-wingers were significantly faster when encountering a word aligned with their beliefs. Right-wingers displayed more consistent behaviour regardless of the type of primes employed. Rojo and Meseguer (2021) focused on measuring the time needed by translation students to select an appropriate translation for headlines that either aligned or conflicted with their political perspectives on the Catalonia's independence crisis. Results from the study did not reveal a significant interaction between the translation students' political position and that reflected in the text content. However, a statistically significant effect of participants' political beliefs emerged when reading to translate the headlines. In this study, congruent stimuli slowed reaction time down during source text comprehension, but speeded it up when making a final decision to select a suitable equivalent.

Emotions arising from conflicting beliefs have not only been shown to have an impact on translators' reaction times but also on their choice of translation strategies. Naranjo (2021) for instance, explored the influence of anger on translation students' choice of translation strategies when dealing with an offensive text. Results showed students' higher use of semantic attenuation or euphemistic expressions and even omissions in their translations to mitigate the content and negative evaluative language of the source text, which may indicate their intention, unconsciously or not, to manipulate the original content. Meseguer et al. (in press), on the other hand, tested the influence that emotions aroused from political (in)congruence may have on translation students' facial expressions and choice of strategies when translating text against the independence of

Catalonia. The facial expression recognition software FaceReader was used to recognize and quantify thirteen translation students' facial emotions. Results revealed no significant interaction for the congruency between participants' stance on the Catalonia's conflict and the text content, although pro-independence participants showed more anger than neutral and against-independence participants when translating the against-independence text. Regarding translation strategies, there was a significant interaction between participants' stance on the conflict and the choice of strategies: while pro-independence participants used more attenuation strategies, those against-independence tended to intensify the tone of the against-independence text.

Ideology significantly influences translation, often leading translators to use their work as a tool for resistance or advocacy. This influence can result in the adoption of specific strategies to adapt or even manipulate the text. Studies by Lima et al. (2022) and Lima et al. (2023) illustrate this dynamic. Lima et al. (2022), for instance, argue for an ethical approach to translation, emphasizing the translator's active and decisive role in amplifying the voice and message of the original author. To do so, they carry out an experiment using a text by Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997), reflecting on the importance of the racial question. Only a year later, Lima et al. (2023) expanded on this concept by introducing what they term, based on the work of Esteves (2014), "dampening". This censorship strategy aims to soften terms in translation when the original text conveys ideas or messages that might incite conflict or promote violence between social groups. The translator herself, Lenita Esteves, reflected on this approach after enduring emotional distress while translating a work by H.P. Lovecraft—a widely recognized and admired author who unapologetically expressed his racism in his writing. In this context, translation becomes a weapon of resistance and opposition against a discourse that clashes with the translator's convictions. However, rather than attenuating or censoring a discourse with which we disagree, it would be preferable to offer a second reading through specific strategies, as footnotes or introductions. From this perspective, translation is indeed used as a tool, but one that facilitates more transparently a critical reading that challenges traditional narratives and promotes social change.

4. Audio description of violent content

When it comes to audio description, the guidelines are clearly governed by the "What you see is what you say (WYSIWYS)" principle (Snyder, 2008), i.e. objectivity must be paramount when it comes to standard audio description. This applies to all types of content, including violent, sensitive and offensive content. AD guidelines around the world reflect this, albeit with slight differences. For example, while the *Guidelines on Providing Television and On-Demand Access Services* published by Ofcom (former Independent Television Commission) stress that the "AD should not unnecessarily censor information that may be considered sensitive such as sexual acts and violence", *the Audio Description Project*, created by the American Council for the Blind, is more categorical in this regard: "Do not use offensive or racist terms, (but do describe ethnicity where relevant), however, do not censor what you see"[2]. Guidelines created by Netflix include a specific section on censorship, warning against the following: "Avoid censorship: do not censor any information. Description should be straightforward when addressing nudity, sexual acts, and violence". Fryer (2016) goes further,

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[2] https://adp.acb.org/guidelines.html

recalling the ultimate goal to avoid (self-)censorship in scenes involving sexual intercourse or sexual violence, and respect the tone and intention of the original. Following this logic, the audio describer should remain neutral and describe without any bias and as impartially as possible what she or he sees. Moreover, the audio describer must respect the creator's intention, which may lead him or her to employ specific strategies to favour and enhance the original discourse (Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez, 2023).

However, recent studies have shown that audio describers often resort to self-censorship or rewriting strategies to soften the content they describe. For example, Ramos and Meseguer (2023), in a recent study, set out to explore the strategies that a group of translation students would employ when audio describing images depicting different types of diversities (sexual orientation, gender, functional diversity, racial and ethnical diversity) and sexual violence. The results of the study revealed a high use of self-censorship and rewriting strategies, especially in images depicting sexual or violent scenes, aimed at softening the content they were transcribing. In the case of sexual violence, an ad from the 2007 Dolce&Gabbana campaign was chosen, showing a half-naked woman surrounded by several men in a clear situation of gender-based domination and sexual violence. This controversial advertisement sparked heated debates and was criticised for conveying a message that promoted rape culture, which forced this prestigious fashion brand to back down until the campaign was eventually withdrawn. Of the 107 participants in this study, only 9% used the word "rape" while 66% did not allude to any kind of sexual violence. Among these participants, 89% were women. Nearly 11% of participants (all male) even suggested that the scene depicted was normal and consensual, where "everyone interacted with everyone" and even "judging by the expression on her face, the woman seems to be enjoying herself" (Ramos & Meseguer, 2023, n.p,). These findings underline the need for further discussion on how to balance objectivity and ethical responsibility in audio description. While the aim is to faithfully describe what is seen, it is also crucial to consider the impact these descriptions have on listeners, especially when dealing with violent or traumatic content. In this context, audio description could become a tool to challenge normalised narratives and foster a critical understanding of the violence depicted. In line with this research, the present study aims to investigate further the reasons behind the use of these strategies by focusing this time on a video with a high degree of sexual violence.

4. The study

4.1 Aims and research questions

The present study aims to analyse whether ideology can have an impact on the choice of strategies used to audio describe a scene depicting sexual violence. To reach this particular aim, two research questions are formulated:

1) Does the audio description output reflect the violence of the scene?

2) What role does ideology play in the choice of strategies to audio describe sexual violence content?

In this case, we predict that depending on their ideological profile, audio describers will use certain strategies to underline or soften the violent content of the scene.

4.2 Participants

A convenience sample of 107 fourth-year translation students from the Translation and Interpreting Degree at the University of Murcia was used for this study. They were all trained in audiovisual translation and audio description (one semester). After being informed about the voluntary nature of the participation, they granted their consent and were informed of the general purpose of the study. There were 21 males and 86 females, with an age range between 20 and 47 years old and a mean age of 21.72. They received no credit for their participation.

4.3 Design and materials

For the experiment, we chose a 1:30-minute film from the TV series *Game of Thrones* (Season 1, Episode 6), based on the novel A Song of Ice and Fire by George R.R. Martin. The scene depicts the wedding night episode of Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke) and Khal Drogo (Jason Momoa). It opens with the Dothrakis, nomadic warriors who inhabit the Dothraki Sea Plains, drinking and arguing around a fire. At some point in the scene, the imposing barbarian warlord Khal Drogo stands, throws his cup into the fire and bursts into the tent, where a fearful Daenerys awaits and is about to become the victim of a brutal sexual assault. George R. R. Martin himself lamented that the original scene, portrayed in the novel as a scene of consensual seduction, was transformed into the "brutal rape of Emilia Clarke" (Silvestre, 2020) as a consequence of the screenwriters' intention to show the Dothrakis as a savage and violent people. Nonetheless, the selection of this scene for the study is justified by its raw and brutal portrayal of rape.

To classify participants according to their ideological positioning (right-wing, left-wing or, neutral), a Likert-type questionnaire was designed with 20 items based on a 5-point agreement scale (1= strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree) and with specific questions about sexual/gender diversity, feminism, political ideas or religious beliefs (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was designed based on instruments used in previous studies on translation and ideology (Rojo & Ramos, 2014; Rojo & Meseguer, 2021; Meseguer et al., in press), and was expanded to include items specifically related to feminism. Additional information on participants' emotions was also collected with self-report questionnaires, before and after performing the audio description task. The first questionnaire contained prompts designed to explore their emotional background in greater detail, "Do you currently have any medical or psychological problem?", "Have you experienced any situation that has had a major effect on you (e.g. accident, assault, change of habits, death, abuse, etc.)?" or "How did this situation affect you?". The second questionnaire was composed of three questions in which the subject was asked to comment on the scene and the degree of violence perceived (see Appendix 2).

4.4 Procedure

The experiment took place in a computer lab during a two-hour class at the University of Murcia. Access to the internet was allowed throughout the experiment. After reading the information sheet with the general aims of the study and the tasks involved, and in accordance with

the research protocol approved by the university ethics committee, participants were requested to carefully read and sign the informed consent. Due to the content they were to be exposed to, participants were told that they could leave the experiment at any point. We also informed participants that their personal data and opinions would be anonymized and handled in accordance with protocols for data collection, processing, and storage. Then, participants were requested to audio describe the scene with no time or space limitations. Once the audio descriptions were finished, they completed the post-task questionnaire including the three open questions aimed at obtaining qualitative information of relevance to the experiment. All materials were presented and collected through the University of Murcia's online tool for conducting surveys. Following Naranjo (2021) and Meseguer (2022), audio descriptions were evaluated based on three strategies, the use of which determined a tendency towards self-censorship or towards the reinforcement of the violence contained in the scene: *explicitation* (when they mentioned violence explicitly), *omission* (when violence was suppressed) and *attenuation* (when participants softened or lowered the violence of the scene).

4.5 Results

In this section, we provide data from the quantitative analysis as well as the analysis of some examples of the strategies employed by our participants, which account for the degree of violence detected and transmitted in the audio descriptions produced. These results contrast sharply with the information gathered in the post-task questionnaire where participants, through their responses to three open-ended questions, shared their impressions of the scene and the audio description performed.

4.5.1 Quantitative and qualitative analysis

35.5% of the participants explicitly mentioned the act of rape depicted in the scene. Only 19.7% of them chose to soften or tone down the violent content of the scene. In contrast, 44.8% made no mention of rape or any element or detail that could lead the recipient of the audio description to imagine a violent and non-consensual relationship.

Table 1 (below) lists two examples of the strategy of *explicitation* detected in the analysis of the ADs created by the participants.

Table 1: *Explicitation*

Original AD	Translated AD
(1) Khal Drogo y Khaleesi en una cama, ella está agachada delante de él. Khal Drogo viola a Khaleesi mientras esta llora.	(1) Khal Drogo and Khaleesi on a bed, she is crouched in front of him. Khal Drogo <u>rapes</u> Khaleesi while she cries.
(2) Drogo viola a Daenerys dentro de la tienda. Están en una cama y hay una pequeña vela brillando. Drogo se muestra agresivo con ella y Daenerys llora. La penetra con fuerza una y otra vez. Daenerys no lo quiere. Drogo la agarra con fuerza.	(2) Drogo *rapes* Daenerys inside the tent. They are on a bed and there is a small candle shining. Drogo is aggressive with her and Daenerys cries. He **penetrates her forcefully again and again**. Daenerys does not want it. Drogo grabs her tightly.

Source: Authors (2025)

[Description]: Examples of *explicitations* detected in the analysis of audio descriptions created by participants [End of the description].

While the audio description in the Example (1) is shorter and more direct, the Example (2) goes into more detail, providing information about the setting, the characters and how the man is behaving ("Drogo is aggressive", "penetrates her forcefully again and again", "grabs her hard") and what the woman is feeling ("Daenerys cries", " Daenerys does not want it"). In this case, the focus is on the character of the woman, and on the physical and emotional violence she is suffering, which makes the result a more immersive, emotional and disturbing audio description. It is worth noting that of this 35.5% using *explicitation* as strategy, only 22% explicitly used the word "rape" while the rest preferred other options such as "forced encounter" or "non-consensual sex".

Three examples of *attenuation* are given in Table 2 (below).

Table 2: *Attenuation*

Original AD	Translated AD
(1) El hombre y una mujer de pelo blanco y largo están teniendo sexo. La agarra con fuerza por el cuello.	(1) The man and a woman with long white hair **are having sex**. He **grabs her hard** by the neck.
(2) Están en la postura del perrito. Ella tiene expresión desesperada. Él la empuja hacia abajo. Ella mira hacia delante con tristeza y desesperación.	(2) They are in the doggy style. She has **a desperate expression**. He pushes her down. She looks forward **in sadness and despair.**
(3) El hombre está penetrando por detrás a una chica. Él se mueve rítmicamente, concentrado en su tarea y con expresión de esfuerzo. Ella se deja hacer con expresión contrita, frunce el ceño y mira al frente mientras él la mueve con sus sacudidas.	(3) The man is **penetrating** a girl from behind. He moves rhythmically, concentrating on his task and with an expression of effort. She lets him do it with a **contrite expression**, frowns and looks straight ahead as he moves her with his thrusts.

Source: Authors (2025)

[Description] Examples of *attenuations* detected in the analysis of audio descriptions created by participants [End of description].

These are three examples of the 19.7% cases of *attenuation* detected in the analysis, where participants preferred not to make explicit mention of the character's rape and, where appropriate, chose to attenuate the violence contained in the scene. In example 1, a brief description devoid of detail has been chosen, where the focus is once again on the man. Although the choice of the expression "grabs her hard by the neck" could imply that the man uses violence against the woman, the fact of portraying the characters as "having sex" could also imply that this is consensual, so the result is not only incorrect, but also confusing. In example 2, the focus is on the character of the woman. However, once again, the choice of words undercuts the violent tone of the scene. The audio description could have opted to reflect the woman's sorrowful expression or the tears streaming down her face. On this occasion, at most, it could be implied that she is not enjoying the moment, which is a far cry from what is actually happening on the scene. In example 3, we find a description that focuses more on the physical actions ("penetrating", "moves her with his thrusts") and expressions ("with an expression of effort") than on the context or the internal emotions of the characters. The only description that could provide a counterpoint is this "contrite expression" of the woman, which contrasts with the man's apparent concentration and effort, creating an implicit power imbalance. It could be intuited that there is no explicit consent on the part of the woman. However, the absence of a direct mention, combined with the rest of the description obscuring this apparent imbalance, ensures that the violent nature of the scene remains unrepresented.

Finally, Table 3 (bellow) shows three examples of *omission*, where the violence of the scene has been eliminated.

Table 3: *Omission*

Original AD	Translated AD
(1) Están realizando el acto sexual. El hombre coge a la joven de la cabeza y se la agacha. Ella tiene los ojos llorosos y desvía su mirada.	(1) We can see how **they are having sex**. The man grabs the young woman's head and holds her down. She is teary-eyed and averts her gaze.
(2) Hace el amor con intensidad a una joven de pelo largo y blanco. La joven parece no disfrutarlo demasiado.	(2) He **makes intense love** to a young woman with long white hair. The young woman does not seem to enjoy it too much.
(3) Khal Drogo y Khaleesi tienen sexo. Él está apoyado con las rodillas y ella está arrodillada y apoyada con las manos en dirección a los huevos de dragones.	(3) Khal Drogo and Khaleesi **have sex**. He is leaning on his knees and she is kneeling and leaning on her hands and looking in the direction of the dragon eggs.

Source: Authors

[Description] Examples of *omissions* detected in the analysis of audio descriptions created by participants [End of description].

These three examples of *omission* result in very different versions, all far removed from the reality of the scene. It is worth recalling that almost half of the participants (44.8%) employed this strategy, choosing, consciously or unconsciously, to erase any trace of violence contained in the scene. In example 1, it would seem that we are witnessing a very different scene from the one conceived by the series' scriptwriters to portray the character's wild nature. First of all, we are introduced to the scene in such a way that it could be a consensual sex scene, in which the characters are active subjects ("they are having sex"). It then goes on to describe the characters. This time, information is provided about the man's actions and the woman's emotions. However, the violent nature of the scene is not conveyed. Although the extract "the man grabs the young woman's head and holds her down" could reveal a dynamic of physical domination, no intentions or consequences are made explicit. Similarly, the description of "teary-eyed and averts her gaze" could hint at vulnerability or discomfort, but the lack of detail may lead to a simplistic interpretation. Example 2 seems to portray a completely different scene and is not at all faithful to the original. Firstly, we find a very terse narration, in which no details are provided about the emotions, thoughts or context of the characters, leaving the recipient with an ambiguous interpretation. Then we find a strong contrast between the sentence "makes intense love" and the sentence "the young woman doesn't seem to enjoy it too much". The former, which uses the word "love", can generate a lot of confusion as this implies an emotional implication that contrasts especially with the woman's lack of interest or disconnection. In fact the sentence "the young woman doesn't seem to enjoy it too much" is vague and does not address issues such as consent, internal emotions or power dynamics. The use of this strategy in Example 3 highlights the describer's responsibility and its significant impact. As there is no mention of violence in the scene, we seem to be dealing with a very different one: one of consensual sex. The audio description reflects that both of them are taking part in the scene ("Khal Drogo and Khaleesi have sex") and nothing in the description of the context or the position of the characters can indicate any kind of relationship of power, subjugation or submission ("he is leaning on his knees and she is kneeling and leaning on her hands").

4.5.2 Pre and post-tasks analysis

Before starting the experiment, participants had to fill in a questionnaire with demographic and personal questions, as well as an ideology questionnaire designed to identify their political stance:

left-wing, right-wing and neutral. The information gathered in this first round of questionnaires did not shed light on the data analysed in the quantitative and qualitative study. In fact, the results of the ideology questionnaire revealed an overly homogeneous sample (95% of left-wing participants) which nevertheless led us to believe that the use of strategies would be quite different from the ones identified. After completing the task, participants were asked to answer three questions. The aim of this questionnaire was to obtain data that could explain the results obtained in the analysis of the audio descriptions. We were particularly interested in finding out (1) whether they considered themselves feminists, (2) how violent they considered the scene of Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen to be (Likert scale, from 1 to 5, with 1 being "not at all violent" and 5 being "extremely violent"), and finally, (3) whether they wanted to comment or contribute something, for which they were provided with a blank space.

90% of the participants considered themselves feminists compared to 4% who positioned themselves as non-feminists. The remaining 6% preferred not to express their opinion on the subject by marking the option don't know/no answer. The information gathered in the second question, regarding the degree of violence perceived at the scene, was perhaps what most caught the researchers' attention. 88% considered the scene very violent or extremely violent. However, if we take the results of the quantitative analysis, we observe that only 35.5% chose to make explicit mention of the violence contained in the scene. We turn to the information from the post-task questionnaires to find justification for this tendency. The following are some of the most noteworthy comments: (1) "I think it is one of the few scenes that portrays rape in such a crude way. It is very uncomfortable to watch, but even more uncomfortable to analyse and describe." (2) "I wanted to say that it was rape, although I put 'forced relations' in the text." (3) "It is quite clear that it is rape, but for others it may not be so clear, especially considering that they are husband and wife." (4) "How difficult it is to describe this kind of scenes." These comments highlight the emotional and cultural challenges audio describers face when approaching the scene of the experiment, revealing a conflict between the objectivity mandated by audio description guidelines and their personal perceptions.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this study we aimed at test whether ideology could play a role in the audio description of sexual violent content leading to changes in translation performance that could reflect or omit the violence of a scene. To test this, we formulated two questions: 1) Does the audio description output reflect the violence of the scene? 2) What role does ideology play in the audio description of sexual violence content? To answer these questions, we combined the analysis of the audio descriptions produced by the participants with information gathered in pre- and post-task questionnaires. Although the results of the ideology questionnaire gave us an overly homogeneous sample —95% left-wing—, the results of the analysis revealed that only 35.5% of the audio descriptions explicitly reflected the violence contained in the scene of Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen's wedding night, using words and expressions such as "rape" "forced relationships" or "non-consensual sex". Even if most participants considered the scene to be explicitly violent (88%), the use of *attenuation*

strategies (19.7%) and *omission* (44.8%) revealed a high degree of self-censorship or normalization of violence not reflecting the violence of the scene.

Study participants had received training in audio description, were aware of official guidelines and what to do when faced with violent or sensitive content: "As with any content that is being described, the AD should match the tone and the intention of the original. This is also true for content of sensitive nature" (Fryer, 2016). On the other hand, the writers of the series aimed to portray the Dothrakis as a savage and violent people and only an audio description with explicit mention of the violence of the scene would have served this purpose. We have an overtly left-wing (95%) and feminist (90%) sample, but against all odds, 64.4% of audio descriptions missed to reflect the rape perpetrated by Khal Drogo. Ideology does not seem to have an impact, but comments provided by participants, such as "I wanted to say that it was rape, although I wrote 'forced relations' in the text", reflects how dominant cultural norms and social perceptions surrounding sexual violence exert pressure on the translator's practice. In this sense, ideology is not only internalized but materialized through the act of translation itself, shaping discourse through mechanisms such as self-censorship.

That rape scenes provoke discomfort and affect women is an undeniable fact. While happiness brings us into intimate contact with things, distress and anger can drive us to take action—a phenomenon supported by various studies examining the interplay between ideology, emotions, and translation. However, the limited research available on strategies used in audio description reveals that sexual violence is particularly challenging to describe, often leading to instances of conscious or unconscious self-censorship (Ramos & Meseguer, 2023). This exploratory study appears to support this notion, although the results do not fully explain the underlying causes of such behaviour. Perhaps it is easier to reinforce an existing discourse than to create a new one that demands a personal stance or the expression of deeply intimate emotions. As Mulvey (1975) posits, women consuming cinema or media dominated by the patriarchal male gaze are compelled to identify with female portrayals that reinforce their subordination and suffering. Other factors may also contribute to the normalization of such violence, as reflected in the observation of one participant: "It is quite clear that it is rape, but for others, it may not be so clear, especially considering that they are husband and wife."

Just as feminist studies advocate for translation strategies that strengthen feminist discourse (Castro Vázquez, 2010; von Flotow, 2019a, 2019b), audio description should also serve as a tool for education and resistance. The emotional is inherently political. As Bolt (2014) argues, visual perception operates as a form of power—one that can be exploited, abused, and used as a means of control. In contrast, audio description has the potential to act as a transformative force within feminist discourse, serving as a weapon to combat violence and voice silenced discourses (Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez, 2023). It could provide a secondary layer of interpretation, accessible even to sighted audiences. As Thompson (2018) notes, although AD began as an assistive technology enabling blind people to engage with visual media, recent developments in fields such as sound science, translation studies, immersive technology, and critical disability studies have reimagined it as a creative response to source material. This redefinition elevates AD into a literary and interpretative genre in its own right (Kleege, 2018). In this context, rather than advocating for neutral, emotionless AD, we propose a collaborative and activist approach. Such an AD would be

integrated into the creative process itself, as suggested by Romero-Fresco (2019), transforming it into a medium for advocacy and change.

The results of this study, although preliminary, could have implications for AD training and pave the way for new avenues of research. The comments collected in the post-task questionnaires underline the need for a more conscious and critical approach in the training of audio describers, in order to avoid self-censorship or cultural prejudices perpetuating the minimisation of sexual violence. Regarding futures lines of research, it could be interesting to explore the differences in how students and professionals describe acts of sexual violence, analysing variations in detail, tone, and focus. It would also be relevant to investigate how cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds influence the construction and interpretation of these descriptions. A process study could focus on identifying where describers direct their attention and what the main challenges are when addressing such sensitive topics. Finally, a reception study could analyse the mental images participants form when reading these descriptions, assessing how the language used shapes their perceptions and emotional reactions or measure immediate physiological responses, such as changes in heart rate, breathing, or skin response.

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Appendix 1 – Ideology questionnaire

1. La monarquía debería ser abolida
   - 1. Muy en desacuerdo
   - 2. En desacuerdo
   - 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
   - 4. De acuerdo
   - 5. Muy de acuerdo

2. El estado debería aumentar las partidas para la educación concertada
   - 1. Muy en desacuerdo
   - 2. En desacuerdo
   - 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
   - 4. De acuerdo
   - 5. Muy de acuerdo

3. Los homosexuales deberían poder adoptar en igualdad de condiciones
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

4. La prostituición es un modo de vida legítimo
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

5. Los transexuales deberían poder elegir legalmente su sexo
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

6. Las operaciones para el cambio de sexo deberían estar cubiertas por la Seguridad Social
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

7. Las menores de edad no deben abortar sin el consentimiento de sus padres
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

8. El cannabis debería estar permitido legalmente
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

9. Los inmigrantes que llegan en patera deberían ser devueltos de inmediato
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

10. El velo debería estar prohibido en los colegios
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

11. La unidad de España debe ser protegida por cualquier medio
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

12. La Ley de Violencia de Género es discriminatoria con el hombre
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

13. El feminismo enfrenta al hombre y la mujer
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

14. El Gobierno debe potenciar las ayudas sociales para aquellas personas que las necesiten
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

15. La economía nunca debe ser regulada por el Estado
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

16. Las ayudas a la dependencia deberían ser suprimidas
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

17. La ocupación regulada de las viviendas vacías debería ser una opción para las personas más desfavorecidas
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

18. Los partidos de extrema derecha deben ser ilegalizados
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

19. Los partidos de extrema izquierda deben ser ilegalizados
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

20. La pena de muerte no debería ser una opción para ningún delito
- 1. Muy en desacuerdo
- 2. En desacuerdo
- 3. Ni en desacuerdo ni de acuerdo
- 4. De acuerdo
- 5. Muy de acuerdo

Appendix 2 – Questions

1. ¿Te consideras feminista?
- Sí
- No
- NS/NC

2. Indica el grado de violencia que, según tu perspectiva, tiene la escena de Khal Drogo y Daenerys
- 1. Nada violenta
- 2. Poco violenta
- 3. Ni poco violenta ni muy violenta
- 4. Muy violenta
- 5. Extremadamente violenta

3. Te agradecemos que, de tener comentarios u observaciones sobre este experimento, utilices el siguiente espacio: _____

Notes

Authorship contribution

Conceptualization: P. Meseguer Cutillas
Data collection: P. Meseguer Cutillas, M. Ramos Caro
Data analysis: P. Meseguer Cutillas, M. Ramos Caro
Results and discussion: P. Meseguer Cutillas
Review and editing: P. Meseguer Cutillas

Research dataset
Not applicable.

Funding
Not applicable.

Image copyright
Not applicable.

Approval by ethics committee
Study approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Murcia.

Conflicts of interest
Not applicable.

Data availability statement
The data from this research, which are not included in this work, may be made available by the authors upon request.

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