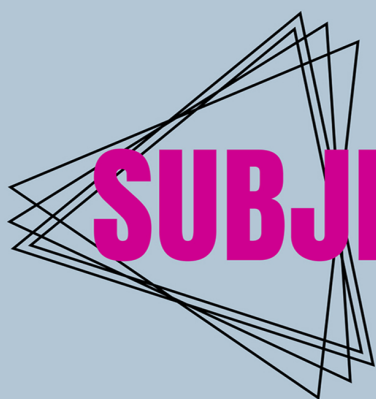


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SUBJECTIVITY

& MATERIALITY

IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION AND MEDIA ACCESSIBILITY



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Subjectivity and materiality in audiovisual translation and media accessibility

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I. Introduction

When we drafted the first version of the call for papers for this special issue, we were interested in exploring the relationship between audiovisual translation and the embodied experiences of individuals. Specifically, we sought to investigate whether audiovisual translation and media accessibility modalities could have tangible effects on the bodies of audiences. While this relationship might initially appear linear—for instance, representation shaping consumption, which in turn affects bodies—we aimed for a more nuanced approach. We recognised a significant gap concerning the ontological distance between representation and materiality: between the symbolic and the tangible, between discourse and the body. Our envisioned critique was grounded in the technological dimension of audiovisual translation—understood not merely as a medium of representation, but as a technology that has evolved from early sound-image systems to contemporary forms of digital entertainment. Acknowledging the virtuality of audiovisual technologies—the ephemeral nature of moving images and sound—we believed there was potential to grasp how these sensory elements might materially affect subjects. We were also interested in whether such effects extended to the translators themselves or to those involved in media accessibility work. The proposals we received truly surpassed our expectations—both in terms of the sheer number of submissions and the conceptual depth they offered. The quality of the contributions exceeded our initial goals in a way that was not just positive, but transformative. This allowed us to see new possibilities for our original vision of the special issue, and now we can set a higher benchmark for what we hope to achieve moving forward.

This experience has led us to reflect on how serving as guest editors constitutes a form of academic citizenship—what Albia and Cheng (2023) refer to as the “citizenship of engagement”. This mode of engagement fosters a collective, global community around a specific topic or theme



within a journal's scope. Understanding academic citizenship as a “practice of enactment” (Albia & Cheng, 2023) —rather than a fixed ideal of “being a good citizen”—highlights how both editing and contributing to a special issue involve varying degrees of personal (though not necessarily individualistic) and collective disciplinary commitment. Participants in this process may assert certain entitlements—such as the gatekeeping role of editors—or exercise rights and claims, such as being recognised as part of a scholarly community or as a specialist in a given field. This framing also reminds us of the pressures scholars face under current academic systems, particularly the imperative to publish in order to remain visible or “productive”. It invites us to recognise our status as “knowledge workers” or *cognitariat*, shaped by diverse contexts and forms of precarity that place us at a disadvantage within neoliberal academic structures (Voulvouli, 2019). For this reason, rather than framing this special issue through the binary of gatekeeping versus disciplinary development, we came to see it as a mixed, in-between, and fluctuating endeavour. Its aim has been to promote sustainable academic work—both in terms of advancing the discipline and supporting the people behind it. Editors and authors, in this view, engage in mutual support, working together to move the field forward (Acker et al., 2022).

Building on this reflection and experience, we also aim to contribute to the work of the authors whose research shapes this special issue. What follows is a set of concepts that were part of the original call for papers—ideas we initially had in mind but which were questioned, expanded, or transformed through the editorial process and our engagement with the authors' contributions. By revisiting these concepts, we hope to further the development of audiovisual translation and media accessibility studies, particularly from the niche yet generative tension between subjectivity and materiality.

2. Audiovisual

In the field of audiovisual translation, the “audiovisual” has traditionally been approached through an operational and applied lens. Early theoretical efforts focused on integrating the concept into translation studies by emphasising the “audiovisual text” as a unit of analysis—an operational approach that treated the audiovisual artefact as possessing textual and even linguistic properties such as coherence, cohesion, and grammar, making it suitable for translational analysis (Chaume, 2004; Zabalbeascoa, 2008). This framing allowed scholars to examine how meaning emerges from the semiotic interaction between auditory and visual codes—interactions often governed by principles of synchrony. Key notions such as constraint or strategy enabled researchers to conceptualise audiovisual translation as a professional and pedagogical field, where translation is analysed in terms of shifts that can be observed, categorised, and taught (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007; Chaume, 2012; Zabalbeascoa, 2024). This perspective has offered valuable insights into how translations happen, and how they might ideally happen when questions of quality are at stake.

However, as this special issue suggests, the audiovisual also demands a broader critical reflection that acknowledges it as a techno-cultural form shaped by the conditions of modernity and mediation (Deleuze, 1986, 2009). These conditions have historically integrated conventional audiovisual translation modalities such as dubbing and subtitling into the very narratives, concepts,



and structures that shape screen-based sound and visual imagery (Pérez-González, 2014). In this context, when individuals engage with audiovisual artefacts—whether a film, a television episode, or YouTube or TikTok videos—they do so within a perceptual, situated and always embodied space mediated by image and sound, but also by translation. This raises questions not only about how linguistic material is rendered across languages—a central concern in audiovisual translation studies—but also about how translation itself shapes the viewer’s experience. What elements of a translated artefact generate affect? And how does linguistic material contribute to that affective response? While these questions may appear to fall mainly within the realm of reception studies, close readings and interpretive analysis remain equally valuable—especially when the researcher’s own subject position is acknowledged as part of the inquiry.

The methodological and theoretical premise behind this kind of approach is that audiovisual artefacts presuppose a viewer whose memories, aesthetics, ethics, and ideological perspectives are activated in the act of watching. In this encounter, viewer and audiovisual material—sound, image, translation—interact within an expanded field of perception. The researcher, in turn, must navigate their own position while attending to the non-determined subjectivity set in motion by these images and sounds.

For example, the contribution by Miguel Ángel Oliva-Zamora and Carme Mangiron addresses these concerns through the lens of cognitive accessibility in video games, an area where audiovisual interaction is multisensory, immersive, and deeply material. Focusing on players with dyslexia, their study examines how certain textual and visual features of gameplay—such as excessive reading demands, memory load, or complex controls—disrupt the player’s embodied relation to the game and fracture the tangibility of the audiovisual experience. Using thematic analysis of focus group discussions, the authors explore how the affective dimension of gaming is interrupted by inaccessibility, and how these barriers manifest not only as usability issues but also as disruptions to immersive engagement. By foregrounding the testimonies of users and the sensorial challenges they encounter, Oliva-Zamora and Mangiron (2025) reframes audiovisual accessibility as a relational and affective practice—one that shapes, and is shaped by, the corporeal and perceptual modes of interaction between subjects and artefacts.

This article—and others in the issue—illustrate how the notion of the “audiovisual” in translation and accessibility can no longer be constrained by a purely textual or operational understanding. Instead, they invite us to consider translation as a generative, embodied, and affectively charged encounter, shaped by cultural codes, viewer subjectivities, and the material conditions of media production and reception.

3 Affect

When drafting the call for papers, affect was conceived as a potential force—something that turns possibilities into actual experiences, the virtual into a form of expression or emotion, an embodied sensation, or a shift in perception (Massumi, 2022; Lima et al., 2023). In any case, affect resists fixed states and is always in motion. As Koskinen (2020, p. 21) argues, “Affect is (also) embodied”. All languages have evolved numerous strategies for handling, adjusting, and



manipulating affects. In translation, these strategies are compared within the involved languages and against the contexts of the texts in question (Koskinen, 2020).

When watching audiovisual artefacts, affect builds gradually or can be recognised by a cumulative process. In audiovisual translation, affect may first emerge through patterns of sound, image, language, and rhythm. But it also surfaces when something fails—when synchrony breaks down, and a gap opens between image and sound. These moments of lack of cohesion question the act of conscious recognition, of following narratives. Affect sparks in these gaps between what is on screen and what is sensed. This notion is informed by the Deleuzian concept of the “affect-image” and the tensive model developed by Fontanille (2008). At the same time, we draw on Ahmed’s (2014) conception of emotion—particularly her insight into how words and linguistic material circulate between bodies, attaching themselves to embodied surfaces and shaping lived experience. Through the contributions we received, we came to realise that in audiovisual translation and media accessibility studies, affect is often understood as operating between two poles: sensation and perception.

In the case of sensation, as shown in the paper of Puri Meseguer Cutillas and Marina Ramos Caro, affect is shaped through visceral responses to disturbing imagery and language. Their study explores how translation ideology may influence the way violence against women is represented in audio description. Meseguer Cutillas and Ramos Caro (2025) asked translation students to audio describe the wedding night scene between Khal Drogo and Daenerys Targaryen in the series *Game of Thrones*—a scene widely recognised for its depiction of sexual violence. Although the participants formed a relatively homogeneous group (women, left-wing, and feminist), the findings revealed a consistent tendency to soft or omit references to rape. Rather than making the violence visible through direct language, many participants employed mitigation strategies that toned down the scene’s affective charge. This contrast between anticipated and actual choices underscores how affect—anchored in ideological positioning—intervenes in processes of perception and sensation of the audio described scene. Audio description, as an embodied and affective practice, raises critical questions about how audiovisual artefacts materialise power relations and sensations for trainee audio describers. It engages the body and language to expose or obscure violence, becoming a site where silences are either reinforced or resisted—highlighting the ethical responsibilities of media accessibility professionals when dealing with gender-based violence.

In the case of perception, affect and affective relations are framed more explicitly in emotional terms. One example is the study carried out by Saeed Ameri on the Persian YouTube channel @Kouman, which examines the role of subtitlers’ notes as forms of affective self-mediation. Grounded in affect theory, Ameri (2025) investigates how these embedded captions function not merely as linguistic supplements but as emotional and performative cues that allow subtitlers to insert their voice, humour, and personal reflections. These translation notes materialise a form of affective labour reshaping viewer engagement and fostering a more intimate connection with the content. Rather than treating subtitles as neutral containers of dialogue, the study reframes them as affective artefacts that participate actively in the construction of mood and meaning. This approach highlights how perception is not solely determined by what is visible or audible, but also by how textual interventions elicit affective responses in the audience.



Altogether, the articles gathered here suggest that affect is not a secondary by-product of audiovisual translation and media accessibility, but a structuring principle that can shed light on how meaning, embodiment, and ideology circulate across language and media. Affect destabilises static categories, operating instead through intensities and discontinuities that foreground the lived, situated dimensions of translation. As these studies show, affect can be traced both in how viewers engage with media and in how translators and audio describers navigate the tensions between fidelity, ideology, and emotional resonance.

4. Body, materiality, and tangibility

Critical disability theory advances an important intersection between embodiment, identity, and agency. On the one hand, in the context of media accessibility, this approach to theorising and inquiring into disabled bodies creates a productive tension with institutional frameworks—for example, the critique by Greco and Jankowska (2020) of framing accessibility as a human right, which tends to rely on normative, legalistic, or overly institutional discourse. This understanding of the body in critical disability studies goes beyond the idea that the anomalous body stems from pure biology, focusing instead on normative forms of embodiment—and inviting everyone to interrogate their own ways of being embodied (Shildrick, 2019). This interrogation rests on the understanding that the body is not merely a thing, but a site—a morphology—through which knowledge, affect, and social norms are inscribed.

On the other hand, in the context of audiovisual translation, the body can be seen as a porous surface: a form we inhabit, use, and experience through, and through which we interact with media and technology. Bodies become the material interface that enables reading (subtitles), hearing (dubbing), and forming connections—relationalities—with media artefacts. The materiality of the body and the tangibility of objects open up the possibility of grasping reality not only through representation, but also through touch, sensation, and affect—“the forces that affect the self quite apart from subjective consciousness and intentionality” (Newell, 2018, p. 2). Materiality also reminds us that objects exist and exert force—they act upon individuals, shape experiences, and participate in meaning-making. In this sense, the division between the human and the material is deconstructed, allowing us to see both as part of a shared reality. Materiality becomes a way to understand how bodies and objects are co-constitutive, entangled in the production of audiovisual experience (Tiainen et al., 2015).

This understanding of the body, materiality, and tangibility in audiovisual translation and media accessibility reminds us that audiovisual culture has always been embodied—embedded in physical artefacts such as DVDs, VHS tapes, and CDs. The technological and medial realisation of audiovisual translation has historically been produced, circulated, and consumed through these material forms. In this sense, translated audiovisual artefacts have also shaped how the social and the cultural permeate bodies and subjectivities—often in ways that escape conscious awareness.

Some contributions in this special issue, like Sanchez (2025) and Vidal Claramonte (2025), exemplify how translation and media accessibility can be reconceptualised as materially grounded, corporeal, and affective practices. In her theoretical article, África Vidal Claramonte explores what she terms “tangible translation”—a form of translation that exceeds verbal language and engages



the senses, gestures, and emotional registers of the body. Inspired by the anthropology of the senses, she positions translation as a somatic and parasomatic process, suggesting that meaning is not only interpreted intellectually, but also experienced through the body's full sensorial apparatus. Through examples from the work of artist Cecilia Vicuña and Doctors Without Borders, the study shows how translation can take place through tactile objects, affective gestures, and multisensory engagement—foregrounding the body not only as a mediator of meaning, but as a site where meaning is generated and transformed. Translation, in this light, becomes not only interlingual, but also intersensory and intermaterial (Vidal Claramonte, 2025).

Alexandra Sanchez's article similarly advances a material and embodied understanding of translation through her analysis of audio description as a sensory and co-creative act. Building on the concepts of "blindness gain" and the "spectrum of materiality", she frames audio description as a relational and interpretive practice that resists the industry's traditional demands for neutrality. Through a comparative analysis of two audio description versions of *Rough Diamonds*—one produced by Netflix and the other by Flanders' public broadcaster (VRT)—Sanchez (2025) demonstrates how different approaches to material engagement shape the narrative experience. While Netflix's audio description reflects determinate materialities and a preference for spatial clarity, VRT's version embraces ambiguity and abstraction, fostering symbolic resonance and emotional texture. The study reimagines audio description as a narrative interface where bodies, voices, and media artefacts co-construct meaning in a multisensory continuum. Audio description thus emerges not as a neutral supplement to vision, but as a tangible and ideological act, inscribed with the cultural and material conditions of its production (Sanchez, 2025).

Together, these contributions invite us to rethink translation, audiovisual translation, and media accessibility as processes in which media, affect, and materiality converge—where bodies are not passive receivers of meaning, but active participants in the production of sensory and cultural experience. The artefact, in this context, is never detached from the body—it is *through* the body that audiovisual and artistic media gain texture, resistance, and life.

5. Methods and relationality

Some of the contributions gathered in this special issue can be understood as case studies, given their focus on specific phenomena, the criteria guiding their selection (such as degree of typicality), their sampling strategies (purposive or theoretical), and the fact that their findings are intended primarily for analytical or theoretical generalisation. Case studies can articulate a range of specific methods—such as focus groups, interviews, content analysis and coding, textual and contrastive analysis—to generate sufficient data for understanding the phenomenon in relation to the research object or problem and objectives (Yin, 2018). In these last two sentences, we have deliberately used terminology drawn from qualitative inquiry—such as findings, data generation, and theoretical generalisation. That said, our broader aim with this special issue was to extend beyond conventional qualitative inquiry by proposing alternative conceptual tools—such as relationality, affect, and materiality—inspired by post-qualitative approaches (Jules & Salajan, 2024; St. Pierre, 2025).



While we recognise that we are not fully there yet, the contributions gathered here demonstrate a clear openness to following this path. In particular, the notion of relationality offers a shift away from traditional criteria like typicality or formal sampling strategies, which often pose challenges when attempting to justify why a particular film, TV series, or other audiovisual artefact needs to be analysed from an audiovisual translation or media accessibility perspective. Relationalities refer to how an object, artefact, or case is selected not for its representativeness, but because it unfolds connections or intensities that emerge between bodies, texts, media, and technologies. Mobilising relationalities means recognising pastness—the contacts researchers, as individuals, have experienced, the connective openness of objects, of intensive materials. In this respect, Massumi (1995) speaks of the trace of past actions conserved in the brain and in the flesh—relationalities that do not always appear in complete form, but rather as incipient impressions that tend towards completion in new contexts. This is how research objects take shape: what once felt appealing, striking, or unresolved in the past becomes, over time, part of a study.

An example of this approach can be found in the contribution by Gonzalo Iturregui-Gallardo, which explores how queerness is represented in the audio description of *Sex Education*. This series, especially in its final season, has been noted for its inclusive portrayal of queer and intersectional characters. Through a multimodal analytical framework, the study examines how non-normative sexualities and identities are constructed in the audio-described version of the series. Grounded in feminist and queer translation theories, Iturregui-Gallardo (2025) situates audio description within the broader field of media accessibility and highlights the audio descriptor's subjectivity and ideological positioning as central to the construction of meaning. The analysis addresses how audio description can either reproduce or resist dominant norms, and foregrounds the agency of accessibility professionals in shaping diverse representations. Ultimately, the study reveals how audio description can serve as a site for queer visibility and self-representation, especially for visually impaired audiences, affirming the importance of inclusive practices within media accessibility.

The study carried out by Marina Pujadas-Farreras explores how individuals with intellectual disabilities perceive different speech rates in easy language audio recordings. Using an intralingual design with native Catalan-speaking participants, Pujadas-Farreras (2025) examines how speech rates—ranging from 130 to 190 words per minute—are experienced and evaluated. What emerges is not a search for a universal parameter, but rather an engagement with the materiality of voice, tempo, and comprehension as they unfold across different bodies and cognitive rhythms. The perceptual variation between subgroups, despite equivalent cognitive scores, points to the complexity of affective and embodied responses to linguistic artefacts in this (new) mode of media accessibility. In her paper, speech rate can be understood not merely as a technical setting, but as a relational and affective dimension—one that challenges normative assumptions about media accessibility and foregrounds how subjectivity and identity intersect with the temporal aesthetics of easy language.

Taken together, these studies suggest a growing willingness within audiovisual translation and media accessibility research to engage with less linear, more relational forms of knowledge production. While traditional case study frameworks remain useful, the contributions in this issue



show that concepts such as relationality and affect can enrich our understanding of how research questions emerge, evolve, and take shape through lived experience, embodied interpretation, and ideological positioning.

6. Palpability and interpretation

As mentioned earlier, most of the contributions to this special issue fall within the realm of qualitative research and case studies. When we read the manuscripts and reviewer reports, it became clear that the authors placed significant emphasis not only on clarifying their methods but also on guiding readers through the process by which they selected specific examples or quotes. These selections—drawn from larger samples or corpora—were chosen for their richness and their ability to serve as meaningful evidence of the authors' broader findings. In this context, interpretation is not merely an act of representation, but one of tactile engagement: to cite, to quote, to analyse, is also to touch and be touched by the material. For example, the study developed by José Javier Ávila-Cabrera and Pilar Rodríguez-Arancón engages with questions of taboo and censorship through a descriptive analysis of how sexual references are subtitled in the Spanish version of all four seasons of the TV series *Succession*. Building on Descriptive Translation Studies and using a taxonomy of translation techniques, the study evaluates how sexual expressions are transferred from US English into European Spanish, as broadcast on the streaming platform Max. While the methodology follows an established framework, the analysis goes beyond formal categorisation: it attends closely to the cultural and affective weight of sexual language, the pressures of normative regulation, and the politics of textual visibility. The examples selected—some explicit, some tactfully veiled—invite readers to engage with the material and affective dimensions of language, where words are not just carriers of meaning, but socially and sensorially charged artefacts. In this sense, the study exemplifies how interpretation in audiovisual translation research is always embodied and situated, shaped by the translator's subjectivity and by broader discourses around censorship, propriety, and genre conventions.

The findings challenge prevailing assumptions about the erasure or mitigation of sex-related language in interlingual subtitling, demonstrating that explicit sexual content is often preserved and even rearticulated through culturally resonant substitutions. By mapping the most frequent techniques used and assessing the retention of taboo intensity, the study contributes to ongoing debates about linguistic normativity, viewer reception, and the politics of screen translation (Ávila-Cabrera; Rodríguez-Arancón, 2025). This way of sharing one's research process contributes to traditional criteria for evaluating research, such as validity and reliability, but also moves towards more sensuous and responsive models of analysis. It sustains the notion of method as a still-relevant tool for producing knowledge. Through this lens, subtitled artefacts are not neutral renderings but sites of discursive negotiation, where interpretation unfolds as both an analytical and ethical act, grounded in the textures of language, embodiment, and cultural expectation.

The papers in this special issue also demonstrate sophisticated ways of blurring the boundaries between emic and etic forms of analysis—that is, between approaches grounded in participants' perspectives and experiences (*emic*) and those that draw on the researcher's interpretive framework and theoretical positioning (*etic*). In their book on qualitative literacy, Small



and Calarco (2022) propose “palpability” as a criterion for assessing and building research quality. They argue that selecting the most compelling elements of the data to support an argument depends not only on close reading of transcripts or corpora, but also on carefully structuring the research design and methodology. Overall, their approach remains grounded in post positivist assumptions—such as the idea of data as something to be “collected”, and the aim of achieving “concreteness” (as if referring to a fixed element of reality) through representational means. Not because it promises access to some ultimate truth through key data points, but because the term itself suggests the researcher’s ability to approaching something tangible through representational systems like language and writing as acts of touching and elaborating something although just momentarily. In this way, the process and outcome of interpreting data is always provisional and incomplete—an ongoing act of theorising in progress that does not abandon responsibility for what emerges (Brinkmann, 2014).

Such an understanding of interpretation as a tactile, incomplete, and ethically charged process finds resonance in Núria Molines-Galarza’s theoretical contribution to this issue. Building on deconstructive translation studies and working through a mode of conceptual elaboration rather than empirical demonstration, her article explores the “politics of vulnerability” as an ethical lens for engaging with audiovisual translation and media accessibility. In a media landscape marked by accelerated production, technological automation, and industry-driven fragmentation, the paper interrogates how the creative and embodied dimensions of translation are being eroded. The work positions audiovisual artefacts not simply as products to be processed, but as “multimodal surfaces” shaped by the material and symbolic labour of translating bodies—bodies that are themselves vulnerable, situated, and responsible. Molines-Galarza (2025) proposes that contemporary practices in audiovisual translation and media accessibility often displace this bodily presence through mechanisms such as automated workflows, rapid turnarounds, and the invisibilisation of authorship. These dynamics, she argues, obscure the relational and interpretive nature of translation, severing it from the ethical encounter with the “other”. By theorising “trembling” and the “fall of the body” in translation, the paper reframes translation not as a seamless operation, but as a space of corporeal negotiation—where meaning is never guaranteed, but emerges through hesitation, relational tension, and the act of taking responsibility. Vulnerability, in this framework, becomes not a weakness to be managed, but a condition of possibility for creative and ethical engagement with audiovisual texts.

This emphasis on the material tangibility of interpretation—both linguistic and bodily—adds a critical layer to the notion of palpability introduced by Small and Calarco (2022). It reminds us that interpretation is not only about constructing arguments, but about feeling through the object, acknowledging the weight of representation, and allowing oneself to be moved, implicated, and transformed by it. In this sense, the politics of vulnerability proposed by Molines-Galarza (2025) does not reject interpretation; rather, it asks us to hold it lightly, to feel its outlines, and to interpret as one touches—with care, with pressure, with attention to what resists being grasped.

7. Representation

Representation is a foundational aspect of audiovisual translation and media accessibility. In all modalities, what is translated—whether intra- or intermodally—passes through one representational system into another. Beyond this applied fact, research approaches also tend to begin with representational assumptions about the artefacts they analyse: by comparing translation strategies in translated products, examining how these artefacts are received, used, or valued by audiences, or assessing their quality according to formal criteria. In all these cases, the linguistic system of representation is treated as a reflexive means for interpreting reality. In addition to early concepts such as constrained translation (Mayoral et al., 1988; Titford, 1982) and the audiovisual text (as previously mentioned), multimodal theory has helped revive and expand the core assumption of semiotic and modal interaction in audiovisual translation and media accessibility (Kaindl, 2012, 2020; Pérez-González, 2020).

The representational dimension of audiovisual translation and media accessibility has also been examined through more critical approaches that engage with questions of ideology, power, and performativity—often drawing on frameworks from critical discourse analysis and cultural studies (Fairclough, 2015; Hall, 1997, 2013), and even from descriptive translation studies (Díaz-Cintas, 2012). In this issue, most of the contributions grounded in qualitative approaches engage directly with the representational dimension of audiovisual translation and media accessibility.

Rita Menezes's contribution exemplifies this engagement by examining how representation operates not only in the translated artefact, but also within the workflow ecologies that shape it. Focusing on subtitling revision, her study highlights how revisers' interventions—often perceived as technical adjustments—are in fact deeply interpretive and situated. Through a case study with nine Portuguese professional revisers, the research reveals how decisions are influenced by emotional responses, personal experiences, and situated expertise. These interventions navigate the tensions between formal accuracy and interpretive agency, mediating between multiple stakeholders (translators, clients, platforms, audiences). As revisers rework subtitled content, they simultaneously reshape the semiotic artefact, redirect its affective tone, and participate in a broader politics of visibility. Revision thus emerges not only as a phase of textual control, but as a site of subjectivity, where linguistic, material, and ideological dimensions intersect in tangible ways (Menezes, 2025).

This relational view of representation is further expanded in the study by Irene Hermosa-Ramírez and Mouloud Boukala, which maps the practices and epistemologies of insider research in media accessibility. Based on semi-structured interviews with eleven researchers who themselves identify as insiders to the accessibility communities they study, the article examines how representation is not only constructed but also inhabited—through lived experience, embodied perspective, and reflexive engagement. Rather than reproducing the insider-outsider binary, the study proposes positionality as a dynamic and affectively charged continuum, shaped by visibility, self-reflection, stigma, and performative identity work. By articulating the experiences of researchers who simultaneously occupy the roles of investigator, participant, and community member, Hermosa-Ramírez and Boukala (2025) call attention to the material and emotional dimensions of knowledge production. The authors argue that positionality matters not only in how



knowledge is interpreted, but in how it is authorised, legitimised, and circulated—particularly in fields like media accessibility, where the researcher’s body, identity, and experience often serve as a point of access to the research object itself. Representation, here, is not simply a matter of depicting others, but of co-creating meaning through relational entanglements—with participants, institutions, and research infrastructures.

Hermosa-Ramírez and Boukala’s (2025) study offers several key takeaways. First, it urges scholars in media accessibility and user-centred research to approach insider knowledge with epistemological care—recognising its value not only as data but as an interpretive stance informed by affect, vulnerability, and agency. Second, it reveals how traditional accessibility services may fail to resonate with the lived experiences or worldviews of some users, suggesting the need for more diverse, culturally situated, and even radically transformative approaches to access provision. Third, it critiques the systemic barriers to participation in academic publishing, reframing these as manifestations of institutional ableism (Hermosa-Ramírez & Boukala, 2025). Through these reflections, the article makes a compelling case for representation as both a political and material act, embedded in bodies, systems, and histories. Insider research, when approached reflexively, offers not only empirical insights but also new ways of imagining what it means to be accountable, visible, and situated in accessibility research.

8. Subjectivity

This is a concept used in diverse ways within audiovisual translation and media accessibility research. However, one of these uses is misleading: subjectivity is not synonymous with a lack of reflexivity or methodological rigor. The dismissive use of the term subjective—as if it referred to a flaw or bias in research—does not engage with its theoretical grounding in the social sciences. Instead, it often reflects lay understandings of the subject, the individual, and society. There are several approaches to understanding the subject and subjectivity. One of them is the Foucauldian perspective, which frames subject formation as a process shaped by the productive dimensions of power. In this view, individuals become subjects through power, but also become subjected to power (Foucault, 1991). At first glance, this account may seem to strip the subject of any agency. However, it is part of a broader theory in which the discourses and forms of knowledge available within a society also shape what the subject can do, say, and think—and how they can interpret the world around them. Translation Studies has long incorporated a notion of the translator as a subject with agency. This is particularly evident in hermeneutic approaches, from Romanticism to late 20th-century theories, where the translator is seen as a privileged subject—whose intellectual capacities enable them to interpret the source text and rearticulate it in the target language (Hermans, 2020).

The translator has also been explored as a site of inquiry in relation to their social and subjective dimensions, as well as their contribution to or involvement in broader translation phenomena. This perspective is present in what Chesterman (2009) refers to as “translator studies”, in the emerging field of translators’ auto/biographical studies (Kaindl, 2025), and also in gender and feminist translation studies—for instance, in the work of Spolunsky (2019, 2022) and Spolunsky and Zucchi (2022) on the notion of ethos in translated discourse.



This embodied and affective dimension of subjectivity is central to Érica Lima's contribution to this special issue. Based on interviews and open-ended survey responses from professional women translators working in dubbing and subtitling across various genres, her study investigates the emotional, perceptual, and corporeal dimensions of the translation process. She argues that as it is widely studied in audiovisual translation, meaning is not constructed by verbal language alone, but emerges from a multimodal ensemble—image, sound, gesture, rhythm, lighting, facial expression, body language, intonation. These sensorial and material elements make audiovisual translation a privileged site for understanding translation as a fully embodied act—where the translator not only *acts upon* the text, but is *acted upon* by it (Lima, 2025). Anchored in the idea that interpretation is never purely linguistic, the study draws on affect theory to foreground how emotions experienced in the act of translation give shape to meaning-making. The personal experiences, memories, and values of the translators analysed are not presented as idiosyncratic noise, but as constitutive of the translational act. The data reveal that the translators' subjectivity—expressed through emotional responses, ethical discomfort, or intuitive strategies—often collides with ideossomatic constraints (Robinson, 2003), including dominant industry narratives that idealise objectivity or neutrality. Rather than treating emotion as a threat to rigour, Lima's (2025) article reframes it as a form of epistemic access: a way to interpret texts through the body, in relation to specific social, cultural, and political contexts. Subjectivity here is neither reduced to personal bias nor elevated to universal insight, but understood as a situated and relational interface—a condition through which translators interpret, intervene, and are themselves transformed.

In audiovisual translation and media accessibility, the notion of subjectivity is often linked to unconventional or creative approaches to translation and the production of accessible texts. This understanding tends to rely on a representational assumption—that words carry subjective meaning beyond their systemic function—and is largely grounded in the initial intention of the author or translator. It also reinforces the idea of the human as the central agent in the production of translation and knowledge (Romero Fresco & Chaume, 2022). The creative dimension of audiovisual translation and media accessibility, as discussed by Romero-Fresco and Chaume (2022), offers a crucial perspective for rethinking the role of subjectivity—not as a flaw to be eliminated, but as an enabling force for meaning-making. It is precisely within this framework that Alejandro Romero-Muñoz's contribution is situated.

In an experimental pilot study, Romero-Muñoz (2025) explores the subjective and objective components of audio description through a physiological lens. Using an audio-described clip from Netflix's series *Money Heist*, the study manipulated the audio description script to create two versions: the original and a creative one, in which objective components were turned subjective (and vice versa). These versions were then tested with partially sighted participants using a combination of heart rate monitoring, questionnaires, comprehension tests, and interviews. What emerges is not merely a comparison of styles, but an investigation into how creative subjectivity in audio description enhances user immersion and emotional engagement. The study offers empirical evidence that subjective, interpretive choices—often associated with creativity—are not incompatible with clarity or accessibility. On the contrary, they may foster stronger perceptual and affective responses. In this sense, subjectivity is not only a matter of translator

intention, but also something that materialises in the viewer's embodied experience. By treating subjectivity as both a textual and physiological phenomenon, Romero-Muñoz's (2025) study expands current debates on audio description and challenges rigid notions of neutrality. His experiment invites us to reconsider creativity not as excess, but as a calibrated and responsive strategy—rooted in the translator's interpretive stance and directly linked to the user's cognitive and emotional reception.

Some contributions to this special issue (Ameri, 2025; Oliva-Zamora & Mangiron, 2025; Romero-Muñoz, 2025) consider subjectivity mainly as an ethical lens for using qualitative methods—such as interviews, focus groups, or analysing comments on social media. This approach aims to open a space of intersubjectivity, allowing researchers to engage ethically and critically with the ways participants make sense of themselves. Looking ahead, subjectivity can remain a key concept in audiovisual translation and media accessibility research. However, we argue that it should not be treated as a totalising notion of the individual. Assuming that individuals are omniscient or fully capable of understanding every aspect of themselves and their surroundings risks reinforcing neohumanist or neopositivist approaches. Subjectivity isn't something that defines the whole person or ties everything together. It's just one part of what makes up an individual — a kind of temporary coherence that stands out for a moment in the middle of all the flows, forces, and changes a person goes through (Deleuze & Guattari, 2020). In fact, that sense of being a “subject” is more of an exception than the rule. Most of what we are escapes that coherent image we usually associate with subjectivity.

9. Some final thoughts

The special issue “Subjectivity and Materiality in Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility” opens with a theoretical and critical reflection on audiovisual translation and concludes with another conceptual proposal on how to translate both the audiovisual and the tangible. The articles in between provide an empirical foundation for sustaining—and further developing—complex reflections on how the translation of audiovisual materials transforms individuals, subject positions, and embodied experiences.

What we had hoped for with this issue was to gather a selection of contributions that could interrogate audiovisual translation and media accessibility beyond functionalist paradigms. What we obtained, however, surpassed this expectation. The authors not only examine how audiovisual artefacts are translated, accessed, or received, but also show how these practices are inseparable from questions of representation, subjectivity, tangibility, and affect. The volume as a whole evidences that audiovisual translation and media accessibility are not merely tools for transferring content between languages or modalities; they are also epistemological sites where language, identity, and power converge.

By foregrounding relational, material, and interpretive dimensions of audiovisual translation, this issue contributes to ongoing efforts to reimagine the field—not as a stable set of techniques, but as a dynamic and reflexive practice embedded in contemporary media ecologies. We hope these contributions will not only foster further interdisciplinary dialogue, but also inspire future research to keep questioning how we translate, who translates, and for whom.



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Políticas de la vulnerabilidad como marco ético para la traducción audiovisual y la accesibilidad en los medios

Politics of vulnerability as an ethical framework for audiovisual translation and media accessibility

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Resumen: El panorama audiovisual contemporáneo se caracteriza por la tensión entre la sobreproducción de contenidos y el surgimiento de obras que encarnan cuerpos y voces singulares. Este contexto plantea retos para repensar el papel del audiovisual en nuestras comunidades y en la construcción de subjetividades. Así, en este polisistema actual de las imágenes, la traducción audiovisual (TAV) y la accesibilidad (AM) son prácticas clave para la construcción de subjetividades y discursos, ya sea desde la investigación, la docencia o el ejercicio profesional, al tiempo que sufren el impacto de las tensiones propias de la industria. Este trabajo aborda la urgencia de reflexionar críticamente sobre las dinámicas “descorporeizantes” del sector, como la fragmentación de obras, los tiempos de entrega imposibles, los sistemas de selección automatizados y la creciente implementación de traducción automática y posesición. Estas prácticas problematizan la dimensión creativa y ética de la TAV y la AM, ya que distancian a los sujetos de su responsabilidad hacia el otro. A su vez, tienen un impacto clave en la obra audiovisual entendida como artefacto multimodal. Con un marco teórico basado en la traductología deconstructiva y una metodología de desarrollo conceptual y argumental, este estudio analiza la caída del cuerpo en la traducción, la noción de temblor y el desdibujamiento de la autoría, tanto en los textos originales como en los traducidos. Con este análisis se propone resituar éticamente el lugar de los cuerpos que traducen y las obras que estos crean, con la vulnerabilidad como rasgo esencial de la creación humana. Este enfoque no solo plantea un marco crítico frente a la automatización en la TAV, sino que también reivindica mejoras materiales y de reconocimiento de la autoría en el sector. Finalmente, se subraya la pertinencia de integrar los desarrollos teóricos de la TAV y la AM en los estudios fílmicos, reivindicando su lugar en el pensamiento contemporáneo sobre la imagen.

Palabras clave: vulnerabilidad; traductología deconstructiva; creatividad; traducción audiovisual; accesibilidad.

Abstract: The contemporary audiovisual landscape is defined by a tension between the overproduction of content and the emergence of works that reflect unique bodies and voices. This context challenges us to reconsider the role of audiovisual media in shaping communities and constructing subjectivities. Within this polysystem of images, audiovisual translation (AVT) and accessibility (MA) emerge as vital practices for shaping subjectivities and discourses—whether in research, teaching, or professional settings—while simultaneously grappling with the pressures and contradictions of the industry. This paper highlights the urgent need to critically examine the industry’s ‘disembodying’ dynamics, including the fragmentation of works, unrealistic delivery timelines, automated selection systems, and the growing reliance on machine translation and post-editing. These practices undermine the creative and ethical dimensions of AVT and MA, distancing individuals from their responsibility toward the “other”. Moreover, they have a considerable impact on audiovisual works as multimodal artefacts. Using a theoretical framework grounded in deconstructive translation studies and a methodology of conceptual and argumentative development, this study explores the fall of the body in translation, the concept of trembling, and the obscuring of authorship in both original and translated texts. It argues for an ethical repositioning of translating bodies and the works they produce, emphasizing vulnerability as a fundamental aspect of human creativity. This perspective not only critiques the automation-driven direction of AVT and MA, but also advocates for tangible improvements and the recognition of authorship within the industry. Finally, the paper underscores the importance of integrating theoretical advancements in AVT and MA into film studies, asserting their significance in contemporary discourse on the image.

Keywords: vulnerability; deconstructive translation studies; creativity; audiovisual translation; media accessibility.

I. Introducción

El panorama audiovisual contemporáneo vive atravesado por las fricciones que se crean entre la sobreproducción de contenidos y los nombres propios que abren espacios para la emergencia de cuerpos y voces singulares en forma de *obras*. Ante ese escenario, los estudios fílmicos siguen repensando el lugar del audiovisual en nuestras comunidades y en la construcción de subjetividades, así como las transformaciones contemporáneas de la propia escritura cinematográfica, que trasciende los contenidos temáticos y atiende a lo concreto de la forma fílmica. Ese espacio más periférico que parece que ocupa el cine hoy —en los mapas de la ciudad, como espacio disciplinar de pensamiento y en el consumo cultural de las sociedades (Rosenbaum, 2010; Monroy, 2020)— permite, a su vez, la acogida de otras voces que antes no se filtraban en los relatos cinematográficos, pues “[...] si el cine deviene un arte razonablemente marginal, es, sin duda, porque ha llegado su momento histórico de acoger *voces marginales*, esto es, *voces no habituales*” (García Catalán et al., 2022, p. 13). Esas *voces no habituales* o formas alternativas de enunciación siempre han necesitado de espacios alejados de los centros para emerger con mayor libertad de la que ofrecen los lugares centralizados de relatos normativizados y moldes preconfigurados. De hecho, observando los fragmentos de las historias del cine que han surgido en los últimos años atendiendo a esta disparidad, localizamos una amplia trayectoria de antecedentes: el “cine *underground* neoyorquino” frente a la hegemonía de Hollywood (Mendik & Jay Schneider, 2020), el cine social marsellés frente a los modelos autorales con centro parisino (Segura Pérez, 2013), o los cines periféricos españoles frente a los centros industriales de Madrid y Barcelona (Blanco Pérez, 2020; Redondo, 2021).



En este polisistema contemporáneo de las imágenes, es urgente repensar el papel que desempeñan la traducción audiovisual (TAV), la accesibilidad (AM) y los sujetos que participan de ella —tanto en el ámbito profesional, el docente o el investigador—, como agentes que también intervienen en la construcción discursiva —temática y formal— de las obras audiovisuales, y, por ende, en la construcción de subjetividades y discursos. Es también pertinente plantearnos cómo estamos atendiendo desde la TAV y la AM a esas “voces no habituales”, a esos otros cuerpos y rostros que se filtran en la imagen contemporánea; cómo recogemos sus maneras de hablar (véase, por ejemplo, Villanueva-Jordán, 2024a), sus gestos, sus códigos.

En ese sentido, estamos ya lejos ya de los conceptos de “traducción subordinada” (Mayoral et al., 1988), que, pese a su relevancia teórica durante muchas décadas y su pertinencia en el momento, hoy deviene una noción limitante, que perpetua binarismos jerarquizantes (imagen/texto; original/traducción) y no permite analizar, traducir y enseñar los relatos audiovisuales en todas sus dimensiones. Algo similar sucede con las nociones de “traducción restringida” (Titford, 1982; Bogucki, 2004) o de restricción en sí, incluso de “traducción parcial” (Benecke, 2014) que, pese a tener vigencia en el campo, se han problematizado y reconceptualizado. Ya en 2008 apuntaba Martínez Sierra que las restricciones presentes en la TAV, lejos de ser un escollo negativo, son un desencadenante de la creatividad; un planteamiento que seguimos viendo en investigaciones más recientes (Spiteri, 2019) y que hermana esas posturas con una mirada deconstructiva. Una mirada que entiende las im-posibilidades/in-traducibilidades que ofrecen los textos no como elementos negativos, sino, precisamente, como motores hermenéuticos y de lectura, como espacios de apertura al otro (Foran, 2016; Molines-Galarza, 2025). A su vez, la distancia crítica que se toma con respecto a conceptos como el de traducción subordinada o restricción permite resituar la TAV, sus textos y sus agentes en una posición que se aleja de paradigmas estructuralistas y esencialistas, y la inscribe en una tradición de pensamiento que problematiza la cuestión del origen, el sentido pleno o la posición secundaria y pasiva de quienes traducen.

En otra latitud teórica, hallamos las miradas que se han centrado en la multimodalidad como marco de práctica traductora e investigación en TAV. Estos enfoques se alejan de la mirada logocéntrica y monomodal —que da primacía al código lingüístico— y se anclan en un paradigma que define los textos audiovisuales como textos multimodales (Chaume, 2004; Martínez Sierra, 2008), en la necesidad de quien traduce textos audiovisuales de interpretar la trama de interacciones significantes de distintos códigos semióticos (Chaume, 2004) y la comprensión del texto audiovisual traducido como un eslabón transmodal en la cadena de significación (Newfield, 2014). A su vez, los enfoques multimodales atienden al carácter situado de los procesos de resemiotización que tienen lugar en la traducción de textos audiovisuales, a la agencia de los sujetos que participan de ella —con sus horizontes de significación y su bagaje sociohistórico, ideológico y subjetivo—, ya que:

[Estos enfoques] prestan atención a que los significados se producen en contextos específicos, mediante el uso de recursos semióticos que movilizan, a su vez, una carga sociohistórica [...] De esta manera, los procesos de resemiotización [...] de un producto audiovisual, por ejemplo, mediante el doblaje o la subtitulación, contribuyen a que el texto de partida acumule o produzca nuevos significados en los contextos de llegada (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024b, p. 62).



Frente a este panorama teórico, atento a la complejidad del cuerpo textual que encarna el texto audiovisual, como cuerpo que no puede estudiarse o trabajarse atendiendo a funciones y órganos aislados sin atender al desarrollo, acciones y movimiento —significantes— de todo el organismo, encontramos también una realidad industrial y nuevas corrientes investigadoras en el campo que, como plantearé en este artículo, descorporeizan el texto audiovisual y el hacer asociado a este. Entre estas prácticas, se contarían el uso del inglés como lengua puente (Dalli, 2024); las malas condiciones laborales, en términos tanto económicos como temporales (Kuo, 2015); la falta de acceso a los guiones y su substitución por plantillas cerradas para traducir (Kuo, 2020; Bolaños García-Escribano, 2025); el creciente uso de la posesición y otros sistemas de automatización (Bolaños García-Escribano, 2025); sistemas *first come, first served* (Gough et al., 2023); el troceamiento de obras entre distintos profesionales para cumplir con los plazos que marca el ritmo acelerado de la industria, entre otros.

Así, ante esas políticas y prácticas descorporeizantes y alienantes, que afectan no solo a la corporalidad de los textos audiovisuales y a sus procesos de resemiotización, sino a los propios cuerpos que llevan a cabo los diseños multimodales, “[...] los sujetos sociales como hacedores de significados” (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024b, p. 83), es urgente plantear reflexiones críticas que sigan ensanchando las bases teóricas del campo y que permitan plantear un ejercicio más encarnado, situado y responsable de la práctica de la TAV y la AM. Un ejercicio que, a su vez, dé cuenta de las subjetividades que se ponen en juego en toda tarea hermenéutica y creadora. Esta cuestión es especialmente relevante cuando hemos de atender a las singularidades discursivas y significantes que emergen en el audiovisual contemporáneo, y que han de tener también su espacio en la TAV y la AM.

En este artículo, con un marco epistemológico que parte de la traductología deconstructiva¹ y una metodología de desarrollo conceptual y argumental, analizo la problemática que entraña dejar caer el cuerpo de la obra, desdibujar la noción de autoría —del original y de la traducción— y traducir sin poner el propio cuerpo. Así, desarrollaré un anclaje ético sobre el que resituar el lugar de los cuerpos que traducen y las obras que estos crean. El objetivo principal de este trabajo es ampliar la noción de vulnerabilidad como uno de los rasgos esenciales de la creación humana, en la que también se engloban las obras de autoría derivada. Esa operación nos permite ofrecer un marco crítico frente a las prácticas descorporeizantes y alienantes antes descritas, agravadas, en especial, con la irrupción de los grandes modelos de lenguaje en el sector de la traducción audiovisual.

A su vez, este trabajo conceptual también nos permite generar unos cimientos más sólidos sobre los que reivindicar mejoras materiales y de reconocimiento de la autoría en el sector de la TAV y la AM. Por último, los desarrollos teóricos de este trabajo también buscan acercar los planteamientos teóricos de nuestro campo al ámbito de los estudios fílmicos, reivindicando la pertenencia orgánica de la TAV y la AM al corpus teórico del pensamiento sobre la imagen, en línea con el giro hacia afuera (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019) de nuestra disciplina. Así, se abre la puerta a futuras investigaciones que integren perspectivas de ambos campos de conocimiento, si bien en este

¹ La traductología deconstructiva (TD) “[...] es un espacio de pensamiento dentro del campo de los estudios de traducción que, bebiendo de la obra derridiana y de la deconstrucción en general, elabora perspectivas críticas para pensar su práctica, su ética y su teoría. A su vez, como marco epistemológico, cuestiona los binarismos y rastros esencialistas instalados en las propias corrientes investigadoras y metodológicas del campo” (Molines-Galarza, 2025, p. 4-5).

trabajo he de limitarme a desarrollar planteamientos más propios de la traductología —con los que más adelante dialogar con propuestas de los estudios fílmicos—.

2. El cuerpo que (se) traduce

En “Freud y la escena de la escritura”, texto incluido en *La escritura y la diferencia*, Derrida (1967, p. 312) hace una reflexión clave que guiará la investigación conceptual que planteo en este texto: “Un cuerpo verbal no se deja traducir o transportar a otra lengua. Eso es justo lo que la traducción deja caer. Dejar caer el cuerpo, esa es justo la energía esencial de la traducción. Cuando restituye un cuerpo, es poesía”². En primer lugar, cabe precisar que Derrida aquí asigna corporeidad al significante —la parte material del signo—, por oposición al significado. Así, en una lógica tradicional y estructuralista de la traducción, el significante —el cuerpo del signo— es justo aquello que ha de caer, ha de “sacrificarse” para que pueda haber una traducción —de significado—³. Así, la lógica fundamental de la traducción —entendida en términos clásicos de equivalencia pura— es “dejar caer los cuerpos” —los significantes originales—, sin que esa caída afecte al significado. No obstante, en la segunda parte de la cita, el filósofo incluye una salvedad: la traducción también puede no dejar caer el cuerpo, puede volver a levantar un cuerpo, momento en el que pasa a ser poesía.

Para desplegar el potencial teórico de esta reflexión, cabe matizar el uso de la palabra poesía: se entenderá aquí este término como creación, invención, obra firmada, el resultado de un proceso de transformación que se aleja de la noción clásica de traducción, que Derrida tematiza con más claridad en *Posiciones*: “La traducción pone en práctica la diferencia entre significado y significante. Pero si esta diferencia nunca es pura, tampoco lo es la traducción; por eso, la noción de traducción tendría que sustituirse por la de *transformación*” (Derrida, 1972, p. 31).

Un marco epistemológico que asume la caída de los cuerpos significantes originales como eje del proceso de traducción y que no ahonda en lo que sucede al levantar otros cuerpos —otros significantes—, al resemiotizar en el texto meta, desactiva la carga de responsabilidad que conlleva levantar otros cuerpos, poner en práctica esa transformación que es la que permite que el texto perviva (Derrida, 1986). Los cuerpos textuales llevan inscrita una estructura de pervivencia y las traducciones parten, precisamente, de ella (Benjamin, 1972); véase, de la apertura necesaria para que haya interpretaciones *a posteriori* que permitan que el texto tenga otra vida más allá de su momento de creación, para permitir la venida del otro. Sin dicha apertura, tanto si se coloca desde el extremo de lo totalmente traducible como de lo totalmente intraducible, el cuerpo textual muere: “Totalmente traducible, desaparece como texto, como escritura, como cuerpo de lengua. Totalmente intraducible, incluso en el interior de lo que creemos que es una lengua, muere enseguida” (Derrida, 1986, p. 148).

Todo el marco metafórico somático-escatológico que se despliega a partir de pensadores como Derrida o Benjamin con respecto a la traducción tiene consecuencias de calado para pensar

² Se facilita la traducción de todas las citas en aras de una mejor comprensión del texto. Salvo indicación contraria, todas las traducciones son mías.

³ Para una mirada estructuralista, la unión entre significado y significante es arbitraria, encarna una separación radical (Saussure, 1987). A su vez, esa arbitrariedad sitúa al significante del lado de lo secundario frente a la primacía del significado (trascendental); para la lógica estructuralista saussureana, un cambio de significante no implica un cambio de significado.

el estatus de los propios textos y el lugar que ocupan los sujetos que traducen ante los textos de partida. A su vez, este nos permite empezar a introducir la cuestión de la vulnerabilidad en la ecuación. En primer lugar, pensar los originales como cuerpos que llevan inscrita una estructura de pervivencia señala la propia vulnerabilidad del texto de partida, como original no pleno, no absoluto. Con este original se establece una deuda bidireccional al traducir: el original está endeudado con quien traduce y quien traduce responde al llamamiento de pervivencia del original. Así, como ya sugerí en otro lugar: “Una traducción deconstructiva quizá deja caer el cuerpo del texto original — su carne, su letra—, pero, al no dejar caer el cuerpo de la traducción, hace poesía, y permite que el texto original perviva” (Molines-Galarza, 2025, p. 236). En esta articulación, la cuestión de la responsabilidad hacia el texto de partida y hacia la propia tarea traductora pasa a un primer plano.

En segundo lugar, este marco metafórico dificulta que podamos pensar como cuerpos textuales, tanto si son textos de partida como traducciones, los textos convertidos en “material textual” o en “contenido”. En la introducción hacía referencia a prácticas descorporeizantes en la TAV y la AM. Entre ellas, estarían el uso del inglés como lengua puente, el troceamiento —¿descuartizamiento?— de obras entre diferentes profesionales, sistemas *first come, first served* o la aplicación de grandes modelos de lenguaje y sistemas de posesición. En todas estas prácticas se pone en marcha una reconceptualización epistemológica y ontológica de qué es un texto y qué es una traducción. Así, pasamos de entender el cuerpo de los textos audiovisuales como un conjunto de significantes que arrastran una firma y transmiten ciertos significados abiertos a las lecturas ulteriores —una obra artística, encarnada en una forma concreta— a hablar de “contenido”. El desplazamiento de la metáfora somática es clave: el texto deja de ser un “continente” —un cuerpo concreto— para ser “contenido”. En el signo, la cara del significado arrasa la cara significante. Este movimiento, por mucho que pueda parecer un juego puramente terminológico, trae consecuencias de calado en lo material, lo social y lo cultural. Veamos la aplicación de este desplazamiento conceptual en algunas de las prácticas descorporeizantes antes señaladas, donde se verá el cambio de paradigma que ponen en marcha.

El uso del inglés como lengua puente, una práctica desaconsejada por entidades como la Audiovisual Translators Europe (AVTE, 2024) o la Comisión Europea, según se recoge en el informe *Translators on the Cover: Multilingualism & Translation* (European Commission, 2022), sigue al alza en un sector que se mueve en términos comerciales, antepone abaratar costes y la rapidez antes que la calidad (Pięta et al., 2024). Es un caso en el que vemos claramente el desplazamiento ontológico del concepto de texto de partida: los significantes originales —el cuerpo textual— dejan de importar en el proceso de traducción. Pueden sustituirse por otros —más accesibles—, de una lengua puente, sin atender a las singularidades que arrastra el uso de cada significante en su lengua y sistema de partida. A su vez, estas prácticas fomentan la condensación lingüística, la estandarización, las lecturas únicas (Nikolić, 2015) y, lo que es todavía más preocupante, “[...] tienen a sustituir el material audiovisual como texto fuente de la traducción” (Kapsaskis, 2011, p. 175). El texto audiovisual, que, como veíamos al inicio, en su dimensión multimodal conlleva distintos códigos —visuales, sonoros, puramente lingüísticos— queda reducido, en el proceso de traducción, a la monomodalidad, a una parte del cuerpo significante. De nuevo, así pasamos del marco del continente al del contenido, algo que tiene efectos importantes que trascienden la propia TAV y la AM, y afectan al propio objeto audiovisual en su totalidad como obra: “Es evidente que algo falla en el núcleo estrictamente

audiovisual cuando las relaciones entre forma y contenido han quedado tan violentamente descompensadas. [...] cuando hablamos de generar contenidos para plataformas nunca hablamos de generar formas” (Rodríguez Serrano, 2024, p. 90). Sería conveniente explorar, en futuras investigaciones, el impacto que tiene el uso de las lenguas puente en la homogenización de esas voces “menos habituales” que señalaba al inicio; si, precisamente, el uso de una lengua global y colonizante como el inglés como punto de partida está limando y homogeneizando discursos, jergas de comunidades e idiolectos.

Otra práctica en la que vemos este desplazamiento conceptual sería el troceamiento de las obras de partida. Ese desmembramiento se produce cuando la empresa que encarga la traducción —ya sea una agencia, un estudio de doblaje o una distribuidora— parte la obra en diversos fragmentos y las asigna a profesionales distintos. Al quebrar la integridad de la obra, al romper su cuerpo —ya sea una serie, una película, un documental— y asignar la traducción/audiodescripción a distintos profesionales, volvemos a encontrarnos el marco del contenido —ajeno a la forma— y la monomodalidad que implica trabajar sin tener en cuenta los procesos significantes que intervienen a lo largo de toda la obra, entendida como una totalidad.

Por último, el caso más relevante —y urgente de pensar, por todas sus implicaciones sociales, éticas, culturales y legales— que afecta al cuerpo del original y de la traducción es el que pasa por la implementación de grandes modelos de lenguaje y prácticas de posesición en las obras audiovisuales. Si bien buena parte de la investigación en traducción automática y la posesición en traducción automática (TA) se ha centrado en la cuestión de la calidad o en la categorización de errores (Bolaños García-Escribano, 2025; Mejías-Climent & De Los Reyes Lozano, 2023), y en traducción literaria empieza a haber estudios relevantes con respecto a la pérdida de creatividad de los textos poseditados (Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2022), queda espacio para explorar qué marco conceptual se impone sobre el texto original y de llegada desde el momento en el que se abre la posibilidad de procesarlo mediante un gran modelo de lenguaje o un motor de TA.

Ya veíamos antes que la estructura de pervivencia del texto original se articula fuera del binarismo totalmente traducible/totalmente traducible. Así, dicha articulación se asienta sobre la apertura de significado, la necesidad de un otro: “Un texto se abre a la vida solo cuando es leído”, como decía Iser (1989, p. 133). En esa apertura, a su vez, siguiendo a Derrida (1986), ha de haber siempre un escollo, algo que nos obligue a detenernos ante el texto, a tomar una decisión situada, verdaderamente responsable —véase, im-posible, no trazada de antemano (Derrida, 1994)—. Sin embargo, el marco epistemológico que imponen los sistemas de TA parte de coordenadas contrarias: se entiende el texto como algo totalmente traducible, no hay margen para la duda, para la pausa, para detenerse en el escollo. Así, estos sistemas ponen en marcha un gesto necropolítico que no encaja con la lógica im-posible del arte, sino, por decirlo con Fisher (2009), con la del capital y su mecanismo de lenta cancelación del futuro.

Ante los obstáculos que ofrecen los textos originales, la estructura con la que están contruidos estos sistemas —que forzará una respuesta y les negará el silencio— ofrece supresiones (por ejemplo, cuando sistemas como DeepL eliminan el segmento o parte problemática) o nos da datos totalmente irrelevantes, que se han tematizado como “alucinaciones” (Maleki et al., 2024). A su vez, estos sistemas retoman el marco monomodal, se quedan solo con el código lingüístico —sin atender tampoco a los condicionantes culturales, formales e ideológicos que lo atraviesan—, y dejan

caer el resto del cuerpo de la obra. Así, al poseditar, ya no estamos trabajando con un cuerpo textual, sino, con un “metalenguaje que asegure la circulación vigilada entre lo que se llama ‘lengua de entrada’ y ‘lengua de salida’ (por ejemplo, en una máquina traductora)” (Derrida, 1986, p. 165), o, como se ha denominado más recientemente, “material textual” (Villanueva-Jordán & Romero-Muñoz, 2023) o de “textualidad artificial” (Molines-Galarza, 2024).

Como hemos visto en estos tres casos —susceptibles de ampliación, empleados aquí a modo de ejemplo—, cuando el original deja de considerarse un cuerpo —con sus distintos códigos de significación—, volvemos a un paradigma monomodal que desnaturaliza la especificidad de la TAV y la AM. A su vez, se desactiva la relación de deuda bidireccional y la responsabilidad que asumen los sujetos que traducen queda embotada o, cuando menos, problematizada. Este desplazamiento epistemológico también tiene derivaciones materiales que ahondan en la precarización del colectivo profesional del sector; una precarización que, no obstante, contrasta con la pujanza de la industria en la que se desarrolla (Carreira, 2024, p. 1-3). Por último, este desplazamiento también enmascara los elementos de vulnerabilidad que se ponen en juego en todo proceso de creación y, como veremos en el siguiente apartado, son aquellos que están en el centro de los aspectos éticos que los articulan.

3. El cuerpo que tiembla

Tras haber visto cómo afectan los desplazamientos conceptuales de ciertas (malas) prácticas en el sector de la TAV y la AM a la cuestión del cuerpo de la obra y a la propia definición de lo que es el texto audiovisual, cabe avanzar en el desarrollo conceptual que planteo en este trabajo y abordar los efectos que tiene este cambio en la posición y agencia de los sujetos que traducen. Siguiendo con el hilado de conceptos, con el objetivo de ampliar la noción de vulnerabilidad, abordaré ahora la idea derridiana de temblor. En esta noción veremos que se despliega un horizonte ético, unido a todo acto de creación, y por ende, aplicable a la TAV y la AM. A su vez, este permite que emerja la reflexión sobre la vulnerabilidad y me permitirá tematizar con más precisión aquello que define una traducción humana frente a los contenidos que generan los grandes modelos de lenguaje y los sistemas de “traducción” automática.

En la noción derridiana de temblor, se establece la articulación fundamental de tres ideas clave que resumo aquí: 1) Se tiembla ante lo que no se sabe; 2) Todo acto de creación conlleva un temblor porque pasa por un no-saber; 3) Ante el no-saber es donde podemos (y debemos) asumir una verdadera responsabilidad ante el otro. Ese otro, añadiría, es especialmente vulnerable en la traducción cuando no encaja con paradigmas binarios o modos establecidos de discurso, de ahí que el compromiso que se requiere por parte de quienes traducen sea todavía más relevante, como acto hospitalario (Martínez Pleguezuelos, 2022).

Antes de ver su aplicación al campo de la traducción, cabe detenerse brevemente en una exploración del concepto de temblor que plantea Jacques Derrida, para así caminar sobre un terreno conceptual más sólido. El temblor es, para el filósofo, una experiencia fundamental del no-saber que excede toda decisión voluntaria y plenamente consciente; es siempre “[...] la experiencia de una pasividad absoluta, absolutamente expuesta, absolutamente vulnerable, pasiva ante un pasado irreversible así como ante un futuro imprevisible” (Derrida, 2006, p. 94). Temblar es algo que



despoja al sujeto de su carácter pleno y totalmente consciente, lo coloca en relación con una alteridad. Si lo referimos aquí específicamente a las obras de creación, el momento propiamente artístico de una obra es aquel “[...] en el que la mano tiembla porque el artista ya no la controla, porque lo que le acontece, y le sorprende como verticalmente, viene del otro. El artista no es responsable” (Derrida, 2006, p. 97). El temblor surge ante la “irresponsabilidad”, ante la necesidad de firmar aquello que no surge de un sujeto pleno totalmente consciente y responsable; una manera, a su vez, de vaciar de plenitud el concepto de autoría.

Temblar, así, es lo que sucede ante la venida del acontecimiento como aquello inesperado, imprevisible, que es im-posible acoger, y, sin embargo, ante lo que tenemos que responder (Molines-Galarza, 2025). El temblor encarna la responsabilidad absoluta —tomar decisiones imposibles y hacerse cargo de ellas— frente a la ética entendida como generalidad o norma (Derrida, 1999). Así, como apunta Jordà, quien analiza la deuda con Kierkegaard del concepto derridiano de temblor y su relación con la ética de la traducción, “[...] temblar [...] exige más que la sustitución de un sistema ético-moral por otro, o su simple suspensión, más bien, exige una contradicción, una tensión formidable” (Mathiasen, 2023, p. 7).

En el caso de las obras de autoría derivada, como son las traducciones audiovisuales que aquí me ocupan, el temblor es doble: por un lado, está la vulnerabilidad que experimenta el sujeto que traduce ante la tarea im-posible⁴ que se le ofrece —un texto lleno de escollos, de im-posibilidades, con el que se establece una deuda bidireccional—, algo que, sin duda, nos hace temblar ante la necesidad de tomar decisiones que nos parecen imposibles. Todavía se acrecienta más ese temblor cuando las particularidades técnicas de la TAV y la AM nos obligan a tomar todavía más decisiones «im-posibles», a intervenir más a nivel signifiante —con adaptaciones, condensaciones, omisiones— que en otras modalidades de la traducción. Así, podríamos decir que la TAV y la AM son dos ramas especialmente marcadas por su “carácter decisorio” y, por ende, donde la responsabilidad singular de los sujetos que traducen pasa a un primer plano. También, como se ha visto al inicio, el audiovisual contemporáneo acoge los temblores de esas otras voces, cuerpos y sujetos que se abren camino en sus imágenes y con quienes se establece una deuda responsable por parte de quien traduce o audiodescribe.

Por otro lado, está la vulnerabilidad que relaciona al sujeto —no pleno— que traduce con su propia creación, si bien no todas las modalidades de la TAV y la AM tienen aún reconocido su carácter de autoría derivada, como la audiodescripción o la subtitulación para sordos. Las prácticas descorporeizantes que antes señalaba nos alejan de ese temblor y de esa vulnerabilidad creativa al colocarnos en un marco metafórica y literalmente alejado al de la creación y más cercano a procesos maquínicos, algo que tiene consecuencias materiales de gran calado. Como apuntaba Gambier (2023), la larga lista de créditos que acompaña una obra audiovisual no solo consigna una variedad de agentes implicados en el proceso creativo —desde la persona que dirige, la guioniza o la que se encarga de vestuario—, sino también la diversidad de signos semióticos que forman parte del proceso de significación. De ahí que resulte tan llamativa la habitual ausencia de los nombres y

⁴ Sigo aquí el uso derridiano del término, que trasciende la oposición binaria posible/imposible, y, funciona, como un tercer término, una noción que encabalga los dos extremos de posibilidad, se erige como la condición de lo posible y forma la lógica de posibilidad de todo acontecimiento (Derrida et al., 2001), como aquello que parece imposible y, sin embargo, acaba aconteciendo.

apellidos de las autorías de los textos traducidos y audiodescritos, como si fueran ajenos a esa cadena significativa.

Por llamativa que sea, no deja de seguir la lógica monomodal y estructuralista que relega la TAV y la AM a una posición secundaria, subordinada, como si no afectara al proceso global de significación de la obra y, por ende, no hubiese que considerarla, en realidad, una obra —ni siquiera de autoría derivada—. Como apuntaba, ni la audiodescripción ni la subtitulación para sordos tienen reconocidos los derechos de autoría, si bien en normas como por ejemplo la ISO IEC TS 20071-21 (ISO, 2015, p. 5), relativa a la audiodescripción (AD), se reconoce su naturaleza subjetiva y creativa, pues “[...] no es solo una estrategia de acceso, sino, a fin de cuentas, un proceso creativo”. Aunque normas más recientes como la citada reconocen esta naturaleza, no podemos pasar por alto la vigencia e implantación —en buena parte de los países hispanohablantes— de una norma más antigua, como es la UNE 153020 (UNE, 2005), donde no hay referencia alguna a la dimensión creativa y se consigna que “[...] debe evitarse transmitir cualquier punto de vista subjetivo” (UNE, 2015, p. 8), así como que las locuciones han de ser neutras.

En el caso de la traducción para doblaje y subtítulos, si volvemos a fijarnos en el caso español, vemos también que la diferencia en los porcentajes de derechos de autoría que se perciben en España —0,5625 % para traducciones de subtítulos y 1,124 % para traducciones de doblaje— (DAMA, 2025) se detecta una conceptualización diferenciada de los “niveles de autoría” que conlleva cada obra. En el caso del subtítulo, al coexistir el texto subtítulo con la pista de audio original, el porcentaje de autoría derivada se resiente frente a la traducción para doblaje, donde sí que hay una sustitución de pistas. A su vez, en términos de autoría y regalías, el ajuste sigue manteniendo una posición privilegiada frente a la traducción, con un 2,625 %, que arrastra las dinámicas industriales de hace décadas, en las que el ajuste era una fase en la que se intervenía mucho más en el texto, dado que quienes ajustaban sí que tenían acceso al material visual.

No puedo dejar de apuntar aquí, aunque sea como mera nota al margen, el peligro que supone en términos de derechos —tanto los morales como los económicos, y en un ámbito en el que este reconocimiento es ya de por sí complejo, como acabamos de ver— que las autorías de traducciones audiovisuales pasen a ocupar el lugar de posedoras, con lo que el reconocimiento autoral quedará desactivado, así como revocados los derechos relativos a su propiedad intelectual. Reaparecen el temblor y la vulnerabilidad, pero no como eje de un proceso creativo, situado y responsable, sino como efectos de la precarización material y sociolaboral.

4. Temblar, caer, olvidar, fracasar, dudar: políticas de la vulnerabilidad

En las secciones anteriores hemos podido ver, mediante el trabajo conceptual y el desarrollo argumental, el impacto que tienen sobre el cuerpo de las obras y sobre los cuerpos que traducen distintos casos de prácticas descorporeizantes presentes en el sector de la TAV y la AM. Tras centrarme en los conceptos deconstructivos de la caída del cuerpo y del temblor, estrechamente vinculados con la creación, en esta última sección, para cerrar la triangulación conceptual, abordaré la dimensión ética sobre la que resituar el lugar de los cuerpos que traducen y las obras que crean. Esta dimensión ética se construye a partir de los conceptos explorados en este trabajo y se asienta en lo que emerge de la intersección de ambos: la vulnerabilidad. Como argumentaré en esta sección,



la vulnerabilidad es un concepto clave que nos permite ahondar en la caracterización de los textos audiovisuales, en las obras que se derivan de ellos —como parte integrante del texto audiovisual— y en las relaciones que se establecen entre los sujetos que crean y sus obras (originales o derivadas).

La obra artística surge, por una parte, del momento del temblor, y por otra, del gesto de levantar o restituir un cuerpo (figurado), una obra. Para ello, se deriva la necesidad de un cuerpo literal (sujeto) que, a su vez, sea vulnerable, véase, que ponga el cuerpo y que se permita temblar, es decir, aceptar el no saber, la duda, las decisiones im-posibles, la pérdida de control, el carácter situado y subjetivo de su hacer. Solo puede haber gesto ético y una verdadera acción responsable cuando el mundo se acaba (Derrida, 2006), es decir, cuando no hay camino trazado, cuando el suelo desaparece, cuando hay que inventar la senda, tomar decisiones im-posibles, decidir en la aporía. No hay responsabilidad en seguir el camino previamente marcado, en partir del saber, del mismo modo que no puede haber invención o creación de lo posible, pues “[...] una invención debe anunciarse como la de aquello que no parecía posible, sin eso, lo único que haría sería explicitar un programa de posibles, dentro de la economía de lo mismo” (Derrida, 1998, p. 59). Así, cuando traducimos, la vulnerabilidad define nuestra relación (responsable) con ese otro que es el texto, con los otros presentes en la obra, y con nuestra propia labor de creación.

Dudar, perderse, temblar, olvidar, no saber, caer, fracasar, rehacer, acciones que, en la tradición occidental caerían del lado subordinado de sus respectivos pares binarios jerarquizantes⁵, son, sin embargo, aquello que singulariza el acercamiento humano a los procesos creativos como los que se ponen en marcha en la traducción. Lo que para Scott (1985) eran las “armas de los débiles” —resistir mediante la pasividad o la inoperancia—, o para Halberstam (2011, p. 88), hablando del fracaso, “[...] una manera de negarse a ceder ante las lógicas dominantes de poder y disciplina, así como una forma de crítica”, puede recuperarse aquí como aquello que define nuestra tarea traductora. Puede resultar paradójico hablar de dimensiones “negativas” como el fracaso, la duda, la caída o la pérdida para ceñir aquello que distingue la obra frente al contenido, la traducción frente a la textualidad artificial. Sin embargo, es precisamente mediante la deconstrucción de los binomios jerarquizantes que relegan esas dimensiones de lo humano al cajón de lo indeseable y analizando en profundidad las alternativas que nos ofrecen esos gestos de vulnerabilidad donde hallaremos las diferencias epistemológicas, ontológicas y fenomenológicas entre las obras que surgen de una práctica encarnada —en la que el sujeto pone el cuerpo— y las que lo hacen de una práctica descorporeizada. Siguiendo con Halberstam (2011), quedarnos en territorios bien iluminados y saber adónde vamos en todo momento son metodologías que sirven para confirmar lo que ya existe y lo que ya se conoce, pero no nos permiten tener atisbos visionarios, creativos ni imaginativos.

Así, con una política de la vulnerabilidad para la TAV y la AM se defiende un acercamiento encarnado a los textos audiovisuales; un hacer marcado por la duda y el temblor, por la decisión im-possible tomada ante la aporía, por una escucha atenta y hospitalaria que sabe mirar más allá de los discursos hegemónicos de las imágenes; una práctica que reconoce el riesgo de su labor situada y subjetiva, consciente de los efectos de aquellas dinámicas descorporeizantes del sector. A su vez,

⁵ Para Derrida, la tradición de pensamiento occidental ha dividido el mundo en pares binarios jerárquicos (hombre/mujer, original/traducción), el primer elemento se sitúa por encima del segundo, que queda relegado a una posición subordinada. En su proyecto deconstructivo, el filósofo argelino pretende deshacer estos binomios y mostrar los vasos comunicantes, umbrales y sombras que difuminan estos pares estancos.

una política de la vulnerabilidad problematiza el marco epistemológico en el que se basan, por ejemplo, las prácticas de posesición aplicadas a textos audiovisuales —o, directamente, la generación de material textual que salta a la pantalla sin mediación humana alguna—. Estas prácticas se sitúan lejos de un hacer vulnerable: la máquina siempre “sabe” —mentirá/alucinará antes de reconocer una falta de saber u omitirá el segmento problemático que pone a prueba sus límites—. La máquina no duda, no tiembla, no olvida, no enseña el costado vulnerable ante el otro frente al que ha de asumir una responsabilidad. La máquina no crea ni inventa, sino que genera, porque el camino ya lo tiene trazado de antemano; la máquina siempre parte de lo posible, mientras que los sujetos que traducen han de partir siempre de lo im-posible. La máquina aplasta la diversidad y converge siempre hacia lo más probable, lo más hegemónico (Savoldi et al., 2021), ajena a sus sesgos, optará por lo que menos haga temblar el texto. La máquina tiene oído monomodal y genera textos para una lógica monomodal, mientras que, al traducir, los sujetos ponemos en marcha un proceso de resemiotización multimodal y los textos que creamos pasan a formar parte del organismo de la obra, como elementos significantes indisociables de la corporalidad del texto audiovisual.

5. Notas finales y líneas futuras

Este recorrido conceptual nos ha permitido ahondar en nociones como la de la caída/restitución del cuerpo o el temblor, atravesadas por su dimensión ética y su necesidad para que pueda darse lo artístico, la creación. A su vez, hemos tematizado diversas prácticas descorporeizantes que atraviesan el audiovisual contemporáneo, concretadas en los procesos de TAV y de la AM. Con este trabajo conceptual, que cabe seguir ampliando con más nociones afines, se han podido resaltar las contradicciones y trabas epistemológicas, ontológicas y fenomenológicas que entrañan dichas prácticas —el uso del inglés como lengua puente, el troceamiento de obras entre distintos profesionales, el creciente uso de la posesición y otros sistemas de automatización— al desactivar todo componente de vulnerabilidad en la relación con el texto audiovisual de partida y al anular/trabar al sujeto que pone el cuerpo y ha de hacerse cargo de las decisiones tomadas. Así, se ha alcanzado el objetivo de este trabajo ampliando la noción de vulnerabilidad como uno de los rasgos esenciales de la creación humana mediante la conceptualización de las políticas de la vulnerabilidad. Estas políticas sitúan la práctica encarnada en el núcleo de la traducción humana y formulan una crítica a las prácticas descorporeizantes presentes en el sector de la TAV y la AM.

A su vez, se concluye que, asumiendo el marco multimodal en el que se inscriben las obras audiovisuales, los efectos que se derivan de las prácticas descorporeizantes no solo tienen impacto en la TAV y la AM —tanto en los textos como en las personas que padecen esas condiciones materiales para desarrollar su labor—, sino que tocan el propio cuerpo de la obra audiovisual entendida como conjunto de códigos semióticos. En especial, estas prácticas pueden tener un efecto especialmente problemático a la hora de acoger las voces menos habituales que atraviesan el audiovisual contemporáneo, si bien es una línea que exige investigaciones monográficas, que espero poder abordar en el futuro tras haber asentado en este trabajo las bases conceptuales con las que desarrollar análisis ulteriores, de corte más empírico. Por último, se deriva también de este trabajo la necesidad de entablar un diálogo más estrecho con los estudios fílmicos para elaborar reflexiones interdisciplinares que ahonden en las políticas de la vulnerabilidad en el audiovisual contemporáneo



que tengan en cuenta no solo la dimensión de la obra original, sino también la TAV y la AM, como elementos orgánicos que forman parte (significante) de las imágenes que atraviesan nuestras pantallas.

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Broken immersion in media accessibility: How barriers disrupt the connection between players with dyslexia and video games


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Abstract: Cognitive accessibility in video games remains one of the least explored and most challenging areas to address, as the target audience comprises a diverse group, including individuals with cognitive disabilities, but also learning difficulties. To gain deeper insights into how cognitive accessibility in video games could be improved, and due to the wide array of potential users, we conducted a study with persons with dyslexia, since this learning difficulty has not been examined in detail in the existing literature on game accessibility. Two focus groups were carried out to elicit information about the experiences of people with dyslexia in relation to video games, focusing on the barriers that break immersion and hinder the physical and emotional experience of gameplay. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the results. Findings suggest that while video games can offer enjoyable and immersive experiences, they may become alienating if not fully accessible. The main barriers preventing the participants with dyslexia from fully immersing themselves in a video game are reading, memorizing information and controls, and keeping up with the pace of the game. Particularly, they encounter difficulties with heavily text-driven games, and consequently prefer action games or those with a faster pace. In the conclusion, we lay the groundwork for a future reception study aimed at overcoming these barriers to foster more immersive game experiences.

Keywords: video games; cognitive accessibility; dyslexia; focus groups; easy-to-understand language.

1. Introduction

Video games play a crucial role in the entertainment industry, as they provide endless entertainment and immersive experiences to users, allowing them to escape from their daily routine. In addition, playing video games provides numerous benefits, such as reducing stress, enhancing problem-solving skills, and strengthening social interactions (Granic et al., 2014; Smirni



et al., 2021). However, there is still an important segment of the population who has difficulties accessing video games: people with disabilities, who account for 16% of the world population (World Health Organization, 2024) and people with learning difficulties, who represent 15% of the global population (The Treetop, 2024). Game accessibility's ultimate objective is to help users overcome the barriers present in video games when there is a mismatch between user's abilities and the abilities required to play the game (IGDA GASIG, 2024).

Regarding people with cognitive disabilities or learning difficulties, considerable efforts have been devoted to developing detection techniques and training programs. While this approach can be beneficial, it largely reflects the medical model of disability by emphasizing inabilities, thereby inadvertently reinforcing ableist perspectives. In contrast, current studies increasingly align with the social model of disability, as originally proposed by Marks (1997), which aims at suggesting ways of preventing cultural products or society in general from creating barriers that contribute to exclusion.

The social approach to accessibility has gained significant traction in video games in recent years, particularly since the release of *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog) in 2020. The game includes more than 60 accessibility features and has three accessibility presets for visual, hearing, and motor accessibility (Molloy & Carter, 2020). It exemplifies how involving accessibility consultants and integrating inclusive design principles from the outset can lead to a more positive and engaging experience for a wide range of players. Several authors, such as Simon-Liedtke and Baraas (2022) and Torrente et al. (2014), have argued that users with diverse needs and preferences should participate in the entire design process to ensure an adequate implementation of accessibility features. However, *The Last of Us Part II* is not without limitations. One notable shortcoming is the absence of a specific preset for cognitive accessibility. In fact, cognitive accessibility in video games remains one of the least explored and most challenging areas to address, as the target audience comprises a diverse group, including individuals with cognitive disabilities, such as autism or Down syndrome, as well as those with learning difficulties like dyslexia (von Gillern & Nash, 2023).

To better understand how cognitive accessibility in video games can be enhanced, and given the diverse range of potential users, we decided to center this research on individuals with dyslexia as a case study, as this learning difficulty has not been examined in detail in the existing research on game accessibility. Considering the motto of accessibility, "nothing about us, without us", we performed two focus groups to gather information about the opinion and the experiences of people with dyslexia regarding video games. Specifically, we examined the barriers that break their immersion and how these obstacles hinder the physical and emotional experience of video games.

The paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, section 2 provides an overview of dyslexia as a multifaceted learning difficulty to contextualise the study. Section 3 describes the interactive nature of video games, while section 4 explores video games and their promise of embodied experiences. Section 5 presents the methodology of the focus groups and the thematic analysis of the data, followed by the results and the discussion that draw on participants' insights and relevant prior studies. The conclusion highlights the main contributions of the study and outlines directions for future research.



2. Dyslexia as a multifaceted learning difficulty

The estimated prevalence of dyslexia varies depending on the language, ranging from 8.6–11% among Spanish-speaking populations (Carrillo et al., 2011; Jiménez et al., 2009; Rello & Baeza-Yates, 2012) to 15–20% in the U.S. population (Cowen, 2016). That means it is common enough to receive attention, yet it often remains invisible, as it is frequently mistaken for a lack of effort or concern on the part of those who experience it (International Dyslexia Association, 2022). Its origin has been shown to be hereditary (Galaburda et al., 2006; Landi & Perdue, 2019; Temple, 2001), although the specific mechanisms underlying its manifestation remain uncertain. The most common hypothesis is a weakness in phonological processing (Démonet et al., 2004; Goswami, 2000; Ramus, 2003; Snowling, 2000). However, there are many other hypothesis, such as the magnocellular theory (Stein, 2001, 2003; Stein & Talcott, 1999; Stein & Walsh, 1997), which explains the appearance of difficulties in letter recognition (Giofrè et al., 2019; Stein, 2014; Stein & Walsh, 1997), or the multifactorial hypothesis (Pennington, 2006), which suggests that there is a cognitive as well as a linguistic component associated to dyslexia.

Regardless of its origin, the term *dyslexia* refers to varying degrees of literacy difficulties that persist despite educational training. What is crucial, as the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) specifies, is that dyslexia is characterized by difficulties that are “not due to a disorder of intellectual development, sensory impairment (vision or hearing), neurological disorder, lack of availability of education, lack of proficiency in the language of academic instruction, or psychosocial adversity” (World Health Organization, 2019). In other words, the definition excludes the influence of intelligence or external factors not related to cognition, such as socioeconomic status or cultural background.

This learning difficulty is often linked with other disorders or difficulties, such as dyscalculia, which entails barriers in the understanding of numbers, and dysgraphia, which implies finding obstacles in written expression. All three are categorized under the Specific Learning Disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (2013). Hendren et al. (2018) highlight the high rate of comorbidity, particularly between dyslexia with dysgraphia (70%) and, to a lesser extent, dyscalculia (40%). The authors also draw attention to the link between dyslexia and the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), with co-occurrence rates ranging from 20% to 40%. They also speculate on a potential relation between this learning difficulty and the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with reported comorbidity rates between 6% and 30%. However, reading difficulties in individuals with ASD seem to differ from decoding or phonics-related challenges.

Dyslexia usually appears at a young age (the so-called *developmental dyslexia*) and, along with other learning difficulties, it has been associated with absenteeism and dropouts (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). When children experience frustration in their early years, they might feel inferior in comparison to their peers and might develop feelings of incompetency, leading to a low self-esteem (Alexander-Passe, 2006), as well as to distorted misconceptions of themselves, such as being lazy or incapable of adequately learning to read (Washburn et al., 2011). This sense of failure may generalize beyond the classroom and last into adulthood (International Dyslexia Association, 2022), causing mental health outcomes (McArthur et al., 2022). However, dyslexia can be alleviated through treatments such as



hemisphere-specific stimulation (Lorusso et al., 2011) or audiovisual training (Magnan & Ecalte, 2006), where serious games could play a meaningful role.

The primary challenge encountered by individuals with dyslexia lies in their difficulty with reading. Dyslexia has been associated with poor word reading abilities (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012), particularly in a text with infrequent and long words (Cuetos & Valle, 1988; Hyönä & Olson, 1995; Wimmer, 1993). Assimilating words for a person with dyslexia entails more effort than for a neurotypical person, thus causing stress (Buchweitz et al., 2023), and the impact in learning (Simoës & Largy, 2011) co-occurs with a detriment in comprehension (Cutting et al., 2013; Simmons & Singleton, 2000).

Although dyslexia has been predominantly defined by phonological decoding (Peterson & Pennington, 2012; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2005), many other traits of people with dyslexia have been explored. Some studies have assessed their short-term memory (Martinez Perez et al., 2012) and their working memory (Gathercole et al., 2006; Smith-Spark & Fisk, 2007). This difficulty related to memory is linked to serial learning in the context of reading (Bogaerts et al., 2015), although it has also been associated with non-verbal material such as drawings (Hachmann et al., 2014). Other studies associate dyslexia with deficits in different processes, such as executive functions (Brosnan et al., 2002; Reiter et al., 2005) or attentional orientation (Buchholz & Aimola Davies, 2008; Gabay et al., 2013), which aligns with the fact that this learning difficulty often co-occurs with attention-related challenges, such as the aforementioned ADHD.

3. The interactive nature of video games

Video games have consolidated as a medium in the last two decades, but their roots can be traced much further back. Games, in general, have always been a part of culture. Huizinga (1968) goes as far as to assimilate one to the other, stating that culture emerges from games and that games develop in culture. Caillois (2001, p. 9-10) builds upon Huizinga's work and identifies a set of essential characteristics that define any game. The act of playing must be *free*, meaning participation is voluntary and not obligatory. It is *separate*, existing within its own boundaries of space and time. A game is also *uncertain*, as neither its progression nor its outcome can be predetermined. Furthermore, it is *unproductive*, serving no purpose in creating goods or generating wealth. It is governed by *rules*, operating under its own set of conventions. Lastly, a game is *make-believe*, creating a second, imagined reality distinct from everyday life.

However, video games have expanded far beyond their predecessors. They are not only digital but also incorporate a diverse array of elements drawn from other audiovisual media. This raises a fundamental question about their nature: are they a new form of narrative, like an evolved version of cinema? Or are they an entirely unique medium, defined primarily by their interactive qualities? The first perspective is called *narratology*, and the second one, *ludology*. Both approaches can offer interesting views on the origin and the etiology of video games. However, it is important to note that conceptualizing video games solely as narrative structures can obscure the complex role of the player, since player agency, and their activity and actions are what gives sense to these productions (Newman, 2004).



The interplay between television and computers that characterizes video games is mediated through the active participation of the player (López Redondo, 2014), who is conceived as an actor (Juul, 2011) that both reads and produces the narrative simultaneously (Nitsche, 2008). This captures the essence of *interaction*, which could be considered the chore characteristic of video games (Landay, 2014), setting them apart from other media and cultural forms. Furthermore, this concept also serves as the foundation for distinguishing different genres, depending on how rules shape the outcomes that emerge from it (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013).

The significance of interaction is evident in Caillois's rule of *free*, which asserts that the player must have the freedom to play whenever they wish, stop at any time, and resume the game again. For this rule to be satisfied, an *unbroken interaction* is needed (Newman, 2004, p. 83). The perception of the game as an ongoing continuum enables players to step in and out of the game seamlessly. At the same time, this constant need for feedback is what makes video games an escape route from alienation (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2013).

Recognizing the importance of player agency and interactivity allows us to conceptualize video games as experiences (Kuhn, 2016; Muriel, 2018), which unfold through the interface via “the screen, speakers (and microphones), input devices (such as keyboard, mouse, joystick...), as well as onscreen graphical elements such as buttons, sliders, scroll bars, cursors, and so forth” (Wolf & Perron, 2003, p. 15).

4. Video games and their promise of embodied experiences

The controller and other devices transform the interaction of video games into a physical activity, since they require input from the player to function (Wolf, 2001). Physicality creates a connection between the player and the video game that leads to a tacit agreement. After all, these “interactive games promise an immersive experience” (Raynauld, 2011, p. 85). For this to happen, the video game must engage the player via immersion, which can occur at several levels according to Kuhn (2016): *imaginative immersion* is the feeling of being transported to another space; *sensory immersion* is the blocking of sensations outside of the activity; *challenge-driven immersion* grants agency to the user, and *shared immersion* is the ability to socially interact. What is striking about video games is that, unlike other media, they include all four levels.

Immersion is achieved by three conditions: (1) the user's expectations must align with the conventions of the game or environment; (2) the user's actions should have meaningful impact on the environment, and (3) the conventions of the world and the narrative play a crucial role in aligning the user to their expectations regarding the logic of the world (McMahan, 2003). A breach in any of these conditions can break immersion and stop the interaction because it seems unaffordable or frustrating, resulting in the promise of immersion being broken.

However, when the promise is kept, the line between life and play is blurred (Eskelinen & Tronstad, 2003). At this point, the three elements that shape the experience of play—the technical aspects of the game, the narrative it conveys, and the player's involvement—merge and transcend, making their boundaries less clear and becoming interdependent (Aarseth, 1997). After all, a video game involves abandoning one's own body to enter a different world, where the player becomes what they are controlling. “Players experience games through the exclusive intermediary



of another—the avatar—the ‘eyes’, ‘ears,’ and ‘body’ of which are components of a complex technological and psychological apparatus” (Rehak, 2003, p. 104), which encapsulates the concept of *embodiment*. Video games are not simply concerned with creating alternative realities, they emulate *second realities* in which players experience emotions as if they were actually there (Portillo Fernández, 2017).

It is this sense of literal presence, reached by the video game and no other media (Rehak, 2003), that emotionally activates the body and the brain: perceptions and emotions generate cognitions that trigger physical actions in a flow that repeats endlessly, leading to what Lahti (2003, p. 158) calls the “corporealization” of the experience of playing. In fact, the main goal of a video game is “to envelop the player in technology and the environment of the game space” (Lahti, 2003, p. 159), and advancements in technology, with virtual reality and all its complements: rumble packs, pedals and wheels, and motion-sensing technology, are getting us closer to the ultimate bodily experience (Lahti, 2003). Salen and Zimmerman (2004) provide a precise definition of the bodily experience involved in playing a video game:

To play a game is to experience the game: to see, touch, hear, smell, and taste the game; to move the body during play, to feel emotions about the unfolding outcome, to communicate with other players, to alter normal patterns of thinking (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 354).

Therefore, video games cannot be trivialized or reduced to mere entertainment. They engage both our bodies and minds, compelling us physically and emotionally, and in doing so, they offer experiences that we live with our entire being. In this context, certain traits of these audiovisual products pose obstacles to people with dyslexia, which may prevent them from fully engaging with these new realities. There is a tendency to associate dyslexia with a specific body part, often linking it to the eyes and the act of seeing (Berent et al., 2021), despite its cognitive origins (World Health Organization, 2019). This need for embodiment is shared with video games. Thus, if video games experiences cannot be embodied, difficulties derived from dyslexia might be more prevalent.

When designed exclusively for neurotypical users, video games become accessible only to those who do not face barriers, leaving a wide range of players feeling frustrated, alienated, and diminished in self-worth. By understanding the barriers dyslexia poses for users, developers can adopt the social model of disability and incorporate accessibility solutions into their games, helping to ensure that these players remain both physically and emotionally engaged and connected to their creations.

5. Methodology

As part of the research, two focus groups with people with dyslexia were conducted with a semi-structured approach consisting of a set of open-ended questions to guide the sessions. Initially, we considered the possibility of using a questionnaire, since they are easy to distribute, but focus groups were finally chosen because previous interactions with people with dyslexia showed us that they did not like questionnaires due to the amount of reading involved. Moreover,



focus groups are useful to examine experiences and needs (Morgan, 1998) and allow group interaction (Kitzinger, 2004), which could help us elucidate the experiences of a variety of players with different ages and playing habits.

The first step was to gather participants. To do so, we emailed several associations, posted an announcement in LinkedIn, and reached out to the press department of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) to publish a news article. In the end, we established contact with two associations for dyslexic people, Associació Catalana de Dislèxia and Disnavarra, as well as with the Servei Per a la Inclusió at UAB. A brief questionnaire was sent to all potential participants to gather some basic demographic data and information about their playing habits.

Those who were interested in participating in the study, 15 in total, were divided in order to have two groups with less than 10 participants, since most authors recommend not exceeding that number per group (Bryman, 2012). However, some participants did not answer when they were contacted in subsequent steps, or were unavailable on the day of the study. In the end, we conducted the first focus group on the June 4th 2024 with 4 participants and the second on July 4th 2024 with 5 participants, having a total of 9 participants, with ages ranging from 18 to over 50 to account for generational differences.

The first group was composed of three people from Navarra and one from Catalonia. Two identified as women and two as men. Two participants were under 30 (aged 22 and 25), while the other two were over 30 (aged 44 and 57). The older participants reported not engaging in video games, while the younger participants played either weekly or monthly. These regular players used various platforms, such as PC and PS5, and occasionally participated in social gaming.

The second group included four participants from Catalonia and one from Navarra. Four identified as women and one as a man. Most were under 30 (aged 18, 21, 24, and 27), with only one participant over 30 (aged 51). Four participants described themselves as regular players, with three reporting weekly gaming habits. They engaged with a variety of platforms and game genres, although most indicated a reduction in their gaming time compared to their high school years.

Both sessions took place via Microsoft Teams, due to the geographical location of some of the participants. The procedure involved a moderator guiding the session, while a note-taker recorded participants' contributions. The discussion was guided by a prepared set of questions outlined in a previously developed protocol. In addition to defining the study's objectives, participant profile, timeline, and materials, the protocol detailed the specific steps to be followed during the sessions. The sessions began with an introduction to the topic, where the researchers explained their aim of making video games more accessible. Participants were assured that they could express their opinions freely and withdraw their consent at any time. After thanking them for their participation, they were invited to introduce themselves.

Then each session was divided into two main blocks. The first one, "About video games and user needs", focused on participants' experiences with video games—both positive and negative—and their general perspectives on accessibility. Questions aimed to identify difficulties they frequently encounter while playing, accessibility features they currently use, and any specific preferences they may have. The second block, "About easy-to-understand language", began with a brief explanation of this simplified form of language, followed by a discussion in which participants were asked to choose their preferred excerpt from a selection provided. The content and results

of this second block are described in a forthcoming paper. At the end, conclusions were summarized and then confirmed by the participants.

The information was analysed via thematic analysis following the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013), aided by the practical example of Byrne (2022). The approach was constructivist, as themes and categories were created according to their relevance for the objectives of the study. It was also experiential, prioritizing the participants' opinions. Additionally, the approach was predominantly inductive, with codes generated from the data itself. A mixed perspective was applied for semantic and latent coding, since some contributions were coded based on participants' direct statements (semantic) and others based on researcher's inferences (latent).

Since the steps involved in a thematic analysis are usually intertwined, we present the method chronologically to provide a general overview of the coding process. We started by familiarizing with the data. The two transcriptions generated by Microsoft Teams were read twice in order to have a general sense of the discussion. Simultaneously, these transcriptions were corrected comparing the text with the video recordings of the two sessions. We marked interventions with various annotations, such as "[...]" for long pauses, "[laughs]" for non-verbal communication or "[overlaps]" when one participant spoke over another.

We then performed the initial coding by analyzing the transcriptions and focusing on the underlying information within the dialogues. This task was performed in Word, with the goal of breaking down the information in as many pieces as possible. Approximately 400 comments were gathered for each transcription. These initial codes were then transferred to an Excel sheet to look for similarities and to try to create more compact codes. After that, the actual coding was performed in Atlas.ti. Interventions were assigned a code that contained the main idea of the dialogue. In this first coding we identified 12 categories and 79 subcategories, which were refined and reduced.

The coding process provided a sense of how themes could be defined, but some ambiguous cases or codes required reassessment to ensure an accurate codification. Transcriptions were read and coded a third time, and codes were extracted and analysed in a separate Excel sheet four times until reaching a clear structure of the data. The analysis concluded with the creation of the coding list, which included themes, categories, and subcategories, accompanied by a definition and illustrative examples (see Table 1). Given the focus of this paper on the barriers dyslexia presents for users engaging with video games, the results and the discussion only address the first two themes, "The implications of dyslexia" and the "Game experience". The third theme, "Access to video games", is analyzed in a forthcoming publication.

Some categories were difficult to delimit. When considering difficulties with controls, we initially created a code related to motor skills. However, only one participant explicitly mentioned coordination, and it was unclear whether the difficulty arose from combining reading with controls or from personal motor skills. Since motor barriers are not a core aspect of cognitive accessibility, and the discussions in both focus groups centered primarily on having clear instructions for controls (in the first group) and the ability to remap them (in the second group), we concluded that the main cognitive difficulty could be remembering the controls, a difficulty that was explicitly mentioned by some of the participants.



Table 1: Coding list

Theme	Category	Subcategories	Definition	Examples (our translation)
The implications of dyslexia	Dyslexia	Diagnosis	Detection of dyslexia, whether in early or later years, and possible related difficulties.	"I was diagnosed at the age of 40".
		Progression	The progression of dyslexia over time and its possible treatment.	"... but now that I'm older, I've also improved a lot in reading".
		Personal perception	Self-concept developed through experiences related to dyslexia.	"I have been dyslexic since I was a child and left school with the idea that I was kind of stupid".
	Context	Educational	Noticeable events in academic contexts in relation to dyslexia.	"I think I started playing more during secondary school, precisely because I wasn't doing very well in class".
		Professional	Noticeable events in work contexts in relation to dyslexia.	"I've improved a lot and, for example, I can see that I also write much better than... colleagues or people I've worked with, you know?"
		Social	Noticeable events in social contexts, whether family or friends, in relation to dyslexia.	"Of course, my friends had enough time, but I didn't. I would make up what I was reading".
The game experience	Video games	Mode	Way of obtaining a video game and context in which it is used.	"Well, in my case, it's Steam reviews, YouTube, or even friends".
		Interest	Engagement with video games as a form of entertainment, including quantity of time spent with them.	"When it comes to video games, zero. I mean, I've never been someone who got hooked on them".
		Playability	Experiences with video games and game genres that were perceived as positive or negative.	"I prefer games that are more about motor skills, not so much cognitive tasks like reading or deep storylines".
		Materiality	Connection between the physical realm of the player and the digital world of the video game.	"Like, if they give you 2 km of text, like, you have to read everything and it's... I can't".
	Barriers	Memory	Features of a video game that need to be memorised, particularly controls.	"The biggest problem I have is with the controller, for example, the PlayStation controller. It tells me 'R2', and there are times when I can't remember where it was".
		Text	Display of content in relation to format, structure, and language.	"Of course, the main problem I've encountered with video games is when there's too much text".
		Rhythm	Expectations of how the player must progress in the game, such as text or audio velocity or the level of difficulty.	"... it kept going every 5 seconds, and I never had enough time to finish reading it and it frustrated me."..

Source: Authors (2025)

With regard to the subcategories of “Context”, there was an initial overlap between them and the subcategories in “Video game”, because “Social” was used for situations in which participants described experiences with video games in a social context. In the end, we decided to distinguish between “Social”, referring to how dyslexia affects a person’s life, and “Mode” to refer to whether a video game is played alone or with other people. Furthermore, we considered it appropriate to have separate codes to refer to the gaming platforms and playing contexts (“Mode”), and a different one for specific experiences with video games (“Playability”).

It is important to note that the “Playability” code can encompass both positive and negative experiences, making it inherently polarized. The same applies to other codes such as “Personal perception” and “Interest”, as they are broad enough to cover a spectrum of beliefs or emotions ranging from positive to negative. In the following section, all codes are discussed with illustrative examples. Direct quotes from participants have been translated from Spanish by the researchers, and to ensure anonymity, participant’s names have been replaced with colors.

6. Results

In this section, we present the results of the focus groups. We first explore participants’ experiences with dyslexia in their academic, social, and work contexts (first theme) to provide a framework for the barriers they commonly encounter. Then, we describe their experiences with video games to analyze the difficulties they face (second theme).

With regard to the first category, “Dyslexia”, many people with this learning difficulty struggle with skills that are heavily required by the education system in their early years. Since neurotypical people are often considered the standard, people with dyslexia frequently perceive themselves as having a problem, especially before receiving a diagnosis. Under the code “Personal perception”, participants’ self-views were characterized by uncertainty and insecurity, as expressed by **Participant Red**: “I have been dyslexic since I was a child and left school with the idea that I was kind of stupid”.

The process of recognizing a deviation from the norm can be either stigmatizing or beneficial, which we categorized under “Diagnosis”. Since academic failure can be associated with a variety of difficulties or disorders, the detection of dyslexia should be adequate to avoid a diagnosis that could heavily undermine personal perception, such as labeling someone as having low intelligence. In **Participant Gray**’s words:

They detected it quite late in my case, they used intelligence tests to figure out what was happening with my grades and so on, and of course, one of the tests was... I had a certain amount of time to complete it. So I didn’t have enough time to read the questions. So, of course, I did terribly on the test and it came out that I was deficient, but I just didn’t have time to read the things and answer them.

If detected early and adequately, as illustrated in the interventions under “Progression”, difficulties associated with dyslexia can be diminished. For example, reading can become a habit that, over time, is perceived as less demanding or frustrating, and people can outgrow their prior conception, as stated by **Participant Orange**:



Yes, over the years I've developed the habit of reading and I really enjoy it, compared to when I was a child. It could also be influenced by the fact that they detected my dyslexia when I was relatively young, so I can improve progressively.

Dyslexia also has an important impact in the second category, “Context”. Early academic experiences, classified under the “Educational” code, cannot be separated from what we defined as the “Social” code, which encompasses how friends perceive and interact with people with dyslexia, or how these people perceive themselves among their friends, along with the role of dyslexia at home and the support of the family. Others serve as mirrors reflecting one's own abilities and flaws. Comparisons are inevitable, as social animals are inherently driven to engage in group dynamics. That means people with dyslexia are bound to find others that make them aware of their difficulties, as observed by **Participant Gray**:

I mean, I feel much more tired... with my partner, who reads, well, she has some pretty innate abilities, right? But I do notice there's a huge difference. I mean, we're reading menus from the... from the restaurant, and I take maybe twice as long or more, or I don't want to read the menu because I'm tired that day and I tell her to choose instead.

Since dyslexia has a hereditary component, many people have relatives that exemplify how dyslexia can impact someone's life. Family often becomes a link to spaces where the difficulty is examined and discussed, but also, and maybe more importantly, family provides a place to share experiences, as mentioned by **Participant Green**: “... because my son also has dyslexia, dysgraphia, and so I would see myself and think, wow, I might have it too”, and **Participant Purple**: “I have an easier time because I do read, but for example, for my sister, who doesn't read at all, it takes a little longer”.

Understanding is a fundamental human need, and having someone close who truly comprehends what you are experiencing and empathizes with your emotions can be profoundly reassuring. Consequently, early disruptions, particularly in academic settings, often prompt individuals with dyslexia to reshape negative perceptions into positive attitudes when supported by their families, thereby fostering a sense of self-worth, as highlighted by **Participant Blue**:

... but, well, in my case, my mother always instilled in me from a young age that the important thing is if you need to dedicate 100 and others need to dedicate 10, then you dedicate 100. In that sense, like, if you need to give more, then you give more. So, that's been my experience with dyslexia.

Thus, academic and social contexts significantly influence how people with dyslexia will navigate future environments, such as the workplace, which is illustrated in the code “Professional”. The challenges they overcome during adolescence shape their adult experiences, where difficulties may persist to some extent. However, they often perceive themselves as equal to their peers or even as possessing superior skills, having developed greater resilience and abilities through their efforts, as described by **Participant Red**: “I've always thought that at work I've been well above what I was, I think it's because of the merits I've earned and because in the end, I deserved it, and because of my intelligence and personality”, and **Participant Gray**: “I've improved a lot and, for example, I can see that I also write much better than... colleagues or



people I've worked with, you know? In the end, because I've also had to work a lot on my writing".

The presence of dyslexia makes people more vulnerable to situations in which their personal value is at stake, particularly in education, but the support of their inner circle and an early detection set the path to overcome any challenges they might find and to improve their performance at work or related activities, thus making them feel included.

As regards the category "Video games", these audiovisual products provide an escape route from the difficulties and the disruptions that undermine personal perception. They represent a safe space where there are no external judgments. At times, the reality of the digital world is less harmful than the real world, which relates the "Interest" code and is exemplified by **Participant Gray**: "What I've played the most are computer games, and I think I started playing more during secondary school, precisely because I wasn't doing very well in class due to my dyslexia".

As seen in the codes "Mode" and "Playability", the participants enjoy video games that are based on motor skills, such as racing or action games. They also prefer puzzle-solving and simulation games, such as *Candy Crush Saga* (King, 2012) and *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Nintendo, 2020). *Candy Crush* is a casual game with no narrative and very simple mechanics that consists of solving different puzzles every time, but with the same rules. The *Animal Crossing* series is a life simulator with a simple narrative and an intuitive gameplay that involves collecting items and decorating places as main mechanics. Both can be played intermittently, with no harm to the overall comprehension of the video game.

However, participants also have good experiences with more complex video games, such as Role Playing Games (RPGs) or narrative-driven games. One participant enjoys games such as *Baldur's Gate III* (Larian Studios, 2023), which is an RPG that takes more than 60 hours to play, includes more than 10 playable characters and 4 different endings depending on the decisions made. Despite its complexity, the game presents information in a way that is easy to process, as mentioned by **Participant Blue**:

Baldur's Gate III, which recently came out and is very famous, didn't affect me as much, and I think it's because of how they present the information through cinematics. [...] If they present it with cinematics, a little bit of text but not much, and they alternate, I think it becomes much more manageable.

Another participant preferred *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerrilla Games, 2017), which has a relatively easy-to-follow narrative, with more action than dialogue. This video game exemplifies the successful combination of a compelling narrative and an engaging battle system, creating a dynamic and immersive experience. In the words of **Participant Purple**:

Also, for example, I really liked *Horizon Zero Dawn*. [...] It's very visual, the graphics are amazing, and I really liked that. It takes you through a story... that isn't overly complex and is simple, but it grabs you. I think it's important for it to have that element of action but not boredom, I mean, dynamic, so to speak.

However, sometimes people with dyslexia encounter difficulties while playing, as reflected in the contributions under the "Barriers" category. Some video games might lead to personal

frustration and reinforce the stigma of being different. Playing these games may sometimes underscore the struggles faced in academic settings and further highlight a person's divergence in social contexts, as described by **Participant Gray**: "Playing a game with someone, both of us playing and reading the same thing. That also made me feel a bit uncomfortable because he either went faster or even understood things that I didn't, so it made me frustrated". **Participant Yellow** expresses similar views:

... and I had all my friends, who were playing [*Pokémon*], having a great time. My brother had all [the games] and played them, and I had them too, but it was like starting one and just reading and reading and reading. And when I was younger, it took me twice as long to read as it does now, and it was like I was just going through it, not understanding the story or what I had to do.

Negative experiences with video games can adversely affect the self-concept, extending the presence of difficulties beyond compulsory settings, like school or the workplace, to situations in which individuals have actively chosen to engage. Regarding the code "Text", the participants experiment frustration with video games that have a heavily text-based narrative. For example, certain *Pokémon* titles (Game Freak, 1996 to date), a turn-based RPG with constant dialogues, are simple but include too much text for them to engage, as reflected in the previous quote. They do not enjoy puzzles based on letters or words, such as those found in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (Naughty Dog, 2016), as stated by **Participant Yellow**: "I was thinking of something that just came to my mind, and it's that, for example, in *Uncharted* there were many mini-games and puzzles, and some of them were about letters and ordering words, and those would frustrate me". They also find it challenging when different stimuli are presented simultaneously to the player, such as certain instructions and dialogues in *Red Dead Redemption 2* (Rockstar San Diego, 2010), as experienced by **Participant Purple**: "The last game I got is *Red Dead Redemption 2*, and one thing that... it doesn't stress me, but it does annoy me, is that, for example, the dialogues happen at the same time as the explanation".

These bad experiences are caused by different barriers, with reading being the most prevalent one. Formatting impacts readability, with inappropriate typography posing significant obstacles. Overall, the cognitive load involved in reading can hinder comprehension and often leads individuals to stop playing, as explained by **Participant Pink**:

Well, the main reason I don't play is basically this, that when there are many games with a lot of text, I end up getting bored really quickly, because either I don't understand it or I just get bored. So, I just quit the game and don't play anymore, that's basically it.

Many of these barriers could be easily overcome if the game contained accessibility solutions such as text-to-speech technology or the possibility to customize the font. Additionally, the use of easy-to-understand language could improve comprehension and facilitate gameplay, although this approach has yet to be implemented in video games.

Another barrier is present in the code "Memory", which can entail difficulties when dealing with controllers or instructions. On the one hand, key mappings are not consistent across video games, requiring players to memorize a new layout for almost every game. Moreover, the use of

letters to label some keys can be confusing, since they may get mixed up, as stated by **Participant Purple**: “I also have problems with... mixing up letters. I mean, a problem my sister and I have is that, for example, I remember once when instead of ‘cedro’ (cedar), I read ‘cerdo’ (pig)”. On the other hand, some information that is particularly complex might be hard to evoke, causing erratic or inconsistent actions, as mentioned by **Participant Purple**: “The biggest problem I have is with the controller, for example, the PlayStation controller. It tells me ‘R2’, and there are times when I can’t remember where it is”, and **Participant Brown**: “about the controls, I mean, if I have to switch from one game to another, I don’t do it because if I’m going to get confused and not know how to move the character, I won’t do anything”. Existing accessibility features, such as the ability to remap the controls—available in several games, including *The Last of Us Part II* (Naughty Dog, 2020)—can help players with dyslexia overcome these barriers.

As regards the code “Rhythm”, participants noted that many video games fail to provide an appropriate pace. Barriers arise when a tutorial is overly direct, to the point where it becomes obvious that it is an instructional guide, or when it is too detached from the diegetic world. At times, the amount of information and the order in which it is presented can also hinder comprehension. Sometimes instructions are not provided in a structured and consistent way, and sometimes too much information is given to the player at once, as described by **Participant Purple**:

And then when everything is happening at once, I can’t focus on the dialogues, on how to run, on where I have to go, you know? The dialogues should be like, while I’m riding the horse, saying, ‘Okay, this is how you run,’ you know?

The barriers encountered by participants threaten the promise of immersive experiences intrinsic to video games. The code “Materiality” emerges via the controller. Players’ agency is often subordinated to the physical aspects of gaming: their role as both actors and observers is mediated through the hardware, which enables them to make an impact. Unsurprisingly, participants prioritize controls, which are the foundation of interaction, the entryway to this other reality. As **Participant Yellow** describes, assigning high importance to the remapping “... because I think it’s the easiest way to move from one game to another and not just use one game, but be able to enjoy them all”.

Materiality is also present as a coping mechanism. The tendency to embody experiences transforms significant cognitive effort into a physical reality, and it is this perceived reality that hinders their ability to interact with the game, rather than a lack of skill. Thus, texts that could appear appropriate for a neurotypical person are perceived as dense by players with dyslexia, as explained by **Participant Blue**: “... an RPG game of those very overwhelming ones, with texts that are like 2 kilometers long”, and **Participant Purple**: “because that’s it, those heavy games... The need I have is for it not to feel like a chore, for not having to read 30 pages to know what I need to look for”.

The emotional connection between the player and the video game, along with the blurring of boundaries that occurs when the gaming experience becomes truly immersive—when the game transcends reality and the player becomes part of it—may lead players to identify cognitive barriers with physical discomfort, which can be inferred in the following sarcastic comment by



Participant Blue: “No, not that specific font, but it’s so good to have a font that doesn’t make me feel like shooting myself every time I have to read a text, thank goodness, I’m relieved”.

In conclusion, video games can offer contrasting experiences for players with dyslexia. On the one hand, for the participants of this study, they provide a safe space far from academic judgments. On the other hand, these audiovisual products can highlight their challenges, especially when they are not designed considering barriers related to reading or memorization, particularly in fast-paced games. For this reason, it is crucial to promote an accessible game design that offers solutions to help users overcome these obstacles. Features such as the ability to revisit tutorials at any time, hints and clues during gameplay, text-to-speech conversion, customizable text, and remappable controls can facilitate gameplay and immersion for players with dyslexia.

7. Discussion

In this section we examine how the results from this study align with current literature. To begin with, the link the participants established between dyslexia and a low academic performance is widely regarded as one of the main consequences of this learning difficulty (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Many participants reported feeling stupid or perceiving themselves as having a problem due to an inaccurate diagnosis. Hence, it is important to detect this learning difficulty as soon as possible to prevent future mental health issues.

In fact, many of the participants admitted they had improved their reading skills over time. This could be due to having received an early diagnosis and appropriate training, or because they developed compensatory strategies to meet neurotypical standards. Their improvement may also have been supported by their friends and family, especially considering the evidence that dyslexia is hereditary (Galaburda et al., 2006; Landi & Perdue, 2019; Temple, 2001). Sharing this learning difficulty as a common experience within a family might help people overcome related obstacles.

Among the challenges reported by the participants, the most common was difficulty with reading. Numerous studies have explored the reading barriers that people with dyslexia may encounter in both long and short texts, particularly those with infrequent terminology (Cuetos & Valle, 1988; Hyönä & Olson, 1995; Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012; Wimmer, 1993). The impact of this difficulty becomes evident when we consider that video games require learning through tutorials, feedback, rewards, and more (Guay, 2014). In many modern video games, reading remains essential for progress—it is the primary means of learning how to play. Therefore, if games are considered learning experiences (Juul, 2005), being unable to engage with the reading aspect prevents individuals from fully experiencing what the game has to offer.

A second challenge mentioned by the participants was related to memorization, particularly of controls. As noted earlier, people with dyslexia might find barriers in tasks related to memory (Gathercole et al., 2006; Martinez Perez et al., 2012; Smith-Spark & Fisk, 2007), although these are usually linked to reading. Whether dyslexia might have some effect in memorizing controls is yet to be explored. This challenge might also be related to letter recognition, since most controllers associate certain keys to letters, such as Nintendo Switch’s controllers: A, B, X, Y, R, and L. Many people with dyslexia, particularly children, describe difficulties when attempting to identify letters (Giofrè et al., 2019; Stein, 2014; Stein & Walsh, 1997).



Another challenge participants encountered was related to the pace of the game. Fast texts were particularly difficult to follow, which might be related to their attention performance (Brosnan et al., 2002; Buchholz & Aimola Davies, 2008; Gabay et al., 2013; Reiter et al., 2005). It could also be linked to their overall reading ability, as eye-tracking studies have shown that individuals with dyslexia experience slower lexical processing (Hawelka et al., 2010), meaning they require more time to process texts compared to neurotypical readers (Hutzler & Wimmer, 2004). Furthermore, participants reported that an overload of stimuli made it difficult to keep up with a game. Research has shown that persons with dyslexia are more sensitive to auditory distractions than to visual ones (Gabay et al., 2020), which may explain why one of the participants was hesitant to receive different information from both textual and auditory sources simultaneously. It is worth mentioning that, when the different channels—text, audio, or haptic feedback—transmit the same information, participants' ability to perceive it remained unaffected.

All the aforementioned barriers make participants feel frustrated when playing video games. When they struggle to follow the game or fail to understand what the game requires of them, the connection between them and the game is disrupted, leading to a loss of interest in continuing. The crucial issue here is that they do not quit playing because they want to, but because they feel they *have to*, or believe the effort is not worthwhile. This breaks the rule of *free* (Caillois, 2001), which states that the player should be able to play whenever they wish, pause at any moment, and resume at will. The difficulty in engaging with the video game has a negative impact on interaction and undermines the promise of immersion.

In fact, some participants felt so frustrated with certain video games that they chose to stop playing them permanently. Barriers prevented them from understanding the conventions of the game world, thus failing to meet the third condition for immersion (McMahan, 2003). And when the game world is not understood, players may feel that their actions in this other reality are worthless or ineffective, leading them to believe they have no impact on the video game. This breaks the second condition for immersion and ultimately becomes the reason to stop.

Players need to feel that their actions in a video game have a purpose, that they make a difference (Salen & Zimmerman, 2011), as this is how they experience agency. It is through this sense of agency that the video game can be fully embodied and experienced. Barriers disrupt the emotional and psychological state of happiness that is sustained by the paradox of having control (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004), leading both the body and mind of players to disengage. Game accessibility is key to ensure the connection, allowing every player the ability to immerse themselves fully in the video game experience, according to their needs and preferences.

As regards the limitations of the study, the main one is the small size of the sample, which limits its representativeness. Since only nine people participated in the end, results cannot fully reflect the opinion or experiences of all people with dyslexia. It would have been convenient to perform more focus groups, but recruiting challenges, the small scale of the project, and time constraints made it difficult to obtain a higher number of participants. Another limitation is that the study only focused on dyslexia, not considering comorbid difficulties, such as the Attention-Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which was present in two participants, or dyscalculia, which a participant had.

Nevertheless, we believe the data collected provides a valuable initial insight into the barriers faced by players with dyslexia when playing video games, which hinder full immersion. This paves the way for future research in which different accessibility solutions can be implemented to overcome these barriers, and reception studies can be carried out with more players with dyslexia, with a view to improving their immersion and gaming experience.

8. Conclusion

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that affects various aspects of a person's life. While it does not solely determine self-concept, it has an influence over time. During childhood and adolescence, poor academic performance and silent guilt stem from a social framework where comparison with others is inevitable. This affects self-esteem and relational value, giving rise to a personal struggle for a status that is sometimes seen as out of reach for a neurodivergent individual. Thus, people with dyslexia feel compelled to prove their value as they grow and, in fact, often perceive themselves as better workers than their peers. Overcoming challenges becomes a tool to reach normative standards and to gain social validation.

Video games can provide an experience that diminishes vulnerability, but can also be alienating if they are not fully accessible. The normative design of many games often creates barriers: unclear objectives, overly long texts, difficult-to-memorize controls, frenetic progress, overlapping stimuli... The main barriers preventing players with dyslexia from fully immersing themselves in a video game seem to be reading, memorizing information and controls, and keeping up with the pace of the game. Reading was the main challenge the participants mentioned, as the cognitive effort required can hinder comprehension and often lead participants to stop playing. Thus, instead of heavily text-driven games, they preferred action games and those with a faster pace or based on motor skills, such as racing games. Participants also liked puzzle-solving and simulation games, although some of them had also enjoyed more complex video games, such as RPGs or narrative-driven games, if the information was easy to process.

The barriers participants faced led to frustration, breaking the connection between the player and the game, clearly separating the real world from the diegetic one. This disconnection materializes when the controller is set aside. The physical support that forges the experience—that transforms the player into a digital being—is abandoned when the promise of immersion is broken. The main contribution of this study lies in identifying and illustrating the key elements of that disruption. Although limited in scale, the focus groups provided a space for the target audience to both propose and evaluate accessibility strategies. By placing people with dyslexia at the center, the study highlights their role as key stakeholders in the design process of a video game. Thus, the results are valuable from a qualitative perspective, offering insights rooted in the participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

In summary, it is of paramount importance to design games considering the barriers players with dyslexia encounter, and providing solutions that can help overcome them. This may include using easy-to-understand language, incorporating text-to-speech technology, enabling the remapping of controls, allowing access to the tutorial at any time, or providing hints and clues that remind players of what they have to do. The inclusion of these accessibility features would



empower players with dyslexia to interact effectively with the game, allowing them to immerse themselves fully and enjoy the gaming experience.

The next phase of the study will consist of a reception study evaluating the implementation of easy-to-understand language in a video game, presented in both written and audio formats. The ultimate goal is to ensure that video games fulfil their promise of immersion, so that users with dyslexia can access and fully enjoy the embodied experiences these interactive media offer.

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Research dataset

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

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Self-mediation practices in Persian YouTube subtitling: An affective translation perspective

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Abstract: The rise of intralingual blogger subtitling on YouTube has introduced innovative practices in today's mediascape, particularly through the use of subtitles that include notes. These affective subtitles may enhance audience engagement and inclusivity by helping viewers better understand and connect emotionally with the content. Nonetheless, subtitling on YouTube, particularly from an affective labor angle, remains relatively unexplored. To fill this void, the study focuses on the popular Persian YouTube channel *@Kouman*, known for its entertaining content targeted at Persian-speaking audiences. Informed by theories of affect theory and affective self-mediation, this study examines how captions create a platform for materializing affective labor through subtitlers' notes, which convey their voice and inner thoughts to create a more personalized viewing experience. The findings suggest that these notes function as a form of affective labor, exhibiting subtitler's witty remarks and inner thoughts that shape how the video content is felt and understood. These affective and embodied strategies help build affective bonds with the viewers, creating a stronger connection between them and the channel. This study argues that translation theory should reconceptualize subtitles as dynamic, mood-shaping assemblages rather than mere conduits of dialogue.

Keywords: affect; affective labor; affective translation; captioning; self-mediation; YouTube self-subtitling.

1. Introduction

Translation is often regarded as a professional activity practiced by agents identifying as translators (Chakraborty & Israel, 2023). This act of mediation is “full of resonances, voices, sounds, noises, images, and scents” (Vidal Claramonte, 2024, p. 106). Translation is not merely the exchange of words, but “a constant, creative, transformative and ubiquitous act that permeates every space, time and thought in our everyday lives” (Chakraborty & Israel, 2023, p. xxi). This view, as Pedwell



(2016) and Lee (2022) note, is indicative of a shift in focus from rigid constructs of equivalence and fidelity towards a more democratic and creative expression in translation.

The availability of technological tools, along with faster internet connectivity has empowered citizens to expand their amateur translation activities (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda, 2020); thereby redefining translation with their experimental and avant-garde approaches and supporting the above views on translation in the mediascape. This democratization has helped individuals on platforms like *YouTube* to become independent content creators, otherwise known as social media influencers (Abidin, 2018). The outcome of this ‘digital presumption’, a concept that highlights the blurring boundaries between production and consumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021), is challenging the dominance of mainstream media (Pérez-González, 2014).

Therefore, the contemporary media landscape is characterized by the increasing engagement of ordinary people with their self-branding activities, referred to as self-mediation (Chouliaraki, 2010). Online content creators (e.g., YouTubers) have fostered audience engagement and built affinity by incorporating personalized, affective or even ludic content into their content. YouTube serves as a platform for emerging forms of audiovisual translation (AVT), as YouTubers translating their videos frequently diverge from norms and conventions of commercial subtitling thanks to the agency they enjoy (Lee, 2021). To cultivate a sense of affinity in their channel, they may personalize and humanize the video content (Koskinen, 2020). Not only does this affective practice broaden the potential viewership but it also caters to a wide range of viewer perspectives and introduces unique ways of interpreting content.

According to Dwyer (2017) and Wang (2022), commentaries or personalized touches within amateur subtitles enhance audience engagement and strengthen the connection between creators and their audience. They function as paratextual elements, empowering subtitlers to step outside their traditionally-invisible zone and directly address viewers, resulting in a ‘hypertranslation’ where translation becomes a deeply sensory, material and dynamic activity (Vidal Claramonte & Lee, 2024). Viewed through affect theory, the notes underscore the embodied role of the translators. Subtitlers engage in affective labor by incorporating notes, often witty and humorous, into their translations, intentionally aiming to modulate viewers’ emotions, create positive emotional experiences, or sustain particular emotional states in them like YouTube vloggers (Mäkinen, 2021). Affects are communicatively enacted (Tschirhart, 2015) through language or images, and, in this case, through these notes and commentaries.

Thus, subtitlers are not merely conveying the original information; they are actively shaping an affective atmosphere. In fact, the subtitler’s notes build affective connections between the channel and the fans. Additionally, the introduction of the concept of affect challenges the naïve assumptions of fidelity, neutrality and impartiality in translation (Mo & Jin, 2023; Lee, 2025). By understanding fan translation and its interventionist approach as a form of affective labor or practice within self-mediated textualities or audiovisual content (Pérez-González, 2016), scholars can explore how this approach deeply personalizes, contextualizes and situates both content and its surrounding event (Koskinen, 2020). This perspective encourages a rethinking of subtitling through the lens of non-representational theory, which shifts focus from static representations—such as fixed meanings—towards a dynamic and lived experience (Williams, 2020). In fact, Curti (2009) considers film

subtitles “as affective bodily expressions” (p. 201), as they are not merely about meaning and literal translation. They improve the affective experience of audience.

Therefore, in line with affect theory’s emphasis on non-linguistic, embodied and sensory dimensions of experience rather than representational interpretations (Schaefer, 2019), subtitles or fansubs are less about what something means and more about how it feels (Curti, 2009; Wang, 2022). Therefore, subtitles should be evaluated according to “their affective contribution to the materiality of audio-visual texts and their transformational impact on the audience’s experience of self-mediated textualities” (Pérez-González, 2012, p. 348). Although non-professional AVT has received much attention, their examination from the perspective of affectivity and self-mediation is still limited (e.g., Pérez-González, 2014; Lee, 2021; Mo & Jin, 2023; Lee, 2025). Hence, affect theory offers valuable insights into how the individuality and subjectivity of YouTube translators.

In view of the above, this exploratory study examines the affective dimensions of intralingual subtitling on YouTube, focusing on how captions are employed for affective and expressive purposes. It explores how captions offer space for explanatory notes that articulate the subtitlers’ voices and feelings and promise a more personalized and immersive viewing experience. This is where affect theory provides a robust framework for analyzing how the individuality and subjectivity of non-professional subtitlers shape translation. This timely paper invites scholars to reconsider how translation functions in digital ecosystems—particularly through the lens of affect theory, which frames translation as an emotionally charged process, making it as much an art of feeling as of language.

With the growing scholarly interest in intralingual translation (Pillière & Albachten, 2024), the article provides insights into a lesser-explored area of intralingual subtitling—i.e., blogger subtitling on YouTube. Adopting an affective lens, it emphasizes the experiential nature of translation, in which meaning is not merely transferred but recreated and is infused with rich contextual and emotional information.

2. Theoretical foundation

2.1 Self-mediation

A more critical and context-sensitive understanding of translation leads us to the concept of *mediation* (Wang & de Pedro Ricoy, 2023), challenging the so-called ‘conduit metaphor’—which restricts the translator’s role to merely conveying the original message while maintaining a detached and neutral stance (Guldin, 2020). Mediation recognizes that translations are not purely mechanical but are mediated by technological factors, and translator’s agency, beliefs and subjectivity (Wang & de Pedro Ricoy, 2023). Mediation, in this sense, involves interpretation and adaptation based on the translator’s perspective, knowledge and intentions, who may often inject their interpretations and biases into their work to make the content resonate with the target audience or align with their understanding of the text (Wang, 2019). When this idea is applied to fan translators, who often operate outside the formal constraints of professional translation, the role of mediation becomes even more evident but complicated.



The contemporary media landscape is characterized by the growing engagement of ordinary people with their self-branding activities, referred to as self-mediation (Chouliaraki, 2010), enabled by the affordances of modern technologies. To better understand self-mediation, it is essential to examine its position within the broader framework of citizen media, as conceptualized by Rodríguez (2008). She views citizen media as those platforms through which individuals actively enact or perform their citizenship; in other words, these media empower individuals “to name the world and speak the world in their own terms, formats, and aesthetic values” (Rodríguez, 2008, p. 2).

YouTube exemplifies many of the characteristics of citizen media since technological and cultural convergence has inspired a whole slew of people worldwide to create and share their media content on a global scale, transforming the way information is created and consumed (Chouliaraki, 2012; Jones, 2021). Thus, individuals are no longer passive consumers of popular culture but they effectively contribute to its construction and circulation (Chen, 2023). Pérez-González (2019) highlights the link between technological innovation and user-generated content, noting that users create their own translated versions as a kind of self-mediation. Viewing fan translation through the lens of self-mediation provides insight into how AVT is creatively and expressively performed, as opposed to conforming solely to commercial standards (Pérez-González, 2014, 2017).

2.2 Non-professional subtitling as an affective self-mediation

Building on Silvan S. Tomkins’s seminal work conceptualizing affect as a core mechanism in human behaviour and motivation (Tomkins, 2014), contemporary theories view affect as encompassing “the capacity to experience and understand the world in ways that are profoundly relational and productive” (Liljeström, 2016, p. 16). Indeed, it has the affective potential to generate meaning, build connections and influence socio-cultural practices. According to Zhang and Wu (2022), affect emphasizes “human’s spontaneous productivity rather than passive reaction to external stimulus” (p. 328). This understanding has fuelled the affective turn in sociological research, which introduces the concept of affective labor—work aimed at generating or modulating emotional experiences in individuals (Hardt, 1999). By generating “positive externalities such as social networks, attachments, and passions” (Oksala, 2016, p. 293), affective labor illustrates how affect operates as a force in shaping both individual and collective experiences (Hardt, 1999). In the context of digital fandom and media culture, affect is not just a feeling but a productive force, making affective labor a critical lens for understanding the complex intersections of feelings, labor and capitalism (Wei, 2023).

In translation studies, this perspective shifts our focus from a purely textual model to one that views translation as an embodied, materially situated and relational practice (Lee, 2023). Thus, translation becomes “a form of investigation or research and of embracing the unknown, with the potential to open up the space between words and indeed to access that which escapes language” (Campbell & Vidal, 2024, p. 11). Indeed, this perspective positions translation as an inherently “embodied, located, worldly, contextualized, and relational” process (Liljeström, 2016, p. 16). Thus, accurately depicting the source text is no longer the primary goal. Instead, emphasis is placed on the materiality and affectivity of translation, with greater attention to the translator’s subjectivity and



individuality (Calleja, 2019) and their ‘affective engagement’ (Ahmed, 2014), which sheds light on the motivations behind their choices.

This shift towards affectivity and expressivity is particularly evident in non-professional translation, such as fan translation and online content creation (e.g., YouTube vlogging). In such contexts, affect—manifesting as creativity, fun, wittiness, activism, or emotional resonance—becomes both the primary motivation and the intended effect, often overriding the traditional expectations of equivalence or accuracy (Koskinen, 2020). This reflects a shift in focus: from the source text’s fixed meaning (referentiality, representation) to its emotional resonance (expressivity) (Curti, 2009; Lee, 2021; Pérez-González, 2014). To rephrase, these translations often prioritize “the affective and spectacular dimensions of public communication” over strict fidelity (Pérez-González, 2012, p. 346). Therefore, this approach positions subtitling as a dynamic and affective practice, that engages viewers because the goal is no longer to convey literal meaning (referentiality), but to generate and circulate affects and promise a different sensory experience for the viewer (expressivity).

Linking affectivity to non-representational theory, Pérez-González (2012) argues that affect acts as a powerful force driving amateur self-mediation. Practices like adding commentary, humor, emotional cues, or specialized captions like Japanese ‘telop’ (Sasamoto, 2024) actively manipulate the affective dimensions of a text, guiding the viewers’ attention and boosting their sensory experience. These interventions reshape the affective narrative, sometimes reflecting the creators’ beliefs or making their feelings visible (Mo & Jin, 2023). These paratextual elements (i.e., subtitler’s notes or comments) serve as spaces for subtitlers or YouTubers to share their feelings, inner thoughts and interests (Lee, 2019; Mo & Jin, 2023). They therefore prioritize affinity with the audience over referential accuracy, revealing their affective investment (Pérez-González, 2017).

This emphasis on affect and intervention underscores the embodied and relational nature of subtitling in online spaces. Lee (2025) describes self-mediation like YouTube vlogging as involving the bodily interplay between creators and viewers, expanding their capacities through human and non-human factors. A key phenomenon in this landscape is self-subtitling. It is a subtitling activity where individuals, such as bloggers or vloggers, independently create subtitles for their own audiovisual content, typically on *YouTube*, often driven by personal initiative (Mao et al., 2024). The increasing prevalence of self-subtitling is indicative of the growing accessibility of digital tools and the expansion of participatory culture (Wang et al., 2025). These translators render their bodily experience of the source material, giving audiences a glimpse into that subjective reality (Sadler, 2020). This dynamic space gives rise to what Koskinen (2020, p. 140) terms a “translational playground”, where established rules are openly challenged. Thus, subtitling becomes a space for new modes of meaning-making. Approaching YouTube blogger subtitling as an affective act of ‘textual poaching’ (Jenkins, 2013) implies that the subtitlers “exploit semiotic resources, ranging from verbal to nonverbal elements” (Wongseeree et al., 2019, p. 1) to convey “varied meanings and create a visually aesthetic and coherent frame” (Zhang & Vazquez-Calvo, 2024, p. 200).

However, research on amateur subtitling from an affective perspective remains limited (e.g., Pérez-González, 2014; Lee, 2021; Mo & Jin, 2023; Lee, 2025), with a notable lack of studies focusing on intralingual subtitling/captioning on YouTube. Therefore, there is a huge gap in our understanding of this emerging practice in the online mediascape. Focusing on the Persian channel @*Kouman*, this

paper explores how captions provide fertile ground for materializing affective labor through subtitlers' notes.

3. Method

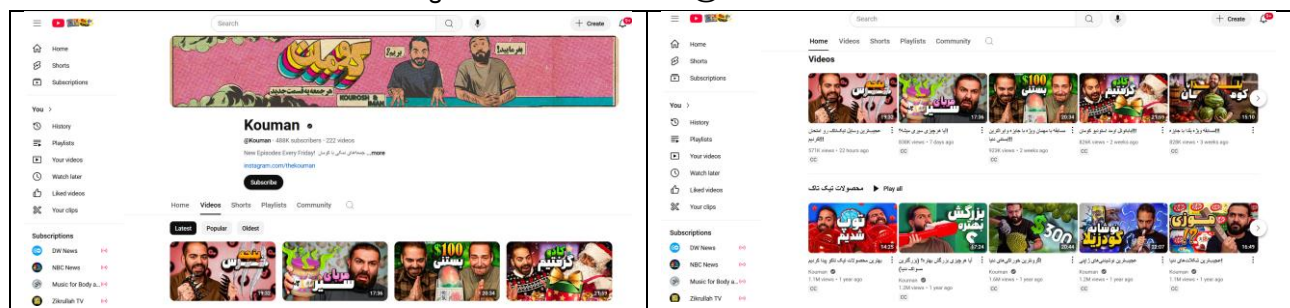
3.1 Research design

This qualitative study follows a research design guided by case studies. The case study method presents a rich and in-detailed exploration of a phenomenon from various perspectives, enabling researchers to validate new models or theories or challenge existing models (Duff, 2020). Case studies typically explore an under-studied phenomenon, which can lead to the development of new theories and fresh insights (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). This exploratory single case study focuses exclusively on the YouTube channel @Kouman. The rationale for selecting a single case stems from the fact that, to the best of our knowledge, this is the only YouTube channel that employs affect-infused captions, which contain subtitler's notes. As such, the case is both critical and revelatory: it is critical because the channel's subtitles align closely with the theory of affective self-mediation, and revelatory because it presents a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible to our scholarly investigation (Yin, 2018), especially, affective subtitling that has been limitedly examined in AVT.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Our case here is the YouTube channel @Kouman, with 584K subscribers and 255 videos¹. The channel was created on 13 January 2021, and has approximately 292 million views. As can be seen in Figure 1, the channel produces entertaining content for Persian-speaking audiences. Videos explore various themes, including the world's most expensive food, unusual drinks or the best toys. The primary language in the videos is Persian/Farsi, and closed captions are provided in the same language. The CC symbol under the videos, as shown in the right picture in Figure 1, indicates the availability of these intralingual subtitles. Besides accessibility for deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences within the channel, the intralingual subtitles on Kouman's channel serve some unique purposes, as will be explored in the result section.

Figure 1: The interface of @Kouman channel



Source: Kouman (n.d.)

¹ Date of consultation: 7 May 2025.

As will be discussed below, all videos uploaded to the channel after February 17, 2023, included Persian captions. It is worth noting that the channel serves as the overarching case, with the purposively selected videos from it representing the most illustrative instances. These videos, therefore, function as analytical units within the broader case of the channel itself. Due to space constraints, this paper analyzes a select sample of these videos, deemed critical for examining affective subtitling. Four videos formed the corpus of the study. These videos were not randomly chosen but were selected through purposive sampling, deemed more appropriate for yielding deeper insights due to their specificity (Table 1). The unit of analysis consisted of YouTube videos and their accompanying Persian captions. These captions, beyond merely transcribing spoken dialogue, often incorporate humor, commentary and additional notes.

This study employed a multimodal comparative approach to analyze these captioned videos. By examining the Persian captions alongside the source videos, the research investigated how they contribute to an affective subtitling experience. Specifically, the analysis sought to identify affective elements present in the Persian captions. The data analysis followed a recursive process of interpretation and meaning-making, involving iterative examination of the captions and the YouTubers' spoken content to assess how they aligned with the affective perspective.

Given the absence of a specific analytical tool designed to examine subtitlers' commentaries through the lens of affect theory and affective labor, insights were drawn from various relevant works in both AVT and sociology. The goal is to reinterpret subtitlers' interventions through affect theory where they are framed as bodily acts. Indeed, their emotionally invested labor makes the act of subtitling feel personal and emotionally resonant, rather than mechanical or detached like any professional rendering. These commentaries transform what might otherwise be an informational or entertainment video into a playful and engaging experience, reshaping how audiences feel and connect with the content.

Table 1: Research units

	Title	Views	Upload date	Video length	Fieldnotes
Video One ²	Which is better, Brazilian or Iranian food?	971K	Nov 15, 2024	20.44	
Video Two ³	Who loves more, Mia or Iman?	1.7M	Feb 23, 2024	22.58	3000 words and 34 screenshots
Video Three ⁴	The game of early humans with punishment!!!	1.1M	Sep 20, 2024	22.04	
Video Four ⁵	We tried the weirdest TikTok gadgets!!!	903K	Jan 10, 2025	19.31	

Source: Author (2025)

In the analysis section, we first present our observations of the channel to provide more context about the channel under analysis and highlight how captioning serves as an essential feature of the channel. The analysis of the cases is presented in tables, which include information about the scene and context, as well as the intralingual subtitles (i.e., captions) and subtitler's notes. The TCR also specifies the timing of each scene within the video. It is important to note that only the back

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omMxKWMTWmA>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6eT2pjhh68&t=74s>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PD6IDIFE4wo>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwKLA6ORVkc&t=3s>



translations into English from Persian of the intralingual subtitles and commentaries are provided here to save space. These back translations have been conducted by the researcher, who is a professional-certified translator.

4. Findings

4.1 Preliminary analysis

This section presents the field notes recorded during the observation of the channel. @Kouman is a Persian-language YouTube channel that releases new episodes almost every week. The inclusion of Persian subtitles (not YouTube's automatic captions) in the videos was not their initial intention, as videos posted before February 17, 2023, lacked Persian captions. This initiative began on February 17, 2023 with a video titled "The best food in the world? Gilan". These Persian captions likely address accessibility issues by helping deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, people in noisy environments, or those who prefer to watch videos silently. They go beyond the YouTubers' spoken dialogue to include the subtitlers' commentaries, which contain additional information and facts about the video's subject, as well as humorous and witty comments.

The subtitlers insert as much information as possible, metaphorically similar to how Sheldon Cooper in *The Big Bang Theory* often provided excessive details about any topic. They engage affectively and not just semantically, which means that subtitles are processual and dynamic. Indeed, cultural assemblages that, in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, bring diverse elements together in a process of becoming. As such, these subtitles integrate heterogeneous components—material, affective and semiotic—into contingent wholes (Wise, 2011). Therefore, the captioned videos become more than just audiovisual content; they become multi-component texts, sites of expressivity, and tools for enhanced engagement.

Figure 2: An example of subtitlers' commentary



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmLrtzkZqo4&t=68s>

Enriched with the subtitler's feelings and personal commentary, these captions function as affect-mediated content, building a space for the creators' emotive performance. Figure 2 shows

one example of such commentaries, where the subtitler offers some facts about *The Alps* in Europe. It is worth noting that these commentaries appear between two asterisks (**) in order to signal that they are not part of the dialogue, as seen in Figure 2. The subtitler is also a member of the channel's team. Therefore, these captions are created under the supervision of the channel's creators.

The inclusion of Persian captions in the videos also captured the attention of some if not all users, as evidenced by comments, some of which are presented in Table 2⁶. Users expressed their appreciation for the addition of subtitles in the videos, particularly for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, with one user mentioning that the subtitles could be displayed for a longer duration. These comments show that in subtitling, adding a funny remark or an emotional touch may evoke affective responses such as laughter or curiosity in viewers (Tomkins, 2014).

Table 2: Users' comments about captions

Users' comments	Likes for the comment	Video title
@k***y It was such a thoughtful thing to add subtitles. Deaf people deserve this kindness. Honestly, this gesture made my respect for you grow a thousand times more. May God bless you. 😊😊	411	The Most Expensive Clothes in the World
@f***4 This idea of adding Persian subtitles for friends who are hard of hearing or deaf is really great. Thank you so much.	422	The Strangest TikTok Products
@g***e Thank you for adding Persian subtitles to your videos. One of my deaf friends loves Komaan's videos, and the subtitles make them so happy.	814	Let's Dance Arabic Together
@g***5 One of the best parts of Koman's videos is the subtitles. Thank you, really 10/10!	58	Can Anything Make You Feel Full?!
@m***4 Hooray! (Subtitles 🎉)	147	Santa Claus Came to the Kouman Studio!!!
@j***8 The person who adds the subtitles seems like the narrator of the story, and they tell it in such a way that it feels like they're actually in the video, which is really cool. The only thing is, the subtitles go by a little too quickly. ❤️	94	Vlog: The Strangest Street Foods in Vancouver!

Source: Author (2025)

Below is an analysis of four cases from the channel, examining how these captions can modulate emotional flows between communicative bodies, such as the subtitler, the audience and the video.

4.2 Video one: Which is better, Brazilian or Iranian food?

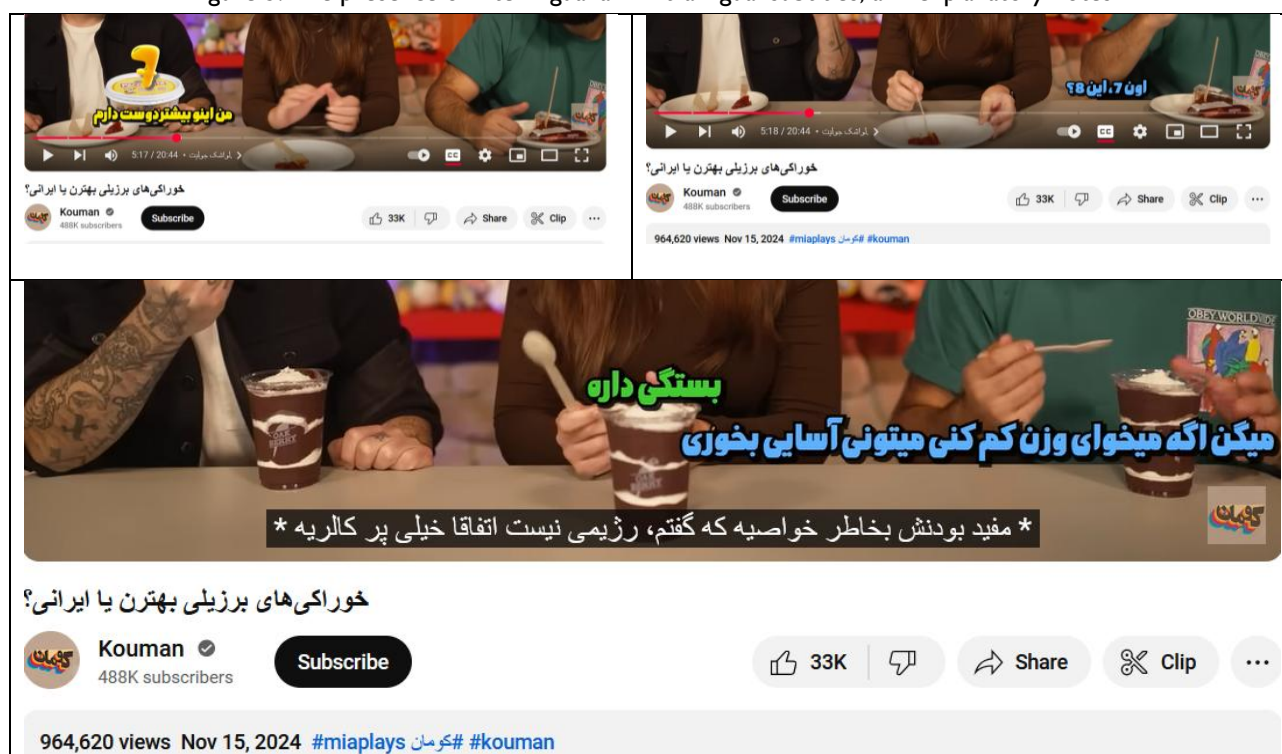
Our first case is fairly peculiar in terms of subtitling. This video introduces Brazilian and Iranian food, featuring two Iranian YouTubers, Kourosh and Iman, who invited a Brazilian guest, Jessica. The video starts with Brazilian food, with Jessica providing information while Kourosh and

⁶ The viewers' names were made anonymous with asterisk to protect their rights.

Iman try the dishes. This is followed by Jessica tasting Iranian food. Although the language of the videos on the channel is Persian as mentioned before, this specific episode was conducted in English due to the non-Persian guest, creating an interesting mix of interlingual subtitles and intralingual captions.

While Kourosh, Iman and Jessica speak English, their dialogue is translated into Persian using a placement and colour technique. The subtitles appear near each speaker to avoid confusion about who is talking, with each person's subtitles in a different colour. Kourosh and Iman occasionally speak Persian in the video. As a result, the viewers can see two sets of subtitles: one in colour for the Persian translation of English dialogue, and another in white, normal font for the Persian sentences and commentary (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The presence of interlingual and intralingual subtitles, and explanatory notes



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omMxKWMTWmA&t=543s>

Affective translation can be seen in the subtitlers' explanatory notes. The first form of this can be observed when Jessica is introducing foods from her country, Brazil. Initially, when Jessica presents and introduces the food, her English is translated into Persian using green-colored subtitles. Alongside this, the subtitlers' notes appear, but they are not included in the green-coded subtitles to prevent confusion, as viewers might mistakenly associate them with her speech. Instead, these commentaries are presented in a different subtitling font.


In Table 3, the subtitler's note, offering factual information about the dish and its preparation, serves not merely to inform but to deepen the viewer's appreciation of the Brazilian culture. This constitutes affective labor, characterized by a desire to build or enhance emotional or relational engagement or deliberately evoke or shape emotions in the audience (Koskinen, 2020; Lee, 2025). In this context, the subtitler actively promotes the understanding, appreciation, curiosity and

connection to Brazilian culture for Iranian viewers. Indeed, these explanatory notes add depth and meaning to the video, helping viewers more easily engage with the culinary richness of Brazil. Lee (2025) points out that they are a means of “exchanging information with fellow fans and displaying affinity for them” (p. 109).



Table 3: Instance one

Context



Here, the YouTubers and Jessica are talking about *Bolinha de queijo*.






خوراکی‌های برزیلی بهترین یا ایرانی؟

 Kouman 
490K subscribers

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 33K 

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966,908 views Nov 15, 2024 #miaplays #کومان #kouman

TCR	Intralingual Subtitles	Subtitler's Notes
07:42 -	Kourosh: So we've got three items. What's this one?	These are the Brazilian version of the same fried snacks sold by weight [in Iran].
07:47	Jessica: This is Bolinha de queijo. It's called cheese balls.	Bolinha de queijo literally means cheese ball. It's usually made with mozzarella cheese, but sometimes they add gouda or parmesan alongside it.
07:48 -	Iman: Can you say it again?	They coat the cheese in flour, egg, breadcrumbs, and annatto seasoning, then fry it. You might ask, what on earth is annatto? Annatto is a Brazilian spice made from the seeds of the achiote tree, native to the Amazon. It gives food a unique color and flavor. The closest thing to annatto you can find in Iran is paprika powder.
08:07	Jessica: Bolinha de queijo.	
	Kourosh: It's so hard to pronounce, Bolinha de queijo.	
	Mia: Fried balls?	
	Kourosh: That's such a cool word to say.	
	Iman: And what is it?	
	Jessica: It's like a snack, made of like cheese deep fried.	
	Iman: Oh, perfect!	
	Kourosh: Oh cheese, it's cheese.	

Source: Author (2025)

The second example (Table 4) presents the subtitlers' emotional reactions to what Jessica said in Persian. The initial reaction to the swear word is of surprise and amusement, reflected in the “What???” commentary. The note plays a crucial role in affective mediation by adding emotional depth or intensifying the feelings, as it captures the humor, surprise and playful interactions that emerge from Jessica's limited knowledge of Persian, particularly her familiarity with only the swear word.

This creates a playful context that encourages viewers' engagement and builds a casual atmosphere. It is also a strong example of non-representational subtitling, which conveys additional information or reflects the subtitler's inner thoughts and feelings (Pérez-González, 2014). Regarding

the viewers' reactions, some highlighted the subtitles in the comments, reflecting the subtitler's affective strategies and their success in eliciting a positive emotional response from the audience (see Table 5).

Table 4: Instance two

Context Here, the YouTubers and Jessica are talking about another Brazilian food *Pão de Queijo*. Then, they switch to this topic if they know anything about the language spoken in Brazil and if Jessica knows Persian.

خوراکی های برزیلی بهترن یا ایرانی؟

Kouman
490K subscribers

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966,908 views Nov 15, 2024 #miaplays #کومان #kouman

TCR

Intralingual Subtitles

Subtitler's Notes

8:44

Kourosh: What do you know in Farsi?

What???

-

Jessica: I know [her Persian word is replaced with a sound]

Who taught this girl Persian?

9:04

[Kourosh and Iman laughed when they heard Jessica says a Persian swear word]

Come on, sis!!

Iman: That's the only word, you know?

He said something in a street-style accent that totally threw me off.

Jessica: No, I know some others.

Wrap it up quickly before it heats up!

Iman: Salam [Persian word for hello]

Jessica: Salam. Chetorin? [Persian phrase for how are you]

Iman: So you know these!

Source: Author (2025)

Table 5: Viewers' comments

@m***9
The subtitles are a whole different world 😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂😂
@m***5
Just the subtitles that appear down there are their own separate content — and they're divine ❤️
@B***t
I'm in love with the subtitles in the videos 😂😂 they're just too good
@n***2
subtitle 😂😂😂😂

Source: Author (2025)

4.3 Video two: Who loves more, Mia or Iman?

The three YouTubers play a game to know who knows Kourosh better. This video was posted to celebrate the Iranian version of Valentine's Day. Like any video on the channel, this video in Persian and has Persian intralingual subtitles with the subtitler's commentary. In this video, Kourosh asks personal questions about his life and lifestyle, which the other two YouTubers answer to receive a score. The questions are displayed in bold yellow subtitles to distinguish them from the regular white captions.

Table 6: Instance three

Context

Here, Mia and Iman compete to see who knows Kourosh best. The winner will receive a gift from Kourosh Just as a lover gives a gift on Valentine's Day.



کی عاشق تره؟ میا یا ایمان

 Kouman ✓
491K subscribers

Subscribe

26K

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Clip

1,705,961 views Feb 23, 2024 #miaplays #کرمَن #kouman

TCR	Intralingual Subtitles	Subtitler's Notes
0:15 - 0:48	<p>Kourosh: Hey Iman, tell me why we're celebrating Love Day today? Didn't Valentine's just pass?</p> <p>Iman: Come on, what is Valentine! Today is the celebration of Sepandārmazgān, which is a day to honor women, love and the Earth.</p> <p>Kourosh: So true Valentine is today!</p> <p>Iman: Our ancient Valentine is today, the other one is fake [He's referring to the western Valentine].</p> <p>Kourosh: Of course, it's celebrated on the 5th of Esfand, but we're celebrating it earlier so that guys can prepare themselves.</p> <p>Kourosh: On this day, back in the old days, people used to give gifts to their loved ones. Now I want to do the same with you two today</p>	<p>Sepandārmaz or Esfand are the name given to the fifth day of each month and the twelfth month of every year [Iranian calendar]. This term, found in Avestan as Spenta Armaiti, is composed of two parts: 'Spenta' or 'Sepand,' meaning pure and sacred, and 'Armaiti,' meaning humility and patience.</p> <p>This ancient celebration has roots in the celebrations of the Achaemenid Empire.</p> <p>In each month, once, the name of the day and the month would coincide, and on that day, a celebration would be held corresponding to the name of that day and month. Similarly, the fifth day of each month was called Sepandārmaz or Esfandarmaz, and in the twelfth month of the year, which was also called Esfandarmaz, a celebration with the same title would be held.</p> <p>On this day, women would wear new clothes and shoes, and in a way, they would rule the household. Therefore, their husbands or sons would take over daily chores inside the house, following all the instructions and commands of the women.</p>

15:39 - 16:07	[Kourosh keeps asking questions, and Mia and Iman answer them. Here the subtitler also answers the questions to create some funny moments] Kourosh: Name three of my favorite brands Mia: I misspelt all of them, both their names and their spellings. Kourosh: Show me, show me. You wrote two of them similarly. Kourosh reacting to Mia's familiarity with the brand Vacheron Constantin: I cannot believe it! How did you know its name? Mia: You mentioned its name, but I don't know if it's your favorite one or not.	Considering his classic and minimalist taste: Patek Philippe, Richard Mille, and Vacheron Constantin. The checkered background of Audemars Piguet reminds you of swimming pool tiles. Not Patek Philippe and Richard Mille? Really? I can't believe it!
17:10 - 17:27	Kourosh: I've only used one perfume in my life for almost 10-15 years. What's the name of that perfume? Kourosh: 3, 2, 1. Kourosh: Bravo, Mia. Creed. Iman: Sauvage. Kourosh: Not Sauvage. I've never worn Sauvage in my life.	Creed Silver Mountain It's a very fresh, cool, and nice fragrance, but among the perfumes I have in this style, I think Tom Ford Gray Vetiver and Marly Galloway are much better. We should create an episode dedicated to fragrances, where I can sit and introduce you to different scents. Sauvage is the inseparable companion of the tired 206-driving Amir.

Source: Author (2025)

This case was quite unique, particularly due to its inclusion of extensive extra information at the beginning of the video. In fact, the effort in presenting detailed information is indicative of a strong affective investment. The opening segment focuses on introducing the Iranian version of Valentine's Day. Here the subtitler provides detailed information about this day in Iran primarily sourced from Wikipedia. The subtitler's effort to educate viewers about Sepandārmazgān circulates positive emotions like pride, curiosity and shared identity. This meaningful activity reflects how fans enrich the viewing session with added context to connect with others (Gregg, 2009).

In the competition segments, the subtitler's active participation, answering questions about Kourosh's preferences, acts as affective labor that elicits amusement and surprise among the viewers. For instance, he manages to name one of Kourosh's favourite brands and is surprised to discover that Patek Philippe and Richard Mille are not Kourosh's favorite ones. Thus, the subtitler is not an anonymous intermediary but a social actor. Such an affective labor yields a sense of community, esteem and belonging among those having common interests or mutual recognition within the same community (Curti, 2009; Gregg, 2009). Affective labor, therefore, generates "social networks, forms of community, biopower" (Hardt, 1999, p. 96).

In the third part, the subtitler adds an intriguing commentary about the perfume *Creed Silver Mountain*, describing it as fresh and cold. He also shares his own favourite perfumes, including *Tom Ford Gray Vetiver* and *Marly Galloway*, and even suggests creating a dedicated episode about perfumes to showcase his expertise on the topic. Thus, the subtitler's participation involves performing affect, like expressing surprise at getting answers right and sharing enthusiasm for perfumes. Indeed, such



embodied notes and commentaries enrich the subtitles with emotional depth, effectively prioritizing expressivity over referentiality (Pérez-González, 2014).

Finally, commenting on Iman’s inaccurate answer—mentioning *Sauvage*—the subtitler humorously says that this perfume is stereotypically associated with young Iranian men named Amir who drive a white Peugeot 206 car. This stereotype requires some cultural clarification: on Iranian social media, it is humorously implied that Iranian men named Amir normally own white Peugeot 206 cars and are known for having many girlfriends, who do not marry them. Such a hilarious paratextual comment allows the affect to be mediated; thus, the subtitler is able to convey their feelings beyond the diegetic space (Mo & Jin, 2023). Overall, the subtitler acts as an affective mediator, who shapes the viewer’s experience of the video through affective labor. This act both generates and circulates amusement, surprise and a sense of connection between the audience and the video content. User comments in this case clearly support the subtitler’s affective mediation, emphasizing the positive emotional impact of their contributions:

Table 7: Viewers’ comments

@y****i
One of the things I love is the subtitles in your videos — it feels like I’m watching it with someone else. Thanks, Mr. Subtitler!
@i****6
The subtitler made my day, thanks dude ❤️❤️❤️

Source: Author (2025)

4.4 Video three: The game of early humans with punishment!!!

The third case is about prehistoric humans’ games. Here, Kourosh and Iman play a game where the loser gets hit with a soft plastic mace. This case continues to highlight the subtitler’s role as an active affective mediator, shaping the viewer’s experience by intervening in the intralingual subtitles with extensive commentary and notes.

Table 8: Instance four

Context	The video begins with an introduction to the games. They also talk about their new under-construction studio before playing the games.
	
<p>!!!بازی انسان‌های نخستین با مجازات</p> <p> Kouman ✓ 498K subscribers </p> <p> 44K   Share  Thanks ...</p> <p>1,184,597 views Sep 20, 2024 #miaplays #کومان #kouman</p>	



TCR	Intralingual Subtitles	Subtitler's Notes
0:00 - 0:04	Kourosh: Today, we're fighting for our honor! Ready? Iman: Let's go	Boys when they play FIFA.
0:19 - 0:32	Kourosh: Hey guys, welcome to another angle of our new studio! Iman: Right now, the studio is facing away from us. Kourosh: It's facing away from us. [They keep talking about the decoration of their studio]	Every week, we'll be setting up a mini studio tour for you all. A rose is a rose.
0:33 - 0:35	[Here, Kourosh pauses for some seconds, while pointing his finger]	While Korosh is thinking, let me tell you a joke. 'Do you know what they say to a banana that hasn't ripened yet? They say, when you're ripe, give us a call.'

Source: Author (2025)

From the outset, the subtitler adds his witty comments, beginning with a reference to Kourosh's statement that reflects common phrases boys say when playing sports video games like FIFA. Functioning as affective translation, it reflects the excitement of male gaming culture and helps circulate affect among viewers familiar with that culture.

The two YouTubers begin by discussing their new studio and its features. When they refer to the studio behind them, the subtitler adds a Persian proverb related to the words 'back' and 'behind'. In Persian, they say, 'a flower has no backside' meaning that a rose can be appreciated from all sides, highlighting its beauty from every angle. The subtitler thus associates the studio with the rose, suggesting it, too, is attractive, no matter if it is now located behind the YouTubers or the viewers can see the back of the studio.

As the two continue discussing the studio, Kourosh suddenly stops speaking, points his finger, and remains silent for a second before bursting into laughter. Capturing this moment, the subtitler notes that while Kourosh is thinking, he would like to share a joke. The joke is amusing because it plays on the double meaning of the Persian word 'رسیدن', which translates to both 'arrive' and 'ripen' in English. As an emotive and non-representational element in the subtitles, humor is introduced as an affective tool, which can fill the silence with levity and create a sense of shared amusement. By inviting the audience to laugh, the subtitler acts as an affect modulator (Mo & Jin, 2023)—not merely transcribing the original, but lightening the atmosphere and helping the viewer's feel entertained and engaged.

Focusing on the game Poetry for Neanderthals in this scene (Table 9), Kourosh introduces the game title while the subtitler seizes the moment to provide valuable information about Neanderthals for Iranian viewers who may not be familiar with them. This act of conveying additional context not only enriches the viewing experience but also enhances understanding and appreciation of foreign culture-specific references. By bridging the cultural gap and offering insights into the historical significance of Neanderthals, the subtitler effectively engages the audience, making the content more accessible and informative.

Table 9: Instance five

Context Here, the two YouTubers start playing the games. This chosen scene focuses on *Poetry for Neanderthals* and Kourosh loses the game.



بازی انسان‌های نخستین با مجازات



Kouman
490K subscribers

Subscribe

43K



Share

Clip



1,152,298 views Sep 20, 2024 #miaplays #کومان #kouman

TCR	Intralingual Subtitles	Subtitled's Notes
13:09 - 13:18	Kourosh: Next game, 'Poetry for Neanderthals'. I've posted the price here for everyone to see. Iman: It is poems for Neanderthals. Kourosh: Yeah, this is one of the games we bought in our last vlog.	Neanderthals were an earlier human species that were more behaviourally and physically similar to chimpanzees than modern humans, or Homo sapiens.
13:19 - 13:31	[They keep talking about the game, and its rules and Kourosh shows the mace as the punishment tool for the losers] Kourosh: We have a piece of wood. Iman: Ok!	Oh my God, what kind of mace did you pull out? I'm speechless.
14:09 - 17:14	[They keep playing the game, here Kourosh loses the game and should be punished with the mace] Iman: Come here. Come here. Kourosh: Wait a sec, Iman. I'm playing with the wrong person! Mia, I should have been playing these games with you! [Iman keeps hitting Kourosh with the plastic mace].	Iman is spinning that mace in such a way that I felt the pain too—God have mercy on Kourosh. Iman hit Koroush so hard, it was like a factory reset for him.

Source: Author (2025)

Moving on with the game, we can see the subtitled again seizes the moment to share his thought and feelings concerning the two YouTubers. The commentary is filled with humor, making the situation more entertaining. The phrase “it was like a factory reset for him” is particularly humorous, which evokes a laughter response in the audience. All in all, these notes and commentaries function as affective interventions and prime examples of affective subtitling, which presents “subjective or engaged spectatorial experiences” (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 263). The users' comments, praising the humor and overall quality of the captions, indicate these affective strategies are well-received and contribute significantly to the viewers' positive experience:



Table 10: Viewers' comments

@s***i
That's what she said 😊
Subtitles are divine
Michael Scott's catchphrase from the series The Office
@e***0
You're awesome! The person who writes the subtitles comes up with some really funny jokes 😊😊
@z***e
Yooo the subtitles are amazing! 😊

Source: Author (2025)


4.5 Video four: We tried the weirdest TikTok gadgets!!!

The last case deals with the introduction of the weirdest TikTok gadgets, which we found the intralingual subtitles full of humorous notes, make it an ideal case for researching affective subtitling. In other words, the subtitler goes beyond the primary role of transcribing dialogue to actively intervene in ways that stimulate specific emotional responses, such as amusement, joy and laughter in audience, thereby building a friendly atmosphere on the channel.


Table 11: Instance six

Context

This is part of the video which features a carrot sharpener.



عجیب‌ترین وسایل تیک‌تاک رو امتحان کردیم

 Kouman ✓
490K subscribers

Subscribe

31K

Share

Clip

...

807,813 views Jan 10, 2025 #kouman #miaplays #kouman

TCR	Intralingual Subtitles	Subtitler's Notes
0:00	Kourosh: Today, our lives are going to get easier! Are you ready?	May God make it happen!
-		
0:04	Iman: Impossible! Let's go.	
0:09	Kourosh: Alright, guys! Mr. Iman.	
-	Iman: Yes?	
0:20	Kourosh: Do you like cooking and eating? Iman: Hmm, I don't know... I like eating it. Kourosh: Cooking it... Exactly, exactly! Kourosh: What makes you dislike cooking?	I have this phobia that Gordon Ramsay might suddenly show up in the kitchen and start yelling at me.

0:36 - 0:48	Kourosh: Today, we're going to test out a bunch of items that have gone super viral on social media. Kourosh: We'll test them today to see if they actually work or not.	Engaged viewers, pay close attention to this episode, these items might come in handy for your dowry
0:51 - 0:59	Kourosh: So, the first item. A pencil sharpener! Look how beautiful it is. Iman: Did you get a large pencil sharpener? Kourosh: A pencil sharpener specifically made for carrots! Iman: Why would anyone sharpen a carrot?	Pencil sharpener or cucumber sharpener? Perfect for decorating fancy salads and totally making other brides green with envy! It depends on its use.
01:16 - 01:19	Kourosh: Carrot! Kourosh: You put it inside this.	I'm glad you said that, I thought it was a mace! Mission Impossible: Veggie Edition
01:44 - 01:52	Kourosh: It turned into a pencil. Iman: Anything else will just turn like this. Kourosh: No, it's way too thick—this won't work. What do you want to do with this now? Iman: With this, you could even kill a vampire.	This device has to be shut down—this thick carrot turned into a much more dangerous threat! This device [the carrot sharpener] has to be eliminated and destroyed under strict security measures. Not only vampires, even the White Demon would be terrified and flee from this pillar of fear.

Source: Author (2025)

From the very beginning, the subtitlers' commentaries show up. Indeed, watching the videos with these Persian captions is like watching a sitcom with a friend who is constantly making jokes and remarks about the show. In these contexts, translation strategies frequently function as 'affective interventions' (Lee, 2025). For instance, in the opening line, when Kourosh says, "Today, our lives are going to get easier," the subtitler adds, "May God make it happen!" to reflect his inner thoughts and boost the viewing experience with a touch of humor.

In the second commentary, we can see that the subtitler makes a reference to the British celebrity chef and restaurateur, Gordon Ramsay, when Kourosh asks Iman, "What makes you dislike cooking?". This reference adds an extra layer of humor or relatability for viewers familiar with him and his shows. Additionally, the commentary "engaged viewers, pay close attention to this episode—these items might come in handy for your dowry!", directly addresses and entertains the viewers, especially those with the intention of marriage, and keeps the tone playful. Thus, these notes add depth to the viewing experience (Dwyer, 2017). Engaging directly with others on an emotional and interpersonal level is affective labor (Hardt, 1999).

To entertain the audience, the subtitler kept sharing his inner thoughts in the commentary. When the first item, which is a huge pencil sharpener is shown, he makes a comment about whether it is a carrot sharpener or pencil sharpener, creating an absurd and playful tone. The follow-up commentary "making other brides green with envy" reflects an Iranian socio-cultural theme of competition and status, particularly in the context of weddings, where brides often feel pressure to stand out in terms of their dowry.

Furthermore, when Kourosh sharpens the carrots with the device and shows it to Iman, the subtitler quickly shares his inner feeling by saying that this device should be banned because it could be dangerous. The hilarious phrasing—"eliminated and destroyed under strict security measures"—



exaggerates the threat of a carrot sharpener, turning an otherwise mundane object into something absurdly dangerous. This type of commentary adds a playful tone, making the scene more entertaining and engaging, especially in moments of absurdity. Additionally, comparing the act of sharpening carrots to a “Mission Impossible” scenario exaggerates the seriousness or intensity of what is otherwise a trivial or comedic action.

Overall, this case demonstrates affective subtitling by showing how the subtitler goes beyond linguistic equivalence to translate or, more accurately, transmit and generate affect, shaping how the viewer feels while watching. The subtitler acts as an affective mediator, interpreting the source material and adding layers to maximize emotional engagement, primarily humor, for the audience. They, Pérez-González (2014) notes, set the stage “for the expression of subjectivity and developing further affinity with their audienceships” (p. 265). This evidence is further supported by the user’s comments:

Table 12: Viewers’ comments

@d***r
Shayan must’ve been in a great mood when he wrote the subtitles for this video 😄😄😄 I seriously laughed so hard. Thank you, Shayan!
@M***x
I want to give a special shoutout to Shayan right here for his creative subtitles 😄😄❤️ Honestly, half the fun of the video comes from the subtitles 😄😄😄
@H***7
People really don’t give enough credit to Mr. Subtitle-Wikipedia-born. I got your back ❤️

Source: The author (2025)

5. Discussion

The current paper explored the affective dimensions of intralingual blogger subtitling on YouTube, demonstrating how the subtitler’s commentaries, viewed through the lens of affect theory, function as affective labor in subtitling. They actively use humor, cultural references and a conversational, companion-like tone to build a connection with the audience, and shape the overall viewing experience in an affectively rich way. These commentaries express the subtitlers’ voices and feeling, making them more visible. They do more than simply convey information; they intervene in the mediation of the video content by injecting emotionally rich notes, creating an enjoyable experience for the audience.

These affect-laden captions introduce new flows of feeling, such as humor, curiosity and a sense of connection with the subtitler’s personality. Indeed, these creative decisions reflect the translators’ bodily presence, marked by their emotional imprint as commentary. This aligns with Koskinen’s (2020) observation that the captions in such videos exhibit “affective qualities such as fun, wittiness, creativity or activism” (p. 135). Building on this, Yoshimizu and Hoshi (2023) argue that affective or non-representational subtitles can transmediate and generate new sensorial and affective effects, further transforming the viewing experience.

By presenting extra information, the subtitler may want to keep the viewers engaged and informed, re-mediating the entire viewing experience. As Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006) and Evans (2020) suggest in the context of fan translation, these notes are like a supplementary text



that aids in appreciating the original content and its nuances. They also “directly address viewers and share information that is intended for their specific audience” (Lee, 2025, pp. 108-109). Such affective mediation also leads us to the concept of subtitler’s visibility. Commercially, subtitles are regarded as high quality when they pass unnoticed by their audience (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). However, affective subtitles disregard accurate representations of the original by prioritizing their visibility or affects, which, in turn, encourages “an alternative aesthetics of reception based on mutual recognition” (Pérez-González, 2014, p. 250). This is because these subtitlers seek to gain “the symbolic visibilities of being educators and innovators” (Huang, 2021, p. 63). In the words of Lee (2025), these translators “make themselves visible as active mediators of audiovisual content rather than remaining transparent and invisible” (p. 109).

Understandably, these explanatory notes like *Danmu*, yield “a dynamic narrative layer that complements the visual content, making the viewing experience more engaging and multifaceted” (Lu et al., 2025, p. 1). This engaging and immersive yet accessible viewing experience was reflected in the video comments as noted earlier. Koskinen (2020) also views that the metric for translation success should not be how accurately the original is rendered, but how well the translated piece resonates with the audience; how funny, clever or aesthetically pleasing it may be. As mentioned by a viewer, “half the fun of the video comes from the subtitles”. In this view, accuracy is devalued, even irrelevant; instead, acceptability, which is how well the audience receives and engages with the translation, is elevated as the core criterion (Koskinen, 2020). On the whole, these affective subtitles have challenged the dominance of representational approaches, such as the translator’s neutrality and invisibility in commercial subtitles (Flynn, 2016) by highlighting the translator’s affect in creating meaning (Calleja, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The current article offered a fresh perspective on self-subtitling on YouTube, exploring how subtitlers’ notes provide a fertile ground for affectivity and expressivity. It investigated how these notes allowed subtitlers to express their voice and inner thoughts. This research argued that affective subtitling is a practice that goes beyond merely conveying the original content. These captions reflect the subtitler’s subjectivity and individuality, such as cheerfulness, wit or playfulness in most of our examples, which, in turn, contribute to a positive environment for the viewers of the channel. Therefore, the act of subtitling is repositioned as an expressive and interpretive practice rather than a mechanical transfer of meaning. Drawing on postmodern and post-structuralist theories, this argument challenges traditional views of translation as a neutral or purely linguistic process. In summary, this paper enriches our understanding of how intralingual blogger subtitling on YouTube functions as a site of affective self-mediation, foregrounding the subtitler’s affective labor in actively shaping the viewing experience of the audience.

It is important to interpret the results with caution and avoid overgeneralization due to the study’s limitations. They are a stepping stone for future research. Further research with larger and more diverse samples is essential to enable the development of robust theories on this topic. It is equally important to analyze these new forms of captioning on YouTube through the lens of ludic translation (Lee, 2022). An issue worth mentioning is that the reading speeds of the captions were



often high due to many commentaries, making it difficult for viewers to read them in real-time. As a result, they may pause or replay the video to fully understand the information in the captions. This issue demands closer scholarly attention, especially as reception studies are increasingly addressing non-professional subtitling (Ameri, 2023).

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Results and discussion: S. Ameri

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

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Insider research in media accessibility

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Abstract: Reflections on insider research, user-led research, and lived experience research, as well as the question of positionality, have long been part of the scholarly conversation in various fields, such as Anthropology and Disability Studies. The present study provides a map of insider research in media accessibility through a literature review and discusses the results of 11 semi-structured interviews with insider researchers working on (media) accessibility and neighbouring fields. Their reflections on positionality in insider research, the benefits and challenges of this approach, their practices in the insider-outsider continuum, and the (in)accessible research processes which they encounter are presented. Researchers reflect on positionality in a nuanced manner, highlighting topics such as visibility and self-reflection, but also stigma and performativity. Experiential closeness to the topic being researched, heightened empathy, and legitimization of insider researchers' and participants' knowledge are highlighted mostly as positives elements, granted that researchers are offered psychological support. For most of the researchers, the risks (emotional impact, unclear role of the researcher, if they are well acquainted with the participants, etc.) can be tackled or resolved (through epistemological reflection, through collaboration, through psychological support, etc.) and the general argument is that the benefits of insider research outweigh the disadvantages. Through the researchers' experience, we argue for greater agency among insiders in the research of media accessibility.

Keywords: insider research; media accessibility; positionality; agency; disability studies.

1. Introduction

Reflections on insider research, user-led research, and lived experience research, as well as the question of positionality, have long been part of the scholarly conversation in various fields, such as Anthropology (Müller, 2015) and Disability Studies (Mohler & Rudman, 2022). Insider researchers have made extremely valuable contributions to the field of media accessibility (MA), for instance recounting ocularcentric approaches to access (Chottin & Thompson, 2021), challenging standard practices in audio description (Cavallo, 2015), introducing integral captions and subtitles (Butler,

2018), and coining concepts such as “deaf gain” (Bauman & Murray, 2013) and “blindness gain” (Chottin & Thompson, 2021), just to name a few. Accessibility consists of the provision of equal access to physical and digital environments, offering safe, healthy places and resources adapted to the diversity of people likely to use them (Folcher & Lompré, 2012, p. 89-90). The field of MA concerns “access to media products, services, and environments for all persons who cannot, or cannot completely, access them in their original form” (Greco, 2018, p. 211) and focuses mostly on services such as descriptive subtitles, audio description, sign language interpreting and translation (Tamayo, 2022), easy-to-understand materials, etc. Authors like Greco (2018) identify a shift in MA from a *maker-centred* to a *user-centred* approach. According to the user-centred approach, users “bear knowledge that is fundamental for the investigation of access issues and the design of accessibility solutions” (Greco & Romero-Fresco, 2023, p. 3). This approach has mostly materialised in the form of reception studies applying social research methods (Arias-Badia & Matamala, 2020; Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018; Szarkowska et al., 2013) and psychophysiological instruments (cf. Hermosa-Ramírez, 2022; Orero et al., 2018) to measure, among others, users’ comprehension, enjoyment, presence, and cognitive load when using access services.

Parallely, examples of accessibility users’ active involvement in the creative industries “whereby users are not merely passive recipients of, but active agents in, the process of production of accessible audiovisual media” (Dangerfield, in Greco, 2018, p. 219) are also flourishing. This involvement is both in terms of initiatives such as visual activism, where artists with disabilities use visual arts to claim spaces in the public sphere saying “‘look at me’, rather than ‘don’t stare’” (Garland-Thomson, 2009, p. 193), or in the production of access services specifically as accessibility coordinators (Romero-Fresco, forthcoming) or accessibility consultants, sign language interpreters, audio description voice talents, etc. Nonetheless, the question of user-led research, lived experience, and insider research remains largely unexplored in MA.

For the purposes of this study, we use user-led, lived experience and insider research almost synonymously. User-led research is deployed here to be distinguished from the more frequent “user-centred” research in MA. The lived experience researcher role “requires the researcher to draw on their lived experiences in the research they conduct and through which they interpret data, working in professional and academic contexts” (Gupta et al., 2023, p. 3), and insider researchers “share common characteristics, such as impairment status, race and sexual orientation, with the marginal group they are studying” (Chhabra, 2020, p. 307). The latter terminology will be deployed consistently throughout this article.

The focus of this study is to interrogate the key role of insider researchers, lived experience researchers, and user-led researchers, and their stances on this approach in the context of (media) accessibility: its benefits and risks, how they reflect on their positionality and positionality statements, and on their experiences as the “researched”, as well as other topics, such as their views on MA. This article first presents a literature review to map existing studies led by insider researchers on the topic of accessibility. It then introduces the methodology of the current study. The presentation and discussion of the results follows, and the main conclusions of the study are introduced last.

2. Literature review

Positionality refers to a researchers' worldview (their ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as those about human agency) and the position they adopt in tackling their research and its social and political context, most commonly regarding the subject under investigation, the research participants, and the research context and process (Darwin Holmes, 2020). In this regard, the researcher may be a member of the group or collective they are researching (Merton, 1972), or they share the lived experiences of this group. Of course, the insider-outsider dichotomy has generated great debate in different disciplines, and some researchers have argued that the insider-outsider positionality might be too simplistic in its associated binaries (privileged/oppressed, us/them, included/excluded, insider/outsider) (Chhabra, 2020).

Positionality and insider research are two key topics with a longstanding tradition in Disability Studies. This is because “scholars in disability studies believe strongly that the voice of individuals with disabilities is a necessity in the production of research and scholarly work and is central to the epistemology of disability” (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 78). Within the five core concepts of Disability Studies identified by Ferguson and Nusbaum (1. The study of disability must be social, 2. The study of disability must be foundational, 3. The study of disability must be interdisciplinary, 4. The study of disability must be participatory, 5. The study of disability must be values-based), number four proposes that this call for participation concerns who is entitled to ask the questions as well, particularly given the underrepresentation of people with disabilities in higher education institutions (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012, p. 74).

Bringing these topics to Translation Studies, while positionality has been the subject of some research in Feminist Translation Studies (Burkhard & Park, 2024; Ergun, 2021), and the topic of experiential knowledge has been discussed in the scope of the work of translators and interpreters (Susam-Saraeva, 2020), these notions have been less central to Accessibility Studies and MA. Some recent examples of positionality statements are Dangerfield et al. (2024), and Tamayo (2024), as well as reflections on the shared space among disabled and non-disabled filmmakers in access coordination (Romero-Fresco, forthcoming). We start from the premise that MA studies are and have traditionally been led by researchers without disabilities¹. Within this context, our first objective was to map existing insider research in MA in English, French, and Spanish. The following combination of keywords was searched on the academic databases Dialnet, HAL, MLA International Bibliography, Scopus, and Web of Science:

(Accessibility OR “media accessibility” OR “universal accessibility” OR “universal design”) AND (autoethnography OR self-representation OR insider research OR user-led research OR Deaf researcher OR blind researcher)
(Accesibilidad OR “accesibilidad universal” OR “accesibilidad universal” OR “diseño universal”) AND (autoetnografía OR autorrepresentación OR investiga* insider OR investigad* sord* OR investigad* cie*)

¹ And while user-centred approaches have taken a central place in MA, other neighboring fields such as communication technologies accessibility are still operating on disability simulations, for instance, without involving users with disabilities at all (Giroux et al., 2022).

(Accessibilité OR “accessibilité audiovisuelle” OR “accessibilité des médias” OR “accessibilité universelle” OR “design universel”) AND (autoethnographie OR autoreprésentation OR recherche insider OR chercheur* insider OR recherche menée par les usagers OR chercheur* sourd* OR chercheur* aveugle)

The keyword search yielded the following results to be screened: 11 for HAL, 3 for MLA, 18 for Scopus, and 347 for Web of Science. The following exclusion criteria were applied:

- the focus is on physical accessibility, transportation accessibility, etc., instead of media, sensory, and communication accessibility;
- accessibility definitions differ from the one used here, i.e. accessibility to economic resources and healthcare;
- user-centred studies are presented where participants act exclusively as respondents or interviewees;
- publications cannot be accessed from the authors' institutions;
- publications are in other languages than English, French, or Spanish;
- conference papers not published as proceedings.

Most of the retrieved publications are unrelated to MA, or they refer to user-centred, but not user-led studies. Healthcare and transportation accessibility from an insider research approach was another frequent topic excluded for the purposes of this article. Ultimately, the review was narrowed down to 19 studies (all in English), listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Publications selected from the literature review

ID	Publication title	Authors	Year
P1	Access on demand: Real-time, multi-modal accessibility for the deaf and hard-of-hearing based on augmented reality	Mathew, Mak & Dannels	2022
P2	Accessible scientific conferences for blind and low vision professionals and researchers: A necessary step for achieving STEMM equity	Rizzo et al.	2024
P3	An autoethnographic case study of generative artificial intelligence's utility for accessibility	Glazko, Yamagami, Mack, Potluri, Xu & Mankoff	2023
P4	An editing process for blind or visually impaired editors	Baker, Nightingale & Bills	2021
P5	Analysis of the level of accessibility of scientific online conferences for blind participants	Arias-Flores, Sanchez-Gordon & Calle-Jimenez	2021
P6	Autoethnography of a hard of hearing traveller	Jain, Desjardins, Findlater, Froehlich	2019
P7	Building bridges with accessible care: Disability studies, feminist care scholarship, and beyond	Kelly	2013
P8	Depending on independence: An autoethnographic account of daily use of assistive technologies	Fussenegger & Spiel	2022
P9	Evaluation of qualitative data analysis software by a visually impaired researcher: An autoethnographic study	Emara	2023
P10	“I am human, just like you”: What intersectional, neurodivergent lived experiences bring to accessibility research	Le	2024
P11	Interview and think aloud accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing participants in design research	Dingman, Tigwell, Shinohara	2021
P12	Living disability theory: Reflections on access, research, and design	Hofmann, Kasnitz, Mankof & Bennett	2020



P13	Managing accessibility conflicts: Importance of an intersectional approach and the involvement of experiential experts	Mogendorff	2023
P14	Mixed abilities and varied experiences: A group autoethnography of a virtual summer internship	Mack et al.	2021
P15	Navigating graduate school with a disability	Jain, Potluri, Sharif	2020
P16	Performing qualitative data analysis as a blind researcher: Challenges, workarounds and design recommendations	Aishwarya	2022
P17	Reflections of a community-based participatory researcher from the intersection of disability advocacy, engineering, and the academy	Raymaker	2017
P18	The odyssey of deaf epistemology: A search for meaning-making	Cue et al.	2019
P19	Using realtime transcription to do member-checking during interviews	Chua & Adams	2014

Source: Authors (2025)

[Table description] Publication ID, publication title, authors and year, in alphabetical order [End description].

For a brief overview, the yielded publications were recent, mostly from the 2020s, and many of them concentrated on the proceedings from the Experience Reports section from the ASSETS conference. Academic journal publications were the second most frequent publication format. In terms of methodological approaches, autoethnography was the most widely used method of enquiry.

In terms of the contents and results of the publications, four categories could be established. First, one of their main aims was to provide recommendations on how to make different aspects of life, and most frequently academic work, more accessible, i.e. in-person (P2) and online academic conferences (P5), graduate school (P15), word processing editors (P4), qualitative data analysis tools (P9 & P16), audio-verbal interviews and think-aloud protocols (P11), virtual work (P14), and real-time transcriptions for interviews (P19). Second, the publications provided first-person accounts of the use and possible improvements of assistive technologies, for instance in travel contexts (P6) and daily life (P8). This is mostly in the field of human-computer interaction. Third, some authors gave advice on how to conduct insider or first-person research (P6, P15, P18). Finally, and perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this study, some publications championed collaboration between accessibility and other fields such as disability studies (P12) and feminist disability studies and care (P7). In this regard, the participant description in the next section precisely underlines that insider researchers working on (media) accessibility do so from a (Critical) Disability Studies perspective.

Since the literature review did not yield publications focused on insider research on MA specifically, this is expanded in the results section to include the publications by the participants in the study.

3. Methodology

The present study deploys 11 semi-structured online interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes each. The interviews were structured around three main topics: the researchers' perspectives on user-led, insider, and lived-experience research; their own personal practices (in the social sciences and humanities), and their experience with academic publishing accessibility. The script from the semi-structured interviews can be found in the "Annex".

A purposive sampling strategy was applied for the study, intended to include researchers from a diversity of geographical locations, level of seniority in academia, and gender. The participants are indeed at several stages of their academic career, from PhD candidates to emeritus professors and retired researchers. However, the sample mostly includes accessibility-adjacent researchers in



European (8), North American (2), and one Northern African institution. Table 2 presents the participating researchers' names, their institutions and a summary of their research interests and academic work.

After careful ethical consideration and with the researchers' explicit consent, we chose to include the names of the participating researchers because, during the interviews, the idea of anonymity was challenged time and time again, in line with some feminist works: "They prefer to disclose their identities so that their authorship and ownership of their own words can be maintained, and their names can contribute to a powerful calling for their groups and communities to work on social change and eliminate social injustice" (Wang et al., 2024, p. 9). In order to avoid any potential harm, we sent participants the quotations that would be attributed to them so that they could modify them if needed. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Committee at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

Table 2: Participants in the interviews

Researcher	Institution	Research background and interests
Cynthia Bruce	Concordia University	Is a blind activist and researcher in Education with a focus on Accessibility, Higher Education and Disability Studies. She works specifically in 3 domains: amplifying minorised voices and diverse voices, making ableism and inequity visible, and creating capacity for change.
Piet Devos	Independent researcher	Has an academic background in Translation Studies, Literary Studies and Latin American Studies, Modern Romance Literature, and Sensory Studies. His research interests are the interconnection between art, literature, the senses, and disability.
Ibrahim Emara	Cairo University	Has an academic background in Journalism and Media. His research interests are accessibility in the media, among others the design of braille magazines, and the use of social media and YouTube by visually impaired people.
Wojciech Figiel	University of Warsaw	Has an academic background in Conference Interpreting and Translation, and his focus has been accessibility of translational professions for visually impaired persons, audio description, and digital accessibility. He is also interested in Disability Studies and Sociology of Translation.
Lourdes González-Perea	Fundación ONCE	Has an academic background in Journalism, Accessible Technologies, and Education and Social Communication, and she has worked in the accessibility industry for many years. Her research interests are accessible technologies, with a recent project on generative AI and involuntary solitude among people with disabilities.
Georgina Kleege	University of California, Berkeley	Describes herself a memoirist and has published academic articles and fiction works on her experience of blindness, others' writings about blindness, blindness and visual art (for instance, visual artists who are blind or visually impaired), and accessibility.
Naiara Larrakoetxea	University of the Basque Country	Has a Political Science background with a PhD in Society, Politics and Culture combined with Deaf Studies (currently a Deaf Studies Incubator Fellow). She works mainly within the community-based participatory research paradigm, intersectionality, Deaf feminism, and linguistic activism (collaborating within minority language projects).
Brígida Maestres	Open University of Catalonia	Has developed an academic career in Sociology and Social Psychology and Public Policy. Currently, she specialises in vision and low vision epistemology and aesthetics, embodied epistemologies, biopolitics, vulnerability, and justice and victimisation.
Laura Moya Santander	University of Zaragoza	Has an academic background in Social Work and Sociology, and she works on Critical Disability Studies, doing discourse analysis on disability and

		researching disability representation and public policies. On accessibility, she has published on ocular-centrism in urban planning and architecture (Moya Santander et al., 2020).
Laura Sanmiquel Molinero	Autonomous University of Barcelona	Is a Social Psychology and a (Critical) Disability Studies researcher that works extensively within the Narrative Production (Balasch & Montenegro, 2003) methodology. She is particularly interested in the construction of disabled subjectivities from a psychosocial approach and an intersectional lens: “how we construct ourselves as subjects in view of the different models of disability, which allow us to reflect on ourselves and how we appropriate the models”.
Bertrand Verine	Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry	Has an academic background in French Language and Literature, as well as Language Sciences. His research interests were formerly on novels of historical awareness, linguistic and narrative analysis, and specifically reported speech. His focus then switched to his true and current interests: sensoriality and discourse around blindness, as well as haptic experience.

Source: Authors (2025)

[Table description] Name of the interviewed researchers (in alphabetical order), institution, and their research backgrounds and interests [End of description].

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and, to analyse the data, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), consisting of a search across the interviews to find repeated patterns of meaning, was utilised. The open coding was performed on Atlas.ti. Reflexive thematic analysis is particularly fruitful in the study of people’s experiences, views and perceptions, and also to understand the social processes and factors that underpin a specific phenomenon (Clarke & Braun, 2017)—which are all key elements in the present study.

The main thematic categories that were found throughout the analysis are gathered into six main sections: 1) positionality as insider researchers: critical, on a case-to-case basis, and consistent positionality; researchers’ own practices regarding positionality statements (4.1), and recommendations for non-disabled researchers regarding positionality statements (4.1); 2) insider research advantages: legitimation of insider researchers’ and participants’ knowledge, experiential proximity, heightened empathy and innovation in terms of research topic selection and discovery (4.2.1); 3) insider research risks: among others, the emotional impact of insider research, and epistemological criticism, complexities in the external perception of insider research, and stigmatisation (4.2); 4) outlooks on participating in other researchers’ studies (4.3); 5) critical stances on accessibility (4.4), and 6) accessibility experiences in research publishing (4.5).

4. Results and discussion

The results and their discussion are presented in the following subsections. Topics around insider research positionality and positionality statements are presented first, followed by a discussion on the benefits and risks of insider research in accessibility and MA. A reflection on participating in others’ research follows. Then, a critical vision of MA informed by lived experience is presented. The final subsection is devoted to the inaccessible aspects of academic publishing.



4.1 Positionality as an insider researcher

In terms of defining their research as insider research, the researchers were consistent in positioning themselves in a nuanced manner. Regarding the themes identified in this category, we may organise the positionings in three groups: critical positionality (within which we place the approaches put forward by Bruce, Sanmiquel Molinero, and Verine), positionality on a case-to-case basis (Kleege, González-Perea, Devos, and Maestres), and explicit and consistent positionality acknowledgements (Figiel and Emara). This subsection then delves into the researchers' practices regarding positionality statements (second theme) and concludes with the third theme: the researchers' outlook on MA non-disabled researchers' positionality statements.

Cynthia Bruce does not tend to talk about her research as insider research, but does consider herself a disabled researcher, a former disabled student, and she does research with disabled scholars and students within a post-structural framework: "I talk about it as centering lived experience. Critical Disability Studies is where my work sits, and that fundamentally as a discipline and a methodology is about centering disabled voices. So I think that's why I just don't talk about it that way".

Laura Sanmiquel Molinero highlights that "you cannot take for granted that, just because you and your participant are both legally categorised as disabled, you are both insiders of the same subject". Instead, this is something that is constructed and deconstructed throughout a research project. Additionally, this positioning is something that is not always defined by the researchers themselves, as she reports that, at times, she has been positioned *by others* as an outsider researcher. Bertrand Verine reflects on his experience both as a researcher on sensoriality and as an activist with a leading role in a blind people organisation. He considers himself an outsider in the current academic world, which is "too visual and too virtual".

Georgina Kleege is interested in the representation and the lived experience of blindness through a humanist lens, not through social science:

One thing that was important to me as a writer of memoirs is to put my own experience in dialogue with other people who are blind and visually impaired, and sometimes that has to do with living people. Sometimes it has to do with the writing of people, and so on, and so forth, and to observe how people represent the experience differently than it is usually represented in fiction or film.

Lourdes González-Perea does not consistently position her research as insider or refers to her lived experience in her academic publications, although she did in her doctoral thesis. In her industry projects and public speaking events, she does highlight the insider aspect more.

Finally, Piet Devos recalls his experience as a student taking a course on visual culture. He had to deliver an essay and chose to base it on his own experience of visual culture. After that, he discovered Disability Studies and the philosophical and critical possibilities that the discipline has to offer and, for instance, chose to deliberately do research on his own experiences of contemporary dance (Devos, 2018). At the beginning of his career, however, it was difficult to find supervisors who were interested in these topics. Brígida Maestres' approach is similar, in the sense that her research is situated in her own experience.



Regarding consistent positionality, Wojciech Figiel does position himself at the beginning of every publication: “This is something I have a stake in because I am myself a visually impaired person and I come from the Central and Eastern European region”. He acknowledges that this does not mean that these experiences are not applicable to others in other regions, but it is something that he always acknowledges.

Ibrahim Emara believes that it is important to state his visual impairment because his work centres around the experience of people with visual disabilities such as bloggers, social media users, etc. and, in his work, he argues:

That it's important to hear the voices of people with visual impairment [because] they have the authority, I use this word, to talk about their issues. They can talk about their lived experiences, it's better to hear from them because they know everything about themselves instead of asking another person to tell us what it's like to be a visually impaired person.

This also applies to his own research. For instance, he has published on the inaccessibility of qualitative data analysis tools (Emara, 2023), informed by his own experience as a journalism researcher. Additionally, he argues that both the lived experience approach and the link between media and disability do not receive much attention in his region of the world, Egypt, where other political topics take the spotlight.

In terms of using positionality statements, Cynthia Bruce always self-identifies as a blind scholar and a lot of her work also centres her own experience on educational contexts. She usually introduces her positionality at the very beginning and in the methodology sections of her publications.

For some of the participants, positioning themselves is a means towards visibility. For Naiara Larrakoetxea, for instance, it depends on the type of research at hand, but for visibility purposes she does include that she is a Deaf woman researcher who uses sign language. Georgina Kleege takes a similar approach: “In some sense, academic research where researchers claim this identity kind of chips away at that stigma. It's saying ‘this is a valuable part of my identity, and it also speaks to my expertise in that subject’. It's a credential. In her own practices, her positionality depends on the context of the work. In publications about access, she always acknowledges her identity as a consumer: “part of it again is sort of political. I don't wanna pose as somebody that I'm just so grateful that I can't express an opinion about how things are done. It's like, you've given me audio description. Thank you. It's not just me, and I don't think it's beneficial”.

Laura Sanmiquel Molinero frames her work and her department's within Haraway's epistemology of situated knowledges: “thus, it's a ‘must’ to position oneself”. She acknowledges the criticism towards confessional reflexivity and puts forward that it is not enough to state that you are disabled because, within this collective, there is great diversity. What's relevant is the epistemological approach from where you present yourself as an insider researcher.

For others, the decision is often to include positionality statements, but it is more contextual. Laura Moya Santander has positioned herself as an insider researcher, but sometimes she has also omitted her embodiment of disability in some focus groups where one of the aims was precisely to assess the participants' discourse on disability. On another occasion, it was a publisher who was against her positioning herself, on the grounds that the article needed to be anonymised. She

acknowledges that in English-speaking contexts, positionality statements are more widespread than in her own country. Piet Devos positions himself consistently, with the exception of some of his earlier research and specifically where he deemed it not particularly relevant for the topic at hand.

Finally, Ibrahim Emara makes his identity explicit to his readers because he found “a power and authority from using this”, but, on the other hand, he does not want his visual impairment to be overemphasised. He does not intend to hide it but does not wish to be perceived as a “supercrip”, “a stereotype narrative displaying the plot of someone who has ‘to fight against his/her impairment’ in order to overcome it and achieve unlikely ‘success’” (Silva & Howe, 2012, p. 178). In his publication on teaching journalism as a lecturer with a visual impairment (Emara, 2024), he makes the argument that he just uses different tools and that does not make him a “great person” or a hero. His aim is also to prove to university administrators that they should accept lecturers with visual disabilities for their qualities and skills. Overall, he does research to have impact and change things; in this sense, he does research advocacy and publication advocacy.

Reflecting on whether academics without disabilities working on accessibility and MA should follow suit and incorporate positionality statements, Cynthia Bruce believes that it is really important that they do. This does not imply that they cannot do this work, as “one of the tenets of disability studies in lots of ways rests on the value of disabled and non-disabled scholars working collaboratively”. She does struggle when non-disabled scholars claim Critical Disability Studies as their field of study, without acknowledging their privileged position and without ensuring the leadership of disabled people, therein, it is relevant to leave space and “allow critical disability studies as a discipline to be really driven by disabled researchers”. Referring to discipline practices and academic tradition customs, Naiara Larrakoetxea acknowledges that, in Spain, positionality statements are less common than in the US, for instance. In specific areas like Critical Disability Studies and Crip Studies, this is a widespread practice.

For Georgina Kleege, the key idea in this regard is that the fact that there are researchers who do not embody a disability or that are not accessibility users is not a problem as long as the people who do embody disability or are accessibility users can increasingly get to that research position: “To me, the political epistemological perspective from which we are working is much more important”. The important thing here is to fight against the barriers that prevent disabled people from accessing research positions.

In the case of Brígida Maestres, she recognises the value of positioning one’s research, but also issues a warning for positionality statements not to become “Catholic confessional booths”, meaning to just continue doing the same research without further reflection or without taking action. What’s more important, according to her, is to reflect on the underlying structures in the academic setting.

Piet Devos does not think positionality statements should be compulsory, but it is always good to see self-reflection. In some of his own articles where he has collaborated with non-blind researchers, they have stated their different contributions to the study in order to diversify their views and voices (Grond & Devos, 2016).

Finally, Wojciech Figiel believes that it would be a good idea for accessibility researchers without disabilities to position themselves because that would reverse “the burden of proof” on the

basis of which researchers with disabilities are often questioned. “You should be warned that what I’m actually saying is based on my perspective as a person who doesn’t have this experience”.

From the nuanced positions towards positionality presented here, some takeaways for MA are the need to amplify studies that are based on lived experience, (with some examples being Kleege & Wallin, 2015; and Cavallo, 2015), the need for all MA researchers to reflect on their epistemological stances (regardless of where they place themselves in the insider-outsider spectrum) while avoiding “performative declarations of positionality in hegemonic contexts” (Gani & Khan, 2024, p. 2), as warned by Maestres, and the need for a more direct dialogue between MA and Disability Studies, where the voices of academics with disabilities have been more central.

4.2 Insider research advantages and risks

4.2.1 Advantages

Previous research has already pointed out an array of advantages in insider approaches. Darwin Holmes (2020, p. 6) cites “easier access to the culture being studied”, “the ability to ask more meaningful or insightful questions”, or a “deeper understanding of the culture”, among others, as possible advantages. Here, we are interested in cross-checking them with the experience of the eleven interviewees.

One first theme in terms of insider research advantages is the legitimization of both the insider researcher’s and the participants’ knowledge. In this regard, Cynthia Bruce reports that her shared lived experience allows her to frame and conduct her work “in ways that are not objectifying of my participants. It’s about situating their lived knowledge as legitimate knowledge in an academic context, where our perspectives are often devalued by simply being framed up as subjective opinions about things”. She can contribute in this regard because of the legitimacy conferred upon her work as an associate professor in a university. Additionally, her lived experience also helps her connect with her participants in ways that would be otherwise impossible without that shared experience: “It provides me with a way of entering into a constructivist and co-constructivist framework with them as we work to construct knowledge”. Overall, it enriches her “capacity to do work that’s meaningful”.

The second theme has to do with experiential proximity. In this regard, Georgina Kleege highlights that in user-led research, the research identifies with the participant; there is a proximity, an absence of a barrier, and there is no need to explain certain things. Ibrahim Emara also argues that rapport between researchers and participants (in interviews and focus groups) is enhanced when they both have a visual impairment, as they share a common area of understanding (see also Emara, 2025). However, this should not condition blind researchers to do research only within the community, as that would be isolating. Experiential proximity also allows the insider researcher to quickly identify problems or relevant research topics: Laura Moya Santander acknowledges that 1) user-led research is faster in terms of identifying a problem or barrier and 2) insiders have easier access to other users that may be interested in participating in a study. Because of these two factors, the research can potentially have a tangible application and impact. Also in terms of impact, Wojciech Figiel, referring to the development of accessibility solutions, has repeatedly observed that solutions



that are made exclusively by non-members of the community are very rarely effective, whereas solutions developed, for instance, by a blind engineer work perfectly: “People think that they are doing us a favour and they are wasting tons of money because they haven’t consulted us, [or] you are invited in the very last moment and then you need to clean up after the normals”. Additionally, “we know how to explain the workings of such a project to a member of our community. We can connect with their experiences”. In this regard, when creating an accessibility solution such as an app, it is fundamental for experts from the community not only to be present in the design and the testing of the solution, but also in writing documentation for the app. It is key for the manual or tutorial to be written by an insider.

The third theme is a heightened empathy or identification that comes with the shared lived experience. In this regard, Piet Devos first highlights the value of first-hand knowledge on the issues around disability, such as accessibility barriers. This also makes one empathetic toward others facing similar, but not necessarily the same, barriers. Second, he has a lived experience of topics around social interaction and stigma, unlike outsiders. Finally, he wants to present himself as a complex person, not highlighting just one fact. In doing insider research you are able to achieve this.

The fourth theme has to do with the exploration of topics that may not be evident for other researchers. For Bertrand Verine, the advantages, specifically of his lived experience research around the sense of touch, are that he feels it is a field that can be useful both for his community of blind people, as well as for general research. His lived experience has prompted him to question the “cult of the visual” and make experiences around touch his main research interest, while for most who do research on touch, it is just a small aspect within a larger study on sensoriality.

Overall, the advantages of insider research in MA according to the interviewed researchers are, first, the legitimization of the insider researcher and the participants’ knowledge. Second is experiential proximity, which fosters common understandings between researchers and participants, helps to find (accessibility) problems more quickly, and offers better, more useful solutions. The third advantage is heightened empathy whenever researchers share their lived experiences with their participants. The fourth and final advantage is the exploration of innovative topics beyond other perhaps more mainstream and normative ones.

4.2.2 Risks

In terms of risks, the literature has also pinpointed some possible elements, such as unknown bias, excessive familiarity, or the fact that “respondents may be less willing to reveal sensitive information than they would be to an outsider who they will have no future contact with” (Darwin Holmes, 2020, p. 6), as possible disadvantages. Here we gather the main risks of insider research identified by the interviewed researchers.

The first risk is the emotional impact that insider research may have on the researcher, if not properly supported. Cynthia Bruce acknowledges that ethics committees always ask researchers to identify risks, but she believes that, in her case, it is more so about the fact that she is researching experiences of oppression. The risks she identifies are the fact that discussions about harm and hardship can be very emotional but, in many ways, this is also a benefit in the sense that it is a validating experience: “When you are in environments that really downplay your experiences of



oppression, that gaslight you at every turn, then coming together with a group of folks who have lived the same kinds of experiences across a real diversity of institutions is really validating”. Similarly, Brígida Maestres proposes that a risk in insider research is the closeness of the experience and the research as a possible source of suffering (for example when dealing with topics such as the violence suffered by the researcher). Looking at oneself from a distance in a context of suffering can be challenging.

Though Wojciech Figiel sees no downsides in user-led research, specifically in the scope of the design of accessible products, he does identify one risk in doing insider research, which is not exclusive to this approach, but is shared by all researchers that conduct social research such as interviews. The researchers face being psychologically impacted by the stories that participants share. Within his community, for instance, many face challenges such as unemployment, low wages, or issues in independent living, and that may impact the researcher if they do not have psychological support. He thus advocates for psychological support for all researchers, especially those undertaking qualitative research on-site, whether they are working with people with disabilities or any other group. Often, the experience is positive because a unique bond is created based on the shared experiences: “I was actually using Pierre Bourdieu’s theory, and there he talks about this similarity of habitus between the researcher and the subject of the research and he says it’s positive because then you can get more information, better information, and you can actually act as an advocate for that person as well”.

The second risk is about the confusing role that the insider researcher may have for the participants, particularly if they know one another or are close. In Naiara Larrakoetxea’s case, her Deaf community is small, and she knows many of its members. When she’s doing research with them, she always introduces her current role as a researcher, not as an association member, for example.

The third risk lies in creating “monolithic” understandings: limiting the lived experience of participants to only one aspect (in this case their disability) or projecting one’s realities onto their participants. For Georgina Kleege, the experience of blindness or race is never monolithic, so she can feel a certain affinity to them, but there are other factors at play such as “gender, nationality, economic status and educational levels” that may be just as significant for a participants’ lived experience, for instance. Following on his reasoning on empathy and shared understandings, Piet Devos first points out that the flip side of this benefit can be becoming too overconfident, believing that, because one is disabled, they will understand the reality of another person. That is something to be cautious about because there are other factors such as the material surroundings and experiences, which are not a monolith. The risk here is to project your reality onto others. Another risk is believing that something is obvious, self-evident and overlooking its relevance or not acknowledging it.

Externally imposed risks are: 1) epistemological criticism, 2) complexities in the external perception of insider research and 3) stigmatisation. First, in Cynthia Bruce’s words, critics to subjectivity come from quantitative paradigms in the sense that “our work can’t be replicated” when “none of us are looking to replicate. We’re looking to broaden and deepen the body of knowledge in the academy that is co-constructed by disabled people”. Second, Laura Sanmiquel Molinero refers mostly to two other aspects which need to be problematized and which are related to complexities



in external perception: On the one hand, her partaking in insider research has allowed her to enter certain spaces, even if the reason why is because she has been understood to be a “harmless researcher” due to underlying ableist beliefs. It has also prevented her from entering other research spaces. What is important here is to reflect on which research spaces one is able to access, and which are vetoed. On the other hand, there are complexities around proximity, “as it can be assumed that everything that is done from an insider perspective will be in favour of the interests of your collective”. This is not always true, as insider research could also be done from a supercrip perspective or through an inspirational porn lens, following Stella Young’s terminology. What is relevant is the researchers’ interpretative framework.

For Bertrand Verine, the risks in insider research in the scope of disability lie in stigmatisation: being perceived as a blind person, rather than a researcher (and being assumed to be interested in a research topic because of this). One may be suspected of not being representative. Critics will argue that the sense of touch is only relevant for blind people, and that the rest of the world does not care about it. These sorts of representations need to be avoided and, to argue that touch is a worthy subject of research not just for blind people, he points to an array of professions where touch is key: artists and craftspeople, medical doctors, divers.

Finally, Ibrahim Emara uses the autoethnography method in his research, but a disadvantage that he found is that for a long time many journals would reject this approach, critiquing a “lack of methodology”.

The risks are, thus, the emotional impact of insider research (and others), the unclear role of the researcher if they are well acquainted with the participants, the “monolithisation” of the shared lived experience, and three externally imposed risks, namely epistemological criticism, complexities in the external perception of insider research, and stigmatisation. For most of the researchers, the risks can actually be tackled or resolved (through epistemological reflection, through collaboration, through psychological support, etc.) and the general argument is that the benefits of insider research outweigh the disadvantages.

4.3 Participating in others’ research

In this subsection, we will explore the reasons why the researchers choose to participate (or not) as informants in others’ studies, how they reflect on past experiences, and how they relate those experiences to their own research including informants.

Because Cynthia Bruce is genuinely committed to amplifying disabled voices and their presence in a variety of disciplines, “I can’t just be the researcher, I also need and want to be the participant. I don’t want to do it only from one position”. In her experience, she has been able to bring her lived experience to domains that are very different from her own research.

Naiara Larrakoetxea acknowledges that people with disabilities receive many invitations, but they never receive the results. The published results are often very inaccessible to Deaf people (and even some questionnaires are sometimes too complicated). She believes in bidirectional communication in research, as it takes time to participate, sometimes even having to organise the accessibility of the interview/research activity oneself as an informant.



Georgina Kleege does not necessarily assume that a researcher who is not blind or visually impaired cannot understand or they are starting at a distance. She believes that knowledge can be acquired through sufficient study, so she does participate in others' research. It is important, however, that researchers do not approach her just because of her visual impairment. She no longer participates in focus groups where "they bring in a bunch of people and what they're asking you is minimal, they're saying, do you like the round button or the square button? And I can deliver an opinion. But is that really all you want to know from me? It takes on a kind of insulting quality". In her view, these practices need to evolve in the sense that researchers or designers ought to start from scratch, not just evaluate the accessibility of the product, service, or environment. She also believes that researchers need to embrace a diversity of opinions, "because what I might say about audio description will be radically different from the next person. And how do you reconcile those things?" She puts forward a positive example where the National Federation of the Blind in the USA was designing a museum, and they brought together a group to brainstorm ideas about how to create an accessible museum from the ground up. This is more enriching "rather than saying that we already have decided this thing, and we just want your small number of inputs. That's not gonna yield good results".

Laura Sanmiquel Molinero reflects on the methodological approach she applies in her own research (Narrative Production). Its aim is to horizontalize the power relations in research and to subvert the traditional logics of social research. For instance, in interviews, literal transcriptions are typically used. This produces an asymmetry between the researcher's structured, intellectually elevated academic discourse in a publication and the oral discourse of the participant that is cited. The status of these texts is not the same. Through Narrative Production, participants and researchers work together to create a coherent, finished transcription that can be cited and stand on its own. As for her own participation in others' research, she always takes into consideration the research team's approach, specifically a critical disability approach, a non-medicalising approach, and a vision outside inspirational porn. Her experience thus far has been positive.

Brígida Maestres' perspective goes against an "extractionist model" where the researcher is the owner of the knowledge and utilises the users, sometimes even infantilising them, erasing them from the academic publications themselves. She problematises the possibility of establishing truly horizontal researcher-researched relations, and the intentions behind accessibility research.

Laura Moya Santander recognises that many researchers keep repeatedly inviting the same people, and that can be overwhelming for participants.

Bertrand Verine reports that he has struggled to find research participants himself, so he participates in others' studies on the basis of empathy and on topics that interest him as a citizen (for instance, accessibility). He has had some issues with experimental psychology studies which compare sight and touch outcomes in quantitative terms. In this regard, he feels closer to psychologist studies informed by cognitivism, anthropology, diversity, and first-person experiences.

Lourdes González-Perea has also participated in other researchers' studies many times. Nonetheless, she pinpoints some specific issues that she has come across: the inaccessibility of consent forms, which often have a tricky design in terms of where to place the signature. She would rather ethical committees accept other forms of consent, such as recorded consent or consent

through e-mail. Other aspects she has come across are the lack of planning for live subtitling or sign language interpreting, or accessibility issues when sharing a screen in a virtual interview.

Wojciech Figiel is willing to collaborate with other researchers as an informant as long as they are sensitive to the collective's needs and, importantly, are willing to give up their platform and have a positive impact on their career. He does question the erasure of participants with disability in research projects where the participants' contributions are anonymised. In some way, these ideas are "stolen" from expert users on the basis of ethical clearance: "I think we should give them the option to reveal their identity because they will be telling us important things which are their invention, not ours, which are their thoughts, their ideas, and they should be attributed to them". Importantly, participants should receive fair compensation for their expert input. In sum, he thinks it is crucial for the principle to "involve disabled people as PIs, principal investigators and leaders, project leaders, with a decisive vote on the way the project is implemented" to be mainstreamed in accessibility research. He cites the Be My Eyes application as an example of good practices, as it is an app led by blind people and all important decisions therein are taken by members of the community:

This is reflected in the way they approach privacy; the steps they take to safeguard our interests. Who else is able to safeguard our needs and interests, if not ourselves? It doesn't always work, there are members of the community that are doing harm to our interests, but still, I would defend it as a principle.

Finally, while non-user led research also has value, he believes that serious research that takes informants from the target groups should be reviewed by an anonymous peer reviewer with lived experience.

Ibrahim Emara believes that reversing roles in academia is an enriching experience. However, reflecting on his experience participating in experiments as a child in a school for blind students, he recalls some "hungry for data" practices that take an emotional toll on participants, particularly when discussing sensitive topics.

It is extremely relevant, then, to be updated with the bibliography and the previous research done by other disabled academics instead of asking them to participate in any MA research, particularly when it was not initiated by members of the community. The aim is ultimately to give up power and agency to insider researchers.

4.4 Against access?

Cynthia Bruce was the first to introduce some takeaways that often go unacknowledged in MA because most researchers in the area hold certain assumptions:

I just think there are things that non-disabled researchers are going to miss. When I think about myself and my kind of connection to audio description, the assumption from sighted folks is that I love audio description. For everything. And I actually don't. Which doesn't mean it shouldn't exist. But I find it exhausting.



She cites *Crip Camp* as a good practice example of AD, where the information provided is really relevant. She cites “every silence being filled” as one of the reasons why she finds audio description exhausting. Similarly, Georgina Kleege does not generally like film AD and believes the developments of museum AD are closer to what people want to know (of course, bearing in mind that these modalities do not share the same time constraints).

Bruce recommends the essay that gives the title to this subsection: “Against Access” by John Lee Clark (2021): “Often the able-bodied people who provide access are providing the access that they think they would want and they’re not necessarily taking into consideration the desires of the end user”. As a general conclusion, Bruce highlights that

If the goal of access is to make the culture more inclusive, it means that the culture is going to change. And change is very scary to people. And you sort of need to acknowledge that, so you’re providing access to a group, but in doing so, that group is going to have something to bring back. They’re going to bring in a different perspective that hasn’t been acknowledged before. And if it really happens, changes things radically, makes things radically different. I just think there are things that non-disabled researchers are going to miss.

For Kleege, it is important to acknowledge that that is the goal, and it is not going to come top down; it is blind people who are going to tell us what we need to know and not the other way around.

Brígida Maestres also puts forward a critical vision on accessibility. Those who create access “depart from the fact that the world needs to be accessible to others, they don’t bother reflecting on why that world is only made in the image of some”. Also in terms of the real impact of research on accessibility, she questions the value of calling a number of disabled people organisations, abusing their time and drafting three paragraphs from their ideas. “All that for a paper that very few people are going to read”.

For Bertrand Verine, only two senses are currently being cultivated by human beings in the West, sight and hearing, and “we try to abolish, to amputate the rest”. In his view, blind people would benefit from placing the other three senses in the centre of their lives. There is “such a cult of normality and a horror towards difference that the goal is always to give blind people access to the visual. That does not interest me, although it does from a research perspective, to verify the imperialism of sight”. As Bruce, he will always defend others’ interest in visual culture, no matter how alienating it may seem for him, and will go as far as organising a photography workshop because, in his association, there were members who were interested. He himself is interested in what he can share with others: touch, taste, smell, and he champions those in his research.

These perspectives (as well as those put forward in Chottin & Thompson, 2021; Cavallo, 2015, and many others) are extremely relevant to MA, and the traditional consultancy and passive research format where participants are just asked for their opinion on a design feature will simply not nurture them.

4.5 Accessibility issues in the process of publishing

Accessibility issues proved to be consistent with many of the interviewed researchers, particularly among those who use screen readers, as amplified below. Some of the researchers also



reflected on the accessibility of their research for other members of their community, and a direct comparison was established between practices in Disability Studies publication avenues and other disciplines. The results are first presented narratively and, afterwards, Table 3 gathers the main accessibility issues discussed by the researchers and their possible solutions, if proposed.

For Georgina Kleege, the issues in academic publishing have changed throughout the years. In the nineties, journals had preconceptions about the work submitted (they assumed “this is just gonna be somebody talking about the tragedy of blindness”). Now the issues lie more so in the inaccessibility of submission portals and the prioritisation of design and established aesthetics over access in some (mainstream) avenues.

Laura Sanmiquel Molinero reflects mostly on the accessibility of her own publications. For instance, she acknowledges that most of them are in English (which negatively impacts her participants’ linguistic accessibility to the results). However, her publication with the most impact (potentially also among her participants) is in her native Spanish. As one secures a tenured position, she argues, it becomes more feasible to choose more accessible avenues of publication.

Also in terms of linguistic accessibility and linguistic rights, Naiara Larrakoetxea does not report accessibility barriers in publishing but finds academic publications very inaccessible for the deaf community in general. She cites signed PhDs in Brazil as a good practice, along with publications in oral and sign languages, as was the case in this very journal’s special issue “*Sign Language Translation and Interpreting Studies: contemporary remarks, perspectives and challenges*” (see Rodrigues et al., 2021a; Rodrigues et al., 2021b). However, she acknowledges that the simultaneous publication of articles in an oral and a sign language require twice the amount of work and cites reach as a reason there are not many academic publications in sign language.

Laura Moya Santander now collaborates recurrently with the same co-authors, and they take on the formatting of their publications, which is a particularly inaccessible process. She also highlights the reviewing process as inaccessible, because of the comment and track-changes format (which Piet Devos also highlights), as well as inaccessible submission portals and inaccessible citation and reference management software (which Wojciech Figiel also highlights, though he acknowledges that the 7th edition of Zotero has made some progress in terms of accessibility). The published papers themselves are often inaccessible. Cynthia Bruce also comments on this, and she adds that citing a specific page number proves to be difficult.

For Brígida Maestres, the academic world is profoundly visual, and it was even more so when journals were only available in print, but the visual aspect remains. She finds podcasts useful and would like to see more audio-format academic journals in the future. In any case, as she finds academia to be an obsolete institution, she believes that it will have to move towards sensory accessibility. As it is, Maestres points out that academic writing in particular is soulless, not just inaccessible. For her, academic publishing also has to change in terms of overcoming “doing anything to get a paper out of it”.

For Bertrand Verine, academic publishing poses accessibility barriers linked to the visual hegemony in research publications and processes. These barriers also make the process longer and

if he has to gain time he will ask others for help, also through the program “forfait Cécité”². Additionally, he reflects on the lack of accessibility of older texts, which are often digitised through inaccessible scans, and cannot be accessed with his text-to-speech reader. In general, all of the cited factors have influenced him to turn to slow science (Stengers, 2018), where one is “less overwhelmed with information and can concentrate more on the limited information that we can analyse in depth”. Wojciech Figiel similarly criticises the competitive and ableist logic that dominates academia, as researchers with disabilities will always be at a disadvantage because they require more funding for assistance in attending conferences, publishing, or doing field research. Travel costs for an assistant also add up in this regard, and this is a virtually unaddressed issue that is preventing them from advancing their academic careers. Besides specific publishing issues, Cynthia Bruce also highlights the importance of human help, beyond independence.

Similarly to Bruce, Lourdes González-Perea highlights the inaccessibility of some journal templates and reviewed versions of her articles. Often, she has had other people help her with this, but she thinks this is a tedious process for all researchers that should be undertaken by the journals themselves. She also mentions inaccessible databases and the platform to upload one’s PhD thesis.

Also in terms of specifics, Wojciech Figiel highlights the inaccessibility of adding endnotes and footnotes, formatting aspects such as headings, the comment system in Microsoft Word, and reference lists. All of them are a burden in terms of the time needed.

Ibrahim Emara recalls that websites and submission platforms from academic journals are inaccessible (for instance, to upload the manuscript, it is necessary to drag the document into a box) and one has to reach out to the editorial team directly for assistance. Beyond this, language barriers are also to be cited as accessibility barriers.

Beyond academic publishing, Piet Devos highlights the relevance of insider researchers and researchers with disabilities being involved in project evaluations and funding commissions, to take part in that decision-making process and avoid gatekeeping.

As for the difference between Disability Studies journals and those stemming from other disciplines, Cynthia Bruce appreciates the process of publishing in Disability Studies journals because they require accessible formats, described tables and images. Often, they also publish simplified PDF or HTML versions. She also favours open access as “the best way to disseminate knowledge”.

Naiara Larrakoetxea has had a similar experience, and that is why she generally prioritises Deaf Studies conferences over Political Science conferences, oftentimes due to the former being held in sign language (with participants signing in International Sign), and thus not depending on the quality or the lack of interpreting. Negative experiences around accessibility conferences (beyond accessibility of slides and presentations), mostly in disciplines outside of Disability Studies, are brought up by virtually all participants.

Ibrahim Emara has found discriminatory practices towards research from disabled people in Media, Journalism, and Communication academic journals, as they usually reject articles from this perspective. He feels that they are “pushing us to submit our works to disability journals only”. In many studies, he does wish to target a Journalism and Media audience, and this is why he pushes to

² In France, blind and partially blind people can be granted a fixed rate to hire different services for a set number of hours per month under the “forfait Cécité” (see <https://www.monparcours handicap.gouv.fr/aides/les-3-forfaits-de-la-pch-surdite-cecite-et-surdicecite>).

be published in journals from his original disciplines. A similar experience is put forward by Cynthia Bruce, who has found general Higher Education publications to be devaluing of accessibility work: “it was just a desk rejection because they said it needed to have a higher education literature focus, not disability studies literature”.

We conclude this section by gathering the main accessibility issues encountered by the researchers in academic publishing and other aspects of academic work in Table 3.

Table 3: Accessibility issues in academic publishing

Accessibility issues	Solution
Dominating ableist logic in academia	Slow academia
	Funding for human support and assistance
(Past) prejudice against lived experience research or lack of interest among funding institutions	Presence of researchers with disabilities in project evaluations and funding commissions
Linguistic accessibility	Publications in the participants' own languages
	Publications in sign languages
Inaccessibility of article/conference submission platforms	
Formatting of academic publications and inaccessible templates	Formatting done by co-authors
	Accessible formats, described tables and images
	Simplified PDF or HTML versions
Inaccessible scientific software (Emara, 2023)	
Inaccessible citation and reference management software	
Review process of academic publications	Alternatives to track changes
Inaccessible published papers (particularly older texts)	Journals in audio format
	Open access publications

Source: Authors (2025)

[Table description] Accessibility issues in academic publishing in the left column, accompanied by their possible solutions in the right column, if proposed by the interviewed researchers [End of description].

Aside from the summary of accessibility issues in academic publishing, it is worth concluding this section by calling all disciplines beyond Disability Studies to challenge the ableist assumptions which deem disability topics as “unrelated” or outside their scope. We agree with Emara and Bruce in that accessibility work (and insider research) needs to be integrated and permeate other disciplines and not remain encapsulated in Disability Studies or even MA.

5. Conclusions

To date, insider, lived experience, and user-led research has not had lengthy coverage in the field of MA, as demonstrated by the literature review and, often, it is not positioned or labelled as such, perhaps because of the nuanced understanding of positionality shared by the interviewed researchers in the current study. As researchers without sensory disabilities, we have often wondered why there are not more publications written (in English or other languages) from the perspectives of lived experience researchers sharing issues with Audiovisual Translation and MA studies. We decided that asking them why directly through these series of interviews—and purposely removing anonymity—would be instructive not only for us but also for others in MA. If our field is to be truly user-centred, then it must amplify insider expert research through collaboration, leadership, and true participation at all stages of the creative, design, artistic,



management, and research processes. In this sense, MA could potentially lean into the (also) interdisciplinary area of Disability Studies, where many of the insider researchers interviewed for this study have found an epistemological approach that is consistent with their worldview.

Some of the takeaways from this study are that, first, positionality is relevant throughout the entire insider-outsider spectrum in MA and that it deserves a nuanced understanding and reflection, as many complex elements come into play (visibility and self-reflection, but also stigma and performativity). Second, the benefits and risks of insider research should be reflected upon in other epistemologies in place in MA. Specifically, the experiences of the researchers as informants must serve to make us reflect on practices in current user-centred studies. Third, for some of its users, traditional accessibility services are not relevant or enjoyable, or they do not adhere to their worldview, and we should be accounting for greater diversity (and agency and radical change) in access provision. Finally, accessibility barriers in academic publishing are yet another manifestation of institutional ableism and, in Translation Studies and MA, we have the opportunity to place ourselves at the forefront of accessibility.

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Annex: Semi-structured interview script

Topic 1: Warmup questions and background

- What is your education and professional background?
- How would you summarize your past and current research interests?

Topic 2: User-led, insider and lived-experience research

- What do you think are the benefits of user-led, insider or lived-experience research?
- What do you think are the risks of user-led, insider or lived-experience research?
- As the subfield media accessibility continues to evolve towards user-centric approaches, which approaches do you consider fruitful and why? (From studies assessing informants' input without their involvement in the study design to community-based participatory research and user-led research).
- If you have ever participated in other researchers' studies as an informant, how do you reflect on that experience?

Topic 3: Personal practices

- Why did you decide to undertake user-led research?
- In what ways does your lived experience shape your research?
- How do you acknowledge your identity as an academic with a disability in your publications, if you do?
- How should others acknowledge their identity as an academic without disabilities working on accessibility?



Topic 4: Improving the accessibility of academic publishing

- How is the process of academic publishing accessible or inaccessible, in your experience?
- What aspects of academic work would you change?
- Additional question: Would you like to touch on any topic that we have not covered throughout the interview?

Notes

Authorship contribution

Conceptualization: I. Hermosa-Ramírez, M. Boukala

Data collection: I. Hermosa-Ramírez

Data analysis: I. Hermosa-Ramírez

Results and discussion: I. Hermosa-Ramírez, M. Boukala

Review and editing: M. Boukala

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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 author upon request.

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Textos que desassossegam o corpo e a mente: tradução audiovisual e emoção na percepção de tradutoras

Texts that unsettle the body and mind: Audiovisual translation and emotion as perceived by female translators

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Resumo: Este trabalho pretende analisar as ligações intrínsecas e indissociáveis entre pensamento e corpo, cognição e sensibilidade que aparecem em excertos de narrativas de tradutoras profissionais provenientes de entrevistas e questionários on-line sobre suas atuações na tradução de dublagem e de legendas de vídeos de diversos gêneros, tais como documentários, novelas e filmes. Três eixos principais de investigação aparecem no recorte selecionado: a somatização das emoções no corpo (Robinson, 2003, 2020), a preocupação com a interferência das emoções no processo e nas escolhas tradutórias (Lima & Pisetta, 2023; Lima & Pimentel, 2024a) e as possíveis consequências do reconhecimento da intervenção das emoções para os agentes envolvidos no processo. As narrativas ontológicas (Baker, 2006) são o ponto de partida para as discussões sobre as percepções das tradutoras sobre os impactos emocionais e confirmam que elas recorrem ao uso de estratégias específicas na tradução de materiais audiovisuais (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2022). Além disso, uma leitura atenta dessas narrativas mostra que há uma responsabilidade (Derrida, 2006) e uma preocupação ética (Berman, 2007) face aos conteúdos que provocam alguma perturbação emotiva e, embora as emoções sejam experiências individuais, estão inscritas em contextos sociais e são diretamente relacionadas a emoções compartilhadas e coletivas (Ahmed, 2014). Em última instância, o artigo mostra que o estudo da influência das emoções na tradução pode auxiliar na compreensão do papel de quem traduz e no entendimento das escolhas tradutórias nas esferas cultural, social e política.

Palavras-chave: emoção; experiências tradutórias; narrativas de tradutoras; tradução audiovisual.



Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the intrinsic and inseparable connection between mind and body, cognition and sensibility, as evidenced by excerpts from professional female translators' narratives derived from interviews and an online survey consisting of open-ended questions about their work in translating video dubbing and subtitles for different genres, such as documentary, soap opera, and movies. Three main areas of research arise from the chosen section: how emotions are expressed in the body (Robinson, 2003, 2020), how emotions influence the translation process and decisions (Lima & Pisetta, 2023; Lima & Pimentel, 2024a), and the emotional consequences for translators and those involved in the process. Discussions about how translators perceive emotional impacts begin with ontological narratives (Baker, 2006), which confirm that translators use specific techniques when translating audiovisual materials (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2022). Furthermore, a close reading of these narratives reveals responsibility (Derrida, 2006) and an ethical concern (Berman, 2007) to address content that causes emotional distress, and although emotions are individual experiences, they are embedded in social contexts and closely linked to shared and collective emotions (Ahmed, 2014). The article concludes by suggesting that recognizing the impact of emotions on translation could contribute to a better understanding of the translator's role and the decision-making process in cultural, social, and political contexts.

Keywords: emotion; translation experiences; translators' narratives; audiovisual translation.

I. Estudos da tradução e o papel de quem traduz

*A pessoa que traduz não é alguém cuja tarefa
é conservar algo, mas propagar, espalhar
e desenvolver: tradutoras e tradutores
são agentes de mudança
(Chesterman, 1997, p. 2)¹.*

The Name and Nature of Translation Studies, de Holmes (1972/2000) é um marco na área que retoma algumas nomenclaturas usadas para referenciar o estudo da tradução, tais como tradutologia, ciências, filosofia, arte, fundamentos e princípios da tradução. Também nessa obra, o autor propõe que se nomeie o campo como Estudos da Tradução (*Translation Studies*), elencando possíveis subáreas que depois foram resumidas no clássico mapa (na figura proposta por Toury). Na ocasião divididos em dois grandes grupos – puro e aplicado –, os Estudos da Tradução foram ampliados e passaram por diversas “viradas”, por exemplo, cultural, tecnológica, pragmática e sociológica (Snell-Hornby, 2006), que trouxeram mais especificações e desenvolvimento às subdivisões iniciais. De maneira geral, os estudos aplicados abrangem a formação de tradutoras e tradutores, ferramentas, políticas e crítica de tradução, enquanto os puros são divididos em teóricos (gerais ou parciais, restritos ao meio, à área, à categoria, ao tipo de texto, ao tempo e ao problema) e descritivos (orientados ao produto, ao processo ou à função).

¹ Textos indicados na língua original em nota de rodapé foram traduzidos por mim. No original: “A translator is not someone whose task is to conserve something but to propagate something, to spread and develop it; translators are agents of change” (Chesterman, 1997, p. 2).

Revisitando o mapa mais de 30 anos depois da primeira proposta, Chesterman sugere uma subárea, os Estudos do Tradutor (*Translator Studies*)², nos quais “os textos são secundários, os tradutores são a fonte primária de estudo” (Chesterman, 2015, p. 36). Ele relaciona esses estudos à virada sociológica da tradução, que abrange desde o “estatuto de diferentes tipos de tradutores em culturas distintas, a remuneração, condições de trabalho, modelos e hábitos do tradutor” até “a prova da imagem pública da profissão de tradutor” (Chesterman, 2015, p. 37).

Os estudos e as pesquisas sobre a tradutora ou o tradutor como agente já existiam antes de haver um nome específico para isso – assim como há séculos existiam os estudos da tradução com nomenclaturas variadas. Douglas Robinson, por exemplo, havia publicado *The Translator's Turn* (1991) que, como lembra John Schmitz (2012), é um título propositalmente ambíguo, uma vez que *turn* tanto pode significar que é a vez do tradutor (o momento em que ele assume o protagonismo), como pode significar aquilo que o tradutor faz (*to turn* como tradução do grego *tropein* e do latim *vertere*).

Na época da publicação, Robinson (1991), foi criticado por enfatizar a emoção, intuição e sentimento da pessoa que traduz em contraponto ao pensamento e à razão, e por propor que a tradutora e o tradutor passam por experiências idiossômáticas com a tradução, que diz respeito a reações sentidas no corpo, individualmente (por isso somáticas), que repercutem em marcas reguladas coletivamente (ideossômáticas), dialogando com os marcadores somáticos de António Damásio (2012), para o qual o corpo responde somaticamente a estímulos externos de acordo com a subjetividade da percepção em relação a determinado objeto³. Mais recentemente, Robinson defende que a tradução

É uma atividade afetiva, determinada por regras do que e de como as pessoas *sentem* (se gostam do que estão fazendo). Mas também é uma atividade cognitiva, uma atividade *inteligente*, regulada por regras de como as pessoas aprendem e como usam o que aprendem: como as tradutoras e os tradutores desenvolvem suas preferências e hábitos idiossincráticos em um processo geral para transformar textos de partida em textos traduzidos bem-sucedidos (Robinson, 2020, p. 52)⁴.

Essas declarações de Robinson remetem ao aspecto performativo da linguagem (Austin, 1990), à ideia de que a pessoa que traduz sente e age na sua língua e na língua do outro, bem como a uma das afirmações mais citadas de Derrida no que diz respeito à tradução:

Nos limites em que ela é possível, em que ela, ao menos, parece possível, a tradução pratica a diferença entre significado e significante. Mas, se essa diferença nunca é pura, tampouco o é a tradução, e seria necessário substituir a noção de tradução pela de transformação: uma transformação regulada de uma língua por outra, de um texto por outro (Derrida, (1972/2002, p. 26).

² Sempre que possível priorizei o uso da linguagem inclusiva, como adotado em projetos anteriores (explicado, por exemplo, em Lima & Pimentel, 2024b, 2024c). Mantive o padrão masculino quando são retomadas traduções já publicadas em português.

³ A relação entre os pensamentos de Robinson, Damásio e Austin foi desenvolvida em Lima e Pimentel (2024a).

⁴ “It is an affective activity, governed by the rules of what and how individuals *feel* (whether they enjoy what they’re doing). But it is also a cognitive activity, an *intelligent* activity, governed by the rules of how people learn, and how they use what they learn: how translators develop their own idiosyncratic preferences and habits into a general procedure for transforming source texts into successful target texts” (Robinson, 2020, p. 52).

A tradução, portanto, é uma transformação regulada em diversos sentidos – inclusive pela afetividade, como defende Robinson (2020), reverberando a ideia de Didi-Huberman (2021, p. 38) de que as emoções “são também transformações daqueles e daquelas que se emocionam”. Traduzir, portanto, é escrever um novo texto, que requer criações na língua de chegada, considerando a historicidade de cada palavra e as complexas interconexões textuais que a envolvem. Esse processo decorre de uma interpretação, na qual os sentidos são constantemente construídos e reconstruídos a partir da leitura de quem traduz, transformando o texto de partida em um texto traduzido em uma determinada época e com determinados propósitos. Nessa esteira, entendemos a tradução como uma “construção do comparável” (Ricoeur, 2011, p. 68) que mostra a relação inevitável entre as línguas, ampliando o conhecimento que temos da que é, para nós, a nossa própria língua.

Em 2016, Robinson retoma as críticas feitas ao aspecto somático da tradução explicando que colocou os sentimentos no centro dos argumentos, mas que “muitos leitores não perceberam a regulação social dos sentimentos, e, portanto, dos pensamentos, crenças e práticas” (Robinson, 2016, p. 299)⁵. Ainda segundo o autor, havia um meio-termo entre materialismo e idealismo, entre objetividade científica e subjetividade solipsista que foi igualmente ignorado.

Mais do que se apropriar de uma língua, mesmo que essa apropriação nunca seja completa, a pessoa tradutora vive e transita *entre* línguas, conectando diferenças em tempos e espaços distintos, mostrando a instabilidade dos sentidos e a impossibilidade de um significado único e transcendental, que são concepções que têm sido questionadas há anos, mas que passaram a ser mais debatidas a partir do que se nomeou o pensamento pós-estruturalista. Parafraseando o conhecido livro de Austin (1990) sobre os atos de fala, podemos dizer que quem traduz faz coisas com palavras. Ricoeur também recorre à ideia do performativo quando pergunta: “Como faz um tradutor? Emprego propositalmente o verbo ‘fazer’. Pois é com um ‘fazer’, à procura de sua teoria, que o tradutor ultrapassa o obstáculo – e mesmo a objeção teórica – da intraduzibilidade de princípio de uma língua a outra” (Ricoeur, 2011, p. 62).

Quem traduz contra-assina esse novo texto, garantindo a sobrevivência por meio de possibilidades de tradução, colocando em ação “um saber muito peculiar, um saber das relações com e entre obras, línguas, culturas⁶. Um saber (que é também um saber-fazer) dos limites e diferenças entre o próprio e o estrangeiro” (Veras, 2021, p. 264).

A tradução é um processo relacional complexo de negociação entre diferentes línguas, culturas e pessoas, e a tradutora e o tradutor são agentes políticos responsáveis eticamente por suas escolhas, inclusive teóricas, em cada projeto tradutório. Nesse sentido, a hermenêutica, como “reflexão filosófica universal sobre o caráter linguístico de nossa experiência do mundo” (Gadamer, 2003, p. 576) nos auxilia a entender que não é apenas nosso olhar que modifica uma obra, mas a obra também muda o nosso olhar. Em tal perspectiva, o entendimento se elabora por antecipações constitutivas, uma vez que toda interpretação é perpassada pelo nosso ponto de vista, por aquilo

⁵ “The social regulation of feelings, and thus of thoughts and beliefs and practices, is what many readers missed” (Robinson, 2016, p. 299).

⁶ Derrida chama de contra-assinatura o convite à leitura, como um gesto de hospitalidade, que envolve tanto o distanciamento quanto a proximidade do outro: “deixar espaço ao outro para uma intervenção pela qual ele poderá escrever sua própria interpretação: o outro terá que ser capaz de assinar meu texto” (2001, p. 31).

que sabemos de um determinado contexto, de um determinado tempo histórico, que se funde com o conhecimento que temos do presente.

O exemplo do tradutor que tem de superar o abismo das línguas mostra, com particular clareza, a relação recíproca que se desenvolve entre o intérprete e o texto, que corresponde à reciprocidade do acordo na conversação. Pois, todo tradutor é intérprete. O fato de que algo esteja numa língua estrangeira significa somente um caso elevado de dificuldade hermenêutica (...) Como toda interpretação, a tradução implica uma reiluminação. Quem traduz tem de assumir a responsabilidade dessa reiluminação (Gadamer, 2003, p. 562).

“Todo tradutor é intérprete” e, como tal, “é pressuposto ineludível do intérprete que ele participe do seu sentido” (Gadamer, 2003, p. 565), pois não existe “observador neutro” ou uma mera determinação objetiva da verdade, já que a hermenêutica é a arte de ser capaz de ouvir, de entender e ser entendido em uma rede de sentidos. Gadamer (2003) lembra que uma teoria de interpretação de textos tem um significado muito mais amplo do que apenas se limitar a textos, e a hermenêutica lida com o texto do mundo, ou talvez até mesmo com o texto da história do mundo.

A tarefa de quem traduz, então, é ser capaz de assinar o texto traduzido considerando que cada língua tem suas especificidades. Essa responsabilidade tem gerado discussões em torno de uma ética do traduzir que, nas palavras de Berman (2007, p. 68), pode ser entendida como “reconhecer e receber o Outro enquanto Outro. [...] Acolher o Outro, o estrangeiro, em vez de rejeitá-lo ou de tentar dominá-lo”.

Essas considerações sobre a tradução como uma complexa prática da diferença e sobre o papel da pessoa tradutora como produtora de sentidos que está sempre entre duas línguas, culturas e histórias, visam mostrar, de maneira bastante rápida, a relevância da tradução como prática interrogativa e do pensamento sobre a tradução como um lugar questionador que vai muito além das tradicionais crenças sobre fidelidade, imparcialidade e neutralidade de quem traduz. Assim, em consonância com os Estudos do Tradutor propostos por Chesterman (2015) que, entre outros aspectos, abrangem o discurso público e individual da profissão, e compreendem o estudo de ideologias, ética, emoções e atitudes; e em consonância com uma abordagem hermenêutica da tradução, este artigo apresenta algumas narrativas de tradutoras e visa analisar os efeitos da emoção que essas profissionais perceberam após terminarem a tradução de legendas ou textos para dublagem.

Os excertos analisados são provenientes de questionários on-line e/ou de entrevistas individuais com quatro tradutoras, como será explicitado na seção de metodologia. Nesse sentido, considera-se que este estudo, caracterizado como etnográfico e qualitativo, insere-se, ainda, na virada sociológica da tradução audiovisual, que tem como “principal objetivo analisar a figura e o papel da tradutora e do tradutor, suas condições de trabalho, seu *habitus*, o chamado capital simbólico – cujo valor pode ser reduzido ou ampliado pelo contexto histórico em que é acumulado”⁷ (Chaume, 2018, p. 51).

⁷ “The main objective of analysing the figure and role of the translator, their work conditions, their habitus, the so-called symbolic capital – the value of which may be restricted or aggrandized by the historical context in which it is accumulated” (Chaume, 2018, p. 51).

São abordados três eixos principais: a somatização das emoções no corpo (Robinson, 2003, 2020), a preocupação com a interferência das emoções no processo e nas escolhas tradutórias (Lima & Pisetta, 2023; Lima & Pimentel, 2024a) e as possíveis consequências do reconhecimento da intervenção das emoções para agentes que participam do processo (tradutoras, tradutores, gerentes, clientes, público etc.). O artigo começa com uma contextualização sobre os estudos da emoção e a análise de narrativas ontológicas na área da tradução; em seguida, apresenta a metodologia da pesquisa, seguida da análise de alguns excertos de questionários e entrevistas feitas com tradutoras que trabalham na área audiovisual, sobretudo com tradução de dublagens e legendas de diversos gêneros; por fim, traz algumas considerações sobre os resultados e sobre a abordagem da emoção nos estudos de tradução audiovisual.

2. Estudos de narrativas e emoção na tradução

*Tradução para mim é persona. Quase heterônimo.
Entrar dentro da pele do fingidor para refingir tudo de novo,
dor por dor, som por som, cor por cor.
Por isso nunca me propus a traduzir tudo.
Só aquilo que sinto, como diria ainda outra vez
Pessoa em sua própria persona
(Campos, 2009, p. 7).*

A declaração de Augusto de Campos ilustra algo que aparece especialmente em falas de tradutoras e tradutores de textos literários, mas também se encontra em relatos concernentes à tradução audiovisual ou de textos classificados como científicos, técnicos, jurídicos, entre outros: somos afetadas e afetados por aquilo que traduzimos, independentemente do gênero no qual estamos trabalhando. Como afirma Ricardo Reis, heterônimo de Fernando Pessoa, há uma indissociabilidade entre o que falamos e sentimos:

Desde que se usa de palavras, usa-se de um instrumento ao mesmo tempo emotivo e intelectual. A palavra contém uma ideia e uma emoção. Por isso não há prosa, nem a mais rigidamente científica, que não ressuma qualquer suco emotivo. Por isso não há exclamação, nem a mais abstractamente emotiva, que não implique ao menos o esboço de uma ideia (Reis, s. d.).

A despeito do uso de palavras que denotam emoções e sentimentos atrelados à tarefa de quem traduz estarem sendo empregadas por tradutores desde o século XVIII (por exemplo, em Nogueira da Gama, 1798/2018), e das declarações sobre nossa potência de agir estar determinada por nossos afetos terem sido feitas no século XVII (Spinoza, 1677/2014), é de conhecimento coletivo que ainda hoje qualquer expressão de subjetividade na tradução em geral não é vista com bons olhos. Espera-se uma assepsia e uma imparcialidade, decorrentes de concepções de língua e de tradução que continuam a ressoar em certos discursos.

Embora a discussão sobre as emoções como determinantes para e em nossa vida seja milenar, apenas nas últimas décadas os estudos sobre o tema ganharam espaço, principalmente por meio da “virada afetiva” iniciada nas ciências sociais (Clough, 2007). Em consonância com essa mudança, pesquisas recentes sobre tradução colocam a emoção como o *Zeitgeist* de nosso tempo (Koskinen, 2020). Nesse sentido, vários estudos dedicam-se à medição e análise empírica das



emoções em quem traduz, com o auxílio de recursos mais “objetivos”, como óculos para rastreamento ocular, coletor de saliva e cintas cardíacas, principalmente na área da tradução audiovisual, cujas pesquisas abrangem desde medições de reações de quem traduz no momento em que está traduzindo (como nível de estresse e autoconfiança) até reações do público leitor ao uso de metáforas na tradução (Ramos Caro, 2016; Rojo et al., 2021). Muitas vezes essas medições são complementadas com uso de outros recursos, como protocolos verbais, questionários e entrevistas, considerados mais subjetivos, a fim de assegurar que mais variáveis sejam cobertas nas análises (como exemplificado em Lima, 2024a, 2024b).

Diferentemente dessas pesquisas, este artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre a emoção na tradução a partir das percepções das tradutoras de experiências profissionais com tradução audiovisual ocorridas no passado e que ficaram marcadas na memória de cada uma, a ponto de serem selecionadas como exemplos de traduções que, de alguma maneira, foram impactantes para elas⁸. Assim, não se trata de análises empíricas com medições das emoções, mas de interpretações das impressões das pessoas envolvidas em relação a efeitos do processo no corpo, a suas ações em resposta a esses efeitos e ao reconhecimento da influência das emoções, tanto nas escolhas tradutórias quanto na interação com os agentes envolvidos no processo. Nessa esteira, importa muito menos estabelecer definições e diferenças de sentidos entre emoção e outros termos, como sensação, sentimento, afeto, perturbação, paixão etc. (como abordado em Lima, 2024a, 2024b) do que investigar a forma como as emoções circulam e quais são seus efeitos sociais e políticos. A emoção, portanto, é empregada com um sentido amplo, em diálogo com Sarah Ahmed (2014, p. 97) quando defende que a “emoção diz respeito a um sentimento em resposta a algo – contudo, é muito mais complexo e socialmente mediado do que isso”⁹.

Para a interpretação das experiências narradas, parto das concepções de tradução e do papel de quem traduz, apresentadas anteriormente, e recorro a Mona Baker (2006), quando retoma os quatro tipos de narrativas – ontológicas, públicas, conceituais e metanarrativas – propostos pelas sociólogas Margaret Somers e Gloria Gibson (1994). As narrativas ontológicas são as mais relevantes aqui, uma vez que dizem respeito a histórias interpessoais a respeito do lugar que ocupamos no mundo, construídas a partir de experiências individuais de vida que selecionamos na nossa memória de acordo com nossas subjetividades e nossa relação emocional com cada uma dessas experiências. Como e o que narramos interfere nas narrativas públicas, que são histórias que circulam na família e na sociedade em geral. Essas narrativas mostram que, ao traduzirmos, somos responsáveis pela disseminação de histórias ou pelo questionamento dessas histórias no mundo. As narrativas conceituais, também conhecidas como disciplinares, estão relacionadas diretamente a campos do conhecimento, e as metanarrativas, como indica o próprio nome, são situadas em períodos que marcam cada época, tais como industrialização, globalização, crise climática, guerras, ditaduras etc.

⁸ Os dados são provenientes de duas entrevistas e dois questionários, selecionados entre 20 participações feitas pela plataforma Google, em janeiro de 2021, como será explicado na seção sobre a metodologia da pesquisa. O projeto foi submetido à Plataforma Brasil e aprovado pelo comitê de ética em 2020 (CAAE: 35266820.7.0000.8142, número do parecer: 5.287.731).

⁹ “[E]motion is about having a feeling in response to something—however, it is much more complicated and socially mediated than that” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 97).

Baker (2006) também propõe que sejam consideradas quatro características principais dessas narrativas: articulação causal, apropriação seletiva, relacionalidade e temporalidade. Resumidamente, a articulação causal diz respeito à interpretação que cada pessoa constrói de um acontecimento e das relações que estabelece com o contexto (relação de causa e efeito); a apropriação seletiva refere-se ao recorte dado ao acontecimento (o que se escolhe para ser narrado); a relacionalidade evoca a conexão que um evento tem com outros que fazem parte da história coletiva e a temporalidade estabelece associações entre o momento histórico em que o acontecimento se deu e o momento em que a narrativa ocorre. Essas características auxiliam no entendimento das narrativas ontológicas das tradutoras que serão apresentadas neste artigo. As narrativas também são apontadas como positivas por Hokkanen e Koskinen:

O foco nos afetos de tradutores e tradutoras, entendidos como a criação de significados incorporados e operacionalizados em narrativas, oferece um caminho promissor para a compreensão e a análise da experiência tradutória como uma interface em que o cognitivo e o social são reunidos e entendidos por meio do engajamento afetivo do tradutor com eles (Hokkanen & Koskinen, 2018, p. 18)¹⁰.

O embasamento teórico das análises das narrativas é decorrente, ainda, do diálogo com autoras e autores que auxiliam a pensar as relações que temos com a linguagem de maneira geral, seja em termos verbais ou imagéticos (Didi-Huberman, 1998), passando por pesquisadoras e pesquisadores que se dedicam ao estudo das emoções e dos afetos na tradução (Koskinen, 2020) e por pesquisas sobre as emoções de forma geral, como Martha Nussbaum (2001, p. 1), quando nos lembra que:

[A]s emoções moldam a paisagem de nossa vida mental e social. Assim como as “transformações”¹¹ geológicas” que viajantes podem descobrir em uma paisagem onde antes só se via um plano, elas marcam nossas vidas como irregulares, incertas e propensas a reversões. Por que e como? Será que é porque as emoções são energias ou impulsos animais que não têm conexão com nossos pensamentos, imaginações e avaliações?¹²

Nussbaum (2001) constrói sua argumentação com base na ideia de que as pessoas conseguem reconhecer as emoções em seu dia a dia sem que seja necessário que tenham uma explicação consciente dessas emoções ou de seu papel social e político. Assim, o reconhecimento das emoções faz parte de julgamentos que fazemos de situações pelas quais passamos, e a linguagem é uma das formas de expressão dessas emoções, mas não é a única (Nussbaum, 2001). Importa, então, a forma como as tradutoras descrevem a percepção que têm das emoções e os efeitos que reconhecem em cada situação, seja em diálogo com perspectivas mais biológicas (Damásio, 2012), culturais ou políticas (Ahmed, 2014), como será desenvolvido ao longo deste artigo.

¹⁰ “A focus on translators’ affects, understood as their embodied meaning-making and operationalized with narratives, offers a promising avenue for understanding and analysing their experiencing self as an interface where the cognitive and the social are brought together and made sense of through the translator’s affective engagement with them” (Hokkanen & Koskinen, 2018, p. 18).

¹¹ (N.T.) O termo *upheavals* foi traduzido por *convulsões* por Fernando Py (Proust, 2016). Optei por *transformações* para dialogar com as concepções de tradução que defendo.

¹² “Emotions shape the landscape of our mental and social lives. Like the ‘geological upheavals’ a traveler might discover in a landscape where recently only a flat plane could be seen, they mark our lives as uneven, uncertain, and prone to reversal. Why and how? Is it because emotions are animal energies or impulses that have no connection with thoughts, imaginings, and appraisals?” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 1).

3. A trajetória de pesquisa: considerações metodológicas

Antes de apresentar a trajetória que resultou no recorte aqui apresentado, é importante retomar as já mencionadas considerações de Gadamer (2003) quando afirma que não há observador neutro, o que dialoga com Rajagopalan (2014), quando argumenta que os dados em ciências humanas (que não se deixa categorizar como positivista) são formados e não estão imunes à subjetividade, nem constituem em simples aplicação de algum método. Nesse sentido, os “meus” dados originam-se de um trabalho de cunho etnográfico, composto por questionários e entrevistas que são reconhecidos como acontecimentos da vida de cada participante, e a própria escolha dos trechos analisados é interpretativa, pois representam momentos em que vejo a sensibilidade das tradutoras sendo expressa de maneira mais significativa.

A pesquisa foi desenvolvida com tradutoras e tradutores profissionais de diversas áreas, que responderam a uma postagem feita em dois grupos de redes sociais se voluntariando a compartilhar experiências tradutórias que tivessem, de alguma forma, afetado suas vidas, por meio de questionários e/ou entrevistas¹³. Foi feito um roteiro semiestruturado, conforme o projeto submetido ao comitê de ética, com 13 perguntas, três das quais se relacionam diretamente com este artigo:

- De que maneira você considera que essa experiência tradutória afetou sua vida pessoal? E profissional?
- Você sentiu algum sintoma, no corpo, durante o processo tradutório ou depois dele, quando a tradução já estava pronta?
- Quando você aceitou fazer essa tradução, você imaginava que poderia ser trabalhosa e/ou ter consequências (pessoais/profissionais)?

As pessoas poderiam optar em responder as perguntas por escrito, a partir do uso de formulário on-line e/ou por meio de entrevistas, também on-line, gravadas e depois transcritas. Cabe ressaltar que apenas duas convenções foram adotadas na transcrição dos textos orais das entrevistas: reticências para pausa, marcando hesitação ou silêncio, e reticências entre parênteses para supressão de trechos.

Os excertos analisados são provenientes de respostas a essas perguntas e a diálogos que se desenvolveram a partir delas durante as entrevistas de cerca de quarenta minutos cada. Duas narrativas são provenientes de respostas escritas, as demais foram transcritas após os encontros virtuais¹⁴. Uma vez que nas entrevistas foram usadas as mesmas perguntas, de forma a retomar o

¹³ A postagem foi feita nos grupos *Tradutores, Intérpretes e Curiosos* e *Tradutores/Intérpretes*, da rede social Facebook, em dezembro de 2019, em que expliquei que estava fazendo um estudo sobre como somos influenciados pelas traduções e como a tradução afeta as nossas vidas, nosso conhecimento de mundo e de nós mesmas. Na ocasião, pedi para que entrassem em contato comigo e, a partir disso, enviei os formulários e marquei as entrevistas.

¹⁴ Foram usadas as ferramentas Google Formulários e Google Meet, por terem sido a opção feita pela universidade para aulas e atividades a distância. As interações foram adiadas por um ano, devido ao isolamento social ocasionado pela pandemia de Covid-19, e ocorreram em janeiro de 2021. Inicialmente, as perguntas foram elaboradas para o projeto *Tradução de textos ideologicamente marcados: um trabalho de corpo e mente* (Fapesp 19/09310-9). Na análise das respostas, foi observado que as perguntas citadas possibilitavam uma ampliação do escopo da pesquisa, que originou o projeto de pós-doutorado *Para além da dicotomia razão e emoção: um estudo sobre o sujeito-tradutor e o tradutor-personagem* (CNPq 102448/2022-1), para o qual foi submetida uma emenda ao comitê de ética (Aprovação CAAE: 35266820.7.0000.8142).

que as pessoas voluntárias já tinham visto nos formulários on-line, em ambos os casos (participação escrita e oral) houve um tempo para que as respostas fossem minimamente pensadas, de forma a direcionar a interação para os aspectos pertinentes para a pesquisa.

Foram recebidas 30 respostas à postagem, algumas nos grupos, em forma de comentários, e outras de modo privado. Após o primeiro contato e o envio do questionário, recebi a resposta de 18 tradutoras e dois tradutores. O perfil dessas pessoas é bastante heterogêneo, variando desde a faixa etária (de 30 até mais de 60 anos) até as línguas (inglês, espanhol, francês e italiano) e a experiência profissional (entre 10 e mais de 30 anos de experiência). Cinco profissionais atuam exclusivamente com tradução audiovisual, ao passo que o restante do grupo atua em diversas áreas, tais como medicina, psicologia, biologia, educação, religião, autoajuda, tradução técnica e literária.

As narrativas dos 20 participantes evidenciam que determinados conteúdos traduzidos geraram forte impacto emocional, especialmente aqueles que tratavam de temáticas sensíveis, tais como violência contra a mulher, doenças terminais, pandemia de Covid-19, ditadura e holocausto. Também mencionaram reações psicofísicas, como bruxismo, dores corporais, distúrbios do sono, apatia e crises de depressão. Outros efeitos bastante citados foram a alteração do rendimento e a paralisação temporária do trabalho por dias ou semanas, além de preocupação e receios quanto à reação de clientes e gerentes de projetos em relação ao desempenho profissional nesses projetos. Tais conteúdos demandaram não apenas competência tradutória, mas também estratégias subjetivas de enfrentamento, como será exemplificado nas narrativas das quatro tradutoras selecionadas para este artigo.

A fim de manter a anonimidade, essas tradutoras são designadas por T1, T2, T3 e T4, uma vez que algumas preferem não ser identificadas. Três trabalham unicamente com tradução audiovisual, nas modalidades legendagem e dublagem, todas têm mais de dez anos de experiência e encontram-se na faixa de 30 a 60 anos de idade. T1 e T3 trabalham com os pares português <> espanhol, enquanto T2 trabalha com português <> inglês e T4 com português <> inglês e espanhol, conforme resumido no quadro abaixo:

Quadro 1: Resumo das informações sobre as tradutoras

Participantes	Línguas de trabalho	Área de atuação	Anos de experiência
Tradutora 1	português <> espanhol	Legendagem e dublagem	+ 10
Tradutora 2	português <> inglês	Legendagem	+ 20
Tradutora 3	português <> espanhol	Legendagem	+ 20
Tradutora 4	português <> inglês português <> espanhol	Legendagem e textos técnicos	+ 15

Fonte: Autora (2025)

Como mencionado, são abordados três eixos principais: a expressão ou somatização das emoções no corpo (Robinson, 2003, 2020), a conscientização e preocupação com a interferência das emoções no processo e nas escolhas tradutórias (Lima & Pisetta, 2023; Lima & Pimentel, 2024a) e as possíveis consequências do reconhecimento da intervenção das emoções no trabalho para as próprias tradutoras e para demais agentes, como clientes e gerentes de projetos.

As narrativas iniciais dizem respeito à tradução de legendas de documentários, filmes e dublagem de novela que trazem experiências ideologicamente marcadas; em seguida, é apresentado um excerto referente à legendagem de materiais na área da saúde, que, diferentemente das



anteriores, destaca a empatia e o compromisso social; por fim, trago rapidamente uma questão ético-ativista na tradução.

4. As tradutoras e a percepção da emoção

*A tradução sempre foi algo político para mim.
Defino-a como um saber lidar com as diferenças.
E hoje, saber lidar com diferenças
é o que mais nos faz falta
(Cassin, 2024, p.10).*

As duas primeiras narrativas são de tradutoras que foram impactadas por materiais audiovisuais que trazem representações das mulheres na sociedade, um deles traduzido há mais de uma década. Embora não sejam traduções em que há uma defesa explícita do feminismo na língua ou o uso de estratégias para tornar o feminino visível, não se pode ignorar que a tradução é feita por pessoas inseridas em contextos culturais, ideológicos e políticos. Esse aspecto aparece na narrativa da tradutora T1, com mais de dez anos de experiência no par português <> espanhol, sobre a tradução de legendas de filmes “*com formações de personagens que eram homens muito desencanados e mulheres que se esforçam para agradar esses homens*” e na tradução para dublagem de uma cena de uma novela mexicana que a tradutora interpretou como apologia ao estupro.

As características da narratividade (temporalidade, relacionalidade, articulação causal e apropriação seletiva) retomadas por Baker (2006), podem ser observadas desde o início. A tradutora contextualiza a experiência, organizando o relato em sequência temporal para torná-lo compreensível, e relaciona a situação narrada a uma ação recorrente e que causa aversão – que T1 acredita ser intensificada pelo fato de ela ser ativista feminista. A apropriação seletiva diz respeito ao recorte feito por T1, que enfatiza a representação da mulher na sociedade.

Geralmente, nas novelas, a cena é mostrada de forma bem maniqueísta, o cara é sempre do mal... mas passei por uma novela que não era tão caricatural, tinha um formato um pouco mais realista [...] uma narrativa que é: a mulher manifesta que não queria [ter relação sexual], não queria, não queria, mas quando ela é agarrada à força, ela descobre que na verdade ela queria. Então é o maior reforço possível de cultura de estupro e tá aí nas nossas novelas o tempo inteiro e nas novelas mexicanas também. [...] No meio da cena, comecei a passar muito mal e comecei a chorar.

Nessa narrativa, a interpretação da tradutora e as emoções que a cena desencadeou são decorrentes da relacionalidade que é construída a partir da memória daquele acontecimento em referência ao que constitui sua subjetividade dentro de uma configuração de eventos mais ampla – no caso, a luta feminista e a denúncia de estupro. A articulação causal, ou o significado (ético) que a experiência trouxe para a tradutora, se mostra nos sintomas sentidos. Baker (2006) aponta a articulação causal como uma característica importante da narratividade, porque a identificação da causa e dos efeitos possíveis de um evento pode ajudar a determinar as ações que devemos ou podemos tomar em determinada situação. T1 continua:

Comecei a pensar em todo tipo de solução pra aquilo...Na novela, parecia uma cena de sexo consentido, então poderia não ser entendida como cena de estupro, daí ia ser pior. Eu pensei “todo sofrimento que estou passando vai ser deslegitimado”. Resolvi falar com a gerente de projetos – essa cena não consegui fazer.... e fiquei preocupadíssima – entrou o dilema ético. Bom, e se ela achar que sou uma fraca por não ter conseguido, sou não profissional ou não ética por ter feito isso? De repente ela poderia me passar menos trabalho e era um cliente bom.



O receio da tradutora não diz respeito aos fatos, mas à interpretação dada e às consequências decorrentes de uma possível divergência de entendimentos. Na narrativa, observa-se que T I vive um dilema entre compartilhar ou não as impressões que a cena trouxe, com medo de perder o cliente ou de não conseguir a empatia da colega de trabalho (a gerente de projeto) que poderia não entender a sua preocupação com a gravidade da cena. Nesse caso, ela entende que foi afetada e opta por não traduzir, reconhecendo o impacto emocional desencadeado pela tradução, e posiciona-se em relação ao que acha correto de forma a não reforçar uma postura machista e misógina.

A tradutora afirma que se emocionou muito, e que isso resultou em sintomas físicos (dor de cabeça, choro, sofrimento) que influenciaram negativamente o seu desempenho, pois sequer conseguia voltar a traduzir. A imobilidade devida à dor e à raiva causadas pela percepção da vulnerabilização da mulher diante da opressão é decorrente não só do incômodo desse tipo de representação da mulher, mas do agravamento dessa percepção por ela ser feminista, ativista e ter um posicionamento político absolutamente contra os estereótipos alimentados em novelas e em filmes com formações de personagens homens que representam o poder em relação a mulheres que se esforçam para obedecê-los e agradá-los. A relação entre convicções e emoção é defendida por Nussbaum (2001, p. 41), que afirma: “A convicção é fundamental para a emoção, e a emoção é necessária para a convicção absoluta”¹⁵.

Há uma sensação marcante de estagnação e de insegurança quando a tradutora relata que teve receio de externalizar que não estava conseguindo traduzir a cena e, em decorrência disso, perder o cliente. Volta a ideia do senso comum de que expressar emoção indica falta de profissionalismo, e que há uma ambivalência entre a impossibilidade de não se envolver e a preocupação de não demonstrar esse envolvimento, também presente nas declarações de outras tradutoras que afirmam: “*é claro que a gente não passa isso para o cliente*”.

Em relação a estratégias para lidar com essas emoções, T I afirma que, nesses dias que define como “trabalho difícil”, costuma tomar “florais calmantes” e, no caso de legenda, muitas vezes tira a imagem para ficar mais fácil de lidar com o assunto, algo impossível de ser feito na dublagem, uma vez que precisa ser considerada a sincronia labial. A ação de cobrir as imagens está entre as propostas de Perdikaki e Georgiou (2022), que sugerem formas de criar “resiliência emocional” na tradução de legendas.

A alteração de elementos técnicos da tarefa e, mais especificamente, do texto audiovisual, também é usada com frequência como estratégia de enfrentamento de materiais que desencadeiam a emoção. Esses ajustes incluem diminuir o tamanho do segmento ou retirá-lo totalmente da interface do software de legendagem, ocultar a tela para evitar a entrada visual do vídeo, diminuir ou desligar o volume da faixa de áudio e navegar manualmente quadro a quadro do vídeo¹⁶ (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2022, p. 69).

¹⁵ “Belief is sufficient for emotion, and emotion necessary for full belief” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 41).

¹⁶ “Altering the technical aspects of the task and the AV text, more specifically, is also frequently resorted to as a coping mechanism when faced with emotion-eliciting material. Such tweaks include making the video segment smaller or completely minimising it out of the subtitling software interface, hiding the screen so as to avoid visual input from the video, lowering or even switching off the volume of the audio track and manually navigating the video frame by frame” (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2022, p. 69).

No estudo empírico sobre estratégias usadas por um grupo pequeno de tradutores, as autoras apontam que, além dessas ações, as pessoas pesquisadas também costumam fazer pausas durante o processo de tradução; alterar a tradução com aspectos mais técnicos da legendagem; fazer interações sociais; evitar trabalhar com material que possa desencadear fortes emoções; estabelecer compensações após terminar a tradução. Outros mecanismos mencionados incluem caminhar, tomar banho, rezar, meditar, fazer exercício e, muitas vezes, parar de traduzir para chorar, assumindo que está sendo afetado e experienciando a emoção.

Cobrir a tela também foi uma estratégia apontada na segunda narrativa, igualmente atravessada por ideologia feminista, da tradutora T2, com mais de 20 anos de experiência em traduções no par português <> inglês, que diz respeito à tradução de legendas de filmes pornográficos. De acordo com a tradutora, durante os anos em que traduziu centenas de filmes pornográficos, ela percebeu que esse trabalho tinha efeitos diferentes sobre ela. A tradutora, a única que pediu para que seja mantido seu anonimato, confessa que se sentia envergonhada por ter traduzido tantos filmes e que essa vergonha não se deve ao fato de se considerar pudica ou conservadora, mas ao gênero em si. Como lembra Ahmed (2014, p. 104), a palavra “vergonha” vem do verbo indo-europeu “cobrir”: “por um lado, a vergonha cobre o que está exposto (nós nos afastamos, abaixamos o rosto, desviamos o olhar), enquanto, por outro lado, a vergonha expõe o que foi coberto (ela des-cobre)”¹⁷.

A atitude da tradutora remete ao que Ahmed (2014) diz em um contexto diferente sobre a vergonha coletiva: há um sentimento ruim, um sentimento de negação, um sentimento que é mais agudo do que o constrangimento. Esse sentimento pode ser uma consequência do conhecimento de senso comum dos problemas que a pornografia traz para a sociedade, especialmente em termos de violência contra as mulheres, de influências e comportamentos desrespeitosos, de efeitos sobre a imagem corporal e de uma infinidade de mensagens prejudiciais à saúde e à autoimagem, em especial para as pessoas mais jovens. Ao evitar imagens, a tradutora sinaliza que vê a indústria pornográfica como responsável por produções que evocam a objetificação das mulheres, com cenas muitas vezes perturbadoras. Mesmo no momento da entrevista (15 anos depois), ela não parece se sentir à vontade para falar sobre isso e não quer ser exposta. Ela conta que, depois de um tempo, começou a traduzir sem ver as imagens.

Chegou um momento em que eu cobria a tela; aquilo estava afetava minha vida sexual. Eu removia a imagem e ficava apenas com o som. Comecei a sentir o impacto emocional que estava acontecendo com os recursos visuais e tive que fazer alguma coisa.

A tradutora também observa que nunca comentou com o cliente que evitava ver as imagens porque tinha medo de que, se ele soubesse disso, deixaria de enviar trabalhos. Embora ela reconheça que as imagens quase não fazem diferença para as legendas por causa do gênero com poucos diálogos, ela acredita que, para o cliente, afirmar que estava desconfortável ou até incomodada com o conteúdo poderia transmitir a ideia de falta de profissionalismo, pressupondo uma relação de causa-efeito.

¹⁷ “On the one hand, shame covers that which is exposed (we turn away, we lower our face, we avert our gaze), while on the other, shame exposes that which has been covered (it un-covers)” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 104).

Novamente a ideia de emoção como perturbação perpassa o processo, assim como a sensação de que assumir que há um envolvimento no ato tradutório não é o esperado pelo “mercado”. Nessa narrativa, a estratégia usada para lidar com o incômodo é evitar as imagens ou, nas palavras de Didi-Huberman (1998, p. 29), “o que vemos só vale – só vive – em nossos olhos pelo que nos olha. Inelutável porém é a cisão que separa dentro de nós o que vemos daquilo que nos olha.” As imagens se instalam negativamente, perseguindo os olhos, causando incômodo – talvez trauma – além de mudanças no comportamento sexual da tradutora.

As características da relatividade, da causalidade e da temporalidade são perceptíveis pelo fato de ser uma mulher a traduzir filmes de uma indústria que continua sendo perniciosa para a imagem feminina, bem como do reconhecimento das consequências que essa indústria tem para a sociedade – que incentiva esse tipo de material – que tem alcançado ainda mais pessoas com as redes sociais e o crescimento do *soft porn*.

Se, de um lado, as traduções que trazem representações femininas contrárias às ideologias das tradutoras causam incômodo e perturbação, de outro também podem causar raiva e uma postura de resistência, como recusa de trabalhos que vão contra as posições políticas. Um exemplo é também de T2, que não aceitou traduzir um documentário sobre uma igreja norte-americana que pregava a obediência das mulheres. A série mostra a vida de um grupo de mulheres, “donas” da igreja, que vivem em mansões, com muitos empregados, ostentando riquezas e que pedem dinheiro para pessoas carentes. Para a tradutora, aquela situação “*dava uma raiva. Eu pensava: gente, como é possível alguém fazer isso? Eu decidi que, pelas minhas mãos, não ia ser divulgado esse tipo de assunto*”.

Outra postura de resistência foi narrada por T3, com mais 20 anos de experiência com o par espanhol <> português, que se recusou a traduzir tópicos que eram contrários à sua ideologia e se sentiu “*empoderada em poder rejeitar os trabalhos*”. O empoderamento também aparece em uma situação na qual o cliente diz explicitamente que prefere contratar tradutores e não tradutoras. T3 comenta:

Quando iniciei na tradução, traduzia muito material técnico. E uma determinada empresa me disse que preferia um homem para realizar a tradução, e não uma mulher. Eu os convenci a fazer um teste e o teste os convenceu de que eu estava preparada para fazer a tradução para eles.

Essas narrativas ilustram a função política da tradução e as relações de poder que perpassam o processo e o mercado. A resistência dessas tradutoras a discursos opressivos e patriarcais e à desvalorização da mulher mostra que podemos ser agentes da história e não apenas vítimas do machismo. Toda tradução pode ser um espaço de ação política e de mudanças sociais (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002; Baker, 2018), mesmo aquelas que começam com a sinalização de que um determinado texto não merece ser traduzido ou a problematização das consequências daquilo que traduzimos.

Diferentemente das narrativas apresentadas, em que as tradutoras não estavam envolvidas com os temas de forma direta, embora se sentissem tocadas e responsáveis, de alguma maneira, pelo conteúdo traduzido, nas narrações a seguir as traduções foram feitas quando as tradutoras passavam por situações reais relativas ao que estavam traduzindo. Como nas experiências anteriores, a responsabilidade (Derrida, 2006) é um fator predominante. A narrativa é novamente de T3:



Quando aceitei, era para ser um projeto de tradução como qualquer outro. Era uma série de vídeos sobre oncologia. Aconteceu que durante o projeto, uma tia muito amada descobriu um câncer que estava já em estágio muito avançado. E muitos dos vídeos eram sobre o tipo de câncer da minha tia. Eu sofri muito traduzindo sobre uma situação dolorosa que eu estava vivendo naquele momento e acabei me identificando muito com o material. Eu sofri sabendo tudo o que aconteceria com ela, e chorava muito durante a tradução. Às vezes, precisava parar para tomar um ar e sentia um grande bloqueio para traduzir. Finalizei o projeto pensando nas muitas pessoas que precisavam daquela informação legendada, mas foi um desgaste imenso e precisei de ajuda psicológica.

Como narrado, aconteceu algo inesperado e isso afetou a tradutora e o processo, que é lembrado com dor por T3, apesar de já terem se passado anos. O reconhecimento da importância da tradução para levar a informação às pessoas que estão passando por situações semelhantes perpassa a narrativa, concomitantemente à tristeza (expressa pelo choro), ao desejo de ajudar e a uma espécie de satisfação decorrente dessa possibilidade de ser “útil”, o que remete às paixões primárias de Spinoza (desejo, alegria/satisfação, tristeza). Aparece uma preocupação com o outro, que só pode ter acesso a determinadas informações graças à tradução. O choro, mencionado por T3, foi a reação mais apontada pelas tradutoras e tradutores que entrevistei, seguido pela necessidade de pausas constantes e recusa de outros trabalhos de temáticas semelhantes aos considerados negativamente impactantes.

Na tradução dos vídeos, a impossibilidade trazida por sintomas idiossomáticos (Robinson, 2003), dá lugar à necessidade da tradução e ao pensamento da tradução como ação política (Baker, 2018, 2023), ou seja, apesar de apresentar muitos sintomas no corpo, há uma conscientização e um orgulho em fazer um trabalho importante, sem o qual muitas pessoas seriam privadas de informação. A tristeza decorre da compaixão e não da incapacidade de fazer o trabalho, e em momento algum há questionamentos ou dúvidas sobre o resultado da tradução. De certa forma, pode-se observar a relação entre compaixão e poder (de quem traduz) em contraste com o sofrimento e a impotência (das pessoas em fase terminal).

A empatia aparece como uma característica na narrativa da tradutora, seja no sentido compassivo (de sentir a necessidade de colocar-se à disposição), projetivo (de tentar imaginar quais seriam os sentimentos da outra pessoa) ou reflexivo (de se colocar no lugar daquele que só tem acesso à informação por meio da tradução). Koskinen (2020, p. 167) defende que a empatia é um dos principais aspectos que diferenciam a tradução humana da tradução de máquina, e sugere que os cinco tipos de empatia (projetivo, cognitivo, afetivo, reflexivo e compassivo) devem ser uma das competências trabalhadas em sala de aula.

A última narrativa, da T4, com mais de 15 anos de experiência nos pares português <> inglês e português <> espanhol, ocorreu em 2019 e representou um desafio porque eram vídeos de manifestações a favor do Bolsonaro, que havia acabado de ser eleito. Segundo a tradutora,

Nos vídeos com entrevistas dos apoiadores do Bolsonaro, a minha vontade era reproduzir cada um dos erros de concordância e pronúncia para caracterizar os falantes como mais brutos e raivosos, menos educados e estudados, porém isso seria antiético porque quando lendo um vídeo de uma pessoa normal falando sobre um tema comum, se a pessoa comete algum ‘erro’ ou pronuncia diferente uma palavra ou outra, eu não faço essa marcação por entender que a fala não roteirizada e não ensaiada sempre tem pequenos deslizes. Então, se faço esse tipo de correção com um vídeo alinhado a meus princípios ideológicos (ou pelo menos que não os fere diretamente) eu tento dar ao conteúdo que vai contra minha ideologia a mesma atenção e cuidado.



Aparece, nesse excerto, a preocupação ética em não demonstrar um viés ideológico, resultante de “constante atenção e revisão”. T4 reconhece que “a língua é ideológica e subjetivamente marcada”, e essa conscientização leva a um policiamento maior quando se trata de conteúdos dos quais discorda, como é o caso do governo bolsonarista. Além do trabalho ser mais desgastante, dispende mais tempo e concentração. Ela afirma, entretanto, que apesar de ter tido muita raiva durante a legendagem, não se arrependeu de ter aceitado o trabalho porque o vídeo seria usado para “*mostrar pontos negativos do governo*”.

A tradutora acredita que seu posicionamento foi ético (Berman, 2007) e não acredita que tenha feito intervenções no texto, uma vez que procurou não mostrar seu posicionamento, o que dialoga com as preocupações que aparecem em narrativas anteriores de que qualquer tipo de envolvimento pode passar a impressão de falta de profissionalismo.

5. Considerações finais

Na tradução audiovisual, como é amplamente estudado, o sentido não é construído apenas pelas palavras, mas por uma multiplicidade de elementos que atuam conjuntamente, como imagem, som, perspectivas, iluminação, movimentos, expressões faciais, linguagem corporal e entonação. Esses fatores evidenciam que o processo tradutório transcende a linguagem verbal, envolvendo aspectos sensoriais e materiais que impactam diretamente a construção do significado. Essas características fazem da tradução audiovisual um lugar privilegiado para compreender a tradução como ação e a tradutora e o tradutor como agentes mediadores que tanto agem quanto reagem ao contato com outras línguas, transformando o texto e sendo transformado por ele, como defende Gadamer (2003). A interpretação, portanto, nunca se restringe às questões linguísticas, mas é atravessada pelo corpo que traduz e, ainda que não seja possível controlar as reações e emoções individuais diante de cada situação, é fundamental discutir essas questões. Isso contribui para a compreensão de que as emoções despertadas no processo tradutório podem enriquecer a leitura e a interpretação dos textos, ao mesmo tempo que permite atribuir sentido à experiência de traduzir, articulando-a às práticas discursivas inseridas em contextos sociais, culturais e políticos específicos.

Considerando as narrativas ontológicas (Baker, 2006) apresentadas, observa-se que a percepção das tradutoras não se limita a algo individual, mas está relacionada às histórias que circulam em discursos coletivos. Como defende Ahmed (2014), as emoções significam enquanto se propagam, e a maneira como sentimos, percebemos e expressamos as emoções ajudam no entendimento de que tudo o que nos constitui determina nossas leituras, interpretações e traduções. Nesse sentido, a circulação de narrativas ontológicas sobre experiências tradutórias pode proporcionar oportunidades de discussões sobre narrativas públicas e até conceituais sobre o nosso papel de tradutoras e tradutores.

As narrativas ontológicas possibilitam, ainda, uma análiseêmica de como as tradutoras e tradutores entendem o ato de traduzir e os impactos das emoções no corpo e no processo tradutório desencadeados pelo trabalho principalmente com textos reconhecidos como sensíveis. Esse conhecimento, por sua vez, pode levar a uma análise mais detida sobre a subjetividade e responsabilidade ética (Berman, 2007) de quem traduz. Essas concepções, que coadunam com uma



abordagem hermenêutica que considera a tradução como paradigma da alteridade (Ricoeur, 2011), também auxiliam a ampliar o entendimento das experiências idiossômáticas (Robinson, 2003) e, quem sabe, podem levar à problematização de narrativas que regulam o que deve ou não ser dito e assumido (por agentes diversos) no que diz respeito ao impacto das emoções no desempenho tradutório.

Os recortes analisados das quatro tradutoras deixam evidente que o ato tradutório é marcado pelas experiências pessoais (vivências, percepções, emoções, valores) e tem reflexos no corpo de quem traduz, mostrando, ainda, que a expressão dessa subjetividade pode ser cerceada por aspectos ideossomáticos (Robinson, 2003) relacionados a uma narrativa pública – muitas vezes até conceitual - da tradução como algo que pode ser neutro. Portanto, reforçar a ideia de que a tradução é um ato performativo (Austin, 1990) é primordial para a compreensão de que o papel da tradutora e do tradutor não é apenas transferir, mas transformar, reinscrever e deslocar um texto em outro (Derrida, 2006), para que produza efeitos em outros contextos, reencenando outros atos discursivos com diferentes implicações éticas, políticas e afetivas.

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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 stance¹, 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

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 *Irreversible* (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,

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

Table I: *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 I – 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 prostitución 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

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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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A descriptive study on sex-related language in the subtitling of *Succession* into Spanish

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Abstract: Sex can be considered a vulgar, forbidden or unwelcome topic in many contexts and this fact can add a challenge to subtitlers of audiovisual products depending on the cultures and languages involved (Ávila-Cabrera, 2024). Although some authors claim that sexual references tend to be altered, mitigated or omitted when dubbing (Ferrari, 2010; Scandura, 2021) and subtitling (Fuentes-Luque, 2020) from English into neutral Spanish, other researchers such as Villanueva-Jordán (2023) have demonstrated through a case study that neutral Spanish for the Latin American audience does retain sexual references in dubbing. This paper examines the subtitling of the four seasons of the TV series *Succession* (Armstrong, 2018–2023) from US English into Spanish (from Spain), as broadcast on Max (formerly HBO España). The primary objectives of the study are as follows: (1) to explore the extent to which sexual references from the source text are transferred to the target text. To achieve this, we will analyse the transfer through the lens of Descriptive Translation Studies (Toury, 2012). (2) To determine how sexual references are treated in the translated text, whether they are rendered using explicit sexual language or replaced with other taboo or offensive phrases. For this, we employ Ávila-Cabrera's (2023b) taxonomy of translation techniques to examine the handling of these references and assess whether the taboo load is preserved in the subtitles. (3) To identify the most recurrent translation techniques used. Among the expected findings, we aim to test our initial hypothesis that considers that sexual phrases tend to be transferred as closely as possible in the subtitles in this TV series. In summary, our intention is to contribute to the literature of the treatment of sexual language in interlingual subtitling through this paper.

Keywords: sexual language; interlingual subtitling; fidelity; translation techniques; *Succession* (TV series).

I. Introduction

Taboo topics, often considered prohibited or unwelcome, exhibit significant variability depending on different. As Allan (2018, p. 1) posits, what is considered taboo involves “[...] the use of [...] words and language in certain contexts; in short, the taboo applies to instances of language behaviour”. Moreover, absolute taboos do not exist because “[...] nothing is taboo for all people under all circumstances for all time” (Allan, 2018, p. 14). This means that perceptions of taboo topics vary based on individual acceptance, age, and cultural background.

Hargraves (2023) examines the evolution of television from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, highlighting how significant changes in aesthetics, form, genre, industry, and technology have trained audiences to transform unease into pleasure. Following this author, taboo words contribute to constructing a shared cultural imaginary or capital by finding ways to express ideas despite societal prohibitions. In other words, while television changes have helped people enjoy provocative or controversial content, taboo words can help us communicative restrictive ideas.

In Audiovisual Translation (AVT), addressing taboo phrases requires careful consideration of the source and target languages and their respective cultures. Translators must navigate complex cultural dynamics and balance fidelity to the original text with sensitivity to the target audience's cultural norms. Elements such as the audience's language, age, context, and cultural background play a critical role in shaping the translator's approach to transferring content from the source text (ST) to the target text (TT). In subtitling, the challenge lies in maintaining this balance while adhering to the spatio-temporal constraints of this AVT mode, which often necessitate condensing the TT by up to 30–40% (Roales Ruiz, 2017). This reduction, commonly referred to as technical manipulation (Díaz Cintas, 2012), is driven by medium constraints rather than censorship.

As Villanueva-Jordán (2024) aptly notes, cultural sensitivity plays a pivotal role in shaping the subtitling strategies for diverse Spanish-speaking audiences. Moreover, while television and streaming services have introduced darker narratives, taboo subjects, vulgarity and extreme behaviours (Hargraves, 2023), these elements appear to be widely accepted by audiences. There is notable terminological diversity in the description of strong, vulgar, or rude phrases. To avoid confusion, this paper adopts the distinction proposed by Ávila-Cabrera (2016b) between taboo and offensive language as follows:

Offensive language refers to those linguistic terms or expressions made up of swearwords, expletives, etc., which are normally considered derogatory and/or insulting. [...] Taboo language is related to terms that are not considered appropriate or acceptable with regard to the context, culture, language and/or medium where they are uttered (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016b, p. 28).

When dealing with sexual terms within the taboo category—such as those referring to sexual practices, organs, functions, or effluvia (Allan & Burridge, 2006)—the translator must pay particular attention to the target audience's cultural sensibilities. In subtitling, this often leads to the omission or modification of taboo phrases due to the constraints of the medium (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015; Díaz Cintas, 2001).

Over recent decades, research into taboo language has expanded significantly. Scholars have explored euphemisms and dysphemisms (Allan & Burridge, 1991), censorship and taboo language



(Allan & Burridge, 2006), and sexual language through metaphor (Crespo-Fernández, 2015). Comprehensive volumes like Allan's (2018), which examines taboo language through multidisciplinary approaches, and De Rosa (2024), which explores taboo topics such as sex and swearing in subtitling and dubbing, provide critical insights. Emerging research has also examined the role of swearing in conveying emotion (Allan, 2023) and the use of euphemisms in pornographic film titles (Crespo-Fernández, 2023). Cultural norms significantly influence how taboo topics are treated in translation. For instance, translations in Arabic-speaking countries often euphemise or censor religious and sexual content (Al-Adwan, 2015). In contrast, Latin American subtitles for neutral Spanish tend to employ euphemisms or omit explicit swearwords and sexual references (Ferrari, 2010; Fuentes-Luque, 2015; Scandura, 2021). However, for Spanish-speaking audiences in Spain, explicit swearwords and sexual references are often retained in subtitles, reflecting a higher level of fidelity to the load of the ST (Ávila-Cabrera, 2016a, 2023b). In this context, religious blasphemies are more likely to be replaced with other offensive terms than directly translated, such as "[...] Jesus [fucking] Christ" (Ávila-Cabrera, 2020, p. 128).

Studies on amateur subtitling (Ameri & Ghazizadeh, 2015; Beseghi, 2016; Bucaria, 2017; Forutan & Modarresi, 2018; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2018; Moura, 2020) show that fansubs often adopt bolder approaches compared to professional subtitles.

This paper investigates the treatment of sexual references in the subtitling of the TV series *Succession* (Armstrong, 2018–2023) (originally in US English) for audiences in Spain. The study explores the extent to which sexual phrases are faithfully transferred to the subtitles, given that the Spanish audience is accustomed to such language on screen (Valdeón, 2020, 2024). The manuscript is organised into several sections: this introduction outlines the scope and goals; the theoretical framework reviews literature on sexual language from a cultural perspective and its treatment in AVT and media accessibility; the methodology section introduces the initial hypothesis and research questions, the corpus, and translation techniques with a selection of analysed samples; the data analysis address the research questions and interpret findings in the discussion; and the conclusions discuss the paper's implications and limitations.

2. Theoretical framework

This section examines the cultural approach to sex to explore how perspectives on this topic vary across different cultures. Additionally, it discusses studies related to the representation of sex in AVT.

2.1 A cultural approach to sex

Sexuality is an intricate and multifaceted aspect of human life, profoundly shaped by cultural backgrounds. Cultural contexts wield substantial influence over how sex is perceived and the establishment of taboos surrounding it. Culture, understood as the embodiment of collective customs, practices, values, and beliefs that define a community (Tylor, 1871), fundamentally impacts individuals' beliefs and behaviours within its milieu (Geertz, 1973). When applied to sexuality, this concept reveals stark variations in attitudes toward sex across diverse societies.



The cultural approach to comprehending sexuality delves deeply into the complex interplay of societal norms, values, and traditions in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours regarding sex (Chapman, 2023). Religious doctrines, in particular, exert a considerable influence over cultural perceptions of sexuality (Rigo & Saroglou, 2018). The notion of “sexual morality” and the norms governing sexual conduct exhibit significant variation across temporal and cultural landscapes. Many religions impose moral codes and guidelines on sexual behaviour, which in turn shape societal norms. For instance, conservative interpretations of religions like Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism often stigmatise premarital or extramarital sex as taboo. In contrast, certain aspects of historical Hinduism embraced sexuality as a natural and sacred element of life, as evidenced by its rituals and art forms (Cleaveland et al., 1979).

Cultural attitudes toward sex are also deeply intertwined with prevailing gender norms and societal power structures. Patriarchal cultures, for instance, often impose strict limitations on female sexual autonomy, regulating women’s behaviour and expressions through stringent societal expectations (Phillips, 2010). These power structures influence not only individual behaviours but also collective taboos, shaping what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable within a specific culture (Ávila-Cabrera, 2023b).

In addition to religious and gendered dimensions, socioeconomic factors and technological advancements significantly influence cultural perceptions of sexuality. Urbanisation, globalisation, and exposure to diverse media sources contribute to cultural shifts and, in some cases, the erosion of traditional taboos (Laumann & Youm, 1999). Furthermore, advancements in reproductive technologies, such as intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection and in vitro fertilisation, have transformed sexual practices and norms, challenging long-standing beliefs in some societies (Greil et al., 2010).

The existence of cultural taboos surrounding sex has profound implications for individuals within a culture. These taboos can foster feelings of shame, guilt, or secrecy around sexual experiences, potentially impacting mental health and inhibiting healthy sexual expression (Gruskin et al., 2019). Conversely, cultures with more liberal views on sexuality often afford individuals greater freedom to explore sexual behaviours and identities. However, such freedom can also present challenges, particularly in navigating boundaries and societal expectations (Kehily, 2007).

The translation of obscenities is always a negotiation between cultural systems that define the boundaries of what can be presented (Toledano Buendía, 2003). This may suggest that, despite the potentially sensitive nature of the subject matter, Spanish-speaking audiences from Spain are accustomed to receiving sexual linguistic content in the form of subtitles. This observation aligns with Moura’s (2024) study, which highlights the participants’ acceptance of swear words in subtitles through a case study.

As Pizarro Pedraza (2019) argues, taboos can serve different linguistic functions: they may be referential, addressing specific aspects of reality, or non-referential, appearing in the form of insults or expletives. Spanish, for instance, exhibits a highly productive sexual lexicon. These “variants of a taboo concept”, as Pizarro Pedraza (2021, p. 583) notes, can be placed on a continuum of offensiveness, ranging from euphemistic avoidance strategies to dysphemistic offensive expressions.

Understanding the cultural dimensions of sexuality and taboos is pivotal in fostering inclusivity, respect, and effective communication in a diverse world. By acknowledging and appreciating the variety of cultural attitudes toward sex, society can cultivate a more nuanced and

empathetic approach to discussions surrounding sexuality, ensuring that these conversations promote understanding rather than alienation.

2.2 Sex and LGBTQ+ representation in audiovisual translation and media accessibility

The exploration of taboo content in AVT reveals diverse approaches to handling sensitive material across languages and cultures (Ávila-Cabrera, 2024). For example, Díaz Cintas (2001) analysed the subtitles of Pedro Almodóvar's (1995) *La flor de mi secreto* [The Flower of My Secret], comparing the English subtitles aired on Channel 4 to those in the VHS release. He observed that television subtitles employed bolder translation choices than those of the VHS version. Similarly, Ávila-Cabrera (2016a, 2023a, 2023b) examined offensive and taboo language in Spanish subtitles of popular Tarantino films, finding that sexual content is often faithfully transferred to the TT. This contrasts with English-Arabic (Al-Adwan, 2015; Alsharhan, 2020; Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019; Izwaini, 2017) and English-Turkish subtitling practices (Alan, 2011), where more conservative strategies, "euphemised and ideologically recontextualized" (Alan, 2024), are frequently employed.

Translation challenges are also evident in specific lexical cases. Wilkinson (2021) analysed the translation of the Spanish term *puta* [whore] in English subtitles for the first season of *Paquita Salas* (Ambrossi & Calvo, 2016–2019). The study revealed inconsistencies in maintaining the offensive load, with literal translation being the most common strategy. This often failed to capture cultural nuances. Similarly, Permpoon and Kaewkwan (2022) compared translation strategies in the subtitling of *Sex Education* (Nunn, 2019–2023) and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015). They observed significant differences in approaches due to audience demographics and external factors such as censorship and film distribution policies. De Laurentiis and Marra (2024) also examined *Sex Education*, contrasting Spanish and Italian subtitles. They found that Spanish subtitles leaned toward informal, colloquial language to reflect teenage naturalness, whereas Italian subtitles adopted more formal language, avoiding vulgarity.

In contemporary series, societal shifts have influenced translation practices. Ogea Pozo and Bujalance (2022) analysed *Sex Education*, finding that Spanish dubs tended to amplify the offensive load of sexual terms, while orthophemisms and dysphemisms were employed to adapt to cultural expectations. Their findings align with Ogea Pozo and Botella Tejera (2023), who compared teen series from the 1990s to modern productions, highlighting increased explicitness in contemporary dialogues.

Chiaro (2021) reviewed Italian dubbing strategies for *Sex and the City* (Star, 1998–2004), emphasising moderation rather than erasure of taboo content. The study underscored the influence of dubbing directors, whose decisions shape what audiences perceive as acceptable. Parini (2023) extended her research by analysing taboo language in *The Young Pope* (Sorrentino, 2016) and *The New Pope* (Sorrentino, 2020) in their Italian dubs, noting a shift toward retaining offensive language in recent years. In line with Chiaro (2021), Hjort's (2009) study analyses swearing in Finnish subtitles and the fact that even though not all of them can be subtitled, as acknowledged by audiovisual translators, audiences welcome swear words translated as faithfully as possible and do not expect their omission.



The study of LGBTQ+ representation in AVT has gained increasing attention due to its cultural and social significance. Several scholars have explored this topic, focusing on different cultural and linguistic contexts. Ranzato (2012) explored Italian dubbing strategies for translating gayspeak and gay themes. Through examples from dubbed films and TV programmes, the author highlighted how Italian translations sometimes altered gayspeak terms, reflecting slower societal acceptance compared to Anglo-Saxon cultures. Martínez Pleguezuelos (2018, 2021) analysed gender and LGBTQ+ representation, focusing on the Spanish dubbing of *Will & Grace* (Kohan & Mutchnick, 1998–2020). His study assessed whether the translated text preserved the same gay identity as portrayed in the ST. Similarly, Villanueva-Jordán (2024) investigated gay masculinity in the Latin American and European Spanish dubbing of *Looking* (Haigh, 2014–2015), revealing notable differences in translation strategies. He argued that the translation of homoeroticism in audiovisual products requires interpretative frameworks that address the expression of sexuality without normative assumptions. Furthermore, he emphasised the importance of recognising the affective dimension of audiovisual translation, where words create networks of meaning that influence how individuals construct and interpret the erotic meaning of audiovisual artifacts. González Cruz (2024) highlighted the increasing presence of LGBTQ+ characters in TV series, while emphasising the challenges that non-binarism poses challenges for translators. She argued that translators play an important role in ensuring the accurate portrayal of diverse identities across languages and cultures. Her study aligns with Martínez Pleguezuelo's (2022), which aims to look into how non-binary language is an element that constructs gender identity and how AVT can help to make it (in)visible.

Other studies from different media, such as that by Anshori et al. (2021), are worthy of mention. They investigated 446 sexual English expressions in YouTube sex toy advertisements, categorising them into orthophemistic, euphemistic, and dysphemistic expressions. They identified 13 translation techniques in Indonesian subtitles, noting challenges with dysphemistic expressions due to cultural taboos. Similar patterns are seen in Latin American subtitling, where euphemisms or neutral terms are preferred (Fuentes-Luque, 2015, 2020). Last but not least, although sex as a taboo element in media accessibility has not been addressed as much as in the case of AVT, there are some studies in this regard. Sanz-Moreno (2017, 2018, 2020) has explored audio descriptions (AD) of sex scenes for blind and partially sighted audiences. Her studies have revealed user preferences for explicit yet objective descriptions, challenging traditional assumptions of censorship in AD. In addition, Villela (2017) discusses the challenges of the AD process of two erotic and sensual scenes of the film *Praia do Futuro* (Ainouz, 2014). This study therefore focuses on the integration of sexual and erotic scenes in the AD script. In line with this, Villanueva-Jordán (in press) explores the complexities of the AD narrative in telefiction with porn and sexual content. With regard to AD reception, Rojo López et al. (2021) conducted a study, opening a new research avenue, on how AD can enable similar experiences for visually impaired and sighted participants that are exposed to porn reception.

3. Methodology

The methodology used for the analysis of the subtitling of *Succession* into Spanish is rooted in the DTS paradigm, as proposed by Toury (2012). Guided by this approach, the aim here is to



elucidate and describe how sexual phrases were handled during the subtitling process to assess the fidelity of the TT to the ST while maintaining a descriptive rather than prescriptive approach to translation practices. Fidelity here, associated with faithfulness (Munday et al., 2022), must be understood as being able to transfer the ST taboo load to the TT as closely as possible. Thus, the focus is on the meaning rather than on the words.

3.1 Initial hypothesis and research questions

Our initial hypothesis posits that sexual phrases in Spain are typically rendered in a faithful manner in the TT (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015), whether through sexual language or the use of other taboo or offensive terms. To examine and validate this hypothesis, we have framed 3 research questions that delineate the objectives of our study:

- RQ1. Were sex-related phrases transferred to the TT? This question aims to gauge the degree of fidelity in the subtitling of sex-related phrases into Spanish in relation to the ST.
- RQ2. In the cases of transfer, were sex-related phrases subtitled using sexual language or any other taboo or offensive terminology? The quantitative data will shed light on whether sexual phrases were subtitled using similar language from the same semantic field or, conversely, whether they employed different taboo or offensive connotations, as already elucidated by Ávila-Cabrera (2015). This will provide insights into the treatment of sexual content in subtitling for Spanish-speaking audiences.
- RQ3. What were the most and least recurrent translation techniques employed? This question aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing and less common translation techniques, which collectively define the approach to transferring sexual terms in this specific case study.

The findings derived from these questions will offer a nuanced perspective on the subtitling strategies employed in *Succession*, particularly regarding the treatment of sexual content for Spanish-speaking audiences.

3.2 The corpus

The corpus analysed in this study comprises the four complete seasons of the TV series *Succession*, created by Jesse Armstrong (2018–2023), that tells the story of Logan Roy, founder and CEO of global media conglomerate Waystar Royco, and his daughter and two of his three sons who will battle for controlling the company. The original audio of the series is in US English, while the subtitles under study are in Spanish (from Spain). The series was originally aired on HBO España (currently Max), primarily targeting Spanish-speaking viewers. The professional subtitling for the four seasons was carried out by Marina Rodríguez García, Javier Sánchez Camacho and María Romero Soronellas from Iyuno.

The decision to analyse this series was based on the number of instances of sexual language that it contains and the variety of such expressions. In order to collect the necessary, the four



seasons of the series were meticulously reviewed by watching them on the screen. The instances in which the ST contained language related to sexuality were identified and annotated on an Excel spreadsheet, previously tagged with the translation techniques (discussed in the next subsection), along with the TT in the form of subtitles. However, swear phrases not directly related to sexual content were excluded, such as *fuck off*, *what the fuck*, *shut the fuck*, etc., as well as insults like *cunt*, *cocksucker*, *ratfucker*, etc. These expressions were excluded because their primary function is not to address sexuality but to perform “face-threatening acts” (Bruti, 2009, p. 7) intended to offend the addressee.

The focus of the analysis was carried out from the ST to the TT, examining how these instances of sexual content or expressions were transferred or not into the subtitles. This study aims to strengthen the fact that taboo topics, in this case dealing with sexual content, tend to be subtitled into Spanish—for the audience in Spain—with fidelity (Ávila-Cabrera, 2017). In addition, given that the four seasons of *Succession* (containing 39 episodes) have been scrutinised, this case study can serve as an evidence that enriches this research field.

3.3 Translation techniques

The translation techniques employed in this study for data analysis were adapted from Ávila-Cabrera’s (2023b) framework, which was specifically designed to address the transfer of offensive and taboo terms in AVT. These techniques aim to assess the extent to which the offensive or taboo load of the original terms in the ST has been preserved, mitigated, or altered in the TT. A detailed explanation of these techniques follows.

Table 1: Taxonomy of translation techniques

Translation techniques	
Transfer	Load toned up
	Load maintained
	Load toned down
Non-transfer	Load neutralised
	Load omitted

Source: Ávila-Cabrera (2023b, p. 78)

As shown in Table 1, two main categories of techniques are discernible: the “transfer” technique, which enables the translation of offensive or taboo terms into the TT, and the “non-transfer” technique, which fails to retain the full or partial weight of the ST in the TT. Within the subset of techniques that successfully transfer the taboo load, 3 distinct cases can be identified. A set of examples from the corpus, accompanied by individual discussions, is presented below.

- Load toned up. This refers to instances where the load in the TT becomes stronger than in the ST phrase(s), as demonstrated in Example 1:

Example 1 – SE02 EP02	Transfer – Load toned up
ST	TT
-Is that all you've got. - Fuck you. Fuck you , man.	¿Y ya está? - Que te den por culo , tío. [And that is? - Get fucked in the ass , man.]

The ST reads: “Fuck you. Fuck you”, which was subtitled as *Que te den por culo* [Get fucked in the ass]. The vulgar phrase “Fuck you” is repeated in the ST to intensify its impact, but in subtitling there is no room for including such a repetition and seems to have been taken a single phrase. Thus, the phrase has been toned up in the subtitle by adopting another dysphemism that is more explicit: *Que te den por culo* [Get fucked in the ass]. The TT therefore intensifies the sexual load of the phrase, making it more vivid and explicit.

- Load maintained. In this case, the ST and the TT are balanced in terms of the taboo load conveyed. Examples 2, 3 and 4 illustrate this technique:

Example 2 – SE03 EP07	Transfer – Load maintained
ST	TT
He loves fucking me, and he just doesn't wanna fuck you anymore.	Le encanta follarme y ya no quiere follarte a ti. [He loves to fuck me and doesn't want to fuck you anymore.]

Example 2 reads: “He loves fucking me”, which was subtitled as *Le encanta follarme* [He loves to fuck me...]. As can be inferred, the taboo load in both the ST and the TT is balanced, as both employ coarse and vulgar language to describe the act of sexual intercourse, constituting a dysphemism. Consequently, the taboo load has been maintained in the TT.

Example 3 – SE04 EP10	Transfer – Load maintained
ST	TT
Fuck you.	Me cago en ti. [I'm shitting on you.]

The case presented in Example 3 corresponds to instances where the ST includes a sexual phrase such as “Fuck you”, which, when subtitled, retains an offensive tone but is no longer related to sexuality. In this case, the transfer has been achieved by using a different offensive expression instead. This case would account for the instances of RQ2, that is, a sexual phrase subtitled using other offensive/taboo terminology rather than sexual.

Example 4 – SE02 EP05	Transfer – Load maintained
ST	TT
Yeah, but you shouldn't be turned on because dead women aren't wet .	no tienes que excitarte [you must not get hot] porque las muertas no se mojan . [because dead women do not get wet .]



The ST shown in Example 4 depicts Roman Roy’s unconventional sexual behaviour, which crosses boundaries. He asks his girlfriend to pretend she is dead because it excites him more, to which she responds as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Snapshot of subtitle (SE02 EP05)



Source: Armstrong (2018-2023)

The ST has been transferred through two subtitles, both of which preserve the taboo load of the ST. The original line reads “you shouldn’t be turned on because dead women aren’t wet.”, and has been subtitled as *no tienes que excitarte* [you must not get hot] and *las muertas no se mojan*. [dead women do not get wet.]. Thus, in both cases, the transfer maintains the original load. The snapshot in Figure 1 highlights Roman Roy’s dominant position over her, which helps viewers to understand the intensity transmitted by the audio and visual channels (Chaume, 2004).

- Load toned down. In this case, the translation in the TT reduces the intensity of the ST, although the translator makes an effort to retain some of the taboo load in the subtitle, as shown in Example 5.

Example 5 – SE02 EP03	Transfer – Load maintained
ST	TT
We’re actually quite relentless in that regard. Just Fuck City .	Somos incansables en ese aspecto. Vivimos en una ciudad de polvos . [We are tireless in that regard. We live in a city of shagging .]

The fact that not every expression in a source language (SL) has a close equivalent in the target language (TL) is illustrated in Example 5 above. The ST includes the phrase “Fuck City”, which

is euphemised as *una ciudad de polvos* [a city of shagging]. The transfer has been made, although the tone has been toned down with the chosen solution.

When the non-transfer technique is employed, two scenarios can be identified:

- Load neutralised. The chosen solution in the TT nullifies the load of the ST, as its effect lacks offensive or taboo connotations. This can be observed in Example 6.

Example 6 – SE03 EP06	Non-transfer – Load neutralised
ST	TT
You just wanna give him a blowjob , so stop projecting.	¿Lo dices por experiencia? [Are you speaking from experience?]

The ST in Example 4 reads: “You just wanna give him a blowjob, so stop projecting”, which was subtitled as *¿Lo dices por experiencia?* [Are you speaking from experience?]. It is evident that the sex-related term “blow-job” is entirely absent in the TT. Instead, the TT employs a question that avoids any sexual or offensive language. Consequently, the approach taken in the TT effectively neutralises the load of the ST.

- Load omitted. This scenario is common in subtitling, often due to the need to condense the text. Offensive or taboo phrases are omitted in the TT for reasons such as brevity or character limitations, among others. Example 7 illustrates this case.

Example 7 – SE03 EP08	Non-transfer – Load omitted
ST	TT
He’s fucking a 20-year-old and he’s planning for babies in jars.	Quiere tener hijos con una veinteañera. [He wants to have kids with a female 20-year-old.]

The ST reads: “He’s fucking a 20-year-old”, which was subtitled as *Quiere tener hijos con una veinteañera* [He wants to have kids with a female 20-year-old.]. The subtitler seems to have condensed the ST by placing greater emphasis on the second part of the script, “he’s planning”... As a result, the sex-related phrase “He’s fucking”... has been omitted in the TT. Omission cases are particularly common in subtitling due to technical constraints as space and time limitations (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021).

4. Data analysis and results

The results derived from the data analysis are now presented in order to address the research questions. Thus, a total of 792 instances of sex-related language have been identified in all the 4 seasons. The following are the 3 research questions, enabling us to delve into each one.



4.1 Research questions

- RQ1. Were sex-related phrases transferred to the TT? In order to answer RQ1, we turn our attention to Table 2, which provides quantitative data related to the transfer of sex-related phrases.

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 will show the cases transferred and not transferred.

Table 2: Analysis of season 1

SE01 EP01-10	Transfer			Non-transfer		
	Examples from each episode	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Neutralised	Omitted
	19	1	17	0	0	1
	14	1	11	0	0	2
	8	1	7	0	0	0
	25	0	20	4	0	1
	18	1	15	1	0	1
	24	1	18	1	3	1
	17	1	15	1	0	0
	43	5	30	6	0	2
23	2	21	0	0	0	
21	1	19	1	0	0	
Grand total						
212	14	173	14	3	8	
100%	6.60	81.62	6.60	1.41	3.77	
Transferred	94.82	Not transferred			5.18	

Source: Authors (2025)

Table 3: Analysis of season 2

SE02 EP01-10	Transfer			Non-transfer		
	Examples from each episode	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Neutralised	Omitted
17	1	11	3	1	1	
27	2	17	5	2	1	
20	0	15	4	0	1	
25	1	22	2	0	0	
23	0	22	1	0	0	
26	1	17	4	1	3	
31	2	24	3	0	2	
29	0	22	5	2	0	
33	2	25	3	2	1	
20	0	17	1	2	0	
Grand total						
251	9	192	31	10	9	
100%	3.58	76.51	12.35	3.98	3.58	
Transferred	92.44	Not transferred			7.56	

Source: Authors (2025)



Table 4: Analysis of season 3

SE03 EP01-09	Transfer			Non-transfer	
	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Neutralised	Omitted
Examples from each episode					
7	1	6	0	0	0
10	0	10	0	0	0
13	0	8	3	1	1
10	0	9	1	0	0
13	2	10	0	1	0
12	0	8	3	1	0
28	0	25	3	0	0
30	0	26	3	1	0
20	0	17	2	0	1
Grand total					
143	3	119	15	4	2
100%	2.09	83.25	10.48	2.79	1.39
Transferred	95.82			Not transferred	4.18

Source: Authors (2025)

Table 5: Analysis of season 4

SE04 EP01-10	Transfer			Non-transfer	
	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Neutralised	Omitted
Examples from each episode					
33	0	28	5	0	0
16	4	10	2	0	0
7	0	7	0	0	0
18	2	16	0	0	0
11	0	10	0	0	1
17	1	13	1	2	0
20	0	15	2	2	1
17	1	6	5	4	1
20	0	13	7	0	0
27	1	15	4	6	1
Grand total					
186	9	133	26	14	4
100%	4.83	71.53	13.97	7.52	2.15
Transferred	90.33			Not transferred	9.67

Source: Authors (2025)

The data in Tables 2-5 reveal that transfer cases have surpassed non-transfer ones, with results exceeding 90%. It is evident that the subtitling of sex-related language has demonstrated an exceptional level of fidelity to the taboo load of the ST. Therefore, RQ1 can be answered affirmatively: the majority of sex-related language cases have been closely transferred to the Spanish subtitles.

- RQ2. In the cases of transfer, were sex-related phrases subtitled using sexual language or any other taboo or offensive terminology?

Following an in-depth analysis of whether sex-related phrases were transferred to the TT using sexual terms or other taboo or offensive expressions, Table 6 clarifies this by showing the instances where of sex-related phrases were transferred using offensive or taboo expressions instead of equivalent sexual terms.

Table 6: Not-sex-related transfers in the TT

Not sexually-related transfers	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Total	Percentages
SE01	14	173	14	201	9 not-sexual (4.5%)
SE02	9	192	31	232	14 not-sexual (6%)
SE03	3	119	15	137	0 not-sexual
SE04	9	133	26	168	14 not-sexual (6.5%)

Source: Authors (2025)

The data presented in Table 6 reveal that only a minority of cases were transferred not using sex-related language but instead conveyed a certain degree of taboo or offensive tone in the subtitling, as described in Ávila-Cabrera's (2023b) taxonomy of offensive and taboo language. This can be attributed to technical restrictions, such as rapid exchanges between speakers, the need for text condensation inherent to this AVT mode, and the use of idiomatic expressions easily comprehensible to the target audience, as advocated by Ávila-Cabrera (2023b). The subtitling was predominantly carried out using sexual phrases, as shown by the quantitative data: 95.5% in season 1, 94% in season 2, 100% in season 3, and 93.5% in season 4.

- RQ3. What were the most and least recurrent translation techniques employed?

Table 7 examines the translation techniques applied during the subtitling of the 4 seasons.

Table 7. Sex-related cases not transferred under this category

Grand total		Transfer		Non-transfer	
Examples	Toned up	Maintained	Toned down	Neutralised	Omitted
212	14	173	14	3	8
251	9	192	31	10	9
143	3	119	15	4	2
186	9	133	26	14	4
792	35	617	86	31	23
100%	4.41	77.90	10.85	3.91	2.90
Transfer	93.18			Non-transfer	6.81

Source: Authors (2025)

Table 7 provides a comprehensive examination of the frequency of translation techniques used throughout the subtitling process. Among the transfer cases, the predominant technique is “maintaining”, which accounts for 77.90% and preserves the sexual load of the phrases in the TT.



This is followed by toning down (10.85%), which reduces the impact of the phrases, and toning up (4.41%), which amplifies it. Notably, these 3 categories significantly surpass the percentages observed in non-transfer cases, where neutralised cases account for only 3.91% and omitted instances for 2.90%. These findings align with the quantitative data from Tables 2-5, further corroborated by the translation techniques highlighted in Table 7.

4.2 Discussion

From a DTS approach and focusing on the quantitative analysis of the corpus, our initial hypothesis has been confirmed through the analysis of data presented in the previous section. For European-Spanish-speaking audiences, sex-related phrases tend to be translated with fidelity to the ST (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015; De Laurentiis & Marra, 2024; Ogea Pozo & Botella Tejera, 2023; Valdeón, 2020, 2024) whether using explicit sexual language or resorting to other taboo or offensive expressions, as shown by the results of RQ1 and RQ2. The findings for RQ1 and RQ2 indicate a strong tendency to retain the essence of these terms as closely as possible to the original in the TT. Regarding RQ2, less than 10% of the transferred cases were translated using alternative phrases with taboo or offensive connotations. This low percentage highlights the contrast with the high proportion of cases subtitled using sex-related language. These results reinforce the notion that subtitlers across all seasons aimed to convey sexual language as faithfully as possible. When direct sexual phrases could not be transferred, vulgar or offensive expressions were used in the subtitles in an effort to maintain the intended tone. For example, “-Fuck you!” subtitled as *-Vete a la mierda*. [Fuck off!] (SE01 EP02), a vulgar phrase; “Fuck you” as *Joder* [Fuck.] (SE01 EP03), an expletive; “Well, fuck me.” as *Me cago en todo* [I shit on everything.] (SE02 EP06), a vulgar expression; “-But I don't like being fucked.” as *-Pero no me gusta que me puteen* [But I don't like to be fucking bugged.] (SE02EP07), an offensive phrase; “Who the hell calls us The Incredible Fuck Brother Bandwagon?” as *¿Quién hostias nos llama eso?* [Who fucking calls us like that?] (SE04EP10), a religious-related taboo phrase. Other studies have shown how swearing and taboo language are prone of undergoing semantic changes, such as those by Pujol, (2006), Santaemilia, (2008), Moura (2022), or Xavier (2024), among others.

These results align with the study conducted by Ogea Pozo and Botella Tejera (2023), which highlights the fidelity in transferring sex-related language from English into Spanish dubbing. While dubbing and subtitling are different AVT modes, the outcomes here open new research avenues to compare the fidelity of translating sex-related language into European Spanish across multiple AVT modes of the same audiovisual product. On the other hand, the results found in this case study do not coincide with Valdeón's (2020, 2024) vulgarisation hypothesis, taking into account that the toned up cases have been much lower than those in which the offensive/taboo load was maintained, this technique being the most recurrent in all 4 seasons (see Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Regarding RQ3, the findings suggest that the most frequently employed translation techniques include toning up, maintaining or toning down the taboo load of the ST in the TT. The cultural background of the target audience appears to have been a consideration by the subtitlers of the series, as European-Spanish-speaking viewers are used to being exposed to sex-related language in audiovisual content without requiring significant censorship (Ávila-Cabrera, 2015, 2017; Ogea



Pozo & Botella Tejera, 2023; Ogea Pozo & Bujalance, 2022). However, the lack of a reception study represents a limitation of this research. There are thorough reception studies with other target languages that bring to the fore the fact that audiences consume audiovisual content with swear words, offensive, sexual language, etc. and especially younger viewers welcome them, such as those in Finnish (Hjort, 2009), German (Briechele & Eppler, 2019), Portuguese (Moura, 2024) and Chinese (Jiang & Doherty, 2024) for example.

5. Conclusions

This paper has analysed the subtitling of sex-related language in the TV series *Succession*, characterised by frequent use of swear words, open discussions about sex, and references to other taboo subjects. The primary focus has been on how these sexual expressions were transferred to the Spanish subtitles intended for audiences in Spain, as broadcast by Max.

Our initial hypothesis, confirmed through the quantitative analysis addressing the research questions, sheds light on the treatment of sexual phrases in the Spanish subtitles of this TV series. We have confirmed that these subtitles have been faithfully transferred to the TT, with a majority of cases employing sex-related language; similarly, Ávila-Cabrera (2015) reported similar results on the subtitling of offensive and taboo language into Spanish of some of Tarantino's films, with sex-related language under scrutiny.

In summary, with regard to RQ1, it was proved that sex-related phrases were mostly transferred to the TT in more than 90% of the 4 seasons (see Tables 2-5); as for RQ2 it was revealed that in the most of the seasons sex-related content was subtitled by employing the same type of language (in SE01 in 95.5%; in SE02 in 94%; in SE03 in 100%; in SE04 in 93.5%) (see Table 6); regarding RQ3, the most recurrent translation techniques were those that transfer the sex load to the subtitles, that is, maintained (77.90%), toned down (10.85%), and toned up (4.41%), while the non-transfer techniques accounted for 6.81% (see Table 7). However, this trend is not universal. Another study conducted by Rodríguez-Arancón and Ávila-Cabrera (2024) on the subtitling of religious expressions into Spanish of the same TV series, *Succession*, showed that subtitling for Spanish-speaking audiences in Spain often avoids direct insults to religious references. Instead, subtitlers opt for expletives or swear words from different taboo areas to maintain the intensity of strong language in the subtitles. This reflects cultural sensitivities, as audiences might find direct insults to figures like "God" or "Jesus Christ" offensive.

It is important to underline that Spanish audiences differ significantly from their Latin American counterparts, who often receives foreign audiovisual products toned down or stripped of their taboo load entirely, as observed by Fuentes-Luque (2015, 2020). By contrast, Moura's (2024) research on audience reception in the case of Brazilian Portuguese revealed that in certain audiovisual genres the audience expects the use of (more) swear words in the narrative, which also lines up with Valdeón's (2020) vulgarisation hypothesis.

One limitation of this study is its focus on Spanish spoken in Spain; further research could contrast the subtitling of this TV series with the neutral Spanish commonly used in Latin America. Another limitation is the lack of qualitative data from the subtitlers themselves because being able to interview them would allow us to triangulate the quantitative data in the form of the analysis



conducted with qualitative data from the subtitlers' views on their subtitling of sexual-related language, and also if the subtitlers worked with templates. Nonetheless, this study is expected to offer a valuable contribution to the literature on taboos in subtitling, specifically concerning the translation of sexual references for Spanish-speaking audiences. Further studies could explore audience reactions to corroborate or challenge the findings presented here.

In conclusion, this study underscores the faithful treatment in the subtitling of sex-related language in the subtitling of all seasons of *Succession* into Spanish, providing significant insights into how this taboo topic has been addressed in subtitling.

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The heartbeat of multimodal creativity: A pilot heart rate study on objectivity and subjectivity in audio description

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Abstract: The appropriateness of subjectivity or objectivity in audio description (AD) is an ongoing debate where the professional and the academic perspectives seem to collide. Whereas some professional guidelines support the view that an objective AD is the advisable option, some scholars have pointed out the advantages of more creative alternatives. Meanwhile, part of AD research is making inroads into experimental methodologies: AD and eye-tracking, text-to-speech AD, the automatic generation of AD, and physiological measurements applied to AD, such as heart rate, cortisol levels, or skin conductance response, among others. In this vein, our proposal presents an experimental pilot study using a heart rate sensor to measure partially sighted participants' response to different combinations of subjective and objective multimodal components within the AD script. To do so, objective and subjective multimodal components from an AD clip from Netflix's *Money Heist* were analysed. Afterwards, objective components were turned subjective (and the other way around), which resulted in two versions of the clip in subjective-objective terms: the original and the creative one. Both versions were recorded by a professional studio, participants were randomly assigned one of the clips, and they orally completed a demographic survey, a presence test, and a comprehension test followed by a semi-structured interview. Moreover, the UPTIVO Belt-D heart rate sensor was used to measure beats per minute, average heart rate, maximum heart rate, minimum heart rate, etc. Preliminary results were triangulated with the tests and the interview to obtain empirical data about the combination of subjective and objective multimodal components in AD that induces the highest heart rate and presence levels, enables better comprehension and is best regarded by users. Future research following this methodological design and involving an appropriate number of participants could provide empirical evidence about the immersive combination of objectivity and subjectivity in AD to be considered by guidelines.

Keywords: multimodality; audio description; creativity; heart rate; experimental research.



1. Introduction

Audio description (AD) is an accessible audiovisual translation (AVT) and media accessibility (MA) mode that makes audiovisual products (such as films, series, or documentaries) and events (theater, opera, or museums) accessible by means of a verbal narration that translates visual elements (as well as some aural elements that are difficult to interpret) primarily for visually impaired or partially sighted users. Jankowska (2015) as well as Perego and Pacinotti (2020) state that rudimentary forms of AD can be linked to the explanation of images and inscriptions since ancient times, but AD as a professional discipline appeared during the 1960s in the USA with Chet Avery in the American Department of Education. According to Mazur (2020), AD in the USA is more systematically found in 1970s and 1980s theater, which later expanded to UK theater, and then to television (Spain and Italy) and cinema (Poland and Germany). Perego and Pacinotti (2020) point to Gregory Frazier's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1975) as the starting point as a discipline, where AD as a concept is first developed, but it will not be until the late 1990s and early 2000s that AD begins to receive more scholarly attention (Greco & Jankowska, 2020). One of the crucial aspects that has been tackled both professionally and scholarly is the issue of objectivity in AD, so in the following section we will discuss professional and academic views on the topic. After that, we will develop the methodological design and preliminary results of a pilot heart rate experiment to study the most immersive combination of objective and subjective multimodal components in AD that are best received by end-users.

2. Objectivity in audio description. Profession versus research.

Very diverse AD documents, usually called “guidelines”, “quality standards”, or “norms”, regulate the contents of the AD script to different extents, which helps audio describers in their decision making. The concept of “norm” is related to the notion of “standard” and refers to the prescriptive instructions about how to audio describe in certain circumstances. According to Iturregui-Gallardo (2019), this type of document is created by a national or international official standardization agency of a professional nature that intends to homogenize AD. The Spanish *UNE 153020* norm (AENOR, 2005) is an example of a national standard, since it was created by the Agencia Española de Normalización y Certificación (AENOR) and developed by a commission of ONCE members (the national organization for the blind and visually impaired), audio describers drawing on their professional experience, and surveys. In 2000 in the United Kingdom, Ofcom published a revised version of the 1996 *ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description*, a document that originates from the British reception study Audio Description on Television (AUDETEL) project that took place between 1992 and 1995 (Jankowska, 2015). In 2021, Ofcom published the *Guidelines on the Provision of Television Access Services* (updated in 2024), which covers AD, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, and sign language interpreting. In the United States, two national standards can be mentioned: the *Audio Description Standards*, created by the American Council of the Blind (ACB) in 2009, and the *Standards for Audio Description and Code of Professional Conduct for Describers* created in 2009 by the Audio Description Coalition. From an international perspective, we could highlight the *ISO/IEC 200071-21* standard (2015), a document created by the International Organization for



Standardization (ISO) to address the creation of AD and its contents. Another international standard is the *European Blind Union (EBU) Handbook for High Quality Audio Description on Screen* (Hyks & Blokland, 2023), which addresses issues such as the use of verb tenses, articles, the vocabulary that should be used, character naming, their physical appearance, the issue of diversity, the levels of importance of certain activities (principal, secondary, or non-essential), content selection, and so on. Similarly, we should mention the notion of “guidelines”, which are “recommendations produced by private and public companies, professionals or scholars” (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2019, p. 42). Guidelines can be created by private companies (for instance, Netflix), by associations or institutions (such as the American Council of the Blind), or they can have an academic nature, like the European project ADLAB, which results from the European reception studies on media accessibility Digital Television for All (DTV4ALL) and Hybrid Broadcast Broadband for All (HBB4ALL).

Despite their diversity, all of them exert a certain sense of prescription over AD. In this sense, Pedersen (2020, p. 426) talks about experience-based norms, in which “practitioners [...] reported on their experience of their work”, and where, drawing on introspection and reflection, fundamental good practices for a discipline are described, which resonates with some of the national standards already explained. After that, Pedersen (2020) includes descriptive norms, which result from empirical research based on case studies or corpus studies (such as ADLAB). Finally, Pedersen (2020) identifies the experimental norms, which confirm or question the contents of previous norms. In our view, while current guidelines and standards have an evident benefit for the homogenization of AD, experimental studies might help AD to better adapt their contents to end-users’ needs. This urge for experimental studies goes in consonance with the latest developments in AD research. In the 1990s and 2000s, early studies revolved around AD in different countries, their linguistic and textual traits, and their standards or guidelines, which gave rise to studies on alternatives to AD in different aspects, such as objectivity (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020). Progressively, research on AD has expanded into three main categories (Mazur, 2020): text-based, reception, and experimental studies. Given the nature of this paper, it is worth focusing on the myriad of AD research from an experimental perspective: AD and eye-tracking (Krejtz et al., 2012; Kruger, 2012; Orero & Vilaró, 2012; Di Giovanni, 2014; Mazur & Chmiel, 2016; Krejtz et al., 2024), text-to-speech AD (Szarkowska, 2011), the automatic generation of AD (Delgado et al., 2015; Hasegawa-Johnson et al., 2017), and physiological measurements applied to AD, such as heart-rate (Jankowska et al., 2022), cortisol levels (Ramos Caro, 2015, 2016; Rojo López et al., 2021), or skin conductance response (Matamala et al., 2020), among others.

Taking into account the number of documents that regulate AD from a professional perspective and the flourishing of research on this MA mode, it seems convenient to tackle the widely discussed notion of objectivity and the creative alternatives to it. We can find recurrent allusions to objectivity in many guidelines, it is a constant topic at AD congresses and in special issues from international journals, and many papers reflect on whether AD should opt for objective or subjective renditions. However, the disagreement revolves around two opposing views: professional AD guidelines have traditionally preferred objective descriptions (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022), whereas some AVT and MA scholars prefer more creative alternatives.

Regarding the professional perspective on objectivity, national AD standards are a clear example of this viewpoint. The Spanish *UNE 153020* norm advises not to describe any subjective



point of view (AENOR, 2005). The French *La Charte de l'audiodescription* suggests that the description must be done in an objective way and not to use subjective adjectives (Morisset & Gonant, 2008). In the UK, the *ITC Guidance* (2000) states that AD should not reflect the personal view of the describer, whereas *Ofcom's Guidelines on the Provision of Television Access Services* (2024, p. 8) state that “adverbs are a useful shorthand to describing emotions and actions but should not be subjective”. In the US, a similar recommendation can be found in the *Standards for Audio Description and Code of Professional Conduct for Describers* (Audio Description Coalition, 2009, p. 2), which suggest to “describe objectively”, as well as in the *American Audio Description Standards* (California Audio Describers Alliance, 2009, p. 9) when they point out that “the best audio describers objectively recount the visual aspects of an image”. In Brazil, the *Guia para Produções Audiovisuais Acessíveis* (Naves et al., 2016) states that AD language must be objective, simple, and succinct (yet vivid and imaginative), while the *Acessibilidade na comunicação: Audiodescrição* (ABNT, 2018) suggests that the AD script should be coherent, cohesive, fluid, with an objective syntax, etc. Moreover, Joel Snyder's (2014, p. 163) *The Visual Made Verbal* asserts that “the best audio describer is sometimes referred to as a *verbal camera lens*, objectively recounting visual aspects of an event”. Finally, Netflix's (2024, p. 1–2) guidelines state that “description should be factual” and “description should not be opinionated”.

As for the academic perspective, there have been considerable attempts to explore more creative alternatives that deviate from objectivity, which aligns with the concept of “creative media accessibility”, which is “those practices that not only attempt to provide access for the users of a film or a play, but also seek to become an artistic contribution in their own right and to enhance user experience in a creative or imaginative way” (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022, p. 84). Even if these proposals have been labelled as “interpretative”, “creative”, “narrative”, or “subjective”, we believe that the term “creative” encompasses all of them as examples of creative media accessibility. In this light, according to Jankowska (2015, p. 22), “a hundred per cent objectivity is impossible, and AD is always subjective, since it is a choice made by a particular audio describer”. ADLAB states that “AD too is always subjective to some extent since it is based on the interpretation of the audio describer” (Remael et al., 2014, p. 8). Mazur (2020, p. 235) explains that “although AD guidelines generally advise against using subjective judgment in description, in some cases an objective description may be difficult”. We believe that the intersemiotic transfer in AD entails some textual subjectivity related to what to include in the script, which differs from a personal subjectivity related to how to describe those elements. This difference appears in ADLAB (2013), where a distinction is made between personal interpretation (subjectivity) and text-based interpretation (objectivity). In our view, ADLAB's text-based interpretation should not be equated to objectivity, but it is rather proof that complete objectivity is never possible in AD.

Focusing on the creative alternatives proposed by scholars, Kruger (2010) introduced the notion of the “descriptive-narrative continuum” with three types of AD: an explicitly descriptive AD, an AD with some narrative markers and subjective interpretation, and finally an audio narration that favors a coherent narration. Szarkowska (2013) proposed an *auteur* description that includes vivid and emotional language, additional information about the characters, their emotions, as well as actions and settings not necessarily visible on screen. Jankowska (2015) suggests a creative audio description that includes vivid language, metaphors, emotions, and film language. Walczak (2017)



also proposes a creative description, which uses *mise-en-shot* elements as well as intensified, vivid, and emotional vocabulary. Moreover, a traditional notion that can be found in research on creative AD is the concept of “style”. In this sense, Fryer and Freeman (2012) propose a “cinematic AD” style that includes filmic language. Bardini (2020) distinguishes conventional, cinematographic, and narrative AD styles. Holsanova (2016) studies a descriptive AD style that focuses on spatial and visual details, and a narrative style that covers temporal and dynamic elements. Soler Gallego and Luque Colmenero (2023) study AD for museums and compare a standard style to minority styles, such as what they call “gist style”. Finally, Rizzo and Spinzi (2023) study creativity as a multidimensional tool in AD, and to do so they investigated whether and how creativity is used to transmit culture-specific references in “authorial AD”.

In conclusion, there seem to be two points of view regarding objectivity in AD. Firstly, we can identify a professional perspective present in most guidelines where objectivity is a desirable option. On the other hand, an academic perspective rejects the idea of complete objectivity being possible and encourages more creative alternatives (where “creative” is considered to be a deviation from objectivity). Moreover, part of AD research seems to be moving towards experimental methodologies, so in this paper we will contribute to the objectivity debate following some of the latest trends in AD research by presenting an experimental proposal using a heart rate sensor to measure partially sighted participants’ response to different combinations of subjective and objective multimodal components, as will be fully explained in the following section.

3. Methodology

This proposal draws on previous descriptive research (Romero-Muñoz, 2023, 2025) where the multimodal components (i.e., the multimodal configuration) of some filmic AD scripts from some streaming platforms proved to revolve around four sources of information: movement, iconography, spatial-temporal changes, and textual information. Following the recent trends in AD research, an experimental reception study seemed an adequate option to properly tackle end-users’ needs beyond prescriptive or descriptive views. More specifically, our proposal is a heart rate study among partially sighted participants that seeks to determine the most immersive combination of objective and subjective multimodal elements triggering the highest levels of presence, comprehension and heart rate measurements.

Even though reception studies are essential to provide AVT researchers with information about users’ preferences, which can help determine what processes best fit certain audiovisual products (Mangiron, 2022), they are not very frequent in our tradition (Orrego-Carmona, 2019). In reception studies, “different research methods have been used, ranging from surveys and questionnaires to determine users’ preferences, to more experimental studies using eye-tracking and other biometric indicators, such as heart rate” (Mangiron, 2022, p. 416). As Orrego-Carmona (2019) explains, the main research methods in reception studies applied to AVT are questionnaires, biometrical indicators (such as eye-tracking), interviews, direct observation and focal groups. It must be clarified that these methods are usually mixed, so in this case we propose a combination of questionnaires (quantitative data), a heart rate sensor (quantitative data), and a semi-structured interview (qualitative data), as will be developed in the following subsections.



3.1 Questionnaires and interview

Questionnaires are a method that can be found in some AVT research since the emergence of the sociological turn in Translation Studies, although they are also present in experimental research (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). Although similar (yet slightly different) concepts coexist, such as “survey”, “test”, and “questionnaire”, we prefer the term “questionnaire” here, which is a list of questions in a format that allows structuring general information, opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and other data about participants in a standardized way, thus allowing this data to be generalized to a larger population (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). Given their subjective nature, questionnaires in experimental studies are normally used before or after the stimulus, while physiological measurements (such as heartbeat) are used during the stimulus (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2019). Questionnaires should be short to ensure completion (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013) and they need to be specifically designed to obtain the information needed. According to Mazur and Chmiel (2016, p. 102), “comprehension questions may bring more objective data than preference questions since the former test comprehension and not personal likes and dislikes”. In this light, three questionnaires were used in this experiment: a demographic questionnaire (before the stimulus), a comprehension questionnaire (after the stimulus), and a presence questionnaire (after the stimulus). Since participants were partially sighted, questionnaires were read out loud by the researcher and the answers were recorded. Demographic questionnaires help researchers specify the participants' profile, so this experiment opted for questions about their gender, birth date, academic background, their type of vision loss (total, partial, congenital, or acquired), how often they consumed audiovisual products, whether and how they used AD, etc. Regarding the comprehension questionnaire, it included both multiple-choice and true or false questions, and participants answered it right after the stimulus so that they did not forget about the fragment (a clip from *Money Heist*). Finally, in this experiment, presence is an essential notion to measure participants' immersion, so the ITC Sense of Presence Inventory or ITC-SOPI (Lessiter et al., 2001) was selected given its frequency in other AVT and MA studies. More specifically, we used the ITC-SOPI short form used by Fryer and Freeman (2014), which includes ten questions about four dimensions (physical space, engagement, ecological validity, and negative effects) that must be answered using one-to-five Likert scales.

However, questionnaires may not be the best instrument to address explanatory data, such as experiences or opinions (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013), so the experiment design also resorted to qualitative data retrieved from interviews, since they allow access to participants' thoughts and opinions about a specific topic (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). In this experiment, we used a semi-structured interview where participants were asked whether they were familiar with the fragment, whether they could provide a summary of the contents, whether they remembered any reference to multimodal contents (movements, iconography, spatial-temporal changes or text appearing on screen), whether they found the fragment immersive, their opinion about the AD voice, whether they considered that the AD addressed their needs, whether they would change anything about the AD, and finally whether they preferred objective or creative versions of AD. While these questions were prepared beforehand, some changes were allowed depending on the participant's interaction. The interview was recorded and processed afterwards with the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti.



3.2 Heart rate and immersion

In experimental reception studies, it is frequent to complement questionnaire data with physiological measurements (Orrego-Carmona, 2019). In this case, we complemented questionnaires and the interview data with heart rate measurements to study the notion of immersion in AD. More specifically, the aim is to find the most immersive combination of subjective and objective multimodal components obtaining the highest results with the heart rate sensor, questionnaires, and the interview. In this way, we seek to come up with the appropriate formula so that AD can be not only a source of information, but also a source of entertainment and enjoyment. This methodological combination follows the trend suggested by Kruger and Doherty (2018, p. 91), according to whom, in AD, “a clear trend is also emerging to investigate subjective audience reception and immersion as a result of different styles of AD, as well as to use eye tracking of sighted viewers to determine areas of salience on screen that could be used in deciding what to audio describe”.

As Mazur and Chmiel (2016) state, there have been some reception studies exploring users' acceptance of new AD solutions: text-to-speech AD (Szarkowska & Mączyńska, 2011; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2012), *auteur* AD (Szarkowska & Wasylczyk, 2014), AD in verse (Udo & Fels, 2009), AD narrated in first person (Fels et al., 2006), the congruence of AD voices with the filmic content (Iglesias Fernández et al., 2015), intonation (Cabeza-Caceres, 2013), etc. However, not all of these reception studies are experimental. As Díaz Cintas and Szarkowska (2020) remind us, some AVT and MA researchers have focused on ways to better understand audiences' attitudes and behaviors towards certain AVT modes by means of offline methodologies, such as questionnaires, interviews, focal groups, or direct observation. However, the cognitive turn has facilitated research focused on cognitive processes, which, in turn, has led to the use of online and offline experimental methodologies, among which González and Jankowska (2024) highlight the use of physiological measurements, such as eye-tracking, electroencephalography (EEG), galvanic skin response, and heart rate, to study issues such as information processing, reading behavior, attention location, cognitive load, comprehension, and emotions. In our case, we will use physiological measurements stemming from heart rate data in immersive AD.

We must state that the concept of “immersion” can be elusive, since some researchers often resort to notions like “presence”, “enjoyment”, “entertainment”, “engagement”, etc. According to Walczak (2017, p. 26), “immersion is a term used to describe the sensation of the audience being plunged into the story world, experiencing the mediated environment as if it was unmediated”. Cavallo and Fryer (2022, p. 132) explain that immersion is “an objective assessment relating to the degree to which the individual is cut off from the real world such that their sensory inputs come instead from the virtual world”. A similar concept is that of “engagement”, which, in some cases, “it refers to cognitive operations such as attention, effort or agency when performing a task, while in others it refers more generally to participation in activities” (Richardson et al., 2020, p. 1). Then we have the concept of “presence”, a term that appears frequently in studies on virtual reality (Baños et al., 2004) and is often associated with Sherry's (2004) description of it as the feeling of being in a mediated space different from the reality in which the person is. As Cavallo and Fryer (2022, p. 60-61) point out, “presence encapsulates the extent to which any medium induces feelings of

engagement, immersion, and transportation into the virtual world. It occurs when the user is unaware of their experience as being mediated”. Therefore, presence could be summarized as “the feeling of being there” (Heeter, 1992). On the other hand, Iturregui-Gallardo (2019, p. 54) supports the view that “the terms ‘entertainment’ and ‘enjoyment’ can be used as synonyms” and he continues saying that “for entertainment to happen, the spectator should feel immersed in the content which provides emotions that will ultimately bring them to a pleasurable state”.

As these definitions might hint, there is no clear consensus as to what immersion is. Baños et al. (2004) state that, although there have been some attempts to differentiate between presence and immersion, immersion would be the objective description of the technology, whereas presence would be the user’s subjective experience, which means that, if something is immersive, someone would feel presence. Iturregui-Gallardo (2019) associates two components with immersion: flow and presence. The concept of “flow”, which was proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1988) and later applied to media by Sherry (2004), could be defined as “the pleasure experienced from the immersion in different activities and tasks” (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2019, p. 54). As for presence, Lombard and Ditton (1997) define it as the illusion of a mediated experience not being mediated. In this vein, we support Iturregui-Gallardo’s (2019, p. 55) statement: “in some way, the concept of presence when applied to audiovisual media refers to the immersion produced by non-real and mediated input and the experience of transportation inside the mediated environment without being physically moved”. Therefore, we suggest that when an audiovisual product produces an immersive experience, it will trigger high levels of presence in users.

As we have seen, part of AD research moves towards reception and experimental studies, some of which have explored immersion or presence, and some even using heart rate. Following the studies from Baños et al. (2004), Dillon (2006), Riva (2011) and Fryer (2013), the higher the level of presence is, the bigger the emotions that will be felt. In other words, presence is related to emotional activation or arousal. On the other hand, Richardson et al. (2020, p. 2) state that “changes in heart rate have been linked to increased information processing demands and/or greater mental effort” and, more precisely, “increased heart rate is an indicator of increased effort and serves as an indirect measure of cognitive and emotional engagement”. The reason to connect AD with immersion is that an immersive product induces the feelings of flow and presence, among others (Fresno, 2017), so if AD scripts attract and hold users’ attention, then they can improve their filmic experience. In other words, knowing the key to increasing presence can be a useful way to increase AD effectiveness (Di Giovanni, 2020). In this way, the aim of AD would not only be breaking with comprehension barriers, but immersive AD could also allow users to have higher enjoyment. In this sense, Ramos Caro (2013) explores the emotional impact in an experimental heart rate study with sighted and visually impaired participants. Her results suggest that there should not be any empirical reason not to use more emotional AD. Fryer and Freeman (2014) carry out one of the first studies on emotions and presence with partially sighted participants by studying different variables: fragments with and without AD, and with human or synthetic voices. Their results suggest that verbal information does not reduce presence, a feeling that would be increased by the use of human voices. Wilken and Kruger (2016) investigate the effect of having (or not having) *mise-en-shot* elements in AD on users’ immersion. Following their conclusions, the absence of *mise-en-shot* elements in AD has no influence on the feeling of transportation, but it does on the way the audience

identifies with characters, so these elements might be relevant to immersion. Fresno (2017) studies engagement in AD and suggests that this feeling is triggered by comprehension and immersion. Walczak and Fryer (2017) explore how AD styles and locution can influence the levels of presence.

Regarding the device used for our experiment, this pilot study used the UPTIVO Belt-D, a heart rate sensor that was attached to the participants' chest. While the versatility of the device would allow the experiment to take place anywhere, it was restricted to the Asociación Retina facilities, which was familiar to all participants and a location where they felt at ease. While this circumstance might affect the ecological validity of the experiment, since participants do not usually consume audiovisual products in this situation, the main advantage is the possibility of controlling most variables.

3.3 Materials

This experiment is the continuation of a previous eye-tracking study, where the material analysed was narrowed down to two short fragments of video in order to be able to manage a feasible amount of eye-tracking data (for an in-depth explanation, see Romero-Muñoz, in press). Drawing on those two excerpts, in this experiment, a one-minute fragment from *Guillermo del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities* (episode 1, season 1) was used as an experiment simulation so that participants could understand the dynamic of the experiment without having prior knowledge related to the actual video that was going to be used for the experiment, a five-minute fragment from *Money Heist* (episode 2, season 3).

Table 1: Fragment from the official and creative ADs

Time in	Time out	Original AD	Creative AD
00.00.00.19	00.00.26.11	Una serie Netflix. Una producción Vancouver Media. En el vestíbulo del Banco de España, Lisboa, Estocolmo y Tokio empuñan sus fusiles. Caminan serenas entre los rehenes. Van vestidas con mono rojo y chaleco antibalas. Río exhala y relaja los hombros. Las mujeres comienzan a desvestirse. Denver aprieta los labios y sonríe a Estocolmo.	Una letra N roja de Netflix se despliega como un abanico en un espectro de colores. Título: "Una serie Netflix". Texto en pantalla: "Una producción Vancouver Media". En un vestíbulo, Lisboa, Estocolmo y Tokio empuñan sus fusiles de asalto. Caminan entre los rehenes. Van vestidas con mono rojo y chaleco antibalas para protegerse. Río exhala tranquilo y baja los hombros. Las mujeres se desvisten con cuidado. Denver aprieta los labios, tenso, y le regala una sonrisa a Estocolmo.
00.00.27.23	00.00.31.12	Río le regala un guiño a Tokio mientras toma el fusil de ella.	Río le guiña un ojo a Tokio mientras toma decidido el fusil de ella.
00.00.32.11	00.00.57.07	Palermo grita a los rehenes "¡Caretas fuera!" y ellos se quitan las máscaras. Río deja las armas de las tres mujeres sobre una pared. A continuación, camina entre las dos hileras de rehenes para que estos vayan echando sus caretas en una bolsa de deporte que sujeta con las dos manos. Las tres mujeres se descalzan y se arremangan las perneras del pantalón.	Palermo grita a los rehenes y ellos se quitan obedientes las máscaras. Río deja las armas de las tres mujeres lentamente sobre una pared. A continuación, camina decidido entre las dos hileras de rehenes asustados para que estos vayan echando sus caretas en una bolsa. Las tres mujeres se descalzan con lentitud y se arremangan cuidadosamente las perneras del pantalón.

Source: Author (2025)



The reason for using just one video for the experiment is the fact that two variables were added to *Money Heist*'s fragment: creativity and gender. In a previous descriptive study carried out by Romero-Muñoz (2023), AD scripts proved to be a mixture of objective and subjective multimodal components, so the original AD script's contents were manipulated in creative terms: objective elements were turned subjective and subjective elements were turned objective (Table 1), drawing on the professional and academic proposals presented in section 2. According to Romero-Muñoz's (2023) study, 80% of the AD contents were objective, which means that the creative AD in this experimental study was 80% subjective.

As for gender, the research aimed to determine whether gender can be relevant to immersion, so the professional studio that recorded the official Netflix AD from *Money Heist* in Spain (Mira lo Que Digo) recorded four different AD versions in Spanish (Table 2): the original AD recorded by a man (Test 1), the original AD recorded by a woman (Test 2), a creative AD recorded by a man (Test 3), and a creative AD recorded by a woman (Test 4).

Table 2: Heart rate experiment Ads

Tests	Video fragment	AD	Voice
Test 1	<i>Money Heist</i>	original	man
Test 2	<i>Money Heist</i>	original	woman
Test 3	<i>Money Heist</i>	creative	man
Test 4	<i>Money Heist</i>	creative	woman

Source: Author (2025)

Thus, we consider that our control group is made up of the participants who listened to the original AD, both with the male and female voices, since we believe that the experience of these participants is the closest to what users might have felt when listening to the AD from *Money Heist* in real life. On the other hand, the participants who listened to the creative AD (either with the woman's or man's voice) make up our experimental group, who experienced a far more subjective AD than the real one from Netflix (Table 3).

Table 3: Control and experimental groups

Test	Creativity	Gender	Group
1	original	man	control
2	original	woman	control
3	creative	man	experimental
4	creative	woman	experimental

Source: Author (2025)

3.4 Participants

Regarding participants, it must be stated that we present a pilot study here to verify the validity of the experiment, "this will allow the researcher to test selected methods of analysis and will give a feeling for how much data might need to be collected to establish some level of credibility" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013, p. 22). Therefore, we limit this first approach to two participants with certain common characteristics: partial sight. There are many classifications regarding people with some major visual loss: blindness, low vision, vision impairment, partial sight, etc. Moreover, this vision loss can have different degrees (total or partial) and have multiple causes: diabetes, glaucoma,



macular degeneration, cataracts, etc. (see López Rubio, 2024, for an overview). According to ONCE, the Spanish association for the blind and partially sighted, in 2022, 81.7% of its members were partially sighted, whereas 13.7% were blind. Taking into account this numerical predominance of partial sight over total blindness, we contacted a Spanish retinal dystrophy association called Asociación Retina, whose members were partially sighted. Once we had partially sighted participants, they were assigned a code (e.g., P001) to anonymise their results, a fact about which participants have to be warned before proceeding with the experiment. This also follows Saldanha and O'Brien's (2013, p. 162) recommendation: "the researcher ought to apply a unique identifier to each participant in order to identify them, but the connection between the identifier and the participant's real name should be available only to the researcher".

3.5 Procedure

The combination of questionnaires, heart rate data, and interviews allowed the mixing of qualitative and quantitative data so that results could be triangulated, that is, "cross-checking the results one set of data provides with results from another set of data" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013, p. 23). Bearing in mind this combination of data collection methods, we applied the following procedure in the pilot study. The researcher guided each partially sighted participant to a private room within the association's facilities, where the experiment took place. Once there, the researcher read the informed consent and the informational document out loud, which was signed by asking the participant if they agreed, a process which was recorded. In the same vein, the researcher read the demographic questionnaire out loud, allowing the participant time to select the appropriate categories. After that, an experiment simulation took place with the aim that the participant could get used to the experiment's dynamic. First, the heart rate sensor was placed around the participant's chest, but it was not activated yet. Then, the participant watched a short video fragment from the Netflix series *Guillermo del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities*, and after that a short version of the presence and the comprehension questionnaires were presented so that the participant could anticipate what sort of questions they were expected to answer afterwards. Having completed the simulation, the experiment as such started. The heart rate sensor was activated and synchronized via Bluetooth with the UPTIVO app, then the researcher left three minutes for relaxation so that the participant's heartbeat could go back to their basal heart rate, after which the sensor started to compile data. The participant was randomly exposed to one of the four *Money Heist's* ADs (Test 1, 2, 3, or 4), after which the heart rate sensor stopped compiling data. The researcher then allowed the participant three minutes of relaxation, after which the measurement was written down. After that, the participant was given the full presence and comprehension tests, followed by the semi-structured interview. Throughout the whole process, the participant never knew about the exact aim of the experiment in order to minimize the Hawthorne effect, which happens "when people alter (usually improve) their normal behavior because they are aware that they are being studied" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013, p. 31). The summary of the experiment procedure is described in Table 4.



Table 4: Heart rate experiment procedure

1. Informed consent
2. Informational document
3. Demographic questionnaire
4. Experiment simulation:
 - Heart rate sensor placement
 - Short clip from *Guillermo del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities*
 - Short presence questionnaire
 - Short comprehension questionnaire
5. Heart rate experiment:
 - Heart rate activation
 - Three minutes of relaxation (basal heart rate)
 - Heart rate data compiling
 - Full clip from *Money Heist* with:
 - Official AD voiced by a man (Test 1)
 - Official AD voiced by a woman (Test 2)
 - Creative AD voiced by a man (Test 3)
 - Creative AD voiced by a woman (Test 4)
 - Heart rate sensor stops recording
 - Three minutes of relaxation (heart rate after relaxation)
 - Heart rate sensor deactivation
 - Full presence questionnaire
 - Full comprehension questionnaire
6. Semi-structured interview

Source: Author (2025)

4. Analysis and preliminary results

As we have stated, our aim was to design a heart rate experiment to study the combination of objective and subjective multimodal components in AD that are best received by end-users in terms of immersion. The UPTIVO Belt-D app retrieved several data values in beats per minute (bpm): average heart rate, maximum heart rate, and minimum heart rate. Beyond this, we also included two other measurements: basal heart rate and heart rate after relaxation. Moreover, this sensor retrieves bpm every five seconds so that participants' data can be monitored throughout the experiment, not just afterwards. Regarding the principles that direct what multimodal contents to consider in creative terms, this research stems from previous studies where Romero-Muñoz (2023, 2025) retrieved the multimodal components that comprise AD scripts from a descriptive viewpoint, a combination labelled as “multimodal configuration”. Romero-Muñoz (2023, 2025) used Chaume's (2004) multimodal proposal for meaning codes (constituted by semiotic signs), some of which are transmitted by means of the visual channel (iconographic, photographic, mobility, shot, graphic, and editing codes) and others by the acoustic channel (linguistic, paralinguistic, musical, special effects, and sound position codes). A corpus of AD scripts was operationalized by using qualitative content analysis, it was classified in creative terms resorting to certain objectivity and subjectivity parameters based on professional and research proposals mentioned in section 2, and it was determined that the multimodal configuration of AD tends to revolve around four sources of information: references to movement, to iconography, to spatial-temporal changes, and to graphic elements on screen. Moreover, according to these results, objectivity and subjectivity seem to coexist in AD scripts, particularly in reference to movement, iconography, and spatial-temporal changes.



As mentioned previously, partially sighted participants were randomly assigned one of the four tests, two of which included the original AD script (one voiced by a man and one voiced by a woman) while the remaining two included the creative AD script (again with male and female voices). Since this is a pilot study that seeks to assess the viability of the research design, we have limited results to the data from two participants with opposite variables: P007 and P010. Participant P007 was a man and he was assigned Test 1 (the original *Money Heist* AD voiced by a man), whereas participant P010 was a woman and she was assigned Test 4 (the creative *Money Heist* AD voiced by a woman). We must remember that Tests 1 and 2 had the original AD and their contents were 80% objective, whereas Tests 3 and 4 had the creative AD with 80% of their contents being subjective. Participant P007 had a basal heart rate of 71 bpm, an average heart rate of 67 bpm, a maximum heart rate of 72 bpm, a minimum heart rate of 64 bpm, and a heart rate after relaxation of 67 bpm. Participant P010 had a basal heart rate of 87 bpm, an average heart rate of 91 bpm, a maximum heart rate of 99 bpm, a minimum heart rate of 82 bpm, and a heart rate after relaxation of 85 bpm (Table 5).

Table 5: Participants' overall data

Participant	Gender	Test	Basal bpm	Average bpm	Maximum bpm	Minimum bpm	Bpm after relaxation
P007	man	1	71	67	72	64	67
P010	woman	4	87	91	99	82	85

Source: Author (2025)

Beyond this data on the overall performance from both participants, we needed to know participants' physiological reactions to different multimodal components in creative terms (Table 6). We chose two fragments (sections of five seconds, which is the minimum span of time that the UPTIVO Belt-D detects) for every component of the multimodal configuration: two fragments with references to movement, two fragments containing iconography, two fragments with spatial-temporal changes, and two fragments with graphic elements. Moreover, these two fragments included an objective and a subjective multimodal reference. We must bear in mind that Tests 1 and 4 were radically different in creative terms: all objective references in Test 1 are subjective in Test 4 (and vice versa). In this vein, out of the possible data that could be retrieved from P001, we selected a first objective mobility fragment (that is, a section where the AD has an objective reference to movement) and a second subjective mobility fragment (where the AD has a subjective reference to movement), and so on (this could not be maintained in the graphic code, so both fragments are objective for Tests 1 and 2, while subjective for Tests 3 and 4).

In this way, we were able to analyze some examples, which will be limited here to the intervals from the mobility code due to space restrictions. The first fragment from the mobility code is found in the interval from second 40 to second 45 and it refers to the objective sign *camina* ("he walks") in the original AD, a piece of information with no interpretation whatsoever. In this same interval from the creative AD, the subjective version of that sign is *camina decidido* ("he walks confidently"), where there is an interpretation of the way he walks.

Table 6: Analysed intervals with the heart rate sensor

Code	Fragment	Interval	AD	Obj./Subj.	Test
mobility	1	00:40 – 00:45	original creative	objective subjective	1-2 3-4
	2	00:25 – 00:30	original creative	subjective objective	1-2 3-4
iconographic	1	00:05 – 00:10	original creative	objective subjective	1-2 3-4
	2	01:20 – 01:25	original creative	subjective objective	1-2 3-4
editing	1	03:45 – 03:50	original creative	objective subjective	1-2 3-4
	2	00:00 – 00:05	original creative	subjective objective	1-2 3-4
graphic	1	02:50 – 02:55	original creative	objective subjective	1-2 3-4
	2	03:40 – 03:45	original creative	objective subjective	1-2 3-4

Source: Author (2025)

Next, the second fragment from the mobility code includes a subjective sign in the interval from second 25 to 30 in the original AD, *Río le regala un guiño a Tokyo* (“Río gifts Tokyo with a wink”), where “gifts Tokyo with a wink” is considered metaphorical and highly interpretative. In this interval from the creative AD, that sign was described objectively as *Río le guiña un ojo a Tokyo* (“Río winks at Tokyo”), a denotational description of the facial movements. Having all this data in mind, we can now clarify what our variables are (Table 7).

Table 7: Variables

Variable	Content of the variable	Type of variable
creativity	creative AD	independent
	original AD	
gender	male voice	independent
	female voice	
heart rate metrics	average heart rate	dependent
	maximum heart rate	
	minimum heart rate	
	basal heart rate	
	heart rate after relaxation	
	fragments 1 and 2 (mobility)	
	fragments 1 and 2 (iconographic)	
questionnaires	comprehension	dependent
	presence	
interviews	semi-structured interview	dependent

Source: Author (2025)

With regard to the results obtained, since this is just a pilot study, further quantitative data will be left aside, since proper quantitative results require an appropriate number of participants where statistical analyses could be performed. As far as questionnaires are concerned, P007 scored 3.7/5 points on the presence test and 7/10 on the comprehension test, whereas P010 scored 4.3/5 points on the presence test and 8/10 points on the comprehension test. Regarding the interviews,



P010 more clearly summarized the basic contents of the scene, P007 struggled more with the identification of the multimodal contents, both felt the fragment was immersive, they would both approve of either the male or female AD voice, they both thought the AD was objective enough and would not change anything in particular, and both P007 and P010 considered that AD should be like the one they had just heard (not more objective or subjective).

5. Discussion and conclusions

According to the preliminary results obtained in this pilot heart rate study involving two partially sighted participants, there seems to be some overall differences, since P010 shows higher bpm levels than P007. At this stage of the study, it is impossible to ascertain whether these differences are due to the participants' gender, to the gender of the voice, or to creativity (the differences between objectivity and subjectivity in Tests 1 and 4). As Table 7 shows, further quantitative data could be extracted: bpm during fragments 1 and 2 from every code, and within those fragments, bpm in every test (1-4). However, the aim of this proposal is to create and assess the experimental pilot study using a heart rate sensor to measure partially sighted participants' response to different combinations of subjective and objective multimodal components within the AD script. Therefore, the quantitative data presented here should be seen as an evaluation of how heart rate data could be extracted in a future study with an appropriate number of participants and a statistical interpretation of the results.

That being said, beyond quantitative results, some interesting tendencies can be extracted from the questionnaires and interviews. Even if participants' overall data (Table 5) indeed point to Test 4 (more subjective and voiced by a woman) as the one with higher bpm, quantitative data from two participants is not a reliable source of information. However, it must be noted that P010 also had higher levels of presence and comprehension, which aligns with the studies carried out by Ramos Caro (2013), Wilken and Kruger (2016) as well as Walczak and Fryer (2017), where they conclude that there is no reason not to use subjectivity in AD, since subjectivity is well received among participants. As a matter of fact, subjectivity might increase the levels of presence following our limited quantitative data, which should be further analysed with more participants.

Nevertheless, if we triangulate these results with interviews, the qualitative data points to an issue: participants do not have a clear understanding of creativity in AD. Although P007 and P010 had opposite ADs in terms of creativity, they both felt that their fragment was immersive, they both thought that their AD was objective (which was only true in the case of P007), neither of them would change anything in particular, and they affirmed that AD should be like the one they had just heard (not more objective nor more subjective). This inconsistency has been documented before, proof of which is ADLAD (2013), where 71% of the participants felt inclined to include evaluative adjectives in AD, but 54% of them claimed to be against subjective or interpretative AD. In this vein, Mazur and Chmiel (2016, p. 102) state that one of the disadvantages of reception studies is that "respondents themselves may sometimes have insufficient exposure to AD, and they may not know the essence of AD". Therefore, our opinion is that the key is to opt for experimental reception studies where data from questionnaires, physiological measurements, and interviews can be triangulated.



In conclusion, experimental reception studies seem to be making inroads in AVT and MA research. As far as AD is concerned, guidelines covering AD contents have been tackled from prescriptive and descriptive points of view, but rarely using experimental reception studies that allow an empirical source of information about the main AD audience preferences. Consequently, this pilot study proposes a way of analyzing how objective and subjective multimodal contents are received by visually impaired users, even if our results are limited because of our sample. Preliminary data points towards differences between participants, likely due to creativity, even if users do not have a clear idea of what creativity in AD means. Irrespective of these divergences, further experimental reception studies with a considerable number of participants and statistical data need to be implemented among the main audience of AD so as to address their real needs. Future research following this path could provide empirical evidence about the immersive combination of objective and subjective multimodal components in AD to be considered by quality standards.

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Notes

Authorship contribution

Conceptualization: A. Romero-Muñoz

Data collection: A. Romero-Muñoz

Data analysis: A. Romero-Muñoz

Results and discussion: A. Romero-Muñoz

Review and editing: A. Romero-Muñoz

Research dataset

The research data is part of Alejandro Romero-Muñoz' doctoral dissertation titled: *Hacia una audiodescripción inmersiva. Estudio descriptivo, comparativo, multimodal y de recepción experimental sobre la objetividad y subjetividad en audiodescripción*.

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Not applicable.

Data availability statement

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



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Speech rate perception in audios in Easy Language amongst individuals with intellectual disabilities

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Abstract: Easy Language is a simplified language variety designed to enhance accessibility for individuals with comprehension difficulties. While its application in audiovisual contexts—such as podcasts and radio news produced in various languages—has garnered interest, guidelines for its oral and audio use remain limited. One common recommendation is to adopt a slower speech rate, yet specific guidance is rarely provided. Furthermore, it must be considered that speech rate perception is influenced by various factors, including language-specific norms and cognitive load, complicating the development of universal recommendations. This intralingual study investigates speech rate perception among 35 native Catalan-speaking individuals with intellectual disabilities, evaluating responses to Easy Language recordings in Catalan at four speech rates: 130 wpm, 150 wpm, 170 wpm, and 190 wpm. Participants rated the perceived speed of each recording on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “too slow” to “too fast”. Results revealed two distinct patterns: one subgroup found all speech rates acceptable, while the other exhibited greater variability in ratings, reflecting a more refined perception or reduced acceptability of certain speeds. A significant age difference was observed between these subgroups, though no differences were identified in cognitive performance, as measured by Raven scores.

Keywords: intellectual disability; easy language; speech rate; perception.

1. Introduction

Easy Language is a simplified language variety that falls under the broader category of Easy-to-Understand languages. It applies a set of recommendations related to wording, syntactic structure, visual design, and comprehension evaluation to make information more accessible to individuals with comprehension difficulties (ISO, 2023). From a translation studies perspective, Easy Language can also be understood as a form of intralingual and intersemiotic translation aimed at functional adaptation to different communicative needs (Castro Robaina & Amigo Extremera, 2024).



Seibel and Carlucci (2021) further argue that it can also involve an interlingual translation process. Recently, research has begun to explore the use of Easy Language in intralingual audiovisual content, such as podcasts (Perego, 2024), interpreting (Rubanovsky-Paz et al., 2024), or radio news (Miyazaki, 2007). However, guidelines for incorporating Easy Language in oral and audio contexts remain limited and often lack clarity (Pujadas-Farreras & Matamala, forthcoming). One of the most frequently suggested practices is to use a slower speech rate when delivering or recording Easy Language audio, though specific speed recommendations are typically not provided (Inclusion Europe, 2009; North Yorkshire County Council, 2014; Pujadas-Farreras & Matamala, forthcoming).

Additionally, as Coupé et al. (2019) observed in their study, speech rates can vary significantly across languages, suggesting that a universal speech rate recommendation may not be applicable to all languages. For instance, native speakers of Japanese and Spanish—the fastest languages in Coupé’s study—would likely perceive “slower speech” differently from native Thai speakers, whose language exhibited the slowest speech rate in that study.

In Catalan, the average speaking rate ranges from 120 to 150 words per minute (wpm) (Canals et al., 2006), with the recommended rate for oral discourses being around 150 wpm (Albaladejo Mur, 2020). However, the perceived speech rate does not always align with the objective speaking rate. Research has shown that various factors can influence how speech rate is perceived. For example, listening to faster speech may make subsequent speech seem relatively slower (Ainsworth, 1974), while increased cognitive load can cause listeners to perceive speech as faster than it actually is (Bosker et al., 2017).

Given these complexities, when considering recommendations for slower speech in Easy Language, it is essential not only to measure the objective speech rate but also to assess how users perceive the speech rate in Easy Language recordings. This study aims to investigate speech rate perception among individuals with intellectual disabilities when listening to Catalan Easy Language audio recordings. Specifically, it seeks to evaluate how participants rate and respond to varying speech rates (130 wpm, 150 wpm, 170 wpm, 190 wpm), offering insights into individual differences in speech rate perception and acceptability.

The structure of this article is as follows: Section 2 offers a review of speech rate and the factors that influence its perception, while Section 3 focuses on speech rate perception in individuals with cognitive difficulties. Section 4 details the methods used in the study, followed by Section 5, which presents and discusses the results. Finally, Section 6 concludes the study.

2. Speech rate perception

Speech rate can be objectively quantified using various metrics, such as words per minute or syllables per second. Beyond these objective measures, research has shown that listeners are adept at accurately judging speech rates. For instance, it has been shown that listeners are capable of assessing speech rates even when the speech signal is degraded, as they can distinguish the rates of tone-silence sequences, indicating that minimal non-linguistic cues may suffice for making broadly accurate estimates of speech rates (Crown & Feldstein, 1991). Moreover, listeners are also able to accurately estimate speech rates in unfamiliar languages by relying on temporal features within the speech signal rather than lexical content or meaning (Vaane, 1982).



However, the ability to accurately perceive speech rate is not constant over time. Lamotte and Droit-Volet's (2017) findings revealed that it is influenced by developmental changes, with accuracy showing a slight improvement around the age of 26, followed by a noticeable decline after the age of 45. Furthermore, the perception of speech rate can be affected by many cognitive and external factors as well.

Studies have also indicated that the surrounding speech context significantly influences how listeners perceive subsequent speech. For instance, a slow contextual rate—whether consisting of speech or non-speech sounds—causes listeners to perceive an ambiguous stretch of speech as relatively shorter. In contrast, a fast contextual rate leads to the same segment being perceived as longer (Ainsworth, 1974; Fujisaki et al., 1975; Summerfield, 1981). Interestingly, these contextual effects are not limited to single speakers. Even when the context is provided by one talker and the target by another, the perception of speech rate remains influenced by the initial context (Newman & Sawusch, 2009).

In addition to contextual factors, cognitive load plays a significant role in shaping speech rate perception. When speech rate increases, the cognitive effort required for processing also increases, which can lead to a phenomenon known as the 'shrinking of time', where time seems to pass more quickly (Bosker et al., 2017; Yang, 2019). However, this relationship is complex and can be influenced by other factors. Variability in the speaker's identity or the content of the speech can diminish the impact of speaking rate on how listeners perceive speech sounds (King et al., 2024). This shows that speech perception also depends on a delicate balance between timing, speaker identity, and sentence content.

Listeners also engage in a process called rate normalization, where the perception of speech sounds is adjusted based on the context and the speaker's rate of speech (Jaekel et al., 2017). This process happens automatically, as listeners continuously adapt their perception of speech rate to align with the surrounding context (Maslowski et al., 2019b). Interestingly, listeners encode a talker's habitual speech rate relative to the rates of other speakers, interpreting a person's usual speaking speed in relation to that of others (Maslowski et al., 2019a).

In addition to contextual and cognitive factors, speech rate perception is also influenced by a range of acoustic and visual cues. Variations in vocal frequency and intensity, for instance, can alter how listeners perceive speech rate (Bond et al., 1988; Feldstein & Bond, 1981). Furthermore, visual information, such as lip movements, can also integrate with auditory signals to modulate speech rate perception (Bosker et al., 2020).

Lastly, the perception of speech rate can also differ between natural and artificially manipulated speech. For instance, a study by Reinisch (2016) found that natural fast speech is perceived as faster than speech that has been linearly time-compressed.

Building on the factors that influence speech rate perception, it is important to recognise that speech rate can vary significantly across individuals and contexts. Previous research has shown that speech rate can differ based on gender, age, and dialect (Jacewicz et al., 2010; Quené, 2008), as well as within individual talkers (Miller et al., 1984). For example, speech rate can fluctuate depending on the interlocutor or the level of ambient noise in the environment (Miller et al., 1984). These variations in speech rate across speakers—both within and between individuals—can affect how speech is perceived. Notably, between-talker variation in speech rate production may lead to

between-talker variation in speech rate perception, helping to explain why speakers in conversation tend to adjust their speaking rates to align with one another (Bosker, 2016).

In addition to individual and contextual differences in speech rate, increased cognitive load during speech processing can significantly impair listeners' ability to comprehend speech, particularly when speech rate increases (Jeong et al., 2024). This impact on speech processing can affect multiple levels, such as the retention of words in working memory or semantic processing (Jeong et al., 2024). These effects are compounded by contextual influences on speech perception, such as how speech rate affects the processing of phonemes, morphemes, and words. Studies have demonstrated that contextual speech rate can influence the perception preceding and subsequent function words (e.g. Dilley & Pitt, 2010; Kim, 2014; Morrill et al., 2014; Wei & Dilley, 2016) and content words (Baese-Berk et al., 2019; Brown, 2023; Dilley et al., 2013).

3. Speech rate and cognitive difficulties

Perception and processing of speech rate can present unique challenges for individuals with cognitive difficulties, including those with autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and intellectual disabilities, as well as older adults. These challenges often stem from difficulties in processing temporal information, adapting to contextual speech cues, or entraining to conversational speech rates.

Individuals with dyslexia exhibit impairments in time estimation tasks, demonstrating difficulty in accurately judging whether a given stimulus is longer or shorter when compared to a standard reference stimulus (Khan et al., 2014; Nicolson et al., 1995). These challenges in processing temporal information are not confined to isolated tasks but have broader implications for speech perception. In particular, individuals with dyslexia often struggle to interpret the speech rate of a sentence, which can hinder their ability to accurately recognise the sounds of the words that follow (Gabay et al., 2019).

For individuals with mild intellectual disabilities, challenges with estimating durations can significantly impact their ability to perceive and process speech rate effectively. Studies have indicated that these individuals exhibit systematic impairments in tasks requiring duration estimation, and these difficulties tend to worsen with age. This is especially evident in tasks that involve distinguishing between varying durations of auditory stimuli, highlighting the connection between temporal processing deficits and challenges in speech perception (Rattat & Collié, 2020).

Additionally, while individuals with autism spectrum disorder are generally adept at using contextual cues to interpret speech sounds, they often encounter specific difficulties in processing temporal information during speech (Gabay et al., 2024). Furthermore, a literature review by Kruyt and Beňuš (2021) suggested that existing studies indicate individuals with autism spectrum disorder may exhibit patterns of reduced acoustic-prosodic entrainment or even show disentrainment. Acoustic-prosodic entrainment refers to the process in which speakers adjust their speech patterns to align more closely with those of their conversation partner, including rhythm, intonation, and rate (Gálvez et al., 2020). This pattern is evident in the studies reviewed by Kruyt and Beňuš (2021), including those conducted by Hogstrom et al. (2018), Lehnert-LeHouillier et al. (2020), Ochi et al. (2019) and Wynn et al. (2018). However, Kruyt and Beňuš (2021) cautioned that due to the variation

in tasks analysed across these studies, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. In general, they noted that while individuals with autism spectrum disorder tend to exhibit similar entrainment behaviours at the syntactic and lexical levels, they show reduced acoustic-prosodic entrainment compared to typically developing individuals.

Specifically, when it comes to speech rate, Wynn et al. (2018) found that typically developing adults demonstrate the ability to adjust their speech rate naturally during quasi-conversational interactions. In fast speech rate conditions, they tend to speed up their own speech, while in slower conditions, they speak more slowly. However, this same pattern of speech rate adjustment was not observed in individuals with autism spectrum disorder or in child populations. The absence of speech rate entrainment in these groups suggests that this ability may be a skill that develops with age and experience, with evidence pointing to potential deficits in adults with autism spectrum disorder.

In conclusion, in addition to the cognitive and external factors previously discussed that can influence speech rate perception, individuals with cognitive difficulties face other unique challenges that can further impact how they perceive speech. These challenges highlight the importance of testing recommendations, such as using a “slower speed” in audio materials in Easy Language, directly with target groups for this language variety. This ensures that the end results are in line with their perceptions and that they find them acceptable.

4. Methods

This study aimed to investigate the subjectivity of speech rate perception among individuals with intellectual disabilities when listening to Catalan Easy Language audio recordings. Specifically, it sought to evaluate how participants rated and responded to varying speech rates, providing insight into individual preferences and the variability in speech rate acceptability. The following sections describe the participant demographics, materials, experimental procedure, and the validation process for the materials used in the study.

4.1 Participants

The study initially included 37 adult participants, all native Catalan speakers with intellectual disabilities, recruited through local associations. However, only 35 were considered valid for analysis (mean age = 45.66 years, SD = 14.58), after applying exclusion criteria to ensure a homogeneous sample. All participants signed a consent form, written in Easy Language to ensure accessibility, which was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

To assess cognitive ability, all participants completed the Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices test (Raven, 1998), a widely used non-verbal assessment designed to measure fluid intelligence and abstract reasoning (Bilker et al., 2012). This specific version of the test is also tailored for populations such as young children, individuals with intellectual disabilities, and older adults (Domino & Domino, 2006).

The exclusion criteria were: (1) Raven test scores or ages significantly outside the typical range for the sample, to ensure group homogeneity in cognitive and developmental profiles; and (2) the presence of visual or auditory impairments, as the intelligence test was visually based and the



experimental tasks were auditory. Two of the initial participants were excluded due to hearing impairments, but there were no exclusions based on age or Raven scores.

4.2 Materials and procedure

The study utilised four prerecorded audio samples in Catalan, each specifically created for the experiment in Easy Language. Each sample contained 130 words and was narrated by a professional female voice actor who was a native Catalan speaker. To ensure consistency across recordings, the voice actor maintained a clear, natural, and uniform tone throughout all the samples, minimising any potential variability in delivery style. The audio samples were modified to test four different speech rates: 130 wpm, 150 wpm, 170 wpm, and 190 wpm. After these modifications, all the samples were digitally normalised to a uniform sound level and inspected to rule out technical issues such as clipping or background noise.

While the content of the four audio recordings differed, each sample was validated for consistency in difficulty level by the Associació Lectura Fàcil (Easy-to-Read Association) (see Section 4.3), ensuring that the material aligned with Easy Language recommendations, such as using common vocabulary and simple sentence structures. Additionally, pauses in speech within the recordings were adjusted to maintain the same length across all speech rates. The pause lengths were modified based on the average pause durations suggested by Cantin and Ríos (1991), ensuring that pauses did not interfere with the perception of speech rate (Liu, 2022).

The testing procedure was conducted in person. Participants listened to the audio samples through the same set of headphones (Skullcandy Riff Wireless) to maintain consistency in sound delivery, and a pre-experiment sound check allowed each participant to adjust volume and confirm audio clarity. The experiment followed a within-subject design (Kim, 2010), meaning each participant was exposed to all four speech rates, allowing for direct comparisons between the different conditions. All sessions took place individually in a silent room to minimize background noise and external interruptions.

Before the main experiment, a volume test was conducted to ensure each participant could adjust the volume to their preferred level for optimal listening comfort. Participants heard the four speech rates in a randomised order to control for any order effects. After listening to each recording, participants rated their perception of the speech rate on a five-point Likert scale: (1 = too slow, 2 = slow, 3 = acceptable, 4 = fast, 5 = too fast). They were informed that they could assign the same rating to more than one speech rate if needed.

4.3 Validation process

The validation of the audio texts followed a multi-step process to ensure consistency in content difficulty and adherence to Easy Language principles. Validation was conducted through expert judgment, a common method in research practices consisting of gathering in-depth insights from specialists in the relevant field (Cabero Almenara & Llorente Cejudo, 2013; Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez, 2008). In terms of the number of experts consulted, there is no strict consensus in the literature. Different studies and authors suggest varying numbers based on different factors



such as the experts' level of expertise, the scope of their knowledge, and the specificity of the field under consideration (Powell, 2003; Robles Garrote & Rojas, 2015; Williams & Webb, 1994).

In this study, the external validation phase included four experts, reflecting the limited availability of specialists in Catalan Easy Language. This aligns with Cabero Almenara and Llorente Cejudo's (2013) suggestion to consider practical constraints such as the availability of qualified professionals in the field.

The process was divided into two phases: an internal validation and an external validation. In the first internal validation phase, an expert in Easy Language within the research group evaluated the texts and provided recommendations for improvement. Based on this feedback, adjustments were made to refine the grammar, vocabulary, and overall structure of the texts. In the second phase, the external validation, specialists from the Easy-to-Read Association reviewed the materials independently, without direct communication, following the individual assessment method outlined by Cabero Almenara and Llorente Cejudo (2013).

The experts were provided with a validation questionnaire, designed in accordance with the methodology used by Robles Garrote and Rojas (2015). Using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, they assessed the ease of the grammar, vocabulary, and structure of the texts and the adherence to Easy Language recommendations. Based on the experts' recommendations, further modifications were made to the materials. Finally, following ISO recommendations (ISO, 2023) for Easy Language validation, the texts underwent a readability check using the Flesch-Szigriszt index, a tool frequently employed for evaluating Catalan texts (Pérez Colomé, 2011). This final step ensured the materials had similar readability indices, further ensuring that the difficulty levels were similar in each audio.

5. Results and discussion

This section presents the findings derived from the Likert scale regarding the groups' perceptions of different speech rates, along with a discussion of their implications. Initial analysis revealed a clear trend, leading to the classification of participants into two distinct subgroups:

- Group 1: Participants who rated all speech rates as "acceptable". This group comprised 15 participants.
- Group 2: Participants who rated one or more speech rates differently, indicating variability in their perception or acceptability of the speeds. This group included 20 participants.

5.1 Demographics of the groups

A demographic analysis provided insights into the observed trend, highlighting significant differences between the two groups. Group 1 had a mean age of 53.5 years ($SD = 11.77$), while Group 2 had a lower mean age of 39.8 years ($SD = 13.87$). This age difference was statistically significant ($p = 0.004$), suggesting that age may be an important factor influencing the perception and acceptability of speech rates.

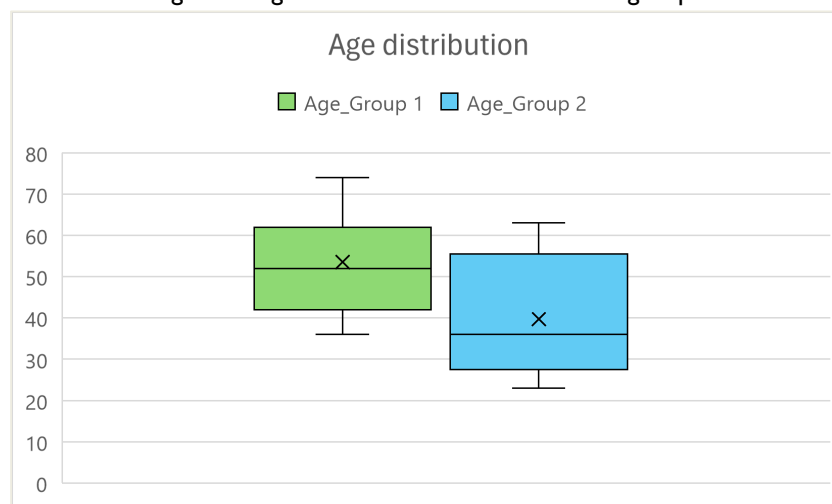
The significant age difference between the two groups in this study may be explained by established research on age-related changes in temporal perception. Older adults tend to prefer



slower internal timing when assessing durations (Block et al., 1998), which may influence their broader acceptance of varying speech rates, as observed in Group 1. By contrast, younger participants in Group 2 displayed greater sensitivity to variations in speed, possibly reflecting more precise temporal processing. This aligns with Lamotte and Droit-Volet's (2017) findings, which indicated a slight improvement in the accuracy of time perception estimations at age 26, followed by a marked decline by age 45, corresponding to the mean ages of the two groups. Additionally, age-related declines in attentional capacities (Lustig, 2003; Vanneste & Pouthas, 1999) may make older adults less reactive to differences in speech rates, as they might rely more on syntactic and semantic cues for comprehension rather than auditory precision (Pichora-Fuller, 2003).

However, this relationship can depend on modality and user experience: for instance, a study on speech rate adjustment in audio description (Nakajima et al., 2024) found that participants with sight loss preferred faster delivery speeds, even though one of the groups had a mean age of 49.9 years (SD = 9.2), similar to Group 1 in the present study. This discrepancy is not unexpected, as accessibility studies with blind and low-vision users have shown that frequent exposure to audio materials—such as screen readers—can significantly increase tolerance for faster speech through compensatory listening strategies and auditory training (Dietrich et al., 2013; Gordon-Salant & Friedman, 2011; McCarthy et al., 2013). This effect has also been observed in users without sight loss who engage extensively with audio content, such as audiobooks or podcasts (Chen et al., 2024; Krokhar et al., 2023). In comparison, audio materials in Easy Language are still emerging and remain relatively scarce, meaning that the participants in this study have had little chance to develop similar familiarity or training effects.

Figure 1: Age distribution between the two groups



Source: Author (2025)

In contrast, no significant differences were observed in Raven's Progressive Matrices scores between the two groups, with Group 1 achieving a mean score of 19.1 (SD = 5.96) and Group 2 a mean score of 23.0 (SD = 7.23). This indicates that cognitive ability, as measured by Raven's test, does not explain the differences in speech rate perception observed between the groups.

5.2 Ratings of speeds

Following the categorization of participants into two distinct groups based on their overall perception of speech rate acceptability, further analysis of Group 2 revealed an interesting trend in how they perceive the different speech rates. As previously mentioned, this perception was assessed using a five-point Likert scale, where a rating of 1 indicated “too slow” and 5 indicated “too fast”.

When examining the mean ratings, the results appeared to be somewhat aligned with the expected perceptions of the speech rates employed. The slowest rate, 130 wpm, received a mean score of 2.55, indicating that it was generally considered slow. The next speed, 150 wpm earned a rating of exactly 3, reflecting that it was viewed as “acceptable” or “normal”, as some participants described it. The 170 wpm rate received a slightly higher mean score of 3.40, still within the “acceptable” range. Finally, the 190 wpm rate was generally perceived as fast, with a mean score of 4.

The ratings for the 150 wpm speed, which were considered “acceptable”, align with the average Catalan speaking rate, which ranges between 120-150 wpm (Canals et al., 2006). However, the 130 wpm speed, rated as somewhat slow, suggests that the participants may have a higher baseline for what they consider an “acceptable” speed. This could be explained by the tendency for younger individuals to speak at faster rates on average (Wasowicz et al., 1986), thus influencing their perception of 130 wpm as slower than expected. Additionally, the 170 wpm rate, rated as “acceptable” by participants, may also reflect this inclination towards faster speech rates in young adults, making them more accustomed to this speed and more comfortable with it.

Another possible explanation is the influence of participants’ Spanish language proficiency. While they were native Catalan speakers, all were fluent in Spanish due to its official status in Catalonia. Given that Spanish is typically spoken at a faster rate than Catalan (Coupé et al., 2019), their familiarity with Spanish could have contributed to their greater comfort with higher speech speeds. This might also help explain why the 190 wpm rate was rated as fast but not excessively fast on average. This preference aligns with findings from a Spanish-language study on audio description, in which sighted participants favoured slightly higher-than-average speech rates when the voice was female—as is the case with this study. Interestingly, slower speech rates were preferred with male voices (Machuca et al., 2020).

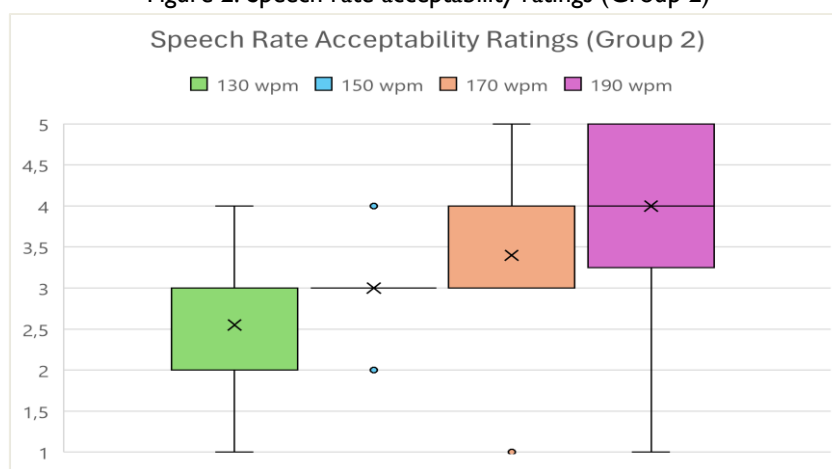
Media exposure to content in standard language, particularly news broadcasts, may also help account for participants’ acceptance of the 170 wpm speed and their perception of 190 wpm as fast, but not excessively so. A study by the Institut d’Estudis Catalans (2023) found that the average speaking rate in Catalan weather forecasts on television is around 189 wpm. Frequent exposure to this type of media may have familiarized participants with these speech rates, making them more comfortable with similar speeds in the study.

An examination of the standard deviations of these scores revealed another important aspect of the data. While the mean ratings showed a logical progression from slow to fast speech rates, the variation in responses suggests that the perception of speech rate within this group is more individualized. The most consistently rated speed was 150 wpm, with a standard deviation of 0.459, indicating a high level of agreement among participants that this speed is considered “acceptable”. In contrast, the other speeds exhibited greater variability in perception. For example, 130 wpm, with

a standard deviation of 0.759, showed a wider range of opinions, with some participants rating it as “too slow” and others closer to “acceptable”. At 170 wpm, the variability increased further (SD = 0.883), with ratings moving toward “too fast”. Finally, 190 wpm, which received the highest standard deviation of 1.124, demonstrated the greatest diversity in perception, as participants’ ratings ranged from “too slow” to “too fast”, highlighting the subjectivity involved in assessing faster speech rates.

The variability in the ratings for 190, 170, and 130 wpm further seems to suggest that individual factors such as those previously mentioned, for example familiarity with certain speech rates or personal speaking habits, play a role in shaping participants’ perceptions of speech rate. Conversely, the low variability in ratings for 150 wpm suggests a strong consensus among participants, highlighting its alignment with the speech rate typically perceived in Catalan. This uniformity likely reflects a shared familiarity with this pace, consistent with the average speech rate for the language.

Figure 2: Speech rate acceptability ratings (Group 2)



Source: Author (2025)

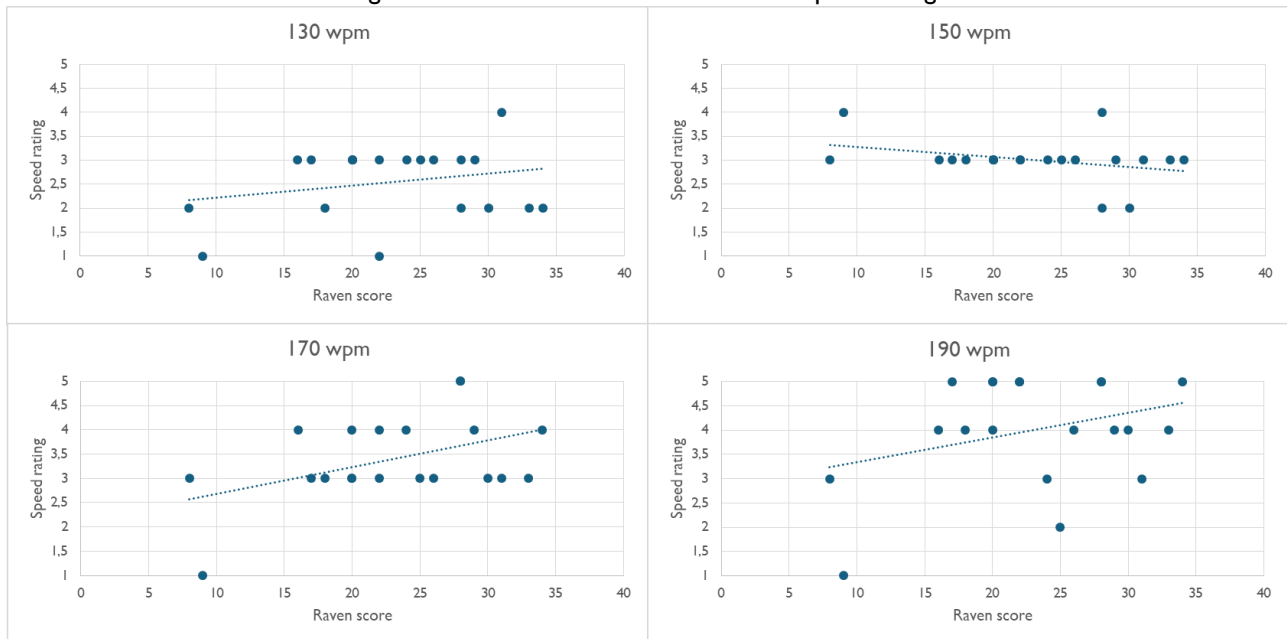
5.3 Correlation analysis

To further explore the relationship between cognitive ability and speech rate perceptions, Spearman’s rank correlation coefficients were calculated for Group 2 to examine potential associations between Raven scores, age, and the ratings given to each speech rate. The aim was to assess whether cognitive ability (as measured by Raven’s Progressive Matrices) or age influenced how participants in Group 2 rated different speech speeds, providing deeper insight into the factors that may shape individual perceptions of speech rate. Since Group 1 demonstrated no variability in their ratings, this analysis was not conducted for that group.

Starting with the correlation between Raven’s Progressive Matrices scores and speech rate ratings, the analysis revealed no significant relationships. At 130 wpm, the correlation coefficient was 0.082 ($p = 0.731$), indicating no significant association between Raven scores and ratings. Similarly, at 150 wpm, the correlation coefficient was -0.291 ($p = 0.212$), suggesting a weak negative trend, though it was not statistically significant. At 170 wpm, the correlation coefficient was 0.303 ($p = 0.194$), showing a weak positive correlation, yet again lacking statistical significance. Finally, at 190

wpm, the correlation coefficient was 0.128 ($p = 0.592$), demonstrating no meaningful relationship between Raven scores and ratings at this speed either.

Figure 3: Correlation between Raven and speed ratings

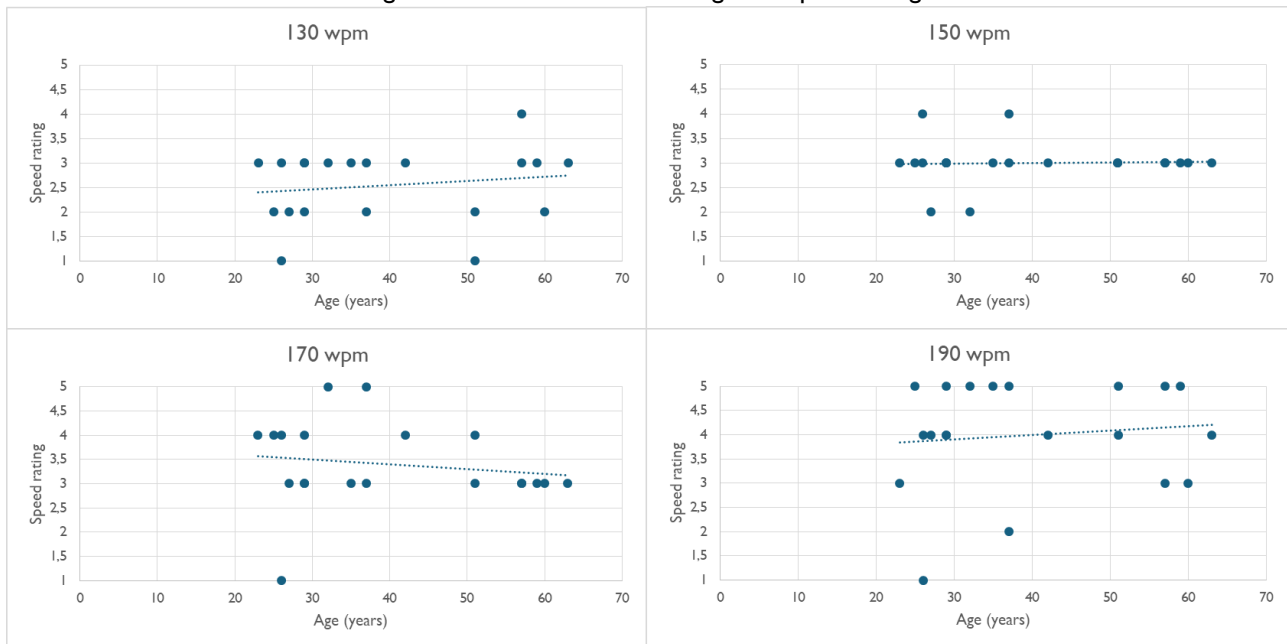


Source: Author (2025)

These findings indicate that cognitive ability, as measured by Raven's test, does not significantly influence participants' ratings of speech rate, suggesting that other factors may shape how speech rate is perceived across different speeds in this sample. This outcome is not surprising, as the initial participant sample was selected and assessed using the Raven test to ensure cognitive homogeneity, reducing the likelihood of detecting a meaningful correlation even after dividing the sample into two groups. Additionally, other factors may have contributed to the lack of correlation. The language of the audios was carefully validated to maintain consistent difficulty across recordings, and the use of Easy Language reduced the cognitive load required for comprehension compared to standard language. While prior studies, such as Bosker et al. (2017), have demonstrated that increased cognitive load can lead to a perceptual increase in speech rate through a "shrinking of time" mechanism, the cognitive load in these audios may have been too low for this effect to manifest.

The correlation analysis between the age of participants in Group 2 and their ratings of the different speech rates also revealed a consistent lack of significant relationship. At 130 wpm, the Spearman's correlation was 0.180 ($p = 0.447$), indicating a weak positive correlation, which was not statistically significant. A similar pattern was observed at 150 wpm, where the correlation was 0.019 ($p = 0.935$), suggesting no meaningful relationship between age and ratings. At 170 wpm, the correlation was -0.254 ($p = 0.280$), indicating a slight non-significant negative relationship. Finally, at 190 wpm, the correlation was 0.092 ($p = 0.669$), showing also no relationship between age and the ratings.

Figure 4: Correlation between age and speed ratings



Source: Author (2025)

Similarly to the Raven test measure, age was also an exclusion criterion to ensure the homogeneity of the initial sample. As a result, it is not unexpected that, even after dividing the sample into groups, age does not significantly correlate with the speed ratings in Group 2. Although Group 1 exhibited a significant age difference compared to Group 2 and rated most speech rates as acceptable, the overall sample was designed to minimise extreme age variability. This homogeneity in the broader sample likely reduced the potential impact of age on Group 2's speech rate perceptions, explaining why no significant correlation between age and speech rate ratings was found in that group.

5.4 Individual case examples

To further illustrate the variability observed in Group 2's ratings of speech rates, individual responses that deviated from expected patterns were analysed. These case examples demonstrate the subjective nature of speech rate perception and highlight instances where participants rated speeds atypically compared to the broader trends. In general, two distinct trends emerged among participants who provided unusual ratings. The first trend involved participants who appear to have been influenced by the order in which the speeds were presented. However, while individual cases suggest such an influence, the group as a whole did not show a statistically significant effect of presentation order on ratings. The second trend encompassed participants who exhibited no clear or consistent pattern in how they rated the different speech speeds.

Participant P35 provided an unusual rating by marking 170 wpm as “fast” while considering the faster rate of 190 wpm “acceptable”. This inconsistency may have been influenced by the order in which the speeds were presented, as P35 encountered the 170 wpm audio immediately after the 130 wpm one. This contrast could have amplified the perceived rapidity of 170 wpm, while 190 wpm, presented later, might have been perceived as less pronounced in its speed.



Participant P34 also exhibited an unusual trend by rating 150 wpm as “slow”, while the slower rate of 130 wpm was deemed “acceptable”. As with P35, this rating pattern may have been influenced by the order in which the audio clips were presented. Specifically, the 150 wpm speed was heard immediately after the 190 wpm audio. The contrast between these two speeds may have affected the participant’s perception, making the 150 wpm speed seem slower in comparison to the faster rate they had just encountered.

In both cases, the participants’ responses are consistent with findings from previous research, which suggest that exposure to slower speech rates can cause later speech to be perceived as faster, while exposure to faster speech rates can lead to the same speech being perceived as slower (Ainsworth, 1974; Fujisaki et al., 1975; Summerfield, 1981). However, since the order of speech rates was randomised to avoid this, the group as a whole was not influenced by this effect.

In contrast, participant P8 rated the slowest speed, 130 wpm, as “fast” while marking all other speeds as “acceptable”. For this specific participant, the 130 wpm audio was the first presented in the test. However, it is challenging to ascertain why this participant perceived the slowest speed as “fast”, especially since the subsequent 190 wpm audio, representing a significant speed increase, was rated as “acceptable”. This suggests that, unlike the cases mentioned before, P8’s perception of the speeds was not influenced by the abrupt change in tempo.

Participant P20 also demonstrated a markedly distinct pattern by rating the 130 wpm, 170 wpm, and 190 wpm speeds as “too slow”, while perceiving 150 wpm as “fast”. This atypical rating cannot be attributed to the order in which the speeds were presented, as the 150 wpm speed was heard after the 190 wpm audio. Given that 190 wpm was rated as “too slow”, it is unlikely that the presentation order influenced the participant into perceiving 150 wpm as faster.

Finally, participant P30 also stands out for their rating pattern by considering 190 wpm “slow”, while perceiving all other speeds as “acceptable”, indicating that the participant found the other speeds faster. In this case, the presentation order does not appear to have a relation again, as the slowest speed, 130 wpm, was heard after 190 wpm, and was still considered faster.

These atypical cases that do not appear to have been influenced by the order in which the speech rates were presented may have been shaped by various individual factors. One possibility is that these participants experienced lapses in attention during certain sections of the test, which could have resulted in inconsistent or arbitrary ratings for some of the speech rates, despite the measures outlined in Section 4.2 to minimise distractions. It is also plausible that some participants perceived certain rates as uncomfortable or unsuitable but were unable to clearly identify the specific reason behind their discomfort. Consequently, they may have struggled to classify these speeds as definitively “slow” or “fast”, and instead provided these labels without a clear rationale, simply selecting one or the other to express their dissatisfaction with the rate. Additionally, personal factors such as individual preferences and familiarity with different speeds may have contributed to these atypical responses. However, these possibilities remain speculative as the methodology employed does not offer insight into participants’ underlying reasoning.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this study was to assess the perception of speech rate in audio recordings using Easy Language, a simplified form of communication addressed to individuals with comprehension difficulties. To achieve this, four different speech rates (130 wpm, 150 wpm, 170 wpm, and 190 wpm) were tested with a sample of 35 adult participants with intellectual disabilities, one of the main target groups of Easy Language. Participants' perceptions of these speech rates were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where they were asked to rate each speech speed based on their perception, categorising it as "too slow", "slow", "acceptable", "fast", or "too fast".

The results revealed two distinct trends among the participants. One subgroup rated all speech speeds as "acceptable", while the other group demonstrated more variation in their ratings, reflecting a more nuanced perception of speech rates or, at the very least, a lower overall acceptability of certain speeds. Notably, these two subgroups exhibited a significant age difference, although no significant differences were found in Raven scores between the groups.

Among the subgroup of participants who rated the speech rates differently, the ratings generally aligned with typical Catalan speech rate practices. Specifically, the speech rate of 150 wpm, which is the average rate in Catalan, was consistently rated as "acceptable" by this group. In contrast, the rate of 130 wpm, which also falls within the Catalan average, was considered slow on average. This suggests that this group had a preference for faster speech, with 170 wpm also rated as "acceptable". These results suggest a general preference for slightly faster speech rates within the subgroup, which may reflect the tendency for younger adults, as observed in existing literature, to naturally produce faster speech. It is also important to highlight that, with the exception of 150 wpm, there was an observable trend where the faster the speech rate, the greater the variability in participants' responses. This suggests that as the speech rate increased, participants' perceptions became more diverse.

One limitation of this study is the relatively short duration of the audio clips used. This brevity may have restricted participants' ability to fully engage with the material or evaluate the speech rates in a more nuanced, contextualised manner. Longer audio samples could offer a more accurate representation of how participants perceive speech rate over an extended period and may reveal differences in their perception depending on the speech context. Future research could consider using longer audio clips to determine if the results vary when participants are exposed to speech rates over a more sustained timeframe. Additionally, the speech rates in the study were modified through a program rather than being naturally spoken at the intended speeds. A future study using recordings of speech naturally produced at the desired speech rates would provide insight into whether the findings differ when the speech rate is delivered in a more natural, human-produced context.

Building on the findings of this study, future research could also explore speech rate perception across a broader range of age groups. This study intentionally sought a homogeneous sample in terms of age, which limits the ability to fully assess how age might influence the perception of speech rates. However, the trend observed in this study, particularly the significant age difference between the group that perceived all speeds as acceptable and the other group that did not, suggests that age could be an important factor to consider in future research. Expanding the participant pool



to include a more diverse range of ages, such as children, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how speech rate perception varies across different stages of life. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore how these perceptions evolve over the lifespan, considering potential age-related cognitive and perceptual changes that could influence how speech rates are processed.

Another possible direction for future research would be to explore whether similar results are obtained when testing different Catalan dialects and varieties. It would be important to assess whether familiarity with these dialects or varieties influences the perception of speech rate, as linguistic familiarity may impact how individuals process and evaluate speech. Additionally, investigating whether age affects the perception of speech rates within these dialects or varieties could provide further insights into the role of language exposure and age-related perceptual changes in speech rate preferences.

In terms of practical applications, the results of this study can be valuable for anyone looking to create content in Easy Language with an audio format. To name just a few examples, organisations like the Easy-to-Read Association in Catalonia, which already publishes simplified versions of classic and contemporary literature, could apply these findings when producing audiobooks. This would support users who struggle with reading or prefer auditory learning. Similarly, under the regional Catalan Accessibility Code (Departament de Drets Socials i Inclusió, 2023), public libraries are required to provide materials in multiple accessible formats. Adding Easy Language audiobooks would not only help libraries fulfil this obligation but also expand options for their users, while promoting culture and language. Furthermore, cultural heritage institutions, such as museums, galleries, and historic sites, must also provide Easy Language explanations. While these are typically offered in written formats, the study's findings provide a foundation for creating Easy Language audio versions that could be offered as an alternative audio guide. Lastly, the principles of Easy Language can also be applied in live interactions, such as at information counters, where staff must assist users with different needs. Understanding how to communicate using oral Easy Language will ensure effective communication with all users.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of how speech rate is perceived by individuals with intellectual disabilities, providing important implications for the design of communication tools, accessibility measures, and content creation that align with their needs. Furthermore, this study examines this speech rate perception using audios in Easy Language, a topic that has only started being explored in research settings. Further research in this area can enhance the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for engaging individuals with intellectual disabilities in various communicative contexts.

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Notes

Authorship contribution

Conceptualization and preparation of the manuscript: M. Pujadas-Farreras

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Image copyright

Not applicable.

Approval by ethics committee

The study protocol (CEEAH 6026) was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona in June 2022.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.



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Data availability statement

The research data will become available at the conclusion of the WEL project at the CORA-RDR repository.

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Audio description and the spectrum of materiality: Gaining blindness through narrative negotiation

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Abstract: This article explores how audio description (AD) actively contributes to storytelling by engaging with the material and sensory dimensions of audiovisual content. Building on the broader philosophical tensions between objectivity and subjectivity, it reconceptualizes AD as a co-creative and interpretive process that transcends the neutrality traditionally demanded by the audiovisual industry. Drawing on Hannah Thompson's (2017) concept of "blindness gain" and Marco Caracciolo's (2023) "spectrum of materiality", the study highlights AD's dynamic role in shaping narrative meaning. Thompson repositions blindness as a source of perceptual and creative insight, while Caracciolo (2023) emphasizes the relational and transformative potential of materiality in narrative engagement. By synthesizing these perspectives for the first time, this article frames AD as a relational practice deeply intertwined with the sensory and material properties of audiovisual source texts. Through a comparative analysis of two ADs for the Belgian-Israeli miniseries *Rough Diamonds* (Shamir et al., 2023; Shamir & Verheyden, 2023)—one by Netflix and the other by VRT, Flanders' public broadcaster—the article highlights contrasting approaches to material engagement. The Netflix AD prioritizes clarity and spatial coherence, reflecting fixed and determinate materialities that subtly reinforce ocularcentric paradigms. In contrast, the VRT AD employs abstraction and nuance, aligning with vibrant materialities that enhance the narrative's symbolic and emotional dimensions. These divergent strategies reveal the limitations of the current neutrality standard in AD, which often overlooks its interpretive and generative nature. By situating AD within a framework that integrates blindness gain and materiality, the study reimagines AD as a culturally resonant practice that enriches audiovisual storytelling through multisensory and culturally resonant engagement. Ultimately, this article positions AD as a dynamic medium for narrative negotiation, encouraging further interdisciplinary research into its co-creative material possibilities.

Keywords: audio description; narrative negotiation; spectrum of materiality; blindness gain.



I. Introduction

The tension between subjectivity and objectivity has long shaped academic discourse, particularly in debates surrounding truth, perception, and the nature of material engagement. Objectivity is traditionally framed as the pursuit of universal truths, suggesting an unmediated, neutral view of reality that transcends personal bias or interpretive distortion (Daston & Galison, 2007; Burge, 2010). In contrast, subjectivity is often viewed with suspicion, associated with individual perspectives and the potential for misrepresentation (Merleau-Ponty, 2013; Silverman, 2014). This dichotomy influences both theoretical and applied domains, including fields like audio description (AD), where questions of narrative, perception, and materiality intersect.

Building on these broader philosophical tensions, this article addresses two central research questions: How does AD's interaction with materiality shape narrative meaning? And how do industry neutrality standards impact this interaction? By exploring these questions, the study examines how AD transcends its traditional role as an objective accessibility tool (Bogucki & Deckert, 2020), emerging instead as a co-creative and interpretive practice deeply intertwined with the sensory and relational dimensions of audiovisual source texts.

For the purposes of this article, the term AD refers specifically to screen AD, which is generally defined as a media accessibility tool delivered during pauses in dialogue or other significant audio elements (Taylor & Perego, 2022; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2024). While other forms of AD exist, such as those provided in live performances, museums, or other non-screen-based contexts, this study focuses on AD for audiovisual media, where describers work within the constraints of pre-recorded audiovisual content. Screen AD, originally developed for blind and partially sighted audiences (Ellis et al., 2018), is now also increasingly relied upon by sighted audiences, such as neurodiverse learners and multitaskers, to enhance their experience of what is happening onscreen (Lewis, 2021; Prime Video, 2024). Widely regarded as “[...] an audio substitute for the visual components” (Bardini, 2020, p. 275) of audiovisual content, screen AD aims to replicate visual information faithfully and impartially, enabling audiences to form their interpretations independently (Snyder, 2013).

Over time, this neutrality requirement has come to dominate the audiovisual industry. It has been reinforced by influential clients, such as national public broadcasters and major streaming platforms (Greening et al., 2010; López, 2023), community-driven professional standards (Fryer, 2016; Perego, 2018), and academic research (Mazur & Chmiel, 2012; Remael et al., 2015). Often referred to as “traditional” or “conventional” AD, this approach is characterized by five key traits: exclusivity, neutrality, non-auteur production, third-party creation, and post-hoc implementation (Udo & Fels, 2009; Fryer, 2018b).

Yet, the industry's preference for neutrality—and its detachment from the artistic, inherently subjective, and partial production process—has not gone unchallenged. Numerous alternatives have been proposed, such as audio narration (Kruger & Orero, 2010; Ramos Caro, 2016), audio drama (Fryer, 2010), enhanced AD (Lopez et al., 2021), creative AD (Walczak, 2017; Zabrocka, 2018; Chottin & Thompson, 2021), co-creative AD (Reviers & Hanouille, 2023; Tancredi et al., 2023; Eardley et al., 2024;), integrated AD (Fryer, 2018a; Romero-Fresco, 2019), artistically integrated AD (Cavallo, 2015), auteur AD (Szarkowska, 2013), and others.



While promising, these models remain largely aspirational and have yet to be embraced by today's industry leaders: streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ (Choi et al., 2023; Massidda, 2023). For instance, Netflix's (2023) style guide for AD acknowledges that "[...] some subjectivity is unavoidable", yet it also stipulates that "[...] description should not be opinionated" (Netflix, 2023). Similarly, Amazon Prime's guidelines favor a "show, don't tell" approach, discouraging any "editorializing" by the describer, such as inferring emotions or intentions (Prime Video, 2024).

Recent scholarship has increasingly questioned whether objectivity in AD truly desirable—or even achievable. This topic has become a focal point of research, exemplified by the recent special issue of the *Journal of Audiovisual Translation* (Romero-Muñoz, 2023; Schaeffer-Lacroix et al., 2023). Traditional AD has faced criticism for failing to engage creatively with the material it describes (Chottin & Thompson, 2021), inadequately addressing the audience's experiential needs (Greco & Romero-Fresco, 2023), perpetuating ocularcentric perspectives rooted in sighted describers' interpretations (Eardley et al., 2024), and marginalizing alternative ways of experiencing and understanding audiovisual narratives (Kleege & Wallin, 2015; Thompson, 2018a).

Another significant point of contention involves the training of describers (e.g., Mazur & Chmiel, 2021; Romero-Fresco & Brown, 2023), their interpretive choices regarding which visual elements to prioritize (e.g., Di Giovanni, 2014; Bartolini, 2023) and the ways in which they translate visual aesthetics into verbal language (e.g., Hadley & Rieger, 2021; Reviers & Hanouille, 2023). While these discussions provide valuable insights, they often neglect a broader and underexplored dimension of AD: its entanglement with the material elements it describes.

This article argues that all AD—including traditional AD—is fundamentally shaped by the material properties and dynamics of what it describes. Elements such as textures, movements, atmospheres, and spatial configurations inevitably inform the structure, tone, and language of the description. This perspective resonates with existing work on the narratological and interpretive dimensions of AD (e.g., Vercauteren, 2012; Walczak, 2017; Starr & Braun, 2024), as well as broader scholarship in narrative theory and media studies that foregrounds the entanglement between medium and meaning (e.g., Massumi, 2002; Butler, 2005; Barad, 2007). Far from being a mere replication of the source text, AD actively engages with these material aspects, rendering them into narrative form and integrating them into the audience's sensory and interpretive experience. Far from being a mere replication of the source text, AD actively engages with these material aspects, rendering them into narrative form and integrating them into the audience's sensory and interpretive experience.

The article further asserts that AD does not simply reflect materiality but also produces material effects. In this respect, it aligns with recent research that treats AD as a generative rather than merely compensatory mode of narration (e.g., Thompson & Warne, 2018; Chottin & Thompson, 2021), as well as with theories that describe media as co-constitutive of perception (e.g., Ahmed, 2006; Caracciolo, 2023). By translating the visual into the auditory and verbal realms, AD invites audiences to interact with the original content in ways that extend beyond the non-AD-enhanced experience. Seen from this angle, AD emerges as a transformative, co-creative practice that actively constructs meaning rather than merely transmitting it.



Building on these claims, this article examines how AD's engagement with materiality redefines its potential as an aesthetic and sensory medium, challenging its traditional functional framing (Braun, 2011; Fryer & Freeman, 2013; Mazur, 2024). Rather than dismissing the impartiality often associated with traditional AD or celebrating the artistry of alternative approaches, this article seeks to transcend this divide. It argues that all forms of AD are inherently shaped by the materiality of the original audiovisual content, operating along a spectrum that resists binary classification.

To develop these arguments, the article introduces two complementary frameworks: Hannah Thompson's (2017) "blindness gain" and Marco Caracciolo's (2023) "spectrum of materiality". Both frameworks resist dichotomous thinking and instead emphasize relationality, multiplicity, and the transformative potential of sensory and material experiences. Blindness gain reconceives blindness not as a deficit but as a source of perceptual and creative insight, challenging the ocularcentric privileging of vision as the dominant mode of knowing. Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality, in parallel, highlights the dynamic and relational nature of material engagement, showing how material objects and their narrative weight resist reduction to fixed categories such as passive/inert or vibrant/agential. Together, these frameworks challenge entrenched binaries—blindness versus sight, subjective versus objective, and human versus non-human—and foreground the relational, sensory, and interpretive dimensions that enrich the audience's engagement with the narrative at hand.

To ground this theoretical framework, the article analyzes two audio-described versions of the same fragment of the Belgian-Israeli miniseries *Rough Diamonds* (Shamir et al., 2023; Shamir & Verheyden, 2023)—one provided by Netflix and the other by VRT, the public broadcaster of the Flemish Community in Belgium. These case studies illustrate how blindness gain and the spectrum of materiality provide a transformative lens for understanding AD. Far from being merely a functional add-on for accessibility, AD redefines audience engagement with the content on-screen—even when ostensibly adhering to utilitarian objectives.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Blindness gain

The present article's transformative perspective on AD is grounded in critical theories of materiality and subjectivity, which emphasize the interconnectedness of the observer and the observed, challenging the presumed neutrality of traditional notions of objectivity. These theories argue that knowledge is not passively apprehended but actively constructed through dynamic interactions between perceivers, environments, and material conditions.

Feminist scholars Donna Haraway (1988) famously critiques the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity through her concept of "situated knowledges". Haraway (1988) rejects the notion of objectivity as a "god trick"—a view from nowhere, detached from historical and cultural contexts. Instead, she advocates for recognizing the positionality of the observer, arguing that knowledge is always partial and shaped by specific social, cultural, and historical conditions. This reframing positions subjectivity as a strength rather than a liability, embracing the complexity and situated nature of knowledge-making.



Similarly, Brian Massumi (2002) and Judith Butler (2005) offer perspectives that disrupt Cartesian and anthropocentric models of perception. Massumi (2002) foregrounds sensation as a bridge between self and world, highlighting how bodies dynamically engage with networks of affective and material interactions. Butler (2005) reframes subjectivity as relational, emerging through external forces, intellectual activity, and sensory experiences. These perspectives dissolve the notion of a neutral observer, emphasizing instead the interdependence of self, others, and the environment in constructing meaning. Scholars such as Karen Barad (2007) and Sara Ahmed (2006) build on the same ideas, interrogating the processes of knowledge production and emphasizing relational entanglements between perceivers and the material world. Together, these perspectives challenge assumptions of an impartial, external reality, advocating instead for a reflexive approach that values relational engagements between humans, nonhuman, and their environments.

Hannah Thompson's (2017) framework of "blindness gain" resonates with this broader critical tradition by reimagining sensory hierarchies, albeit with a distinct focus on blindness. Drawing inspiration from Bauman and Murray's (2014) concept of "deaf gain" and Georgina Kleege's (2010) reflections on "gaining blindness", Thompson (2017) proposes that blindness offers unique modes of multisensory, imaginative, and inventive engagement with the world. Blindness gain challenges deficit-based narratives that portray blindness solely as a loss requiring mitigation, instead reframing non-visual living as a rich, creative practice involving adaptability and the cultivation of diverse sensory modalities (Thompson & Warne, 2018).

Her framework critiques ocularcentrism, the cultural privileging of vision as the dominant mode of knowing (Jay, 1993). Rather than merely compensating for the absence of sight, blindness gain positions multisensory engagement as generative, creating new ways of perceiving, interpreting, and navigating the world. For blind individuals, this perspective highlights the artistry inherent in living through sound, touch, and spatial relationships. For sighted audiences, blindness gain broadens the appreciation of non-visual modalities, disrupting traditional sensory hierarchies and fostering an expanded understanding of perception.

Thompson's work invites a reconsideration of practices like AD (e.g., Chottin & Thompson, 2021; Eardley et al., 2024), which has historically been framed as a neutral tool to "fill in the gaps" left by visual absence (Schaeffer-Lacroix et al., 2023). Conventional AD typically prioritizes factual descriptions intended to replicate sighted experiences for blind audiences (Kleege, 2016). However, blindness gain suggests an alternative approach, framing AD as a practice that fosters aesthetic, emotional, and interpretive engagement (Thompson, 2018a, 2018b). By embracing the principles of blindness gain, AD shifts from simply replicating sighted perspectives to enriching the sensory and narrative experiences of both blind and sighted audiences (Perego, 2016; Adams, 2024).

In this light, blindness gain aligns with and extends the broader tradition of subjectivity and materiality in critical theory. By highlighting the potential of multisensory engagement and critiquing entrenched visual dominance, it provides a compelling framework for rethinking perception and knowledge production. This perspective not only moves beyond deficit-based assumptions but also opens up new possibilities for AD, emphasizing its capacity for innovative, inclusive, and dynamic engagement.

2.2 The spectrum of materiality

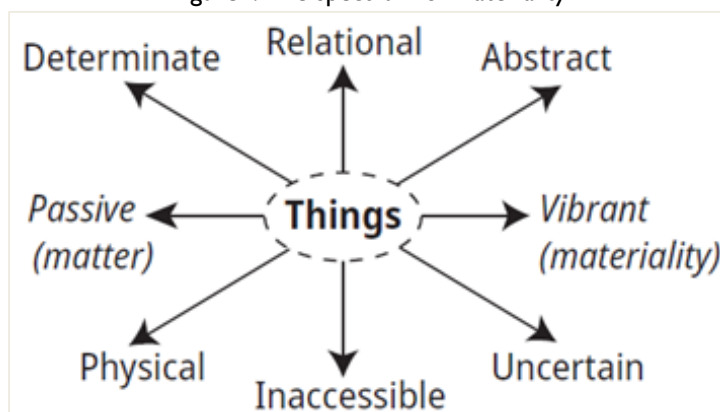
Marco Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality offers a complementary framework to blindness gain, providing a nuanced methodological lens for exploring material engagement. Rooted in traditions such as Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory and Bill Brown's (2001, 2019) thing theory, Caracciolo (2023) builds on their insights while addressing their limitations, crafting an approach uniquely suited to understanding the relational and resistant dimensions of materiality.

Latour (2005) emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman actors, rejecting anthropocentric hierarchies and highlighting the agency distributed across networks of entities. Similarly, Brown (2001) foregrounds moments when objects resist their functional roles and become 'things,' confronting humans with their materiality and breaking free from instrumental utility. These moments challenge traditional subject-object binaries, inviting deeper reflection on the roles objects play in shaping perception and narrative.

While Caracciolo (2023) draws inspiration from both authors, he critiques their binary tendencies. Actor-Network Theory, while rejecting human dominance, often treats all entities within the network as equally agential, potentially flattening the complexity of material interactions. Thing theory, on the other hand, oscillates between two poles: objects as inert and functional versus things as vibrant, autonomous agents. Caracciolo (2023) moves beyond these binaries by conceptualizing materiality as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. His framework introduces intersecting axes that capture the dynamic and multifaceted nature of material engagement:

- **Horizontal Axis or Passive vs. Vibrant Materiality:** This axis reflects a continuum where material entities range from lifeless and functional to dynamic and relational, resisting strict categorization.
- **Vertical Axis or Relational vs. Inaccessible Materiality:** This axis emphasizes how material entities both invite and resist human interpretation, highlighting their dual roles as relational and elusive.
- **Diagonal Axes or Physical vs. Abstract and Certain vs. Uncertain Materiality:** These axes add complexity, exploring how materiality oscillates between tangible sensory qualities and abstract symbolism, as well as between clarity and ambiguity.

Figure 1: The spectrum of materiality



Source: Caracciolo (2023, p. 9)

Central to Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum is the concept of narrative negotiation—the idea that narratives actively mediate the tensions inherent in materiality without necessarily resolving them. Drawing on narrative theory (Greenblatt, 1988; Herman & Vervaeck, 2009; Korthals Altes, 2014; Herman & Vervaeck, 2017), Caracciolo (2023) emphasizes that narratives do not merely represent materiality but interpret and reimagine it. As a literary scholar, Caracciolo (2023) applies this framework primarily to the study of literature, examining how texts navigate the relational and resistant qualities of materiality. His approach highlights how literary narratives engage with material elements—foregrounding their vibrancy, relationality, and elusiveness—while acknowledging the limits of human interpretation.

In this article, Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality is extended to the domain of AD to reframe scholarly discussions about the practice. Rather than aligning with perspectives that emphasize either neutral/objective or creative/subjective approaches, AD is positioned on a spectrum of narrative negotiation shaped by the axes of material entanglement proposed by Caracciolo (2023). This discursive stance shifts the focus from the descriptive qualities of AD to the ways material elements—such as textures, movements, and atmospheres—mentioned in the AD actively shape and resist narrative representation. By foregrounding this interplay, the article highlights how AD operates as a co-creative practice embedded in the relational and resistant dimensions of materiality.

2.3 AD as narrative negotiation

This article argues that AD's engagement with materiality is integral to its narrative potential, a perspective illuminated through the combined frameworks of blindness gain and Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality. Together, these frameworks provide the theoretical lens through which three key concepts—thingness, material entanglement, and narrative negotiation—are examined, demonstrating how AD actively mediates sensory, relational, and material dimensions to enrich storytelling for diverse audiences.

Thingness, as articulated in Bill Brown's (2001) thing theory, emphasizes the qualities of objects that transcend their functional roles. The article argues that AD foregrounds 'thingness' by highlighting the sensory and symbolic dimensions of material elements, transforming them from passive background details into active participants in the narrative. Through blindness gain, thingness is revealed as an opportunity to challenge visual-centric storytelling, encouraging a co-creative relationship between describers, audiences, and the objects themselves, as they collaboratively explore the relational and emotional resonance of material elements.

Drawing on Karen Barad's (2007) concept of "intra-action", this article uses material entanglement to describe the dynamic, reciprocal relationships between objects, humans, and their environments. In AD, material elements acquire meaning through their interconnectedness with emotions, cultural symbols, and narrative structures. By integrating blindness gain and the spectrum of materiality, the article highlights how AD interprets and conveys these relationships, enriching audience understanding of the broader context in which materiality operates.

The article further defines narrative negotiation as the process by which AD mediates competing interpretations of materiality and relationality. In this co-creative dynamic, describers



translate visual stimuli into layered sensory and relational experiences, while audiences actively interpret these narratives, navigating tensions between neutrality and subjectivity in real time. Blindness gain reframes subjectivity as a generative force, while Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum reveals how material elements resist or invite interpretation, creating opportunities for describers and audiences to collaboratively engage with the complexity of AD's narrative construction.

Finally, the article argues that even traditional AD, which adheres to industry guidelines emphasizing neutrality, operates beyond simplistic notions of im/partiality. To illustrate these insights, the article examines two audio described versions of *Rough Diamonds*, focusing specifically on the opening of the first episode—an approximately six-minute, largely dialogue-free segment. This fragment provides a compelling site for analyzing how AD engages with materiality to enrich narrative meaning through the joint efforts of describers, audiences, and the material world itself.

3. Case study: *Rough Diamonds*

3.1 Contextual framing

Rough Diamonds is a Belgian-Israeli Netflix drama co-produced with VRT that delves into the Orthodox Jewish community in Antwerp and the high-stakes diamond trade that underpins their lives. Combining family drama with crime thriller elements, the series explores themes of loyalty, tradition, and survival. At its heart is the Wolfson family, a powerful dynasty grappling with internal fractures and external threats. The sudden death of Yanki Wolfson, a young Hasidic man with a gambling addiction, triggers a series of events that bring his estranged brother, Noah Wolfson, back to Antwerp. Noah, who left his Orthodox roots years ago, must navigate family tensions, the complexities of the diamond trade, and a criminal underworld threatening the family's legacy.

The series has been praised for its authentic depiction of Hasidic rituals and culture, supported by extensive research and consultation with members of the Antwerp Jewish community (VRT, 2023). It captures intricate Orthodox practices, such as handwashing rituals, kosher dietary laws, and Shabbat observances, while also portraying the challenges of balancing faith, family, and business. However, it has faced criticism for perpetuating certain stereotypes about Orthodox Jews, particularly in its portrayal of criminality and familial conflict (Josephs, 2023). Despite these critiques, *Rough Diamonds* has been lauded for its compelling storytelling and multilingual performances, seamlessly blending Flemish Dutch, English, and Yiddish to reflect the unique world of Antwerp's diamond district (Hoet, 2023).

3.2 Focus of the analysis

The choice of *Rough Diamonds* as a case study is particularly apt for exploring the material entanglement of AD, even though the analyzed fragment's linguistic diversity—featuring AD in Flemish Dutch alongside elements of Yiddish and Hebrew in the original audio—presents challenges for an English-language article. Admittedly, the fact that neither the fragment nor the AD is in English adds an additional layer of complexity. To address this, direct English translations of the AD are



provided throughout the analysis to ensure clarity. Despite these challenges, the fragment's unique qualities make it especially valuable for this study.

First, the rarity of having two ADs commissioned by major clients (Netflix and VRT)—both adhering to neutrality standards (Netflix, 2023; VAF, 2025)—provides a unique lens to explore how different narrative approaches in AD render the same material within a framework ostensibly designed to ensure objectivity. Second, the original content contains minimal dialogue, primarily small talk in Flemish Dutch, shifting the interpretive burden to the AD, which becomes a critical mediator of meaning and emotional depth. Finally, the series showcases visually rich storytelling, portraying the daily lives of a community known for its secrecy and infrequent onscreen representation. This rarity potentially invites additional explanation in the AD to contextualize the cultural and social nuances that might otherwise remain unfamiliar to audiences.

This intricate combination of neutrality-driven constraints, sparse dialogue, and evocative visual content makes *Rough Diamonds* an invaluable case study for investigating how even traditional AD, which is expected to aspire to neutrality, ultimately evokes distinct forms of thingness in the on-screen events and actions, thereby summoning different meanings and producing dissimilar knowledge. By comparing the narrative strategies of the Netflix and VRT ADs, this analysis aims to reveal how AD functions as a dynamic and co-creative process. Describers interpret visual elements, audiences actively engage with these interpretations, and material elements shape the storytelling experience. This dynamic ensures that each AD generates distinct meanings and emotional resonances, challenging the viability of neutrality as a standard for AD practice.

The analysis focuses on the introductory sequence of the first episode, leading up to the opening credits. This segment follows Yanki Wolfson as he begins his day, performing mundane yet symbolically charged actions such as waking up, dressing, and walking to his office. It culminates in a pivotal moment when Yanki locks himself in an office and takes his own life. By organizing the analysis around Yanki's activities, the study adopts a classical narratological approach, emphasizing the sequencing of actions and events as central to narrative construction (Genette, 1980; Herman, 2002). This methodology highlights how both ADs structure the story, anticipate audience interpretation, and propel the plot.

To deepen the analysis, the study integrates Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality with Thompson's (2017) concept of blindness gain. These hermeneutic tools examine the Netflix and VRT ADs along intersecting axes: Passive vs. Vibrant, Relational vs. Inaccessible, and the diagonal dimensions of Physical/Abstract and Certain/Uncertain. By situating the ADs on the spectrum of materiality, the study sets out to uncover how they each negotiate material elements, relational cues, and narrative structures.

3.3 Comparative analysis

3.3.1 Yanki wakes up

Table 1: Comparison 3.3.1

VRT's AD		NETFLIX's AD	
00:00:01	In a dimly lit bedroom, a Jewish man in his thirties wearing a yarmulke lies in a narrow bed. He stares somberly at the ceiling, grips his duvet, and turns on his side.	00:00:07	A man with a mustache and beard lies in bed. He wears a white shirt and a white yarmulke on his head. He turns onto his side.
00:00:09	"I thank You, living and eternal King, for restoring my soul to me with mercy. Great is Your faithfulness" [spoken subtitle in Flemish Dutch, recorded over the original Hebrew].	00:00:19	"I thank You, living eternal King, for compassionately returning my soul to me" [spoken subtitle in Flemish Dutch, recorded over the original Hebrew].
00:00:17	The man, Yanki, turns back onto his back, grimaces briefly, and then sits up with difficulty.	00:00:30	He turns back onto his back.
00:00:27	He picks up a silver pitcher with water next to the bed and carefully pours some water over both his hands.	00:00:33	Next to the bed is a bucket with water and a pitcher inside. Yanki leans over the side of the bed and pours water over his hands.
00:00:38	Yanki takes a small towel from the headboard. He dries his hands, swings his legs out of bed, and sits pensively on the edge.	00:00:47	He shakes the water from his hands and dries them with a towel. Then he sits on the edge of the bed.
00:00:46	In a second bed behind him, his wife Gila tosses and turns in her sleep. Without opening her eyes, she turns onto her side and slides an arm under her pillow.	00:00:56	Behind him is another bed, where a woman lies. She turns over, wearing a headscarf.
00:00:58	Yanki glances briefly behind him at Gila and places the towel beside him. After a moment of hesitation, he gets up, looking dejected.	00:01:03	The man briefly turns his head to look at her. Then he turns forward again, staring at his hands.
00:01:10	He quietly leaves the bedroom, and Gila continues sleeping undisturbed.	00:01:17	He takes a deep breath and gets up. The woman behind him keeps sleeping.

Source: Author (2025)

The VRT AD constructs a narrative that emphasizes vibrant materiality, transforming objects and actions into dynamic components of the scene. Yanki's grimace and pensive sitting convey his inner turmoil, while objects such as the "silver pitcher" and "small towel" transcend their functional roles to reflect his psychological state. These details subtly evoke *negel vasser*, the Jewish ritual of handwashing upon waking, which symbolizes renewal and the removal of spiritual impurity (My Jewish Learning, 2025a). By highlighting Yanki's deliberate interaction with these objects, the AD indirectly alludes to the ritual's significance, inviting the audience to consider its deeper cultural and religious context without explicitly naming or explaining it.

The VRT AD further integrates religious materiality through its depiction of Yanki wearing a "white yarmulke". By describing him as a "Jewish man in his thirties" and pairing this detail with his actions, the AD frames the yarmulke as more than a physical detail, suggesting its role as a marker of religious observance. The emphasis on Yanki's handwashing ritual and attire offers interpretive cues that connect his actions to his faith. The AD avoids overt commentary, leaving interpretive space for the audience to link Yanki's behaviors to broader cultural and spiritual practices.



In contrast, the Netflix AD approaches materiality with a focus on clarity and physicality, emphasizing objects and actions as static elements within the scene. Items like the “bucket with water and a pitcher inside” are presented in functional terms, concentrating on their physical presence rather than their cultural or emotional resonance. Similarly, Yanki’s actions, such as pouring water over his hands, are framed as routine gestures. The AD mentions Yanki’s white shirt and yarmulke as part of his physical appearance, treating these details as neutral descriptors without exploring their symbolic or cultural implications. This approach prioritizes straightforward description and avoids embedding objects within broader narrative or relational frameworks.

Relational dynamics are another area where the VRT and Netflix ADs diverge. The VRT AD emphasizes subtle connections between characters and their environment. For instance, Gila’s restless movements and Yanki’s glance at her suggest relational tension, which subtly points at *niddah*, the Jewish laws of marital purity requiring physical separation between spouses during certain periods (Vizel, 2018). While the AD does not explicitly reference this practice, its framing of Gila in “a second bed” and her movements relative to Yanki subtly reflect the physical and emotional distance these laws might impose. By situating Gila’s actions within this relational context, the AD adds complexity to their relationship and its cultural framework.

The Netflix AD, on the other hand, adopts a more neutral stance, describing Gila as “a woman” lying in “another bed” and wearing “a headscarf”. This description acknowledges the physical separation between the couple without engaging with potential religious implications. The mention of the headscarf, however, leaves interpretive space for the audience to consider its cultural or religious significance, even though the AD does not elaborate on it. This approach focuses on providing clear, accessible descriptions while leaving cultural and relational interpretations open to the audience.

The VRT AD also bridges physical and abstract materiality, blending tangible elements with symbolic resonance. For example, Yanki’s grimacing and pensive sitting during his recitation of the morning prayer *Modeh Ani* imbue the scene with spiritual and emotional weight. This prayer, a blessing of gratitude for the return of the soul after sleep, is a moment of theological depth within Jewish tradition (Keil, 2025). The pairing of the spoken subtitle with Yanki’s introspective demeanor conveys the prayer’s significance without explicitly identifying it, allowing the audience to sense its resonance through his actions.

Conversely, the Netflix AD remains grounded in physical materiality here as well. The prayer is presented as a straightforward expression of gratitude, with no additional details suggesting its cultural or theological context. Yanki’s act of drying his hands is similarly portrayed as a clear, physical action, focusing on procedural clarity and leaving interpretive depth to the audience.

3.3.2. Yanki gets dressed

The Netflix AD takes a predominantly descriptive approach to materiality, emphasizing objects and actions as static elements within the scene. Yanki’s routine actions, such as buttoning his vest and retrieving his coat, are described in functional terms, highlighting their role in spatial and narrative progression without delving into their emotional or symbolic resonance. For instance, the mirror and painting in the hallway are mentioned solely to establish spatial orientation, while the



bicycles parked opposite the door are treated as inert details of the exterior environment. This approach prioritizes clarity and accessibility, presenting objects as discrete components that contribute to the scene’s physical layout rather than engaging with Yanki’s state of mind or relational dynamics.

Table 2: Comparison 3.3.2

VRT's AD		NETFLIX's AD	
00:01:17	In the hallway, he carefully buttons up a black vest and silently pushes open the door to a children's room.	00:01:25	Yanki buttons his vest as he walks through a hallway. He now wears a black yarmulke.
00:01:28	He pauses in the doorway, letting his gaze drift over two sleeping boys.	00:01:31	Then he opens a door. In the room are two beds with children sleeping in them. The curtains are open. It is daytime.
00:01:36	With a heavy heart, he turns and walks past several windows and a large painting, continuing down the narrow hallway.	00:01:42	Yanki briefly looks at his children, then leaves the room. He continues down the hallway. A mirror and a painting hang on the wall.
00:01:49	In the hall, he takes a long black coat from the coat rack and puts it on. He also puts on a black hat and picks up a heavy silver watch from a sideboard.	00:01:55	At the end of the hallway, he takes a black coat from a coat rack and puts it on.
00:01:59	He fastens the watch around his wrist, hesitates, and finally puts it back.	00:02:04	He puts on a black hat and takes a watch from a cabinet. He looks at it and puts it back.
00:02:05	Then he grabs a badge from the sideboard and steps out of his apartment.	00:02:14	He takes the badge lying on the cabinet before heading outside.
00:02:11	He strides through the lobby of the apartment building, opens the glass front door, and steps outside.	00:02:19	Yanki walks through the lobby of an apartment building. Opposite the door, bicycles are parked.

Source: Author (2025)

Similarly, moments of interaction with objects, such as Yanki’s handling of the watch, are framed in a straightforward manner. The AD states, “He looks at it and puts it back,” focusing on the physical action without introducing interpretive layers or emotional undertones. The watch remains a functional object, with no suggestion of internal hesitation or conflict. Even when Yanki’s badge could be understood as a symbol of his transition from private to public life, it is described simply as part of his routine, emphasizing its external function rather than its relational or narrative significance.

The depiction of characters follows a similar pattern. For example, in the children’s room, the AD describes the beds generically and notes, “Yanki briefly looks at his children,” framing this moment in terms of factual observation. The children’s presence is presented as part of the physical environment, leaving any emotional or relational connections open to audience interpretation. Likewise, while Yanki’s black yarmulke and black hat are mentioned as part of his attire, the AD focuses on their physical characteristics without exploring their cultural or symbolic resonance. This neutral framing ensures descriptive clarity but avoids embedding objects and characters within broader emotional or cultural networks.



In contrast, the VRT AD constructs a vibrant materiality, imbuing objects and actions with emotional and relational significance. For example, Yanki’s interaction with the watch is described with hesitation: “He fastens the watch around his wrist, hesitates, and finally puts it back”. This description transforms the watch from a functional item into a reflection of Yanki’s internal conflict, encouraging the audience to interpret the action as indicative of his broader struggles. The badge, too, is framed relationally. By juxtaposing its retrieval with Yanki’s hesitation over the watch, the AD suggests a transition from introspection to external responsibility, positioning the badge as a bridge between Yanki’s private turmoil and his public role.

The relational depth of the VRT AD extends to other moments in the scene. When Yanki pauses in the doorway of the children’s room, “letting his gaze drift over two sleeping boys,” the action is imbued with emotional weight. The descriptor “with a heavy heart” highlights the familial and emotional stakes of this moment, encouraging the audience to see the children’s presence as a significant connection in Yanki’s narrative. Even mundane actions, such as “carefully buttoning up a black vest” or “silently pushing open the door to a children’s room,” are framed to reflect Yanki’s inner emotional landscape, adding layers of narrative complexity.

The VRT AD also blends physical and abstract materiality, creating a narrative where tangible objects and spaces carry symbolic resonance. For instance, while the physical act of Yanki gazing at his children anchors the scene in sensory detail, the emotional undertone transforms the space into a site of relational significance. This interplay between the tangible and the abstract creates a layered narrative experience, contrasting with the Netflix AD’s emphasis on factual description and spatial clarity.

3.3.3. Yanki walks to work

Table 3: Comparison 3.3.3

VRT's AD		NETFLIX's AD	
00:02:19	On the street, he glances at some passing schoolchildren, crosses a zebra crossing in Antwerp’s train station area, and continues past various jewelry stores with heavy iron shutters.	00:02:27	Yanki walks on a narrow sidewalk, passing children with school bags. At Antwerp Central Station, he crosses the street at a zebra crossing and walks along <i>Keyserlei</i> .
00:02:35	On a street blocked by a barrier, he steps onto the sidewalk and walks past several surveillance cameras into the diamond district.	00:02:40	He arrives at a street with a barrier and walks past it.
00:02:44	Under the gray morning sky, Yanki tensely continues past a giant poster that reads “In Antwerp, we speak diamond”.	00:02:46	In the distance, there are two patrolling soldiers. Surveillance cameras monitor the street. Yanki walks purposefully onward. He passes a sign reading “In Antwerp, we speak diamond”.

Source: Author (2025)

The Netflix AD emphasizes physical and certain materiality, presenting objects, settings, and actions in straightforward, functional terms. For example, the explicit mention of *Keyserlei* as a recognizable Antwerp location adds specificity to the spatial description, potentially engaging audience members familiar with the area while leaving interpretation to those without this contextual knowledge. Other elements, such as the zebra crossing, barrier, and surveillance cameras,



are described factually, highlighting their roles in Yanki's navigation through the diamond district without introducing broader cultural or symbolic meanings. The poster, "In Antwerp, we speak diamond," is similarly presented as a factual detail: it is acknowledged, but not as being necessarily connected to Yanki's journey or the district's cultural identity. This approach prioritizes procedural clarity, ensuring accessibility while avoiding abstraction or relational framing.

In contrast, the VRT AD constructs a more dynamic narrative by oscillating between physical and abstract materiality, embedding objects and settings within broader cultural, economic, and emotional contexts. For instance, the poster "In Antwerp, we speak diamond" is framed not merely as a visual element but as a symbol of the diamond district's global reputation and exclusivity. The VRT AD describes it as a prominent part of Yanki's surroundings, implicitly linking it to the economic pressures and societal expectations tied to the diamond trade. Similarly, the jewelry stores with their heavy iron shutters are depicted with language that evokes security, secrecy, and restriction, reinforcing the guarded nature of the district and hinting at its high-stakes environment. The surveillance cameras, while noted as part of the physical setup, are also contextualized within the pervasive atmosphere of monitoring and control, subtly suggesting the power dynamics that define Yanki's world. These narrative choices link the physical environment to Yanki's emotional state and situate him within a web of cultural, economic, and relational tensions.

Relationality is further emphasized in the VRT AD's description of the schoolchildren. They are not merely background elements but are framed in connection to Yanki's gaze, inviting the audience to interpret this interaction as reflective of his inner state—perhaps a longing for innocence or normalcy amid the tension of his surroundings. In contrast, the Netflix AD notes the children's presence incidentally, describing them as part of the scene without relational or symbolic framing. Similarly, the heavy iron shutters and surveillance cameras in the VRT AD emphasize the exclusivity and guarded nature of the district, positioning Yanki as simultaneously within and distanced from this world. By integrating these elements relationally, the VRT AD deepens the material engagement, fostering a layered narrative experience.

The interplay between physical and abstract materiality is particularly evident in the ADs' treatment of Yanki's movements and the surrounding environment. In the Netflix AD, these are described with precision, anchoring the narrative in physical certainty. For example, Yanki is described as walking along the narrow sidewalk and past the barrier, emphasizing the procedural clarity of his movements. While this ensures accessibility, it leaves interpretive layers to the audience's imagination. Conversely, the VRT AD imbues these same movements with abstraction. The description of the gray morning sky as mirroring Yanki's tense mood links the physical environment to his emotional state. Similarly, the framing of the poster and the shutters integrates these objects into broader themes of exclusivity and cultural identity, situating Yanki within a layered narrative framework where material elements actively shape the emotional and cultural resonance of the story.

3.3.4. Yanki goes to his office

The VRT AD portrays materiality as a dynamic force within the narrative, emphasizing how objects and actions contribute to Yanki's emotional and cultural experiences. The heavy glass door



and security turnstile, for example, are described as imposing and formal, reflecting the exclusivity and tension of the setting. These elements are connected to Yanki’s unease and the high-stakes nature of his environment. The grandeur of the marble hall adds to this sense of weight and formality, grounding the audience in the emotional and spatial context of the sequence.

Table 4: Comparison 3.3.4

VRT’s AD		NETFLIX’s AD	
00:02:54	He pushes open the heavy glass door of a stately building and scans his badge at a security turnstile.	00:03:00	He enters a building. The lobby is secured with turnstiles. Yanki scans his badge and steps through. He then places the badge back in the chest pocket of his coat.
00:03:03	He steps into the building’s imposing marble hall, passing two armed security guards, nods as he removes his black hat, and anxiously watches them as he steps into an elevator.	00:03:19	Two guards pass him by. He removes his hat and looks back at them before continuing.
00:03:18	The elevator doors reopen. He takes a deep breath and steps out.	00:03:25	Yanki enters an elevator. When it stops, he takes a deep breath and walks further into the building.
00:03:23	With his head slightly bowed, he walks down a hallway. The long black side curls under his yarmulke sway gently with each step. Clutching his hat tightly in one hand, he stops and rings a doorbell, nervously waiting.	00:03:32	The walls of the hallway are white, interrupted by black doorways. Yanki briefly closes his eyes, breathing deeply as he walks. He tightly grips the edge of his hat. At the end of the hallway, he stops at a door and rings the bell.

Source: Author (2025)

The VRT AD portrays materiality as a dynamic force within the narrative, emphasizing how objects and actions contribute to Yanki’s emotional and cultural experiences. The heavy glass door and security turnstile, for example, are described as imposing and formal, reflecting the exclusivity and tension of the setting. These elements are connected to Yanki’s unease and the high-stakes nature of his environment. The grandeur of the marble hall adds to this sense of weight and formality, grounding the audience in the emotional and spatial context of the sequence.

Interactions between Yanki and his surroundings in the VRT AD also highlight a layered engagement with materiality. The mention of Yanki removing and tightly clutching his black hat conveys vulnerability and adherence to cultural norms, connecting this action to his internal state. Similarly, the description of his long black side curls swaying gently as he walks introduces sensory and cultural dimensions, linking his physical presence to his identity. These details integrate Yanki’s actions with the broader narrative, encouraging interpretive connections between his environment and his personal experience.

By contrast, the Netflix AD focuses on materiality as static and procedural, offering factual descriptions of objects and settings without tying them to relational or emotional dynamics. The turnstiles are identified as security measures, emphasizing their functional role within the spatial layout without exploring their contribution to the narrative atmosphere. The hallway’s white walls and black doorways are presented as visual details that delineate the space, and while Yanki’s removal of his hat and tight grip are noted, these gestures are not framed as reflections of his internal



conflict or cultural significance. This approach positions the material world as a backdrop to Yanki's actions rather than an active participant in the story.

The VRT AD further emphasizes relational materiality by embedding Yanki's actions within a network of social and cultural dynamics. The armed security guards are described in relation to Yanki's behavior, with his nod and anxious glance underscoring his awareness of their authority and the heightened scrutiny of the environment. This interaction places Yanki within a hierarchy of power and surveillance, amplifying the tension of the scene. Similarly, physical spaces such as the elevator and hallway are connected to Yanki's internal state: his deep breath before stepping out of the elevator reflects his apprehension, and the doorbell becomes a focal point of anticipation, representing the threshold to an uncertain encounter. These descriptions create a dynamic relationship between Yanki and his surroundings, situating him within the broader stakes of the narrative.

In comparison, the Netflix AD frames objects and settings as more detached from Yanki's internal experience. The guards are described as passing figures, without linking their presence to Yanki's behavior or the social dynamics of the scene. The turnstiles are noted for their function as security features but are not contextualized within the exclusivity and formality of the building. Similarly, the hallway and doorbell are described in neutral terms, providing spatial clarity without emphasizing their emotional or narrative significance.

The two ADs also diverge in how they balance physical and abstract materiality. The VRT AD uses sensory details to establish a concrete visual and spatial setting while introducing abstract dimensions to enhance emotional and cultural depth. Yanki's side curls under his yarmulke, for instance, evoke his cultural and religious identity, while his tight grip on his hat suggests vulnerability and apprehension. Actions such as his deep breath or waiting at the doorbell transcend their physicality, inviting the audience to interpret their emotional weight and narrative importance. This interplay between the tangible and symbolic creates a layered experience, encouraging the audience to connect Yanki's physical actions to the broader context of his story.

The Netflix AD, on the other hand, emphasizes physical materiality and descriptive clarity, providing detailed accounts of Yanki's actions and surroundings. The badge, turnstiles, and elevator are described in precise terms, anchoring the narrative in tangible spatial reality. The hallway's white walls and black doorways are similarly depicted as neutral markers of the environment. Abstract dimensions, however, are largely absent. Yanki's gestures, such as gripping his hat tightly or taking a deep breath, are noted without connecting them to his emotional state. The doorbell, while mentioned, is described as part of the physical sequence without acknowledging its role in building narrative tension.

3.3.5. Yanki steals a gun

The Netflix AD prioritizes procedural clarity, presenting objects, actions, and spaces with precision and focusing on their functional roles within the narrative. For instance, the glowing panel reading "Wolfson Diamonds" is described factually as a lit frame within the setting. This description situates the panel as part of the physical environment, but its broader cultural or emotional resonance—such as its potential connection to familial legacy or professional pressures—is not



explored. Similarly, Yanki's forced smile fading as he enters the room is included as a behavioral detail, but the AD does not explicitly tie this to his internal emotional state or the tension underlying his actions. Additionally, objects like Yanki's hat are described in straightforward terms—he places it on a table—without linking this action to his cultural identity or vulnerability.

Table 5: Comparison 3.3.5

VRT's AD		NETFLIX's AD	
00:03:47	DIALOGUE [small talk between Yanki and the guard in Dutch; no AD].	00:03:54	DIALOGUE [small talk between Yanki and the guard in Dutch; no AD].
00:03:58	"God bless you" [spoken subtitle in Dutch, recorded over the original Yiddish]. Yanki walks into a hallway and closes the door behind him. The forced smile he had put on for the security guard fades from his face. He pauses beside a glowing panel that reads "Wolfson Diamonds," enters an office, and places his hat on a desk.	00:04:08	[Yanki addresses the guard in Yiddish] The smile on Yanki's face disappears as he enters the new room. He stops, stands still, and breathes deeply. Then he continues.
00:04:18	Yanki nervously stands close to the open door, pressing his back against the wall and taking a deep breath.	00:04:21	On a lit frame are the words "Wolfson Diamonds". In the next room, Yanki places his hat on a table and stands with his back against a cabinet around the corner of the open doorway. He braces himself.
00:04:34	A guard storms in with a drawn gun. Yanki grabs the weapon.	00:04:38	Yanki stays put. The guard enters.
00:04:40	The two men fall to the ground, and the guard drops the gun. Yanki grabs the weapon and points it at the guard, who looks at him in terror. Yanki quickly leaves the office, runs into another room, shuts the door behind him, and locks it.	00:04:50	They fall. Yanki grabs the guard's gun. He points it at the guard while he scrambles to his feet.
00:05:00	Yanki locks a second door in the room as well. With the gun in his hand, he waits.	00:05:04	Yanki walks away. He locks himself in an office. Yanki locks the other door as well.
00:05:07	"Hear, O Israel. Adonai is our God, Adonai is one. Adonai is our God, Adonai is one" [spoken subtitle].	00:05:09	[prayer in Hebrew; no spoken subtitle].
00:05:20	Three guards break down the door. Yanki places the gun to his temple and... [gunshot].	00:05:19	[unintelligible background noise and shouting, followed by a gunshot].
00:05:26	The screen goes black.	00:05:34	Yanki has shot himself.

Source: Author (2025)

The Netflix AD prioritizes procedural clarity, presenting objects, actions, and spaces with precision and focusing on their functional roles within the narrative. For instance, the glowing panel reading "Wolfson Diamonds" is described factually as a lit frame within the setting. This description situates the panel as part of the physical environment, but its broader cultural or emotional resonance—such as its potential connection to familial legacy or professional pressures—is not explored. Similarly, Yanki's forced smile fading as he enters the room is included as a behavioral detail, but the AD does not explicitly tie this to his internal emotional state or the tension underlying his actions. Additionally, objects like Yanki's hat are described in straightforward terms—he places it on a table—without linking this action to his cultural identity or vulnerability.

In contrast, the VRT AD integrates materiality and relational dynamics into a more layered narrative. The glowing panel reading “Wolfson Diamonds” is described in a way that ties it to the familial and professional pressures shaping Yanki’s actions. By situating the panel prominently in the scene and describing Yanki pausing beside it before moving forward, the AD implicitly connects it to the weight of legacy and the high-stakes environment of Antwerp’s diamond district. The panel becomes more than a visual element; it symbolizes the economic and cultural pressures that Yanki carries, embedding it within the narrative as a meaningful detail. Yanki’s forced smile, described as fading after he closes the door, highlights the dissonance between his outward composure and his inner turmoil, linking his physical actions to his emotional and cultural reality.

The gun is another element treated differently between the two ADs. In the Netflix AD, it is described procedurally: Yanki grabs the guard’s weapon, the two men fall, and the gun is used to escalate the conflict. The AD focuses on the sequence of events, ensuring spatial and physical clarity but leaving the emotional stakes implicit. By contrast, the VRT AD emphasizes the relational tension of the moment. It describes the terror on the guard’s face and Yanki’s desperation, framing the altercation as a charged encounter where fear and power dynamics collide. This relational framing deepens the emotional impact of the struggle, encouraging the audience to consider the symbolical weight of this altercation for both characters.

The treatment of the prayer also reveals significant differences. In the Netflix AD, the original audio of the Hebrew prayer is presented without modification or explanation, leaving it as an auditory detail that is not explicitly connected to its cultural or spiritual resonance. In the VRT AD, however, the *Shema* prayer is explicated through a spoken subtitle in Dutch (My Jewish Learning, 2025b), framing it as a profound moment of spiritual connection that ties Yanki’s final act to his religious identity and cultural heritage. This narrative treatment introduces an abstract layer to the narrative, connecting Yanki’s physical actions to broader themes of faith, despair, and identity.

Relational materiality also diverges significantly between the two ADs. In the Netflix AD, the guard’s role during their conversation and struggle is described in terms of physical action, with no additional relational context. In contrast, the VRT AD adds depth to the interaction. The spoken subtitle ‘God bless you’—which the Netflix AD leaves untranslated—highlights a moment of well-intended social exchange that sharply contrasts with the subsequent tension and fear of their struggle. By including this subtitle, the VRT AD underscores the guard’s terror and Yanki’s sudden shift in demeanor, from pleasant to desperate, framing the altercation within a broader web of relational and emotional dynamics.

The ADs also differ in their balance of physical and abstract materiality. The Netflix AD remains grounded in physical materiality, emphasizing Yanki’s actions—placing his hat, locking doors, and bracing himself—with precision. This ensures spatial clarity and accessibility but avoids interpretive engagement. The VRT AD, on the other hand, blends tangible details with symbolic dimensions. The glowing panel, Yanki’s deep breath, and the *Shema* prayer are all described in ways that connect the physical environment to abstract (i.e., emotional and cultural) layers.

4. Discussion

The Netflix and VRT ADs provide contrasting approaches to the practice of audio description, with the Netflix AD aligning with the passive, physical, determinate, and inaccessible axes, while the VRT AD leans toward the vibrant, abstract, relational, and uncertain axes. These differences illustrate distinct narrative negotiations, revealing how AD engages with the original audiovisual content through different forms of material entanglement. While these alignments emerge most clearly through contrast, the analysis suggests that certain tendencies—such as the Netflix AD’s emphasis on procedural clarity and object-focused description—reflect broader patterns found in industry-standard AD shaped by neutrality guidelines. In this way, the case study offers a situated yet potentially indicative model for how AD may position itself along Caracciolo’s (2023) spectrum of materiality.

This is especially evident in the Netflix AD, which emphasizes clarity and procedural precision, describing objects and settings as functional and static elements. Objects are presented with tangible detail, focusing on their immediate physical presence and spatial coherence. This approach ensures accessibility and coherence while situating the narrative in a domain that prioritizes physicality and leaves interpretive depth largely to the audience’s imagination. However, despite its seeming adherence to traditional neutrality standards, the Netflix AD is not neutral. By treating the visual components of the source text as discrete, objective data points to be translated faithfully into auditory form, it reinforces the assumption that visuals can be objective—a notion critiqued by the blindness gain framework (Jay, 1993; Kleege, 2016; Thompson, 2018b). This assumption elevates vision as the primary mode of knowledge and meaning-making, reinforcing an ocularcentric paradigm. The blindness gain framework, by contrast, invites recognition that vision is one among many subjective senses, all capable of enriching perception. By reframing sensory modalities from loss to gain, it highlights how non-visual senses can add to, rather than detract from, the immersive AD experience. The Netflix AD, however, privileges sighted modes of perception and interpretation while failing to embrace the generative potential of multisensory engagement or to acknowledge and build upon the subjective choices inherent in the act of description.

In contrast, the VRT AD proactively integrates materiality into a dynamic and relational narrative framework, bringing objects and actions to life as active participants in the story, tying them to broader social, cultural, and emotional contexts. By layering descriptions with abstraction and nuance, the VRT AD subtly guides the audience toward interpreting material elements in connection with themes of faith, identity, and power. This approach demonstrates a more explicit challenge to ocularcentric assumptions by reframing the visual components of the narrative as multisensory and relationally significant, thus enriching the narrative’s emotional and symbolic dimensions.

These differences reflect how the Netflix AD prioritizes descriptive clarity in a way that obscures the inherently interpretive nature of AD. This approach reinforces an ocularcentric bias in its assumption that neutrality is achieved through fidelity to the visuals, conflating sight with objectivity. Conversely, the VRT AD demonstrates a narrative approach that organically aligns with Thompson’s (2017) concept of blindness gain. By situating material elements within broader cultural and emotional contexts, the VRT AD facilitates a richer, multisensory narrative experience. Through



the lens of blindness gain, this approach highlights how AD can disrupt sighted paradigms by reframing non-visual perception as transformative rather than compensatory. Together, these descriptions highlight a spectrum of possibilities within AD, with the Netflix AD adhering to a more conventional framework and the VRT AD showcasing the potential for AD to function as a co-creative and interpretive medium, fostering deeper sensory and relational engagement with the audiovisual narrative.

5. Conclusion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that screen AD is not merely a mechanism for translating the visual into the auditory but a deeply dynamic element of audiovisual storytelling. Far from being a supplementary accessibility tool, AD emerges as a profoundly interpretive and creative practice that mediates the relational, affective, and material dimensions of the on-screen narrative. It reshapes how stories are constructed, experienced, and understood by challenging traditional hierarchies of perception and engaging actively with the textures, movements, atmospheres, and spatial configurations of the source material. These material entanglements not only shape the language and structure of the description but also anticipate and invite the audience's engagement, offering new ways to perceive and interact with the source text.

By bringing Thompson's (2017) concept of blindness gain into dialogue with Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality, this article introduces a framework for understanding AD as a process of narrative negotiation. Blindness gain critiques sensory hierarchies and underscores the generative possibilities of non-visual modalities, challenging the dominance of vision as the primary mode of knowing. Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality, in turn, examines how AD navigates axes such as vibrancy, relationality, abstraction, and certainty. Together, these hermeneutic tools reveal AD as an inherently interpretive and co-creative process that transcends simplistic notions of subjectivity or objectivity, redefining the ways narratives are rendered and received.

The case studies analyzed here underscore how blindness gain aligns with Caracciolo's (2023) vibrant, relational, and abstract materialities, revealing AD's potential to enrich storytelling by disrupting ocularcentric assumptions. The VRT AD exemplifies this alignment by foregrounding symbolic and relational materiality, situating objects and actions within broader cultural and emotional contexts that invite multisensory engagement. In contrast, the Netflix AD emphasizes procedural clarity and spatial orientation, aligning more closely with Caracciolo's (2023) passive and determinate materialities. This approach reflects a conventional, ocularcentric perspective that treats visual components as isolated, supposedly objective data points. This divergence illustrates how every attempt at providing an AD mediates the narrative and sensory dimensions of audiovisual content in a unique way, offering distinct forms of audience engagement.

This study underscores the need to move beyond neutrality as an industry standard in AD. Historically, neutrality in AD has been framed as a means of ensuring accessibility, striving to replicate visual experiences without imposing interpretive biases. However, this framework reflects an ocularcentric assumption that sighted experiences are inherently objective and replicable, overlooking the inherently interpretive nature of all descriptive acts. Based on the comparative analysis of the Netflix and VRT ADs for *Rough Diamonds*, this study critiques neutrality not merely



as inadequate but as counterproductive, perpetuating the very sensory hierarchies it seeks to dismantle.

Through the case studies, this article demonstrates how AD that adheres to traditional neutrality standards, like the Netflix AD, prioritizes procedural clarity at the expense of engaging with relational and multisensory dimensions. In contrast, the VRT AD illustrates the potential of an interpretive approach to enrich storytelling by embedding materiality within broader cultural and emotional contexts. Building on this comparative analysis, the study argues that moving beyond neutrality enables AD to embrace its co-creative and interpretive dimensions, fostering deeper sensory and narrative connections for diverse audiences. It should be noted, however, that this article is not empirical in nature: its claims are grounded in the close analysis of a single audiovisual fragment. Therefore, its findings should be understood as illustrative rather than exhaustive. The aim is not to generalize across all AD practices, but to demonstrate how a conceptual framework—rooted in blindness gain and the spectrum of materiality—can reveal the interpretive and narrative potential of AD in specific, materially rich contexts.

While these insights open new avenues for understanding AD, they also leave important questions unanswered, inviting further interdisciplinary inquiry. For instance, how might Thompson's (2017) blindness gain framework and Caracciolo's (2023) spectrum of materiality apply to other forms of AD, such as live performances or museum exhibitions? Could alternative frameworks of material engagement, such as affect theory or sensory studies, complement or challenge these insights? Future research could also examine how AD training and industry practices might evolve to balance procedural clarity with the multisensory richness advocated in this study.

This study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that positions accessibility as a proactive cultural and epistemological principle, rather than a reactive service oriented solely toward end-user needs. In doing so, it resists what Greco (2016) has termed the “ghetto effect”: the tendency to frame accessibility within narrowly defined, group-based entitlements that reinforce deficit-based models of disability. By foregrounding AD as a site of narrative negotiation and aesthetic engagement, the study reframes description as a generative medium—one that not only conveys visual content but actively reshapes how stories are told, perceived, and experienced across sensory modalities.

While firmly situated in the realm of conceptual and theoretical inquiry, the analysis nonetheless draws attention to practical divergences in AD styles that may hold implications for industry training, commissioning practices, and future empirical research. Differences in tone, rhythm, and material engagement—illustrated through the contrast between the Netflix and VRT ADs—point to the ways descriptive strategies shape affective texture and narrative interpretation. These insights may serve as a foundation for future empirical and practice-based research to test, challenge, or expand upon the theoretical claims advanced here.

By reframing AD as a transformative medium, this study aligns this practice with contemporary efforts to prioritize diversity, equity, and creativity within the realm of media accessibility (e.g., Fryer, 2023; Hutchinson et al., 2020; Romero-Fresco, 2019). It suggests that AD has the potential to influence and expand storytelling practices, fostering new ways of engaging audiences across a range of disciplines, including film, theater, museum curation, and other narrative arts. Moreover, by foregrounding questions of material engagement, narrative form, and sensory



translation, the study's conceptual framework may also be of interest to scholars working in fields such as aesthetics, cognitive narratology, neurolinguistics, and philosophy of perception, offering a set of theoretical tools for rethinking how meaning is mediated across sensory modalities.

Ultimately, the study advocates for a more holistic approach to AD. It calls for both a celebration of its interpretive possibilities as well as a repositioning of AD as a central contributor to inclusive, multisensory, and culturally resonant storytelling.

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Subtitling revisers as agents of change in audiovisual workflows

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Abstract: This study explores the pivotal role of subtitling revisers in audiovisual workflows, focusing on how their subjective decisions influence textual quality, cultural relevance, and collaborative dynamics among subtitlers, project managers, clients, and audiences. Grounded in data collected from an experiment involving nine Portuguese professional subtitling revisers, the research provides unique insights into their practices and attitudes. The findings reveal that subtitling revisers navigate complex decisions shaped by their professional expertise, emotional responses, and lived experiences. Their interventions often balance technical precision with creative interpretation, addressing linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges. While these decisions can lead to significant enhancements in subtitle quality and viewer experience, they also highlight the variability in practices and the potential for unintended consequences, such as overlooked errors or changes that disrupt collaborative dynamics. In an era of increasing automation, this research highlights the indispensable role of human intervention in producing subtitling that is both linguistically and culturally appropriate, as well as technically accurate. Subtitling revisers emerge as key agents of change, bridging linguistic and cultural divides while responding to the evolving demands of global audiovisual localisation. Their interventions – whether positive or negative – can significantly influence the quality of the final product, with far-reaching implications for audience reception and for workflows shaped by automation. These decisions not only shape the quality and accessibility of the translated audiovisual content, but also impact key stakeholders – particularly the subtitler, whose work is subject to alteration, and the audience, whose experience of the content depends on the effectiveness of those revision.

Keywords: subtitling revision; stakeholders; decision-making; agents of change.

1. Introduction

The worldwide circulation of audiovisual content usually relies on translation to achieve its global communicative purposes—see, for example, Georgakopoulou (2019) on how this video surge is being made accessible to wider audiences—. The dissemination and consumption of these cultural



artifacts depend on a complex workflow that involves not only a translator or subtitler but also a reviser, a project manager, a client, and an audience, among other agents—for different discussions on the participants in this workflow see, for example, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2021), Hagström & Pedersen (2022), Nikolić (2021) and Robert & Remael (2016)—. These contributors form an interconnected network, where each role is vital in delivering a polished final product that meets diverse linguistic and cultural needs.

Professionals in the AVT industry face constant pressures to adapt to technological advancements, manage constrained financial and human resources, and uphold rigorous quality standards. Among these professionals, subtitling revisers stand out as important figures in navigating these challenges. These dynamics underline the value of subtitling revisers as human-in-the-loop agents who bring expertise, creativity, and cultural sensitivity to workflows increasingly dominated by automated systems. This stage of the workflow demands a nuanced understanding of language, culture, and technical specifications. Subtitling revisers act as gatekeepers of quality, ensuring that subtitled content adheres to predetermined sets of rules and maintains readability and accessibility for diverse audiences.

Subtitling workflows are inherently complex, shaped by the interplay of various stakeholders and technological tools. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021, p. 33) put it, subtitling “[...] is the result of a team effort” and technology “[...] has come to be an omnipresent reality” (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 37). As audiovisual content continues to circulate on a global scale, the subtitling reviser’s role remains vital in bridging linguistic and cultural divides and in ensuring that stories resonate with audiences worldwide. Each decision made by a subtitling reviser can have far-reaching implications, influencing not only the final audiovisual product but also the confidence and trust among stakeholders. On this matter, Szarkowska et al. (2020) indicate that professional subtitlers and viewers perceive subtitling quality differently, employing distinct criteria to assess it. Subtitling revisers’ decisions are often subjective, informed by their professional expertise, lived experiences, and emotional responses. Such subjectivity introduces both opportunities and challenges, as subtitling revisers must balance technical precision with creative interpretation, cultural adaptation, and ethical considerations.

Previous research in subtitling revision has underscored the pivotal role of revisers in ensuring subtitle quality, yet several areas remain underexplored. Studies have highlighted that revisers’ interventions influence the final product, affecting both linguistic accuracy and audience reception. However, there is a lack of consensus on standardised revision practices, leading to variability in quality outcomes. Despite these insights, empirical studies examining the cognitive processes of subtitling revisers and the impact of their decisions on different stakeholder groups are scarce. This gap calls for more comprehensive investigations into the subtitling revision process to develop best practices that balance efficiency with quality. This study aims to examine how subtitling revisers’ decisions impact both textual quality and stakeholder relationships, identifying best practices and challenges within the process. More specifically, it seeks to understand how the subtitling reviser functions as an agent of change in subtitling workflows, considering that their actions can have both positive and negative effects. The findings reveal both best practices and usual challenges, emphasizing the necessity of integrating human expertise with technological tools to achieve localization outcomes that are both efficient and culturally resonant.



2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Subtitling is a multifaceted process that skilfully integrates words into a cinematic experience, creating an immersive and enriching journey for the audience. A crucial part of this process is revision – a meticulous task that involves thoroughly reviewing subtitles to identify issues and making strategic decisions to address them. Given that quality is a central concern in AVT practice (Robert & Remael, 2016), it is expected that subtitling revision encompasses a comprehensive analysis and the implementation of precise amendments to ensure the final product meets the highest quality standards. As Kruger (2008) warns, errors in subtitling are inexcusable, not only because of the high visibility and isolation of words on the screen but also because a single mistake can overshadow the excellence of the remaining subtitles. According to Flower et al. (1986, p. 18), revision is “[...] a strategic adaptive process”, a notion further emphasised by Martin (2007, p. 58), who observes that “[...] idiosyncrasies will always prevail”.

The concepts of revision and quality are intrinsically linked, yet their interpretation is often shaped by individual perspectives. Revision, as defined in standards ASTM F2575–14 (ASTM, 2014) and ISO 17100–2015 (ISO, 2015), is a quality control procedure conducted after the translation process by a different professional. The procedures in subtitling workflows are similar, with the revision being carried out by someone other than the subtitler—but most of the times is also a subtitler. This ensures an independent assessment of the work before it is delivered to the client (cf. Mossop, 2020; Robert & Remael, 2016). Quality control is inherently reactive, focusing on detecting and resolving issues (Menezes, 2024). It tends to prioritise the target text and the expectations of clients, ensuring that the translation aligns with their specific requirements (James, 2001; Mossop, 2020). This highlights subtitling revision as a key step in meeting quality standards and delivering a polished final product.

Schäffner (1998, p. 4) notes that “[...] quality is not ‘objectively’ given”, highlighting the inherently subjective nature of this concept. In subtitling, quality emerges from the collaborative work of various actors within production contexts, as well as from numerous extrinsic factors related to production, process, and social dimensions (Artegiani, 2021). Therefore, the quality of subtitles depends on a complex network of interrelations involving different contributors. As Abdallah (2012) argues, the more clearly defined the scope and boundaries of responsibility for each actor in this network, the greater the potential for improved quality.

Subtitling revisers are widely expected to objectively amend subtitles to enhance their quality. As Horguelin and Pharand (2009) and Nikolić (2021) explain, mere suggestions and subjective amendments are generally not well received by translators or subtitlers, particularly when they do not have the final say. While subtitling revisers are tasked with making objective decisions—such as correcting spelling errors or ensuring synchronisation with on-screen dialogue—many of their decisions are inherently subjective. Although not desirable, subjective decisions are to be expected—otherwise, they would not be included as a category in classifications of revision and subtitling revision interventions (see, for instance, the following proposals: Arthern, 1983, 1987; Künzli, 2006, 2007; Menezes, 2024; Robert, 2012; Robin, 2018; van Rensburg, 2017). These subjective choices stem from individual interpretations of linguistic, cultural, and stylistic norms, which can differ significantly among professionals. For instance, when encountering a culturally



specific reference, a subtitling reviser must evaluate the audiovisual content and the subtitler's choice and determine whether to retain a literal translation, adapt it to a more culturally relatable reference, or omit it altogether. Each approach influences the audience's comprehension and engagement, with the subtitling reviser's final decision, shaped by their assessment of the target audience's expectations, also affecting the subtitler's work and confidence.

The subtitling reviser's subjective decisions often result in changes—or their absence—that directly influence the final audiovisual product. Once the revised content reaches the audience, it typically reflects a combination of amendments, all of which, ideally, contribute to enhancing the audience's viewing experience. At the same time, these revisions can impact subtitler's confidence, project managers' trust, and clients' financial outcomes, highlighting the ripple effects of such decisions. Consequently, the reviser's role can be examined not only from a textual perspective but also through a sociological lens.

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) explain that QCers—referred in the present text under the umbrella term 'revisers'—are supposed to check and curate other colleagues work “paying attention to the linguistic, translational, and technical dimensions involved in subtitling” (p. 37). Drawing on this, it can be inferred that subtitling revision encompasses several key forms of mediation, each addressing specific aspects of the subtitles to make sure they meet quality standards. These include linguistic mediation, which involve correcting grammatical errors, refining syntax, and improving word choices for clarity and fluency; cultural mediation, which adapt content to align with the cultural norms and expectations of the target audience; technical mediation, which ensures synchronization with audiovisual content and adherence to specifications such as reading speed, character limits, and display time; and content mediation, which modifies or omits elements to maintain relevance, appropriateness, and accessibility.

Acting as a mediator, a subtitling reviser intervenes in a way that reflects task complexity, with each intervention shaped by underlying factors that influence the subtitling reviser's strategic decisions. As proposed by Menezes (2024), subtitling revision interventions can be categorised based on their necessity, object, and motivation. In terms of necessity, interventions are either needed or not, and are classified as necessary revision (when amending an error), hyper-revision (a preferential adjustment), over-revision (when an error is introduced), and under-revision (when an intervention is needed but absent); these last three are neither necessary to improve quality nor desirable. The object of revision, that is, what is revised, is the subtitle text, the subtitle timing, or both. Finally, the motivation behind these interventions may stem from language rules, general subtitling rules (typically language language-specific and widely available and accepted), client-specific rules (which must be shared beforehand with those involved in a project), or remain unknown (often due to norms or idiosyncrasies). As Menezes (2024) emphasises, this approach to subtitling revision acknowledges that the process is not merely a mechanical task but a complex interpretative exercise, requiring subtitling revisers to make decisions informed by their understanding of the source text, the target audience, project-specific constraints, and all the sets of rules they are obliged to.

Ideally, subtitling revisers, building on the subtitler's work, enhance the audience's experience by ensuring that the content is clear, engaging, culturally appropriate, and relevant. While subtitlers lay the foundation, subtitling revisers serve as a crucial link between the original material and diverse global audiences, mediating linguistic and cultural nuances to deliver a polished and impactful final



product. This alludes to the subtitling revision expectancy norms, mentioned by Menezes (2024) as well as to the relevance of revision as a central feature in the production of translations, as highlighted by Mellinger (2018) and to subtitling revision as a form of validation of translation decisions, as observed by Menezes (2022).

Through the sociological lens, the subtitling reviser is best understood as an agent whose actions influence and are influenced by the network in which they operate. Drawing on Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), agency is viewed as distributed across both human and non-human actors, where interactions are shaped by constant negotiation and transformation. Latour (2005, p. 46) explains that "[...] [a]ction is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated", emphasising that agency is not limited to individuals but is shared among various elements of the network. As such, subtitling revisers embody a dynamic role. In addition to human actors, non-human ones, for example, subtitling software or client-specific rules, play a significant role in shaping the subtitling reviser's decisions.

The subtitling reviser's role extends beyond textual adjustments; it also influences trust and collaboration within the production network. Abdallah (2012) identifies trust as a critical factor in AVT networks, noting that "trust-building among the actors in production networks seems to present a challenge", particularly concerning matters of quality and ethics. Revisers, by ensuring high-quality output, contribute to building confidence among stakeholders. However, this role is not without its challenges. The balancing act of respecting the source text, adhering to client demands, and meeting audience needs highlights the complexity of the reviser's position within the network.

Ultimately, subtitling revisers exemplify the interconnected nature of agency in AVT networks. They exert a multifaceted agency that impacts not only the subtitles as a text but also the various agents involved in the subtitling process. At the same time, the reviser's interventions can have profound effects on the subtitler in particular, a professional whose work is evaluated and altered, sometimes significantly (see, for example, Nikolić, 2021). Subtitling revisers' actions may reinforce or undermine the subtitler's confidence and sense of professional autonomy. By mediating between institutional demands, client expectations, and the subtitler's initial output, revisers navigate a complex network of relationships, where their decisions not only ensure textual quality but also influence the perception of trust within the network. This dual impact underscores the critical and sensitive nature of the reviser's agency within audiovisual translation.

3. Methodology

An experiment was conducted to gain deeper insights into the practice, attitudes and behaviours of subtitling revisers. It sought to explore how revisers engage with a set of subtitles created by a professional and make decisions that impact the final audiovisual product. To achieve this, a multi-method approach was adopted, combining textual and extra-textual data collection techniques. This combination allowed for a comprehensive analysis of both the revisers' actions and their underlying thought processes.



3.1 Participants

Nine Portuguese professional subtitling revisers participated in the experiment. These revisers were selected based on their professional experience in audiovisual translation and revision, ensuring a diverse pool in terms of background and expertise. They were experienced subtitling revisers with an average of eight years of professional experience. Although relatively young (age range: 26 – 46 years old; average: 39 years old; mode: 41 years old; SD 7.09), they display a mature and professional approach, reflecting their accumulated experience in the field. All participants hold higher education degrees; their areas of training include languages (six), translation (two), and other field (one); seven of them have undertaken continuing professional development (CPD) in audiovisual translation or subtitling. Much of their expertise was gained through professional practice, both as subtitling revisers and subtitlers working collaboratively with other subtitling revisers. Most participants are freelancers with small but diverse client portfolios, providing them with exposure to different workflows. While their experience in subtitling revision was understandably limited early in their careers, they had acquired sufficient hands-on expertise to be recognised as experienced professionals.

Subtitling revision is not their primary professional activity, as they also engage in subtitling, subtitling post-editing, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), and technical translation. Despite their varied professional activities, most participants express genuine enjoyment in performing subtitling revision. Their work primarily involves revising translation of subtitles or revising both translation and timing, with much of this focused on projects for paid streaming platforms using templates. The audiovisual genres they work on include films, series, reality shows, comedy, animation, documentaries, and trailers.

Participants occasionally receive a briefing when assigned subtitling revision tasks, but this is not always guaranteed. Hence, it can be assumed that, in the absence of detailed instructions, participants are accustomed to relying on their experience and professional judgement to determine whether changes are necessary. This highlights their ability to navigate the subtitling process independently, drawing on their knowledge to ensure the subtitles meet the required quality standards. Their reliance on best judgement emphasises the critical role of revisers as decision-makers who adapt to varied project demands and contribute significantly to the overall quality of audiovisual content.

3.2 Research design

The material chosen for the experiment was a 4-minute excerpt from an American sitcom (English audio)¹, featuring authentic subtitles in European Portuguese. This excerpt had 84 subtitles with 49 errors in subtitles text, 78 errors in subtitles timing and 48 errors in subtitles reading speed (a total of 175 errors, with 79 subtitles presenting these errors); these errors—already present on the file—were identified and subsequently classified by the researcher and validated by two experts in subtitling. Participants were instructed to follow Netflix guidelines as client rules; these ‘client

¹ Owing to a confidentiality agreement, the name of this sitcom cannot be disclosed. This excerpt is taken from an episode first aired internationally in 2018.

rules' were mentioned in the instructions and explanations provided to participants prior to the experiment, and a copy of these rules was also shared with them. The selection of a sitcom was deliberate, as this genre often poses challenges related to humour, cultural references, and rapid dialogue, all of which require careful consideration during revision.

To ensure a certain degree of consistency across the participants while performing the task, each subtitling reviser was provided with the same excerpt and was instructed to use the same professional software, simulating a professional workflow. However, they were free to work at a place and schedule of their choice, with no time limit for the task. For this reason, participants worked without the researcher's presence. Their participation was pro bono, yet professionals were told to proceed as if it was a paid subtitling revision project. They received the explanation of the task, along with instructions on how to access the online subtitling software and how to access and install the screen recording software, which was also used for recording their voice. These instructions and explanations were provided in carefully prepared guides that participants were required to read before beginning the task. They were encouraged to speak freely about their thought processes while they proceeded with the task, ensuring that their natural workflow was not overly disrupted. Considering they were working alone, they did not receive any reminders to verbalize their thoughts.

3.3 Data collection

The multi-method approach allowed for the collection of both textual and extra-textual data, providing a robust set of data for analysing the revisers' decisions and behaviours from multiple perspectives:

a) Textual Analysis. The revised subtitles were subject to detailed textual analysis to identify interventions and patterns of intervention. This analysis focused on linguistic and technical aspects while also adhering to client-specific guidelines. The textual data allowed for a systematic evaluation of the changes made. The amendments were categorised based on the necessity of the interventions (necessary, hyper-, over-, and under-revision), the object of the interventions (text, timing or both) and the motivation behind interventions (language rules, general subtitling rules, and client's rules). Patterns of consistency and divergence among the participants were noted, providing insights into individual and collective approaches to revision.

b) Screen Recording. Screen recording software captured the subtitling revisers' on-screen activities during the task. This data provided valuable insights into the revision procedures, the time spent on specific segments, and the subtitling revisers' interactions with subtitling software. By observing the screen recordings, it was possible to trace the sequence of actions and decisions taken by the subtitling revisers. The recordings were analysed to identify trends in workflow efficiency, use of tools, and common behaviours, such as, frequent rewinding or pausing to assess timing accuracy.

c) Think-Aloud Protocol. Subtitling revisers were asked to verbalise their thoughts while revising the subtitles. This method offered a direct window into their cognitive processes, revealing the reasoning behind their decisions and the challenges they encountered. The think-aloud protocols were crucial for understanding subjective aspects of subtitling revision, such as the interpretation of



subtitled decisions and the prioritisation of interventions. Verbalised thoughts were transcribed and thematically analysed to uncover recurring themes, decision-making strategies, and challenges faced by the subtitling revisers. The qualitative analysis shed light on the cognitive processes underpinning subtitling revision tasks. Even though studies have shown that using think-aloud protocols while performing another task can affect cognitive processing (e.g. Sun et al., 2020), the subtitling revisers consistently followed a specific procedure—visualize, detect, resolve. Through screen recording data, it became evident that, during the assessment (visualize) phase, they did not engage in think-aloud verbalisation. It is therefore assumed that the TAP might have not influenced their cognitive processing during revision.

d) Questionnaire². After completing the subtitling revision task, participants filled out a questionnaire designed to capture their attitudes, preferences, and reflections on the process. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, covering topics such as satisfaction with their subtitling revisions, and views on the role of subtitling revision in the broader context of audiovisual translation. The data from the questionnaires was summarised and analysed to identify overarching attitudes and perceptions, as well as individual differences among the participants. Quantitative responses provided a general overview, while qualitative answers enriched the findings with personal insights. The questionnaire allowed participants to reflect on their experience and share their views on subtitling revision.

3.4 Data analysis

To guarantee that the data collected was reliable enough for analysis, a mixed-method approach was adopted. This enabled data triangulation and provided a more comprehensive picture of the dataset. It also allowed for a more reliable presentation of the results and helped to address any potential gaps in the data. All collected data were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed.

The data collected was analysed within a descriptive framework. A descriptive analysis allowed for the exploration of patterns and trends in the behaviours and decisions of subtitling revisers, providing detailed insights into the types of interventions performed and the strategies employed. This approach was crucial in identifying the interconnections between textual and extra-textual data, offering a comprehensive picture of the subtitling revision process. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis highlighted the nuances in the revisers' choices, underscoring the complexity of their decisions within professional subtitling contexts.

In analysing the subtitling revision interventions, the typology proposed by Menezes (2024) is applied; it considers three criteria: the necessity of subtitling revision interventions and their impact on quality, the object of the intervention, and the potential motivation behind it.

3.5 Ethical concerns

The study adhered to ethical research practices. Participants provided an informed consent before participating and were assured of the confidentiality of their data. The experiment was

² This questionnaire is included as an appendix in Menezes' Ph.D. dissertation (2024), which is publicly available in the University of Lisbon repository.

designed to minimise stress and replicate a realistic professional environment, ensuring that participants felt comfortable and supported throughout the process. To ensure their anonymity, participants were given pseudonyms.

4. Results and discussion

The findings offer valuable insights into the cognitive and practical dimensions of subtitling revision. Moreover, this comprehensive analysis underscores the subtitling reviser’s pivotal role as an agent of change within the subtitling network. Their interventions not only refine and enhance the textual product but also reshape the collaborative dynamics of audiovisual translation, influencing the workflows, decisions, and outcomes of other actors involved in the process.

4.1 Subtitling revision interventions

The triangulation of textual and extra-textual data within a descriptive framework facilitates a detailed identification and classification of the changes – or their absence – implemented by each subtitling reviser. Broadly speaking, changes can involve the transformation, deletion, or introduction of elements. Even minor changes can have significant effects: positive changes, such as constructive feedback or praise, can boost a subtitler’s morale, while negative actions, such as harsh comments left on a file, may harm the collaborative spirit and undermine trust within the workflow.

Table I provides a detailed overview of the frequency and distribution of the four types of interventions, summarising all amendments made by the nine participants during the subtitling revision experiment. In a total of 1504 interventions, 669 are considered necessary, 62 are hyper-revisions (preferential), 33 are over-revisions (errors introduced) and 740 are under-revisions (errors left unamended).

Table I: Frequency and distribution of interventions

Necessary	%	Hyper-revision	%	Over-revision	%	Under-revision	%	Σ
669	44.5	62	4.1	33	2.2	740	49.2	1504
language rules 86		language rules 15		language rules 17		language rules 111		
subtitling rules (text) 48		client rules (timing) 47		subtitling rules (text) 2		subtitling rules (text) 15		
client rules (text) 94				client rules (text) 1		client rules (text) 20		
client rules (RS) 186				client rules (RS) 13		client rules (RS) 262		
client rules (timing) 255						client rules (timing) 332		
RS = reading speed								

Source: Author (2025)

Although subtitling revisers detected and corrected many errors, the textual analysis of the data shows a significant number of undetected and uncorrected issues. Under-revision interventions are the most frequent, totalling 740 and accounting for 49.2% of all interventions, while necessary interventions account for 669, representing 44.5%. Hyper-revision (4.1%) and over-revision (2.2%) are less frequent, suggesting that subtitling revisers perform considerably fewer preferential or incorrect interventions compared to necessary ones. However, the high number of under-revision

cases highlights the challenges subtitling revisers face in identifying all errors, as unnoticed problems cannot be corrected. As already mentioned, these professionals followed a highly specific and repetitive revision procedure – visualize, detect, resolve. During the assessment phase, no verbalisation was observed. For this reason, it is assumed that their cognitive load did not increase substantially, and that any impact on attention shifting and decision-making was minimal. Under-revision therefore does not appear to be associated with an increased cognitive load caused by the use of think-aloud protocols.

Regarding the motivation behind these amendments, think-aloud protocols and screen recordings provided valuable insights. Motivations were categorised into those driven by language rules, general subtitling rules, client-specific subtitling rules, or those that remained unknown (residual in this experiment). Most of the times, participants, through their words or reactions, clearly represented the problem that motivated their intervention; other times, this problem was not mentioned and motivation was inferred by the researcher based on each participant's previous rationales, on the screen recordings and on the textual analysis.

Necessary interventions are most often motivated by client-specific subtitling rules (535 out of 669), addressing textual issues (94 cases), reading speed violations (186 cases), and timing problems (255 cases). In contrast, fewer necessary interventions are driven by general language rules (86 out of 669) or general subtitling rules in Portugal (48 out of 669). This distribution reflects the high number of issues present in the excerpt provided to subtitling revisers, many of which were directly related to client guidelines. While these changes are essential for ensuring quality, the high volume of necessary corrections might have a demotivating effect on subtitlers.

Under-revision interventions follow a similar pattern. A significant number of these unperformed but necessary interventions would have been motivated by client-specific guidelines (537 out of 740), with most addressing reading speed (262 cases) and timing (332 cases). In comparison, 111 under-revision cases related to general language rules and 20 to textual issues. The high frequency of sub-revisions—that is, cases where no changes are made—can negatively impact both the subtitler's and the subtitling reviser's reputation. This is because the audience may notice these unresolved issues and raise complaints about quality, or other internal quality control procedures might catch them downstream in the process.

Hyper-revision interventions are mostly motivated by client-specific subtitling rules (47 out of 62), particularly in relation to timing. Fewer hyper-revision cases are linked to general language rules (15 out of 62), potentially reflecting overinterpretation or misapplication of these rules. These preferential changes, while less frequent, can strain relationships among stakeholders if perceived as unnecessary or subjective.

Over-revision interventions, though minimal, are primarily driven by general language rules (17 out of 33), followed by client-specific rules (14 out of 33), with only 2 cases linked to general subtitling rules. These findings suggest that over-revision often stems from a misjudgement of rules, potentially indicating overconfidence or misinterpretation by revisers. Such changes, which introduce errors, carry the same risk of harming professional relationships and eroding trust among stakeholders.

While necessary interventions are expected, hyper-, over-, and under-revision interventions are not. These cater for the subjectivity associated with subtitling revision, since preferential, erroneous and missed interventions reflect varying degrees of uncertainty.

4.2 Self-perception and attitudes towards subtitling revision

The answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire provided valuable insights into participants' self-perception and attitudes towards subtitling revision. Regarding self-perception, they express clear views on the essence of subtitling revision, which they believe should focus on improvements and corrections while respecting both the audience and the translator/subtitler. Respect for the subtitler is evident in the relatively low number of hyper-revision and over-revision interventions, suggesting a deliberate effort to avoid excessive or unnecessary changes, which is confirmed in the questionnaire. In their answers, participants emphasise the collaborative and supportive nature of subtitling revision. For instance, one participant notes that good revision “questions the translator’s choices—not because the reviser doubts the translator, but because the reviser doubts themselves” (Afonso). Another explains that the subtitling reviser “improves and harmonises the [subtitler’s] work” (Constança), while others stress the importance of correcting only what is necessary, such as “typos, semantics, translation errors, or parameters” (Isabel), and ensuring “no new errors are introduced” (Mafalda). Respect for the subtitler is further reflected in the principle of non-interference, “[The reviser] does not interfere with the translator’s style” (Constança) and strives not to distort the subtitler’s work. Similarly, respect for the audience was articulated as helping subtitles “provide a good viewing experience” (Leonor) and contributing to making the text “invisible and natural” (Dinis).

When it comes to participants’ attitudes towards revision tasks, they admit that their knowledge and expertise significantly influence their interventions. However, opinions are divided regarding the variability of their interventions depending on the time allocated for subtitling revision. Participants also note that other factors – such as remuneration, the translator, the subtitling agency, the client, and the distribution channel – can affect their decisions, with older participants more openly admitting to this variability. These responses suggest that subtitling revision is often shaped by subjective considerations, including individual experience and contextual pressures, rather than by purely objective criteria. Additionally, participants state that they rarely or never justify their interventions, which they attribute to client-specific procedures. This practice may also contribute to a lack of transparency and objectivity in revision decisions. Finally, most participants claim to consistently or frequently pay attention to functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability parameters (cf. Pedersen, 2017) when assessing the quality of subtitles. However, data from the subtitling revision experiment revealed discrepancies between these stated intentions and their actual practices, for example, when looking at the high number of under-revision interventions. These discrepancies further illustrate the tension between subjective decision-making and the application of objective quality standards in revision workflows.

4.3 Subtitling revisers habitus

The way subtitling revisers intervene in the text and timing of subtitles appears to be closely tied to their attitudes towards subtitling revision tasks. Deeply ingrained habits and practices often shape the reviser's approach to their work, influencing their decisions and methods. Curiously, data reveals that greater experience in subtitling tasks does not necessarily guarantee more effective error detection: a moderate strong negative correlation (-0.704 , $p < 0.05$, Kendall's Tau test) between necessary interventions and subtitling experience is found.

What accounts for such a wide variety of changes observed during this subtitling revision experiment? One explanation lies in the habitus of subtitling revisers, as their interventions are shaped by their background and professional practices. Each subtitling reviser's unique profile contributes to this diversity: varied educational backgrounds; some professionals have undergone specialised training or participated in continuous professional development activities, while others have not. Their years of experience, the breadth of their client portfolios, and the nature of the projects they engage in are equally varied. This individuality introduces an inherent level of inconsistency in subtitling revision practices.

Additionally, revisers may have different interpretations of the scope of their tasks, work under diverse conditions, and demonstrate varying levels of linguistic, cultural, and translation competencies. These differences highlight the complex interplay between a subtitling reviser's personal and professional identity and the outcomes of their work. Ultimately, the individuality of each subtitling reviser must be considered as a significant factor contributing to the variability in subtitling revision practices and the diverse range of changes observed in the subtitling process.

All this underscores the lack of uniformity in subtitling revision practices, paving the way for the coexistence of competing norms that are applied simultaneously under similar conditions, which necessarily imply different sets of changes and varied consequences to different stakeholders. Table 2 illustrates, among other issues, an example of how the nine participants approached the same critical point: the interjection "Oh, my God" ("Meu Deus") and the punctuation used by the subtitler. Three subtitling revisers replaced the full stop with an exclamation mark, four retained the original full stop used by the subtitler, and two sacrificed the interjection altogether to ensure a reading speed within the limits stipulated by the client's subtitling rules. The three revisers who altered the punctuation justified their decision by relying on the general rules of the Portuguese language and/or an "implicit rule" (which might actually represent a subtitling norm) advocating for the use of exclamation marks with interjections. Conversely, the four revisers who retained the original punctuation may have done so because their multimodal analysis determined that the intonation, as perceived through the audio-verbal channel, was sufficient to convey the intended emphasis. The fact that they might not have noticed or might not have considered it an issue must also be considered. Finally, the two subtitling revisers who omitted the interjection entirely prioritised adherence to client-specific timing constraints over linguistic and stylistic considerations. This divergence in approaches not only underscores the complexity of subtitling revision but also reflects the interplay between individual judgement, professional rules, and overarching norms within the field.



Table 2: Punctuation used with the interjection “My God”

Audio	Oh, my God. Why are you still here?		
Original PT subtitle	Meu Deus.	characters per second: 19.4	
text	Porque ainda estão aqui?	[per clients rules, maximum 17]	
	My God.		
Back transation	Why are you [plural form] still here?		
ID	Revised subtitle text	Back transation	Think-aloud protocol
Afonso	Porque ainda estao aqui?	Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>This is unnecessary. It will sacrifice reading speed for nothing.</i>
Beatriz	Meu Deus. Que fazem ainda cá?	My God. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>What are you [plural form] still doing here?</i>
Constança	—	—	<i>There's not much time for reading.</i>
Dinis	Meu Deus! Porque estão ainda aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>Let's add here an exclamation mark. This 'my God' has an exclamatory funccion.</i>
Isabel	Céus. O que ainda fazem aqui?	Heavens. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>Here I wouldn't use... It's too literal. And we need to summarize this.</i>
Leonor	Meu Deus. Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>Line Break.</i>
Mafalda	Meu Deus. Porque ainda estás aqui?	My God. What are you [singular form] still doing here?	—
Pedro	Meu Deus! Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>My God', exclamation mark, another implicit Netflix rule.</i>
Sancho	Meu Deus! Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>Incorrect, interjection.</i>

Source: Author (2025)

4.4 The role of emotions

As Lehr (2021) observes, cognitive evaluations during the translation process trigger emotional episodes, resulting in changes to emotional states and adaptations influenced by the translator's subjective perception of circumstances. A similar phenomenon occurs in subtitling revision, where professionals articulate their emotional responses through their reactions to the subtitles they revise. The think-aloud protocols provided valuable insights into the role of emotion in subtitling revision, shedding light on several key aspects of the process. Through the linguistic and paralinguistic elements expressed by participants, it became possible to better understand critical dimensions of their work: communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and empathy.

First, in terms of communication, the protocols suggest how would subtitling revisers interpret and resolve issues related to message comprehension in an actual professional setting. For example, subtitling revisers often verbalise their reasoning when deciding how to balance complete and readable subtitles with high reading speed, showcasing their efforts to ensure the audience fully grasps the intended meaning. Statements such as “I'll omit these two [adverbs] because they add nothing to comprehension and are very big words that make the reading unnecessarily difficult” (Afonso) or “Due to reading speed we might remove ‘father’. OK, now it's at 17, not that high” (Mafalda) reveal a careful attention paid to reading speed. There were also examples on how to give feedback; here Leonor amends the file and immediately explains how she would proceed: “This

would be an objective [error]... and then I would write a comment explaining why I thought this was not correct”.

Second, regarding conflict resolution, the protocols demonstrate subtitling revisers’ ability to find mutually beneficial solutions. A recurring pattern involves striking a balance between client rules and subtitler preferences. For instance, Dinis remarks, “Unfortunately rules here are not very clear in what concerns the usage of two different punctuation marks [...] The problem is many people don’t know how to use them. [...] To make things easier, I’ll remove one of the punctuation marks”, highlighting a nuanced approach to resolving conflicts between stakeholders. Sancho mentions “Let’s merge these two subtitles. There are no gains here. Wait... Actually, there are!”, what denotes an effort to maintain subtitler’s option in terms of translation while attending to client’s reading speed rule.

Third, in decision-making, the protocols capture how subtitling revisers combined rationality with fact-based choices. Participants often refer to established rules, such as client-specific rules or language rules, to justify their actions. For example, Beatriz noted, “He starts talking here. Until here, there are more than 12 [frames]. According to Netflix rules, we can only pull this back if there are more than 12 [frames]. [...] It makes sense setting this to when he starts talking”, demonstrating a deliberate and informed decision-making process based on client’s timing rules. Sancho was shocked with the usage of ‘bué’ in a subtitle, a slang word that means ‘very, a lot’, he was willing to change it but he did some research that helped him validate subtitler’s choice of words, “Very cool [‘bué de fixe’]? I’m not sure I approve this. [...] If I were revising this... This is nothing! I’m not sure if this is acceptable now. [...] [consults online dictionary Infopédia] Actually it is in the dictionary. What an absurd! Including this in the dictionary. But who am I, right? If it is on Infopédia... I’ll approve this”. Pedro resorts to a multimodal analysis to decide on how to amend a literal translation, “‘Let me see that.’ Through the image, we can see that she wants to see what’s in the bags”.

Finally, the protocols highlight the role of empathy in shaping relationships among stakeholders in the subtitling workflow. Subtitling revisers frequently express an understanding of their limits, for example “I will not intervene here. It’s very difficult for me to intervene on others’ work. When I think it is barely acceptable, I do not intervene” (Constança), which is revealing of the interpersonal aspect of subtitling revision and its broader sociological impact. At the same time, protocols also allow the registration of moments where empathy is very difficult to achieve: “This is a nightmare”, said Afonso referring to several consecutive timing issues to amend; “These things are a little bit time-consuming”, mentioned Leonor referring to amending timing issues; “I do not know what I am supposed to do with this”, Mafalda reacted when faced with a subtitle with multiple issues; “I hate this. Therefore, too bad”, Dinis said when disagreeing with the subtitler’s and amending their decision.

Beyond the technical responsibilities of subtitling revision, revisers also take on roles as communicators, ensuring the audience fully understands the intended message; negotiators, balancing the often competing priorities of clients and subtitlers; decision-makers, selecting the most appropriate approach based on guidelines and contextual demands; and empathetic collaborators, respecting the subtitler’s creative input and enhancing the audience’s viewing experience.



4.5 The effects of changes

Equally important are the effects of subtitling revisers' objective and subjective decisions. These decisions not only shape the quality and accessibility of the translated audiovisual content but also influence key stakeholders, particularly the subtitler and the audience, highlighting the subtitling reviser's pivotal position in the audiovisual translation process.

This experiment revealed that subtitling revisers influence both the textual and sociological dimensions of the revision process. Each textual change inherently carries a sociological impact, as the actions of subtitling revisers have consequences—both positive and negative—within the network in which they operate. Textual changes occur when revisers address specific elements within the audiovisual text, such as correcting reading speed violations, amending punctuation errors, or revising mistranslations. Sociological changes, on the other hand, emerge from the ways revisers interact with and influence other agents within the subtitling network with their interventions on a file. For example, revisers contribute to improving work procedures and incorporating feedback, all of which have broader implications for collaboration and workflow dynamics.

Additionally, changes are not only implemented by subtitling revisers but also acquired and perpetuated through their practices. Their behaviour is also guided by norms validated by their peers, which they, in turn, validate. Insights from the questionnaire responses of participants in this experiment further illustrate this. Two participants highlight that their learning as subtitling revisers stemmed from their experience as subtitlers, indicating that subtitling revision norms were internalised through interactions within the subtitling workflow, particularly via feedback mechanisms. Leonor stated: “[I learned] through experience and through revisions made to my work”. Sancho shared: “[I] think my greatest learning came from making mistakes and learning from the revisers”. Both Leonor and Sancho claim they learned with the amendments of seasoned professionals. These reflections underscore how intersubjective knowledge, shaped by shared experiences and collaborative feedback, plays a pivotal role in the development and implementation of subtitling revision practices.

From the data, it can be inferred that the subtitling revision interventions on a file and the resulting changes have both positive and negative impacts. These impacts are observed at various levels, affecting subtitling practices, professional relationships, and the quality of the audiovisual product.

4.5.1 Changes with a positive impact

Contribution to good practices. Subtitling revisers positively influence industry practices when they are involved in providing assessment and informal/indirect training to fellow subtitlers/subtitling revisers. This contribution tends to promote consistency in subtitling practices, helps codify subtitling norms into explicit rules, and ultimately enhances the viewer's experience. For example, Constança explains how she would inform subtitler about a potentially necessary amendment and let them decide on implementing it or not: “Here, [...] in a Word document, I would



include this as a suggestion with the sentence in English so that translator could confront these and then accept or not”.

Fair Assessment of Subtitlers. When revisers assess subtitlers fairly and positively, their evaluations can bolster subtitlers’ careers, incomes, and reputations. Fair assessments also positively impact the client’s reputation and strengthen the sense of community among subtitlers and subtitling revisers. This also includes leaving constructive feedback or mentoring subtitlers, which fosters professional growth. At the same time, it is possible to assess subtitler fairly and negatively (in the case of a less than acceptable file), having a positive impact on client’s reputation. Examples from the data include several comments concerning necessary interventions. For instance Pedro amends a line treatment issue and quickly explains the reasoning behind it: “There’s no need having two lines, according to Netflix guidelines”.

Exhibiting Subtitling Revision Competences. Revisers who display interpersonal and strategic competences, such as respecting others’ work and leaving thoughtful comments explaining their decisions, contribute positively to the well-being and confidence of both themselves and their colleagues. For example, Beatriz acknowledged her dislike for a subtitler’s choice but refrained from changing it, showing respect for the subtitler’s work and maintaining trust: “I don’t like it, but I will leave it like this. I am not the translator”.

Necessary Interventions. Necessary corrections directly improve the quality of the audiovisual text. These changes have a positive impact on the viewer’s experience by ensuring accuracy, readability, and coherence. As an example, Isabel corrected a grammar issue in a subtitle, thus respecting language rules: “Here before ‘but’ [‘mas’] a comma”.

4.5.2 Changes with a negative impact

Unfair Assessment of Subtitlers. Unfair assessments, such as those motivated by competition or bias, can harm subtitlers’ career, reputation, and income. This behaviour damages trust within the professional community and undermines collaborative efforts. In the following example retrieved from the questionnaire, Dinis explains how he would amend a file as he pleases, shall he deem quality as bellow pair: “I am the second line to make sure translator and I will continue receiving work. If I consider the translation puts that into stake, I will amend it with no regrets”.

Exhibiting Impaired Subtitling Revision Competences. When subtitling revisers fail to exhibit interpersonal and strategic competences, such as providing constructive feedback or maintaining respect for the subtitler’s work, their actions negatively affect the well-being and confidence of all parties involved. For example, Isabel commented one of her amendments saying, “I don’t like doing this but sometimes.”..., confirming she is not happy with her action.

Introducing Preferential Changes (Hyper-revision). These changes have a negative impact as they do not improve subtitle quality, but instead waste time and frustrate subtitlers. In Table 3, Pedro conducts minimal research and introduces a minor change that adds no value, reflecting a disregard for efficiency and trust. Contrasting with Pedro, Beatriz demonstrated respect by choosing not to make a change she ended up deeming unnecessary.



Table 3: Example of hyper-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Pedro	<i>Look, I'm sorry I sold you out back there.</i>	Desculpa ter-te tirado o tapete há pouco.	Desculpa não te ter apoiado há pouco.	Removing the rug' ['Tirado o tapete'] is kind of idiomatic (...) 'not supporting you'.
	Back translation	[I am sorry I pulled the rug out from under you just a short while ago.]	[I am sorry I did not support you just a short while ago.]	
Beatriz	<i>Look, I'm sorry I sold you out back there.</i>	Desculpa ter-te tirado o tapete há pouco.	—	Removing the rug' ['ter-te tirado o tapete'] for 'sold you out'... I would say 'snitch' ['delatado']. I don't like it, but I will leave it like this. I am not the translator.
	Back translation	[I am sorry I pulled the rug out from under you just a short while ago.]		

Source: Author (2025)

Introducing Errors (Over-revision). When revisers introduce errors during their interventions, they harm the subtitler's reputation (as their name appears on the screen), degrade subtitle quality, and negatively affect the viewer's experience. The example in Table 4 shows how the amendment caused an error because, although it creates a subtitle structure that makes reading easier, it breaks the sentence in a position that impairs the reading flow.

Table 4: Example of over-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Dinis	<i>You think yelling at a bus feels good?</i>	Achas que gritar com um autocarro sabe bem.	Achas que gritar com um autocarro sabe bem?	Let's split here to avoid the two words hanging down here.
	Back translation	Do you think yelling at a bus feels good?	Do you think yelling at a bus feels good?	

Source: Author (2025)

Failure to Correct Errors (Under-revision). Not amending errors leaves mistakes in the subtitles, negatively impacting the subtitler's reputation, text quality, and viewer experience. For example, in Table 5, Sancho did some reflection and concluded the translation of 'scholar' is correct. However, its translation depends on the context and it is not correct in this case, as Constança points out. Sancho missed the opportunity to correct the error.

Table 5: Example of under-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Sancho	<i>Ray is a brilliant scholar.</i>	O Ray é um académico brilhante.		It is not wrong.
	Back translation	[Ray is a brilliant scholar.]		
Constança	<i>Ray is a brilliant scholar.</i>	O Ray é um académico brilhante.	O Ray é um estudante brilhante.	Ray is the boy. But call him an academic... Academic, yes, but in this case is more adequate... pupil? Student?
	Back translation	[Ray is a brilliant scholar.]	[Ray is a brilliant student.]	

Source: Author (2025)

This study demonstrates the complexity and multi-layered nature of subtitling revision. Subtitling revisers play a pivotal role in shaping both textual and sociological dimensions of audiovisual translation, balancing client requirements, audience expectations, and subtitler contributions. The data reveals how their decisions, whether objective or subjective, affect the quality of the final product, the workflow dynamics, and professional relationships. While many changes have a positive impact, such as, improving subtitle quality, fostering professional growth, and

enhancing collaboration, others carry negative repercussions, such as undermining trust or introducing errors.

The findings highlight the importance of nuanced decision-making. Subtitling revisers act not only as technical agents, but also as communicators and collaborators. Their ability to navigate competing demands while adhering to established rules underscores their relevance.

5. Conclusion

Too simplistically, one could say that “[...] revision is essential because every translator makes mistakes” (Mossop, 2020, p. xii). However, revision is more than just identifying and correcting errors. It is a transformative process that encompasses rereading, restructuring, reconceptualizing and, to some extent, recreating. Subtitling revisers act as agents of change within audiovisual workflows, wielding significant power to influence not only the textual quality of subtitles, but also the broader network of stakeholders involved in the production process.

This role, marked by subjectivity and complexity, demands continuous reflection and adaptation. Subjectivity is central to understanding the work of subtitling revisers. Their lived experiences, intellectual journeys, and emotional responses profoundly shape their decision-making processes. These decisions, in turn, have ripple effects across the subtitling network, influencing other stakeholders, including subtitlers, project managers, clients, and audiences. The embodied nature of their subjectivity highlights how their personal and professional realities intersect to shape their practices. By navigating this interplay, subtitling revisers introduce changes in texts that can have both positive and negative impacts on workflows, collaboration, and the final audiovisual product.

Emotions play a pivotal role in the subtitling revision process. As revisers engage with content, they articulate cognitive evaluations intertwined with emotional responses. These emotional dimensions influence how they interpret subtitlers’ choices, prioritize interventions, and balance competing demands from stakeholders. By respecting subtitlers’ creative voices and fostering collaboration, revisers contribute to building trust and enhancing the collective effort within audiovisual translation. This trust, however, can be fragile, underscoring the importance of thoughtful and respectful decision-making.

The influence of stakeholders on subtitling revisers’ work cannot be overstated. Stakeholders’ expectations, rules, and feedback shape present and future strategies and interventions of subtitling revisers. In this intricate network, revisers navigate client-specific requirements, audience expectations, and the subtitlers’ initial output. Each decision reflects a negotiation of these competing priorities, highlighting the reviser’s role as a mediator and their capacity to enact meaningful change. These subjective decisions are not confined to the textual dimension; they also affect the sociological dynamics within the workflow, impacting on professional relationships and perception of quality.

The findings of this study underscore the need to view subtitling revision as an intricate and dynamic process. Subtitling revisers are not merely correctors of errors; they are creators, negotiators, and collaborators whose decisions shape both the text and the network in which they operate. This research offers deeper insights into their habitus and agency, revealing how their



subjectivities influence their practices and outcomes. While their decisions can lead to significant improvements in subtitle quality and workflow efficiency, they can also have unintended consequences, underscoring the delicate balance inherent in their role.

While the multi-method approach provided a comprehensive dataset, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size of nine participants, while sufficient for generating insights, might compromise the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the think-aloud protocol may have influenced participants' natural workflows, despite their freedom to set up a relaxed environment. Finally, the use of a single sitcom excerpt, while appropriate for this study's objectives, represents only a narrow slice of the diverse challenges encountered in subtitling revision.

To conclude, subtitling revisers embody the dual forces of transformation and continuity within audiovisual translation. Their agency, marked by subjectivity and shaped by experience, is both a source of strength and a potential challenge. As agents of change, subtitling revisers must be supported through targeted training and professional recognition to maximize their positive impact on the industry. By fostering an environment that values their contributions and addresses the evolving demands of the field, stakeholders can ensure that subtitling revisers continue to play a pivotal role in shaping high-quality, accessible audiovisual content for diverse audiences.

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Data collection: R. Menezes

Data analysis: R. Menezes

Results and discussion: R. Menezes

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Not applicable.

Data availability statement

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

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Putting queerness into words: The audio description of *Sex Education*

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Abstract: Recent audiovisual works have increasingly featured non-normative characters, setting a trend in the industry. In translation studies, minority representation has been examined through feminist and queer translation theories. In such instances, the translation process is filtered by the professional's subjectivity and positionality, since translators act as mediators, making translation a purposeful and intentional act. This is especially relevant in AVT, due to the vast scope of audiovisual contents that has traditionally contributed to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Since the cultural turn in translation studies (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990), feminist and queer approaches have produced significant works (Baer, 2020; Castro & Ergun, 2017). Although AVT has been a focus (Martínez-Pleguezuelos, 2018), applying queer feminist perspectives to media accessibility is less explored (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2023; Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez, 2024). Netflix's *Sex Education* (2019–2024) exemplifies diversity, presenting fresh views on sexuality and identity, especially in its final season, which featured more queer and intersectional characters. This paper examines the audio descriptions (AD) of the series, by means of a multimodal approach (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024) to analyse how queerness is constructed and represented in the audio described version of the audiovisual content. The analysis raises questions about the agency, subjectivity, and ideology of accessibility professionals in AD. The results emphasise the importance of diversity in AD and its impact on queer and non-normative visually impaired people's social engagement and self-representation.

Keywords: queer; audiovisual translation; media accessibility; representation; multimodality.

1. Introduction

Representation matters, as has been demonstrated in several research experiences that correlate exposure to diversity, particularly queer representation, with more positive attitudes from groups usually related to more conservative views, such as cis straight men and religious people



(Calzo, 2009; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Representation in audiovisual content is also beneficial for queer individuals and other minorities when it comes their wellbeing (Bond & Compton, 2015).

To represent, to present or depict something, understood as the “re-presentation” of the world, emphasises the process of construction developed in audiovisual production (Casey et al., 2007). What we consume on screen is never an unmediated image of reality since this reconstruction of reality has involved decisions about what and how components of an audiovisual text are shown. This decision-making process undertaken by creators has an important impact on how certain social groups are depicted, and this is particularly relevant when it comes to stereotypical representations. Therefore, the study of representation will always lead to an exploration of how power and ideology are deployed in the realisation of any media text. In order to observe how power and ideology interact with the decisions made by creators and mediators (audio describers and translators), it must be taken into account that fiction will never be an unbiased representation of reality (Casey et al., 2007). Historically, dominant social groups have overseen the way in which certain identities have been represented in relation to gender, class or race (Hall, 2018).

This decision-making process, which is present in all types of representation, is also present in the tasks undertaken in translation (cf. Von Flotow, 2012) and media accessibility. The ideological, political and social approaches to translation were theorised some decades ago with the establishment of the cultural turn (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990) and have since then developed into many perspectives towards Translation Studies that have focused on postcoloniality (Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999), gender and feminism (Castro & Ergun, 2017), activism (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002), queerness (Epstein & Gillett, 2017), and a long etcetera of social inequalities impregnated in all societies. This is particularly relevant in audiovisual translation, since the great scope of audiovisual contents has been traditionally connected to the perpetuation of stereotypes (De Marco, 2006). Recent studies have paid attention to how these decision-making processes take place in media accessibility services when it comes to minorities and diversity, particularly in audio description (AD) (Villela & Iturregui-Gallardo, 2020; Iturregui-Gallardo, 2023; Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez, 2024). These aforementioned studies have based their methodologies on feminist and queer translation theory and investigate the mediating power exerted by audio describers. In this type of intersemiotic translation the visual component in the audiovisual text is translated and transformed into a verbal description (Matamala, 2019) and is primarily targeted at people with sight loss.

The present article analyses the English AD of the series *Sex Education* (Nunn, 2019–2024), with special emphasis on season four, which include several non-normative individuals as both protagonists and recurrent characters. The description of non-normativity, for which the audio describer acts as filter and mediator of information will potentially explain the ideological load of the AD task.

The following sections will explore gender perspectives in media accessibility and audio description that draw from feminist and queer postulates in Translation Studies to inspect the representation of queerness and the power structures that impact any process of mediation. The theoretical background brings to the fore the notion of ethos and reworking of the ethos (Spoturno, 2019, 2022) considering the multimodality of the audiovisual text (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024). The representation of queerness in *Sex Education* is scrutinised to unveil a multilayered whole which is



processed and summarised in the aural message found in the AD experience. Examples of AD are presented and discussed to point at the decisions taken by the AD professional. The study closes with some conclusions in which trends and new possibilities are explained. This will further develop this line of research and reproduce the methodology in future settings.

2. Gender and audio description

Scholars have mainly examined the portrayal of diverse characters in key audiovisual translation (AVT) modes like subtitling and dubbing (Martínez-Pleguezuelos, 2018; Villanueva-Jordán & Chaume, 2021; Von Flotow & Josephy-Hernández, 2018). Research into media accessibility services for people with disabilities is only now gaining traction, revealing significant potential in this field (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2023). However, the contribution of feminist and queer perspectives to AD has been largely overlooked, despite the relevance of the visual component's role in the visual representation of diversity. With the apparition of recent audiovisual content featuring increasing numbers of non-normative characters, some studies have addressed how AD has represented such identities in recent years (Villela & Iturregui-Gallardo, 2020; Iturregui-Gallardo, 2023; Espasa, 2024; Haider et al., 2024; Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez, 2024).

Villela and Iturregui-Gallardo (2020) analysed the AD of *Flutua* (dir. Hooker, 2017), which portrays a gay couple—one of whom is deaf—and features queer artists. The study highlights the portrayal of non-normative identities and the audio describer's role as both mediator and filter, but remains as a description of the possibilities, without engaging further with the content. Later, Iturregui-Gallardo (2023) proposed a queer feminist methodology to both analyse and produce ADs, and provided some examples from Netflix series (*Sex Education*, *Las de la última fila*, *Feel Good*, *Special*, and *Heartstopper*), illustrating how minority representation can be altered or lost in the audio description. The same methodology, combining Castro's (2008) feminist translation strategies and Démont's (2017) queer translation modes, is presented in a case study by Iturregui-Gallardo & Hermosa-Ramírez (2024), where they explored gender-conscious AD strategies for a documentary on lesbophobia, featuring diverse women whose experiences are shaped by factors like race, gender expression, and age. The article highlights the challenges of AD production and underscores the pivotal role of AD professionals in shaping visually impaired audiences' understanding of the content. Focusing on the use of language, Haider et al. (2024) analyse Netflix content with trans and gender-non-conforming characters and the use of gendered terms and pronouns in AD, and how misgendering results in microaggressions. Finally, Espasa (2024) discusses the presence of intersectional characters, particularly those multilingual, and how these complex identities are transferred through audiovisual translation and media accessibility services.

Apart from the work produced in AD for audiovisual products, research has also been conducted on other products where visual images are mediated for blind users and users with sight loss. Examples are the analyses of automated image descriptions generated by AI (Stangl et al., 2020), or the work by Bennett et al. (2021), which dealt directly with AD users and the (self)representation of race, gender, and disability. In the same vein, Oppegaard and Miguel (2022) interviewed queer and racialized blind users. They concluded with the need for ADs to support gender self-expression and avoid social exclusion.



In the realm of professional practice, some guidelines and recommendation have also tackled such topics (Fryer, 2016; Hutchinson et al., 2020; Singh, 2021). While these recommendations offer valuable insights for crafting ADs, existing ADs exhibit varying approaches to depicting aspects like race or sexual identity, as shown in Iturregui-Gallardo (2023). Although the efforts made in the aforementioned recommendations and guidelines contribute to the ongoing negotiation of how diverse identities are represented, they fall short of providing solutions. This shortfall may stem from the relatively recent emergence of greater diversity on screen and a growing societal awareness of these issues, as indicated in the regular reports issued by GLAAD (see, for instance, their 2024 report “Studio Responsibility Index”)¹.

3. The representation of non-normativity on screen

In order to reflect on how representation works, it is worth mentioning that fiction is unable to provide a neutral or objective depiction of reality. Fiction will only shape how audiences interpret subjects and will assign meaning to them (Casey et al., 2007). As a matter of fact, Hall and Du Gay (1996) challenge the concept of a fixed and fully defined subject, suggesting that the construction of subjects is embedded in a continuous dialogue within historical, cultural, and social discourses. In this endeavour of constructing identities, Hall notes that dominant social groups often dictate how identities are portrayed in terms of gender, class, or race (Hall, 2018), which will directly have an impact on how these representations reach marginalised communities (Dyer, 2002).

Since cinema and TV became widely available scholars have long studied how minorities are depicted in the media, with notable attention given between the 1960s and 1990s (Fitzgerald, 2010). Early research largely focused on race, particularly African Americans, with Clark’s (1969) influential model identifying four stages of representation (summarised in Fitzgerald, 2010): Non-recognition, the absence of minority representation in dominant media; Ridicule, minority characters are portrayed as foolish, lazy, or laughable; Regulation, minorities are depicted as enforcers of dominant societal norms; and Respect, minorities are treated equivalently to other groups, with normalized portrayals of interracial relationships.

Clark’s framework has proven to be useful when analysing minorities other than racialised individuals, such as queer people (Raley & Lucas, 2006; Moore, 2015) and can extend to other marginalised populations, including disabled individuals. In the United States, the main exporter of audiovisual content globally, depicting queerness was prohibited during a great deal of the 20th century under the *Hollywood Production Code* (1930–1968) and the *Code of Practices for Television Broadcasters* (1952–1983), and early depictions of queer individuals, especially gay men, were related to child molesters, victims of violence or drag queens (Raley & Lucas, 2006). It was not until the 70s and 80s that representation of queerness was done in a more positive light (Netzley, 2010), but it was never for recurring and complex characters (Dow, 2001). The representation of queerness started being more nuanced in the 90s, albeit it closely followed stereotypes (Dow, 2001).

When it comes to representation beyond race and queerness, McRuer (2006) notes a similarity in how society erases or ridicules both disabled and queer individuals when, for instance, disabled people are portrayed as heroes or fighters in reductive narratives of their life experiences,

¹ GLAAD also issues reports on representation in advertising, gaming, social media, and other platforms.

while gay and lesbian experiences are constrained by heteronormative depictions that exclude more diverse perspectives when it comes to affection, sexuality, and family arrangements. The interaction between queerness and disability in activism and gain of rights, as well as the development of currents of thought that reflect on identity, discrimination, and visibility materialised in crip theory (Moya, 2022). McRuer (2006) claims that queer and disabled individuals have historically represented unproductivity and failure and been linked to illness (e.g. HIV pandemic) but have provided as space for erratic modes of life, leading to the reconsideration of affective bonds and care networks that call for the destruction of the nuclear family or marriage as the default environments for care.

The role of media accessibility professionals in mediating content—whether visual or auditory—significantly shapes how identities are represented. Adopting feminist and queer translation approaches in accessibility services opens the door to challenging entrenched stereotypes and passive interpretations of non-normative identities (Martínez-Pleguezuelos, 2021). Accessibility practices, such as subtitling for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing or AD for blind and visually impaired audiences, offer opportunities to critically reflect on diversity, similar to how written and audiovisual translations can adopt varying perspectives.

3.1. Ethics in representation: Collective and individual ethos

As suggested by Casey et al. (2007), representation is never a portrayal of reality, since it will always show a mediated biased depiction of it. However, the representation of minorities, historically managed by dominant groups (Hall, 2018), has evolved in terms of diversity and respect, that means more queer characters and in more diverse roles (GLAAD, 2024). Under this light, it is convenient to talk about ethical representation, and in this case, of queerness. I discuss ethics and representation based on Amossy's (2014) concept of ethos, conceived from the Aristotelian understanding as the self-image cast by a speaker or narrator and received by an audience, that reflects traces of the identity of the discourse producer in the discourse itself. Spoturno (2019, 2022) sees translation as a means by which the ethos can be modified in what she refers to as the reworking of the ethos. The ethos, as the image attached to a certain individual (*éthos individuel*) or a group of individuals (*éthos collectif*), is always based on a previous ethos (*éthos préalable*). Thusly, the reception of that image, a text, a narrative, will always be based on a matrix of previous images on the receiver's end within the translation process.

In her work, Spoturno (2019, 2022) analyses the reworking of the ethos of Puerto Rican poet and writer Rosario Ferré and Argentinian poet and activist Alicia Partnoy, through the translation of their work for the English-speaking North American readership. This hermeneutical process, by which an individual can be interpreted differently through their own discourse (i.e. poetic production), serves as a framework for the analysis of the elaboration of AD of queerness. Ethical mediation involves responsibly conveying diversity to challenge traditional (and simplistic or negative) representations of non-normative minorities, which can be examined critically through feminist and queer theoretical lenses.

Following this process, the audiovisual representation of the characters and the narratives they are found in their ethos, is already comprehended based on the previous ethos of the audience. This process adds a layer of complexity when mediating the ethos by means of audiovisual



translation, which means that a different linguistic community is going to process meanings based on their previous ethos. In the case of AD, the modulation of the image of such individuals and narratives is not only based on the previous ethos of describers but is also reworked to make sense in an aural rendition of the contents and processed by an audience who may, in their turn, face the message through their previous ethos.

4. Multimodality and meaning-making processes in AVT

Chaume (2001) argues that the audiovisual text belongs to a typology with an organisational mode that presents a semantic framework that has to be deconstructed by viewers in order to be comprehended. As pointed out by Villanueva-Jordán (2024), AVT has been conceptualised from the notion of constraint, which is consistently present in the analytical approaches to AVT (Titford, 1982; Mayoral et al., 1988; Pedersen, 2011; Ranzato, 2016; Baños & Díaz Cintas, 2017; Bolaños García-Escribano, 2017), Martí Ferriol (2010, 2013) even proposes strategies derived directly from the constraints in AVT. However, as suggested by Spiteri (2019), this framework of constraint represents also a source for creativity.

To study translation processes, and AVT in particular, multimodality stands as an integrated model of analysis (Kaindl, 2004; Borodo, 2014; Pérez-González, 2020a), as it addresses how the production of meanings simultaneously uses different semiotic repertoires (Iedema, 2003). In this sense, multimodality provides an effective way to describe communicative situations in their various forms and their complexity in producing meanings (Seizov & Wildfeuer, 2020). This is especially relevant in AD which develops a verbal description of the visual component while relying on the rest of the sound elements in the audiovisual text, creating, in turn, a new text in which elements complement each other. The concept of “grammar” proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) for image analysis suggests that the elements constituting semiotic sets do not restrict the meanings of these sets; rather, they contribute to the generation of meanings resulting from the interaction between their semiotic components.

The semiotic load in an audiovisual text enters a process of resemiotisation depending on the context in which they are found and transposed (Kress, 2020). This is evident in any translation set in which the translator, or audio describer, reads and divides the complete text into a diversity of semiotic components. Villanueva-Jordán (2024) places the audiovisual text in a particular communicative event (in a space and time that may change and that make different readings possible different) in which textuality is malleable. The versatility of signs is encapsulated by social semiotics, which stands as the most popular approach in translation studies (Kaindl, 2012; Remael & Reviers, 2018; Pérez-González, 2020b), following postmodernist postulates in translation.

Based on Reiss and Vermeer (2014) and Kress (2020), Villanueva-Jordán (2024) highlights translation as a process of meaning reconstitution, therefore with analysis potential from social approaches to semiotics and a multimodal perspective. Translators undertake a process of semiosis, creating meaning attached to signs assign makers, designing and producing in their work a target multimodal text. Therefore, for the analysis of AVT, and media accessibility services, observing semiotic design processes deployed by audiovisual translators and media accessibility professionals (as historical subjects and positioned in specific sociocultural contexts) becomes essential. Under

this light, AVT is examined from a critical discourse analysis perspective, influenced by the theories of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and Foucault's conception of power (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024). This approach observes how texts facilitate the circulation of power resources, promote ideologies, and silence others (Sindoni, 2016).

4.1. Multimodality and AD: Queer layering

If Kaindl (2020) categorises dubbing as an intramodal (from the verbal mode to the verbal mode), intersystemic (due to the production of meaning by means of an alternative linguistic system), and potentially intramedial and intrageneric; AD can be described as intermodal (from a visual to a verbal mode), intersystemic (production of meaning by means of another linguistic system), intermedial (visual and aural channels), and intergeneric (since AD counts on a set of expected patterns). The message goes through modifications that reshape its content to fulfil all the requirements to reach users, who mostly rely on the aural channel for the enjoyment of the audiovisual text.

When it comes to queerness, resemiotisation takes place through the audio describer who will undoubtedly have an impact on the form of the discourse around queerness (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024) in the accessible audiovisual content. It is here where Foucault's influence on discourse analysis and the poststructuralist conception of translation as rewriting place the relationship between translation/rewriting and power in the spotlight, pointing at the translator as a non-neutral agent whose actions are not "innocent" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). I argue here that queerness, the meanings associated with it and its semiotic deployment, are also coded within communities. By detaching from queer postulates that historically disentangle ontological constructions of queerness within societies, and the self-perception of queer individuals, I sustain that queerness unfolds by means of a set of semiotic cues that make it meaningful and therefore intelligible to normative individuals, who represent the majority of consumers of audiovisual content.

It is within this context that queerness is fragmented into layers of meaning that are processed differently by audiences. The representation of these layers of queerness are irremediably selected, understood and reproduced by the filter of AD, or any other AVT mode, and it is later reconstructed in its translated form by professionals and, eventually, by audiences. The positionality of the describer, as translator (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024), is crucial for the presentation of this multilayered meaning of queerness.

This is particularly remarkable in *Sex Education*, which shows a queer utopia (Horeck, 2021) where individuality produces multilayered queer characters that fall far from old more simplistic representations of queerness on screen. This becomes a challenge in the AD, which reproduces the different layers of queerness in a multimodal format that are later embedded into a verbal string of words. The representation of queerness is not only limited by the usual constraints offered by AVT but also sees its multilayered multimodal presentation—visual components, such as clothing and make-up, and music, voices, and other sounds—reduced to a single channel.



4.2. Queerness in Sex Education

Netflix's *Sex Education* (2019–2024) set itself apart from other high school series with a strong focus on diversity. Achieving worldwide success, this high school comedy provided a refreshing take on sexuality and identity, breaking away from conventional fiction norms to present a more inclusive perspective than usual in teen series. The series acquired great popularity, being watched in more than forty million homes around the globe (Porter, 2019). The series plays with very recognisable features of genres such as the British “teen drama”, when it comes to humour, and of the American, when it comes to the references to pop culture (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020). The episodes explore issues related to sexuality while bringing to the fore serious contemporary sexual politics including queer politics, feminism, racism, poverty and ableism (Frost, 2020). Since the series was launched, it has captured the interest of scholars (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Horeck, 2021; Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Zurian et al. 2021; Allen, 2024).

The series is described as queer utopia (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Horeck, 2021), in which “outing” stories are rarely a reason for trauma and that integrates completely the vast diversity of sexual and gender orientations (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020). The show uses humour and positive affect to centre queer perspectives and displaces heteronormativity as an idealized form of sexual and social relation (Horeck, 2021). It has been described as “one of the most quietly radical shows on television” (Brookes, 2020), especially for how the topics around sexuality, identity and affection are portrayed (Allen, 2024).

The final season, developed by a more diverse group of screenwriters, notably increased the presence of queer and non-normative characters. It also introduced intersectional characters, where disability, transness, and ethnicity intersected, highlighting the complexity of identity formation, which follows the characteristics of the writing and production team behind the camera, predominantly female and notably Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (Famurewa, 2020). According to Laury Nunn, creator of the series, audiences seek to see themselves reflected in the characters (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020). However, despite the positive reception of the series, it also responds to commercial purposes that consider variables such as the increase of LGBTIQ+ and teen audiences (Silva & Satler, 2019) and an audiovisual panorama in which diversity has proven profitable (Farr, 2016).

While it is true that the show presents a view of denaturalising heterosexuality, by engaging the audience affectively with its queer reorientation (Horeck, 2021), Vázquez-Rodríguez et al. (2020) point out that this utopic universe in which all non-normative characters are accepted correspond to a neoliberal ideology (Hasinoff, 2015) that makes structural and social prejudices and transhomophobic attitudes disappear, thus solely focusing on individuality. Nevertheless, even if *Sex Education* portrays a utopic, imperfect and biased representation of queerness, it is worth bearing in mind that while the inclusion of queer characters in the audiovisual does not erase the violence suffered by queer individuals, it problematises the situation and fosters debate (Peele, 2011).

The uniqueness of this series resides not only in its dialogues and stories, but also in its *mise en scene*, editing, musical soundtrack, performance and camera work (Horeck, 2021). In fact, the construction of queerness happens through a multimodal whole that encompasses practices, clothing, make up, music, and symbolism. By using the power of metatextuality, it reflects the



essential role queer audiovisuals have played for audiences who do not fit the norm (Horeck, 2021), in a process of queer breeding (Marshall, 2013) that reflects on queer inheritance as working through logics of reproduction or binary outside the heteronorm.

The queer utopia constructed in *Sex Education* is explained in a multimodal message that offers a multilayered view of queerness. The final message, in which image, sound and cultural references are intertwined, can be analysed through social approaches to resemiotisation in which the standpoint and situated knowledge of the audience plays a crucial role in their comprehension of the audiovisual content. In the case of AD, this polyphony of components configuring queerness in the audiovisual content is recoded into a verbal stream reshaping it into words that coexist and fuse with the rest of the elements that form the aural dimension of the audiovisual text.

5. Methodology

The series *Sex Education* was selected due to its rich queer visual component. As mentioned in the previous section, the series not only presents a vast myriad of dissidences but does it in a (utopian) way that allows for the construction of dense and complex intertwined messages of queerness, which also rely on pop culture references and camp symbolism. In particular, the series' fourth season presents more queer and multilayered queer characters than the previous seasons, which reflects the writing and creative team behind the cameras.

The first step was to select characters who visibly showed signs of queerness, understood as those aspects which result in discomfort, unintelligibility, and incongruity when compared to cisheteronormative structures of thought. Finally, the analysis was based on Eric Effiong, the protagonist's best friend, who is Black, of Nigerian family, gay and camp; Cal Bowman, a Black non-binary student who struggles with body dysmorphia and whose story becomes an important plot in the last season; Abbi Montgomery, a white trans female student; and Roman, a genderfluid trans male student of Pakistani descent, Abbi's partner. The latter two characters are considered the "it couple" of the high school. Some of the other queer characters are secondary and thus appear in less scenes.

To conduct the analysis, all the scenes where these characters appear as main characters were selected and the English AD of the scenes was transcribed. The data collection was performed using an Excel table that included the transcribed text and a series of categories which reproduce the multimodal semiotics of queerness: makeup, clothing, physical appearance, and actions. The observation was qualitative and had the intention of disentangling the queer components that made it to or that were reshaped in the AD script and how these components interacted with other audio elements to reproduce the multilayered meanings of queerness. Taking this into consideration, a final column was left for observations, in which the researcher could provide further insights into the scene, aspects that should have been specified, the selection of vocabulary used to describe certain elements, and the relationship between the visual component, dialogue and sound elements (music and other ambience sounds). The result was a well-furnished table in which information was collected and placed in parallel for every instance in which these queer characters appeared on screen. Results are presented and discussed in the following section.



6. Discussion of results: Audio describing queerness

This analysis has focused on a list of queer characters, that are particularly defiant of the heteronorm and that have an important presence in the series. The results are presented and discussed for each of the characters, and they are placed in order of appearance in the series.

6.1. Eric Effiong

Eric is Otis best friend and a recurrent character in the series, appearing in all four seasons. He is the queer character with most scenes and whose character arc is more defined and explained since the audience knows him more in depth. In terms of AD, this means that there are more instances in which the character gets to be described, and therefore, there is more room for his characterisation, making it more nuanced and diverse than other characters’. Instances of AD are provided in different examples which follow a chronological order.

Example 1: Eric Effiong, Season 1, Episode 1

Season 1, Episode 1
Context Eric is in his room alone, on his bed laying on his stomach while applying make-up in front of a mirror. His father calls for him.
AD transcript In his bedroom, Eric lays on his bed with his laptop. He applies make up. He reads Otis’ reply: Yes but tomorrow I’m dead! Eric applies more blush. / He grabs a wipe and removes his lip gloss.
Items Make up
Music and other ambience sounds The song <i>I can’t stand the rain</i> by Tina Turner plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)

In this scene, Eric is applying makeup in his room when his father calls for him and he abruptly stops putting on makeup and removes it. The action is accompanied by a song by Tina Turner, who is an icon for the (Black) queer community. As mentioned before (Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2021), queerness is constructed through the actions (a cis man applying makeup) and the use of camp cultural references (Tina Turner). While the visual and aural semiotic resources in this scene construct a layered portrayal of Eric’s queerness, the AD flattens much of this meaning, reducing the semiotic relevance of some details.

Through the lens of multimodality, this scene conveys a convergence of visual (makeup, body language) and aural (Tina Turner’s track) modes. The concept of queer layering is highly pertinent here. The scene encodes queerness through multiple signifiers: the intimacy of Eric’s bedroom, his use of makeup as gender expression, and Tina Turner’s music. On top of that, I argue that queerness is also constructed through negativity here (secrecy, failure, cf. Halberstam, 2011). Eric removes the makeup when his father calls for him, as if this was something punishable. The AD follows all these details constructing queerness but fails to mention the chairs blocking Eric’s door, that are present in the frame.



Example 2: Eric Effiong, Season 1, Episode 3

Season 1, Episode 3
Context
Eric and Lily are putting make up on and dressing up, they talk about sex and Lily asks Eric to show her gay porn. While they watch a video, Eric's father enters the room with tea and biscuits, and asks Lily to leave. He then asks Eric to remove the makeup.
AD transcript
Eric wears a dress and a boa. / Then his dad hands him a mug.
Items
Makeup, clothing, actions
Music and other ambience sounds
No music or ambience sounds

Source: Author (2025)

The relationship Eric has with his religious Nigerian parents considering his homosexuality and queerness could be considered as part of the queer utopia (see Section 4) presented in *Sex Education*. In Example 2, Eric's clothing is prioritised in the AD ("a dress and a boa"), over other queer aspects such as makeup. Eric's act of dressing up and engaging in intimate conversation with Lily serves as a moment of queer self-expression and exploration. The scene is rich in semiotic cues (makeup, costume, and gestures), that visually articulate Eric's fluid identity. The AD reduces this multimodal complexity to; "Eric wears a dress and a boa." From the perspective of ethos and queer representation, this instance reflects a reworking, or partial erasure, of Eric's constructed subjectivity. Eric's ethos as an expressive queer character is reduced to a generic instance of cross-dressing.

When Eric's father interrupts Lily's and Eric's dress up session, Lily is invited to leave. The father seems clearly disappointed (which is understood by the tone of his voice) but then hands his son a mug of tea. The failure to acknowledge the tension between father and son exemplifies the selectivity of the AD task. This detail is a clear example of the complexity of Eric's parents' relationship with their son's identity (worry and protection rather than queerphobia).

Example 3: Eric Effiong, Season 1, Episode 5

Season 1, Episode 5
Context
Eric is ready to go see the musical <i>Hedwig and the Angry Inch</i> with Otis. He is all dressed up as the main character of the musical.
AD transcript
At Eric's house, Eric wears red high heel boots, cut-off jean shorts and a long blonde wig. / Eric grabs a tiger print coat, smiles at his dad, then goes to the door. / His dad shakes his head.
Items
Makeup, clothing, action
Music and other ambience sounds
The song <i>Live Baby Live</i> by INXS plays at the end of the scene as Eric opens the door and leaves.

Source: Author (2025)

In Example 3, Eric is dressed up as Hedwig, the protagonist of the musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (Mitchel, 2001). Eric's scene is put in parallel with Otis². The AD highlights the boots, the shorts and the blonde hair, which are very identifiable traits of the musical's protagonist, a cult musical emblem of queer resistance and gender fluidity. While this instance of AD succeeds in

² Otis is also dressed up as Hedwig, but her mother just says bye and wishes him a nice evening.

transmitting more than minimal visual information, the absence of descriptors related to makeup, facial expressions or the performative nature of Eric’s self-presentation limits the semiotic density of the moment, which includes intertextual references to queer culture.

Crucially, the describer notes Eric’s father shaking his head, a subtle but charged gesture that signals disapproval and breaks the positive energy of the moment. Eric’s father is concerned about his son being exposed to violence and mistreatment. The describer’s omissions may result in queer layering being lost in translation. Subtleties are lost in the description, such as the finesse and detail of Eric’s costume in comparison to Otis’, of which the AD only mentions he is dressed up as Hedwig, as well as Eric’s campness, which acts in contrast with Otis’ more rigid (masculine) movements.

Example 5: Eric Effiong, Season 1, Episode 7

Season 01, Episode 07	
Context	Eric is dressing up for the high school dance.
AD transcript	At his house, Eric applies mascara, gold glitter around his eyes, and wears silver lipstick. He puts on one dangling earring and dons a west African headdress of green thick fabric, wearing a multicolour suit, he checks his reflection then goes down to his family. / His mum and dad sit up from their easy chairs and Eric starts off. / Eric smiles.
Items	Makeup, clothing, ethnic features
Music and other ambience sounds	A funky unidentified song plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)

Example 5 shows how the AD profiles Eric’s queer identity in its intersectional complexity, which stands out as a rich multimodal moment where queerness, Blackness, and cultural heritage intersect visually and aurally. It is not only non-normative given the fact that he is a queer man but also because of his ethnic expression when he uses traditional Nigerian fabrics and accessories within a white European milieu. The AD explicitly mentions Eric’s “mascara, gold glitter around his eyes, and silver lipstick,” along with his “West African headdress of green thick fabric” and “multicolour suit,” offering a vibrant image of gender nonconformity and ethnic pride. This representation aligns with the idea of queerness as layered and culturally situated and reflects a form of multimodal semiosis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Villanueva-Jordán, 2024). The AD’s attention to these components conveys a sense of defiant self-expression in direct dialogue with dominant norms (Hall, 2018).

From the perspective of the ethos (Amossy, 2014; Spoturno, 2022), this moment signals a reworking of ethos through Eric’s embodiment, especially as he is seen by his family, whose reaction (“sit up from their easy chairs”) is left ambiguously interpreted. The audio describer could have gone beyond surface and engage with the political charge of Eric’s appearance, as a queer Black individual embracing both gender expression and cultural lineage, in a public, by delving into his families’ facial gestures.

In Example 6, the AD of Eric’s preparation to meet Adam presents a display of queer embodiment through action, music, and intertextual references. The inclusion of Todrick Hall’s *Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels*, enhances its alignment with LGBTQ+ self-celebration. The importance of the song and its lyrics, an ode to the camp, are left space in the AD script to be present in the multimodal message cast through the aural channel



Example 6: Eric Effiong, Season 3, Episode 3

Season 03, Episode 03
Context
Eric in his room getting ready to meet Adam.
AD transcript
In his room, Eric lip-synchs with the music. He finishes his makeup and dances towards his bed. He cartwheels over his bed then dances into his floral print shirt. He takes Rahim's poems from his drawer. He grabs Pablo Neruda and Ocean Vuong from his bookshelf and tosses them on his bed.
Items
Clothing, makeup, action
Music and other ambience sounds
The song <i>Nails, hair, hips, heels</i> by Todrick Hall plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)

On the other hand, the AD mentions the authors whose books are tossed on the bed by Eric, poetry collections gifted by his ex-boyfriend, Rahim. Neruda is a classic Chilean poet, while Vuong is an important queer poet, who happens to be a non-white author as well. This moment of AD presents a layered resemiotisation of queerness, translating not just the visual but also Eric's cultural interests.

Example 7: Eric Effiong, Season 3, Episode 5

Season 3, Episode 5
Context
Eric before leaving on the family trip to Nigeria. His mum is upset about his outfit. Then Eric goes back to his bedroom.
AD transcript
At his house, Eric rushes downstairs with his suitcase, he wears a flamboyantly patterned tracksuit. / Eric heads upstairs. / In his room, Eric puts away his flamboyant clothes. He pulls on a plain jean bomber jacket over his striped shirt. He examines his reflection then looks at a picture of him and Adam. He smiles, then slips the photo into his backpack.
Items
Clothing
Music and other ambience sounds
No music and no relevant sounds

Source: Author (2025)

In the excerpt found in Example 7, the AD conveys a moment of identity negotiation as Eric prepares for a family trip to Nigeria. The AD uses the words “flamboyantly” and “flamboyant” to refer to Eric's typically vibrant and queer outfits. The word evolves from the French “flambe”, “flame”³, and refers to the extravagant, which catches the eye and is noticed. By using this term instead of others that can easily be related to “having a lot of colours”, queerness is better conveyed, also reappropriating a term that has been used to refer to homosexuality negatively in the past, like the term queer (Traugott, 2005)⁴. This adjective would not be probably used to describe a straight character dressed in colours, but it is used to embrace Eric's iridescence and queerness.

However, the shift occurs when Eric retreats to his bedroom to replace the outfit with more subdued clothing (a “plain jean bomber jacket”), suggesting a conscious modulation of his queerness in response to the expectations of the Nigerian culture and his family. The AD thus subtly exposes the complexities of queer visibility within diasporic contexts, where queerness must often navigate

³ https://www.oed.com/dictionary/flamboyant_adj?tab=factsheet

⁴ Also found in an entry of the Wikipedia section on LGBTQI+ terminology.

multiple, and sometimes conflicting, social codes. In the description, Eric’s change of outfit is set against him smiling while taking his picture with his boyfriend Adam, illustrating his negotiation of his own identity.

Example 8: Eric Effiong, Season 4, Episode 5

Season 04, Episode 05
Context
Eric is in a dream on a bridge where he encounters a black female God.
AD transcript
In the countryside, a river flows gently beneath a truss bridge. Eric dances on the bridge wearing a silver coat and purple iridescent pants. He pauses to gaze at a silver penis-shaped chapstick. He holds the chapstick to his lips.
Items
Clothing, makeup, actions
Music and other ambience sounds
The song <i>Chapstick</i> by Todrick Hall starts playing in the background.

Source: Author (2025)

In Example 8, the scene portrays Eric dancing on a bridge in a silver coat and iridescent purple pants, pausing to sensually apply a silver penis-shaped chapstick to his lips. The scene is set to the song *Chapstick* by Todrick Hall, and the AD deliberately pauses to allow the lyrics to be heard, reinforcing its performative and camp aesthetics. The AD focuses on the shape of the chapstick (penis-shaped), since it is of crucial in the queer and camp narrative. Through these intersecting semiotic elements (costume, actions, and music) the AD participates in a multimodal queering of identity and desire. However, the AD does not specify the kind of dance movements, linked to voguing, a type of dance linked to the ballroom and drag scene, which could have added to the layering of queerness and the semiotic load of the moment.

6.2. Cal Bowman

Cal is a non-binary Black student who is struggling with their identity and their own body image. The AD refers to them with non-binary pronouns and terms from the beginning, before this is explicitly stated by the character themselves. Although this could be somehow patronising for the AD user, since information is provided beforehand, the character’s appearance is visually gender-fluid. The use of non-binary language highlights this visual characteristic in the AD.

Example 9: Cal Bowman, Season 3, Episode 3

Season 3, Episode 3
Context
Cal enters the girls’ changing room.
AD transcript
In the girls’ change room, Cal carries their backpack to a bench near the far wall. As Cal takes off their baggy blazer, they glance at the other girls chatting and changing. Cal removes their baggy button down to reveal a little red crop top. / The girls stare at Cal. Cal notices, then takes their new uniform out of its plastic wrapping. Cal holds up the girls’ tie and examines it. Now dressed, Cal tucks on their snug-fitting grey button-down shirt. Cal sighs, then changes out of their baggy pants. They try on their tighter blazer and take it off again. Cal tosses it into their bag then puts on a baggy sweatshirt and a larger blazer. Cal sits with their eyes closed on the bench.
Items
Clothing
Music and other ambience sounds
The song <i>Trans Mantra</i> by Ezra Furman plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)



In Example 9, the scene follows Cal as they enter the female changing room and is forced to navigate the discomfort of gendered expectations while they change. Although non-binary pronouns and terms are used for Cal, the AD in Example 9 notably misgenders a crucial item of clothing: Cal's binder is inaccurately described as a "little red crop top," which falls far from embracing the queerness of the piece of clothing used by trans and non-binary masculine people, undermining the gender-affirming function of the binder.

This scene deals with Cal's struggle when being obliged to dress "more feminine" by the head of the high school. Furthermore, the AD does not allow space for the song *Trans Mantra* to be heard. This omission is particularly significant given that the song's lyrics explicitly articulate trans experiences of resistance to a normative society: "I'm living somewhere nobody goes to, I'm speaking in a language nobody talks."

Example 10: Cal Bowman, Season 4, Episode 3

Season 4, Episode 3	
Context	Cal in their bedroom.
AD transcript	In their bedroom, Cal scrolls through images of young men on their tablet.
Items	Physical appearance
Music and other ambience sounds	The song <i>Feels like I'm in love</i> by Kelly Marie plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)

As in the previous example (Example 9), in Example 10 the AD fails to portray an important part of the queer component. Cal is looking at young trans men on their tablet, as suggested by the top-surgery scars on their chests. This is also written in the search bar on Cal's screen and reflects language explicitly referencing transmasculine identities, but it is not conveyed in the audio description despite being an important part of the multimodal description of queerness.

The omission reflects a failure of queer visibility and layering: the AD flattens the scene's gender complexity. Drawing from a more creative notion of AD, it could have added to the multimodal construction of meaning. This instance exemplifies a lost opportunity to render the scene's queer gaze audible. The result misses the chance to affirm trans(masculine) embodiment and desire, which are central to Cal's story.

6.3. Abbi Montgomery and Roman Zardari

The queer utopia presented by *Sex Education* (Horeck, 2021; Vázquez-Rodríguez et al., 2020), allows for an ideal queer world in which Abbi and Roman, both trans people, are the it-couple of the high school. These two characters are two of the most non-normative characters in the series due to the way they behave, present and exist.



Example 11: Roman Zardari, Season 4, Episode 2

Season 4, Episode 2
Context
Otis talking to Roman about their sex problems with Abbi.
AD transcript
Otis glances across the yard and sees Roman lifting weights and the outdoor gym. Otis heads over to the gym and as he heads inside, he takes off his backpack and jacket. / Roman stretches. / Flashback: Roman is asleep in bed with Abbi. / As Roman lays with his eyes shut, Abbi masturbates besides him. / Abbi's hand moves beneath the covers. / Roman hands over his water bottle as he moves to a cable machine. / Roman stands and pulls down on handles.
Items
Makeup, clothing, accessories (nails)
Music and other ambience sounds
No music, and just some gym ambience sounds.

Source: Author (2025)

Example 12: Roman Zardari, Season 4, Episode 3

Season 4, Episode 3
Context
Inside the club, Roman is dancing with his group of friends, and is being observed by Cal, the non-binary student struggling with his body dysmorphia.
AD transcript
On the dancefloor, strobe lights flash as dancers group beneath blue, pink and purple lights. Roman, Aisha and Abbi dance in a group. Cal watches as Roman removes his sparkly vest revealing a leather harness fitted tightly over his bare tattooed chest. There are scars beneath his nipples. Cal's eyelids go heavy as they watch Roman. Cal blinks and diverts their gaze.
Items
Clothing, physical appearance
Music and other ambience sounds
The song Strut by Elohim & Big Freedia is playing in the club.

Source: Author (2025)

Example 13: Roman Zardari, Season 4, Episode 8

Season 4, Episode 8
Context
Roman is preparing his bedroom for a romantic night with Abbi.
AD transcript
Roman lowers a record needle onto a turn table. He places a frog and a strawberry stuffy beside a pillow on his bed that reads "you stole my heart". He lights a candle and sets small dishes of snacks onto a vanity. He skewers a cherry with his long fingernail. He eats the cherry then scatters dried rose petals on the bed. He dances in his see-through purple robe when Abbi arrives.
Items
Clothing, accessories, actions
Music and other ambience sounds
Roman plays the song <i>2 become 1</i> by Emma Bunton on his record player.

Source: Author (2025)

Example 14: Abbi Montgomery and Roman Zardari, Season 4, Episode 8

Season 4, Episode 8
Context
Abbi and Roman are having sex in Roman's bedroom.
AD transcript
In Roman's bedroom, Roman sits naked straddling Abbi. He angulates his pelvis as they hold hands and gaze into each other's eyes. He pulls her up to him and they embrace kissing each other.
Items
Actions
Music and other ambience sounds
A soft piano song plays in the background.

Source: Author (2025)



Across Examples 11 to 14, Roman Zardari's character is depicted through a complex mixture of queer embodiment, sexuality, and gender expression, yet the AD varies in its ability to fully embrace Roman's trans and queer identity. Roman's appearance constantly calls into question femininity and masculinity.

In Example 11, nothing is said about queerness, when some camera work points at Roman's body hair or long gel fingernails, two crucial components in the character's physical appearance. The fingernails do not appear in the AD until the scene portrayed in Example 13, when he is preparing his bedroom for a romantic night. Following Spoturno (2019, 2022), this could be understood as a missed opportunity to ethically rework Roman's ethos in a way that challenges prior ethos (*éthos préalable*) of queerness as either comic, tragic, or hypersexualised (Raley & Lucas, 2006).

However, Roman's queer physicality is directly addressed when Cal's looking at Roman's chest as he dances (Example 12). The AD carefully follows the camerawork that focuses on Roman's tattooed chest and the leather harness that leaves his top-surgery scars seen. Cal's reaction, described as "Cal's eyelids go heavy" is capturing their burning desire to get their chest done, which nuances and refines the action of "staring at" or "looking at", and that is representative to the complexity of semiotics in the scene (Kress, 2020), that capture not only objective details (Roman's body) but also is loaded with emotionality and subjectivity (Cal's gaze).

In this vein, in Example 13, the AD highlights Roman's long fingernails and see-through purple robe, details that challenge the viewer's understanding of gender expression. As in Example 12, the omission of Roman's body hair, a traditionally masculine trait, is an important choice made by the AD script and narrows the semiotic range available to construct Roman's identity, reducing in turn the potential for queer layering.

Towards the end of the last episode, Abbi and Roman are seen having sex (Example 14). The scene, without showing genitalia, shows how Abbi laying on the bed, penetrates Roman, who is on top. The AD makes use of the verb "to straddle" which goes beyond being on top and focuses on the movement when he "angulates his pelvis". The penetrative sex incarnated in a trans couple by which traditional sexual roles are challenged is put very consciously on screen and so is reflected in the AD which completes Abbi's line at the end: "I love being. This moment subverts conventional representations of heteronormative sexual practices by positioning Abbi as a feminine figure in a penetrating role, which directly questions traditional gender expectations. In addition, the verbal description of the characters accompanies elements such as their (trans) voices, which complete the multimodal semiotic message by which queerness is aurally transmitted.

7. Discussion

The queer utopia put forward by *Sex Education* stands as a great example of diversity on television, bringing minority representation to the very fore. The series depicts characters who are not only queer, but who have different skin colours, wear clothes, makeup and accessories from various ethnical backgrounds, have different disabilities and relate sexually and affectively in a myriad of manners. Despite the critiques faced by showing an unrealistic society in which discrimination is barely noticeable and whose characters must only deal individually with their own differences (Hasinoff, 2015), it cannot be denied that the creators and scriptwriters have developed the series



with the clear purpose of portraying diversity. Given that greater representation of diversity in audiovisual contents fosters acceptance and diminishes discriminatory and negative attitudes to non-normative individuals, *Sex Education*'s potential is indisputable.

In such multimodal texts, many of the codes that carry queerness are visual, which create a semiotic system that is linked to pop culture, queer iconicity, makeup, clothing, actions and so on. This visual component is entangled in a whole with music, voices and other ambient sounds to create a multimodal message that is decoded by audiences. As proposed by social approaches to semiotics (Kress, 2020), the ability to decode and understand the various modes of multimodal content is strongly dependant on the receiver's sociocultural position (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024). This last assumption is particularly relevant to the construction of queerness, the manifestations of which are historically linked to negative connotations. In the case of AD users, multimodal complexity is embedded in the aural channel, thus becoming temporarily linear and heavily dependent on verbal description.

Thus, the audio describer acts as a filter of the audiovisual multimodal message and transfers the message in a verbal account. Adopting a sociosemiotic perspective, based on poststructuralist postulates, the situated knowledge of accessibility professionals (cf. Haraway, 1995) and their working environment will have an impact on the way queerness and queer characters and narratives are explained and conceptualised. As proposed by the reworking of the individual and collective ethos in translation (Spoturno, 2019, 2022), the understanding of an entity (person, characteristic, action) in the original (audiovisual) text (, that is emitted by the message, undergoes modifications in the translated (audio described) rendition. This analysis evinces how the expression of queerness is built by means of a multilayered construction that is intelligible to varied extents. Some of the elements that convey queerness may or may not be understood in the same way globally, while others rely on culture, on society, on the identity of the audience and so on. It is through this social observation of semiotics that queerness has the potential to make sense and can be perceived positively or negatively.

In the analysis presented in this article, which has focused particularly on the characters of Eric Effiong, Cal Bowman, Abbi Montgomery and Roman Zardari, the AD demonstrates in general a positive and ethical approach when representing the queerness. It shows that efforts have been made to portray the nuances and reduce stereotypical representations through lexical choice, and to allow for all the information outside the audio description to participate in the multimodal account of queerness. Illustrative examples of this are the recurrent use of the adjective "flamboyant", which has been pejoratively used in the past and is able to grasp queer looks and movements; or the spaces left by the AD for the songs in the background that complete the multimodal expression through music and pop references (with the song *Nails, Hair, Hips, Heels* by Todrick Hall or Tina Turner's *I can't stand the rain*).

However, some instances of the AD fail to convey elements that carry queerness. Examples of this are the loss of some details about physical appearance, such as Roman's long nails worn since his first scene or his body hair, which is never mentioned; the scars on the chest of the trans men Cal was scrolling down on his tablet; or the confusion of the binder Cal was wearing to cover their chest by a "crop top" in the AD — a piece of clothing normally related to femininity. Despite these incongruencies in the AD, it is vital to bear in mind the constraints of AD, such as time and space.



While some of this lost information could have been mitigated with the increase of physical space, some choices may be the result of the professional's subjectivity and agency. The confusion of the binder for a crop top, is a good example.

8. Conclusions

The analysis presented in these pages provides evidence of the complexity of the audiovisual text and its translation processes that take place in accessibility services, such as AD. Furthermore, the complexity increases when dealing with queerness (Iturregui-Gallardo, 2023). This is materialised in the form of a multilayered expression that is processed and interpreted differently by the receiver's subjectivity, as suggested by social semiotics perspectives applied in the field of Translation Studies (Villanueva-Jordán, 2024), that in this case is mediating for a second receiver who is decoding a mediated message in the form of verbal description.

Overall, the methodology used to create the AD in the analysed scenes seems to aim at ethical representations of queer and non-normative individuals, trying to focus on elements that convey and shape queerness in the narrative. However, the AD has also failed to convey certain meanings and could have made different choices when selecting the elements of queerness to be included in the script, which leads us to consider the professionals knowledge, positionality and subjectivity when dealing with certain messages of queerness.

Whereas the multimodal analysis presented here was conducted by systematising the observation of the scenes, it is still a descriptive analysis that risks showing the researcher's positionality, in terms of nationality, preferences and experiences. The inherent characteristics of the researcher, and the time and place where the study took place are proof of the complexity of hermeneutical observations of processes of resemiotisation (Kress, 2020). However, it also opens the way to the replication with other audiovisual contents and contexts and provides evidence for the potential possibilities of such methodologies.

The current analysis only takes into account the AD and the visual elements dependant on it. Since dialogues also play an important role in the aural message presented to the AD user, textual analysis of the dialogues may also be carried out in combination with AD. On the other hand, the AD was only analysed in British English. Other proposals should include ADs in other languages and there is potential for the comparison of multilingual analysis of scripts that may reveal fruitful trends in the handling of queerness in the series.

Finally, this analysis was conducted from the standpoint of the researcher. Even if this can identify trends and provide a constructive commentary, to better understand how AD conveys queerness, research should be carried out with AD users, people who are blind or visually impaired. Besides, the study could be reproduced in different territories with speakers of different languages, within the sociocultural environments of both the accessibility practitioners and the AD users.



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Notes

Authorship contribution

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Data collection: G. Iturregui-Gallardo

Data analysis: G. Iturregui-Gallardo

Results and discussion: G. Iturregui-Gallardo

Review and editing: G. Iturregui-Gallardo

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

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Traducir con el cuerpo: la traducción como experiencia tangible y corporal

Translating with your body: Translation as a tangible and corporeal experience

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Resumo: Traducir nunca es una actividad ajena a lo que ocurre a su alrededor. De ahí que, como es bien conocido, las teorías de la traducción hayan cambiado tanto desde mediados del siglo pasado hasta nuestros días. Ni que decir tiene que los retos sociales, económicos, políticos y éticos que nos propone el siglo XXI no tienen paragón. Ante esto, la traducción no podía quedarse al margen. Y no lo ha hecho. Son ya muchas las teorías que insisten en superar el “linguistic bias in Translation Studies” (Marais, 2019). Lo que esto significa es que la traducción entre lenguas no parece en absoluto suficiente hoy, cuando la información se transmite mediante muchos sistemas semióticos. El significado se crea a través de variados canales, entre ellos la materialidad de los objetos. Por eso en la primera parte de este artículo me fijaré en llamada “tangible translation” (Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022), que ejemplificaré a través de traducciones tangibles que se han hecho en el mundo del arte, no con palabras sino con otros sistemas semióticos. Esas traducciones tangibles nos llevarán en la segunda parte del artículo a entender la traducción como una *experiencia* con todo nuestro cuerpo (Campbell & Vidal, 2024, 2025), no únicamente con el intelecto. Siguiendo la llamada “antropología de los sentidos” (Howes, 2005), mi propuesta es que en el siglo XXI se traduce de una forma tangible con el cuerpo, porque transmitimos información con los sentidos, con las emociones, con los gestos, con el tacto, con el gusto, con el olfato. La traducción se amplía así hasta convertirse en un proceso somático y parasomático (Robinson, 1991, 2023). La tercera parte del artículo propone aplicar esta traducción tangible que se crea con el cuerpo a la obra de una artista indígena, Cecilia Vicuña, que traduce con todos los sentidos, sin palabras, mediante *quipus*.

Palabras clave: traducción; cuerpo; sentidos; materialidad de la traducción; traducción tangible; Cecilia Vicuña.



Abstract: Translating is never an activity that is oblivious to what is going on around it. Hence, as is well known, translation theories have changed so much from the middle of the last century to the present day. It goes without saying that the social, economic, political and ethical challenges of the 21st century are unparalleled. In the face of this, translation could not remain on the sidelines. And it has not. There are already many theories that insist on overcoming the “linguistic bias in Translation Studies” (Marais, 2019). What this means is that translation between languages does not seem at all sufficient today, when information is transmitted through many semiotic systems. Meaning is created through varied channels, among them the materiality of objects. That is why in the first part of this lecture I will focus on the so-called “tangible translation” (Ciribuco & O'Connor, 2022), which I will exemplify through tangible translations that have been made in the art world, not with words but with other semiotic systems. These tangible translations will lead us in the second part of the article to understand translation as an *experience* with our whole body (Campbell & Vidal, 2024, 2025), not only with the intellect. Following the so-called “anthropology of the senses” (Howes, 2005), my proposal is that in the 21st century we translate in a tangible way with the body, because we transmit information with the senses, with emotions, with gestures, with touch, with taste, with smell. Translation is thus extended to become a somatic and parasomatic process (Robinson, 1991, 2023). The third section of the article proposes to apply this tangible translation that is created with the body to the work of an indigenous artist, Cecilia Vicuña, who translates with all the senses, without words, by means of *quipus*.

Keywords: translation; body; senses; materiality of translation; tangible translation; Cecilia Vicuña.

I. Introducción

Una de las cosas que, desde siempre, más me han fascinado de la traducción es que es una actividad nunca ajena a lo que acontece a su alrededor. Por eso precisamente, porque la traducción va incorporando los cambios de la(s) cultura(s) en la que se inserta(n), las definiciones de qué es traducir no pueden ser cerradas y las reflexiones teóricas sobre ella han cambiado mucho desde los años sesenta del siglo pasado hasta la actualidad. Lejos queda la creencia prescriptivista de que traducir era buscar la palabra equivalente, que solo había una traducción posible de un texto y que el original era superior. Las nuevas teorías Gideon Toury (1980) desde el descriptivismo, de Theo Hermans (1985) con su concepto de manipulación, las definiciones rompedoras del giro cultural de Susan Bassnett y André Lefevere (1990) y tantas otras ideas, dieron lugar a cambios espectaculares que nos han llevado al lugar donde ahora estamos, un momento histórico en el que quienes traducimos sabemos que los sinónimos no existen, que la relación entre las lenguas es siempre asimétrica y que la equivalencia absoluta, los puentes y los espejos no son más que metáforas vacías. El siglo XXI no deja de recordarnos que traducir se parece más al espejo de Alicia, ese que lo invierte todo, ese que entra en el interior de la(s) realidad(es) y escudriña lo que hay al otro lado. Lejos de concepciones platónicas o positivistas del significado, en un mundo global como el contemporáneo, híbrido y diaspórico, al traducir no se dice nunca lo mismo, como advierte Umberto Eco (2003) en su libro titulado significativamente *Dire quasi la stessa cosa* [Decir casi lo mismo], porque el significado no es estable, lineal ni monocromático, y porque tampoco el lenguaje es neutral ni inocente sino heteroglósico.



En mi opinión, uno de los cambios más significativos que se han dado en nuestra disciplina durante las dos últimas décadas ha sido la apertura de la traducción hacia otras disciplinas. Así, la definición de traducción se ha ampliado. Sin duda, era algo necesario, dado que la traducción está hoy en todas partes, desde los contextos legales e institucionales hasta los medios de comunicación, lo audiovisual, la publicidad, etc. En todos esos entornos y en muchos más, quienes traducimos sabemos que “[n]o translation can ever be the ‘same’ as the original, for translation involves so much more than the linguistic” (Bassnett, 2022, p. vii).

Uno de los avances más significativos, entre otros muchos, en los Estudios de Traducción fue el llamado “outward turn” que Bassnett y Johnston inauguraron en 2019 en un número especial de la revista *The Translator* (Bassnett & Johnston, 2019). En ese volumen se incidía en la importancia de que la traducción se abriese a otras disciplinas, en línea con lo que ya habían adelantado Michael Cronin (2017) con su eco-traducción o Sherry Simon (2012, 2019) con sus ciudades multilingües, por citar dos nombres muy relevantes. Asimismo, ese giro reconocía la traducción como espacio de pensamiento con derecho propio dentro de las humanidades.

Será en este contexto en el que encuadraré mi discurso, porque esa apertura hacia otras disciplinas ha dado lugar a una manera amplia de entender la traducción que considera que traducir no es sólo una operación interlingüística. Efectivamente, son ya muchas las teorías que insisten en superar el “linguistic bias in Translation Studies”, como insiste Kobus Marais (2019) en un libro clave. Lo que esto significa es que la traducción entre lenguas no parece en absoluto suficiente hoy, cuando la información se transmite mediante muchos sistemas semióticos, imágenes, colores, olores, sabores, tacto, gestos, etc. El significado se crea mediante múltiples canales, entre ellos a través de la materialidad de los objetos. Por eso en la primera parte de este artículo me fijaré en llamada “tangible translation” (Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022), que ejemplificaré a través de traducciones tangibles que se han hecho en el mundo del arte, no con palabras sino con otros sistemas semióticos¹.

Esas traducciones tangibles nos llevarán en la segunda parte del artículo a entender la traducción como una *experiencia* con todo nuestro cuerpo (Campbell & Vidal, 2024, 2025), no únicamente con el intelecto. Siguiendo la llamada “antropología de los sentidos” (Howes, 2005), mi propuesta es que en el siglo XXI se traduce de una forma tangible con el cuerpo, porque transmitimos información con los (más de cinco) sentidos existentes, con las emociones, con los gestos, con el tacto, con el gusto, con el olfato. La traducción se amplía así hasta convertirse en un proceso somático y parasomático (Robinson, 1991, 2023), “by perceiving and experiencing non-verbal media through visual, auditory and other sensory channels” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi).

La tercera parte del artículo propone aplicar esta traducción tangible que se crea con y a través del cuerpo a la obra de la artista indígena Cecilia Vicuña, que traduce con todos los sentidos, sin palabras, mediante *quipus*.

¹ No obstante, también es importante señalar que hay casos, como los que mencionaré más abajo, en los que lo lingüístico adquiere una dimensión material, dado que las palabras se tornan objetos que se sienten con todo el cuerpo. El trazo de la escritura es en estos ejemplos la materialidad física que puede revelarse en las ondas sonoras o en los contornos de la escritura. La dimensión material de la lengua, como veremos con algunos ejemplos en páginas posteriores, puede en algunos casos entenderse como algo tangible que resuena en los cuerpos.

2. Traducciones tangibles a través de la materialidad de los objetos

Siguiendo algunas de las líneas de investigación en traducción antes mencionadas, mi hipótesis de partida es que no solamente comunicamos con palabras sino a través de otros muchos canales y sistemas semióticos no lingüísticos. Sabido es que en el siglo XXI la llamada cultura visual transmite información sobre todo mediante la imagen. Por eso en la traducción de publicidad, de literatura infantil, medios de comunicación, espacios digitales, traducción audiovisual, etc., lo más importante es “the translator’s gaze” (Vidal Claramonte, 2022). En la sociedad global, el lenguaje verbal es solo uno más de los repertorios multimodales y multisensoriales a través de los cuales se produce la comunicación. Por eso, el concepto de traducción actualmente se ha ampliado mucho. Traducir ha dejado de ser una tarea mecánica, interlingüística, secundaria (Blumczynski, 2016, 2023; Marais, 2019, 2023; Meylaerts & Marais, 2023; Zheng et al., 2023). Como señala Karen Bennett (2022, p. 61), “it is becoming increasingly accepted that the purely verbal text is something of a chimera and that in even the most banal and everyday kind of text, multiple semiotic codes conspire in the generation of meaning”.

De entre todas las sugerentes posibilidades que plantean hoy los estudios de traducción, me quiero centrar aquí en la traducción no lingüística que se produce a través de la materialidad de los objetos. Quizás el ejemplo más claro de lo que esto quiere decir nos lo ofrece Sherry Simon en un artículo reciente. Simon comenta que, en una reunión del museo de Holocausto de Montreal, uno de los presentes decidió pasar un objeto de la colección del museo, una cartera de piel que procedía de uno de los campos de concentración y que uno de los prisioneros había recibido como regalo de cumpleaños. Simon describe cómo a través del tacto ese objeto traducía emociones, historias, traumas, memorias, y cómo el significado no se transmitió a través de palabras sino mediante los sentidos:

Their meaning is created at the juncture of the immediacy of physical contact (touch, smell, closeness to the eyes) and the distance of their origins, across vast disparities of experience. This is the power of the object – to be accessible and yet to evoke dimensions of faraway, inaccessible suffering. The link between these two dimensions is narrative. We experience the object through the layers of narrative which have accompanied the object through time and across languages. Our encounter with these objects is mediated: it is the result of multiple processes of translation (Simon en Simon & Polezzi, 2022, p. 154).

La traducción se produce aquí a través del tacto:

Touch provides the satisfaction of a corporeal encounter. By touching a collected object the hand of the visitor also encounters the traces of the hand of the object’s creator and former owners. One seems to feel what others have felt and bodies seem to be linked to bodies through the medium of the materiality of the object they have shared (Classen & Howes, 2006, p. 202).

Esto es precisamente a lo que se refiere la llamada “materiality of translation” (Littau, 2011, 2016; Coldiron, 2016; O’Connor, 2021; Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022; Bennett 2022; Blumczynski, 2023; Gambier, 2023). Lo material de los objetos (su textura, su forma, su color, su olor) *traducen* emociones, historias, de una manera tan o más adecuada que las palabras.



Los objetos que han estado en espacios donde se han vivido situaciones traumáticas cuentan historias al ser trasladados a otros espacios, y aquí por supuesto entran en juego la memoria y las emociones. Según Violi (2017, p. 20), “[m]emory is not in the objects that support it, [...] but lies in the processes of construction, interpretation and translation of their meaning”. Los espacios relacionados con el genocidio nazi son ejemplos clave, sin duda. Quién no recuerda los zapatos amontonados en los museos del Holocausto, que traducen las historias de quienes fueron silenciados. Pero también ocurre la materialidad de la traducción a través de la *translatio*² de los objetos en los viajes de los migrantes intentando buscar una vida mejor. Estos son objetos emocionales (Goldfajn, 2023a; Vidal Claramonte, 2024b) que traducen emociones:

Attention to things in translation—attention to objects, materialized forms in the physical world represented in translation—can offer us powerful insights not only about the various ways in which translation has engaged with things but also indirectly about the relations between people and things (Goldfajn, 2023b, p. 455).

Así, los objetos “function as expressions as well as sources of emotions between people, [objects which], within concrete settings, are at the center of emotional experience and act as crucial mediators in emotional transactions between humans” (Goldfajn, 2023a, p. 53).

Con los objetos se produce una *translatio* cuando emprenden un viaje con sus propietarios. La traducción ocurre aquí a través de la materialidad de dichos objetos. Es lo que Andrea Ciribuco y Anne O'Connor (2022) denominan “tangible translation”. En el caso de los migrantes, hay que tener presente que la traducción es “a ubiquitous activity in the everyday life of a migrant or refugee, a survival mechanism in diverse neighbourhoods” (Ciribuco, 2021, p. 10). Los objetos traducen y se traducen, porque mantienen el significado de su lugar de origen, pero también cambian lo que significan en el lugar de llegada, porque el espacio en el que se ubican es diferente.

Este viaje de los objetos da lugar a una *translatio*, pero hay que tener siempre presente que esos objetos cargados de historias y emociones traducen dichas emociones a través de los sentidos, del cuerpo, de lo tangible, de los olores, de las texturas. En estos casos lo meramente lingüístico no es suficiente. Necesitamos un tipo de traducción que vaya más allá de los dualismos cartesianos entre mente y cuerpo y de la idea tradicional de la traducción como una tarea secundaria y mecánica de sustitución de una palabra por otra para encontrar la equivalencia absoluta.

Por eso propongo que estamos también ante un ejemplo de *translationality* (Robinson, 2017; Blumczynski, 2023). La *translationality* es una traducción siempre en movimiento, nunca estática, siempre cambiante en función de los espacios, que se produce a través de los sentidos: “transformationality or the constant emergence of everything through embodied, situated, performative interactions” (Robinson, 2017, p. x). Es una traducción dinámica: “To translate is to

² *Translatio* tiene que ver con *translatio studii et imperii*. Es un concepto utilizado hoy por bastantes translation scholars (entre ellos Blumczynski, 2023) en relación con la traducción que va más allá de lo lingüístico: “To explore translation from a non-linguistic angle by borrowing the notion of *translatio* from medieval and especially relic discourse to propose a multidimensional approach to translation and unlock a genealogy within translation studies that risks remaining concealed by the standard emphasis on language-and text-based methods within the field [...] complicating the discourse of translation studies, an already and profoundly transdisciplinary field, as a legitimate, indeed necessary, move in this specific historical moment when simplistic notions of language, culture, identity are proving sorely unable to make sense of the web of experiences in which each individual is immersed thus creating a perilous hiatus between the intricacy of the world in which we live and a utopian simplicity of the theories that we use to interpret it” (Bertacco, 2023, p. 118).

move (meaningful) things around, even if only on etymological grounds” (Blumczynski, 2023, p. 2). En este contexto, los objetos que viajan son fundamentales “in shaping migrant memories, and how they can become symbols of belonging, badges of identity [...] objects from ‘home’ continue to play a crucial role in catalyzing their memories, nostalgia” (Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022, p. 2). Y, por otro lado, “[o]bjects found and acquired in the host country, on the other hand, often become tangible proof of improved social status” (Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022, p. 2).

Son muchos los ejemplos que existen de esta traducción de las emociones a través de los objetos —desde zapatos, fotografías, comida, relojes, ropa, libros, dibujos, hasta objetos religiosos o instrumentos musicales, entre otros muchos— y que ha recogido tanto la literatura como el arte contemporáneo (Vidal Claramonte, 2024b). Uno muy reciente lo encontramos en una experiencia planteada por Médicos Sin Fronteras. La organización preguntó a una serie de migrantes “Do you carry any prized belonging with you and what do they mean to you?”. En muchos casos, los migrantes portaban pequeños objetos que trasladaban emociones. Por ejemplo, Hamid, de Pakistán, cuenta que:

The ring and necklace I have with me are gifts from my two brothers. Having them with me makes me feel connected to my family wherever I am. When I put them on, I feel I am talking to my brothers, as if I could see them. During my stay in Libya, I didn’t wear the ring or necklace because I know they will be stripped away from me. But when I arrived on Geo Barents, the first thing I did was to put them on because here, it’s a trustworthy place (Doctors Without Borders Canada, 2024).

Para Dilba, de Siria, las fotografías traducen recuerdos:

I have photographs of my husband, my children, my siblings, my best friends, etc. Even one that was on my university student card. The one that is the most precious to me is the one of my father, who passed away. I carry all these photographs with me to keep the memories alive. With the war in Syria, everyone went to a different place. Some of my friends went to Norway, others to the Netherlands, some stayed in Damascus, I went to Kobanî. I had to quit university, leave my neighbourhood, my friends, the place I grew up in. The war dispersed us and even though I haven’t seen them for years, with the photographs, their memories stay (Doctors Without Borders Canada, 2024).

Algo similar le ocurre a Khadijah a través de bolsas llenas de hierbas y plantas tradicionales que le preparó en su día su abuela, o a Amer, con pequeños objetos que le dan esperanza y fuerzas para seguir adelante:

These items carry a huge amount of memories and meaning. It was hard to carry them all the way and across borders to ensure they didn’t get ruined. I carried them when I crossed the desert and walked through valleys. I was ready to let go of the clothes I had but didn’t want to lose these. The wooden piece has been damaged because of the heat and humidity, but I will fix it (Doctors Without Borders Canada, 2024.).

Otro ejemplo muy relevante de traducción tangible hecha a partir de la materialidad de los objetos nos lo ofrece Moira Inghilleri, que en diversas conferencias y publicaciones amplía la definición de traducción y habla de traducciones visuales no lingüísticas que se construyen con



objetos que traducen emociones e historias en el mundo del arte. Inghilleri asegura que en muchas ocasiones los objetos traducen las emociones mejor que las palabras (BYU Kennedy Center, 2019). Pone un ejemplo que me parece extraordinario, las “traducciones visuales” (el término es de Inghilleri, y nótese que utiliza la palabra “traducciones”) del artista sirio Nizar Ali Badr. Badr hace traducciones tangibles de los viajes que sus compatriotas inician en busca de una vida mejor, y lo hace con pequeñas piedras de la playa, que son las “palabras” con las que habla de las emociones de estas personas. Sus cuerpos, sus pertenencias, todo está hecho con piedrecitas, a través de las cuales se construyen traducciones tangibles de esas vidas migrantes, siempre en movimiento. Las narraciones no se crean aquí con palabras sino *objets trouvés* que se convierten en la voz de quienes han sido silenciados.

Posteriormente, la escritora Margriet Ruurs, atrapada por la fuerza de las traducciones visuales de Badr, quiso reescribir esas traducciones lingüísticamente y transformarlas en un libro de literatura infantil. *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey*, a su vez, se ha traducido ya a diez lenguas y ha servido para recoger fondos para familias de refugiados. Además, el libro ha aparecido en una versión bilingüe, traducida al árabe por Falah Raheem, para quien las piedras son el verdadero medio de comunicación del libro, y por eso las hace aparecer en su título: “Las piedras de los caminos” es la traducción literal del título en árabe.

Como hemos visto, en todos estos casos la *translatio* de objetos da lugar a una traducción que no ocurre con palabras sino con objetos, no con el intelecto sino con las emociones, con todos los sentidos. Al tocar, oler, sentir, tocar esos objetos, traducen recuerdos, historias, sensaciones, emociones. Por eso es necesario ampliar la definición de traducción:

If the emotional, cultural, and personal importance of objects in the migratory experience is undeniable, looking at it from a translational point of view means looking at the various ways in which the significance of a “thing” is expanded and transformed to encompass the movement of meaning across different landscapes. Objects can emphasize translation’s role as a force impacting the worlds that migrants and refugees inhabit (Ciribuco & O’Connor, 2022, p. 6).

El giro hacia la materialidad de la traducción abre nuevas perspectivas, nuevas maneras de traducir que tienen en cuenta todos los canales, no solamente los intelectuales, a través de los cuales nos llega el conocimiento del mundo. La traducción tangible, el giro material, pone sobre el tapete la necesidad de atender a lo que los sentidos, a lo que nuestro cuerpo, nos transmite.

3. Traducir con el cuerpo

Por lo tanto, traducir, sobre todo en situaciones conflictivas donde se transmite información no tanto a través del intelecto como de las emociones, no puede ser una actividad solo intelectual o solo lingüística. En estas circunstancias se traduce con todo el cuerpo. “Carrying things from one place to another means feeling their size, shape, texture and weight – sometimes also their smell and taste” (Blumczynski, 2023, p. 11). Traducir es una experiencia psicosomática (Robinson, 1991) que se siente:



Felt experience will reveal that we not only *feel* the processuality I'm calling translationality: we *perform* it with our bodies, interactively. We coperform it. Performed translationality would be shorthand for *felt- becoming-mobilized-becoming-performed translationality*. We first feel the change, feel the need to respond actively to the change, to participate in translationality. As we also feel the others around us feeling the same processual or translational impulses, we collectively *mobilize* those impulses for action. The performance of the mobilized action that ensues is collective as well, but continues to be felt and mobilized in each individual member of the group (Robinson, 2017, pp. ix–x).

Las traducciones a las que me he referido anteriormente se hacen con el cuerpo, son experienciales en el sentido de Campbell y Vidal (2019, 2024, 2025)³. Son ejemplos claros de que “communication happens on many levels, the gestural, the olfactory, the visual” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxv):

The translator effectively plays the role of mediator in an experiential process that allows the recipients (viewer, listener, reader or participant) to re-create the sense (or “semios”) of the source artefact for themselves [...] This holistic approach recognizes that there are multiple possible versions of both source and target texts and this can help mitigate the biases and preconceptions a static, intralingual translation can sometimes introduce (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi).

Son traducciones performativas que se producen “[s]witching the emphasis from communication to experience”. Traducimos “not just with the eyes but with all other senses” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxix):

[P]erceiving through the eyes, ears, tongue or body of another opens the willing recipient (performer or spectator) to unfamiliar affects and sensory experiences, a “disorienting” event that can, if enacted in a safe environment, lead to personal growth and greater levels of awareness and understanding of the other, and thereby enhance cultural literacy (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxiv).

Traducir implica experimentar, sentir, “to be experienced [...] that aspect of material culture that experientially connects us to other people, places, times, and sensations” (Blumczynski, 2023, pp. 41, 192–193). Traducir con todo el cuerpo, no solo con palabras, nos abre un gran abanico de posibilidades “to carry form and sense from one culture into another beyond the limitations of words. At the same time, such processes impact on the source artefact enriching it with new layers of understanding” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi). Esto implica “the full immersion of the translator in the text, with eyes, ears, skin, nose, limbs and heart” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. 3). Una traducción que encuentra significados no únicamente en las palabras sino en las formas, los sonidos, los silencios, las texturas, los gestos, los olores. Una traducción que es interactiva y participativa, resultado de una metodología holista que “recognizes that there are multiple possible versions of both source and target texts and this can help mitigate the biases and preconceptions a static, intralingual translation can sometimes introduce” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi). Así, al destacar

³ Madeleine Campbell y Ricarda Vidal lideran un grupo de investigación al que tengo el honor de pertenecer. Este grupo está formado por traductores y artistas que plantean una forma totalmente nueva de entender la traducción, a través del cuerpo y de los sentidos: <https://experientialtranslation.net/>

la dimensión corporal del proceso que es traducir, acercamos la traducción a la responsabilidad ética hacia los objetos que traducen y que nos traducen.

Para construir esta nueva manera de entender la traducción es muy útil darse cuenta de que la llamada antropología de los sentidos ya planteó hace unas décadas la idea de comunicar a través de los sentidos. La cultura occidental siempre ha privilegiado el sentido de la vista, pero este giro hacia los sentidos de la antropología se propone ser una crítica al verbocentrismo del giro lingüístico de Rorty en los años sesenta del siglo pasado y al giro pictórico de Mitchell en los ochenta, giros a los que siguieron el “corporeal turn” y el “material turn” (Howes, 2021; véase también Howes, 2022, 2023, 2024). Además, es importante destacar que el giro hacia los sentidos en antropología surge a la vez que el giro material, que se centra en los objetos, los materiales y sus entornos, y también al tiempo que el giro afectivo, que subvierte la tradicional hegemonía de la razón en occidente.

Por eso durante los últimos años hay un auge muy importante de teorías de la traducción que se están fijando en qué papel desempeñan las emociones y los afectos en la persona que traduce, como hemos visto más arriba con los ejemplos aportados por Sherry Simon, Moira Inghilleri, Tal Goldfajn o Médicos Sin Fronteras. Sin duda esto es importante en cualquier circunstancia, pero mucho más en aquellas traducciones que se insertan en situaciones emocionalmente complejas, que se relacionan además con la memoria y los recuerdos, como son las de los migrantes, refugiados, o situaciones traumáticas por motivos muy diversos. Las aportaciones de Sara Ahmed (2014), Bella Brodzki (2007), Federica Mazzara (2017), Kaisa Koskinen (2020), Loredana Polezzi (2020), Siobhan Brownlie (2021), Susannah Radstone y Rita Wilson (2021), Sharon Deane-Cox y Anneleen Spiessens (2022), Susan Petrilli y Meng Ji (2022, 2023), Claudia Jünke y Désirée Schyns (2024), Margarita Savchenkova (2024), entre otras muchas, han contribuido sobremanera a que la definición de traducción se amplíe, superando lo meramente lingüístico hasta demostrar que la comunicación se produce mediante muchos canales y se transmite significado tanto intelectual como emocional, y, si esto es así, la tarea de traducir tiene que adoptar formas nuevas. Parece que las nuevas líneas de investigación están en el buen camino:

Can smell be translated into sound? How are biochemical signs translated into electromagnetic signs? What kind of reality does translation studies construct if it never deals with the translation of touch, smell or taste? [...] translation is a complex process: Meaning is a complex trajectory to which a multitude of factors contributes (Marais, 2019, pp. 55, 56).

Y es que son muchas las situaciones en las que la comunicación se produce con el cuerpo, más allá de los dualismos típicamente cartesianos. Aparte de los ejemplos ya mencionados, cabe citar los *drip paintings* de Jackson Pollock, inspirados en los *Navajo sand paintings*, cuadros que transmiten su mensaje sensorial y emocional a través del tacto, como lo hacen los navajos:

Seeing Pollock lay his whole body on the canvas covering the ground is clearly reminiscent of the Navajo healers in direct contact with the materiality of their sand paintings. Similarly, Pollock's paintings are also multisensory. A closer look reveals their multiple layers, textures, colors, and sensations that appeal to all the senses. Pollock paints with his whole body, translating sensations and emotions through the “lower” sense of touch. Touch is here synonymous of bodily intimacy (Vidal Claramonte, 2025b, p. 110).



También se podrían citar muchas performances de Joseph Beuys como *The Chief* o *How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare*, donde de nuevo, como explico con detalle en otro lugar (Vidal Claramonte, 2024a), la comunicación se produce sin palabras, a través del tacto:

The tactile sense encompasses the entire body, inside and out. It emanates from the whole expanse of the skin, unlike the other senses, which are more circumscribed. We feel the surrounding world at every bodily surface and in every instant, even while we sleep. Sensory experience is first and foremost tactile experience, contact with others and objects, the feeling of our feet touching the ground. The world imparts its forms, volumes, textures, shapes, masses, and temperatures to us through its endless layers of skin (Le Breton, 2017, p. 95).

Asimismo, cabe citar, por ejemplo, a artistas como Cindy Sherman o Dina Goldstein, que, entre otras muchas, utilizan su propio cuerpo como un territorio que traduce luchas de poder contra el patriarcado (Vidal Claramonte, 2025a). Pero, en este caso, me gustaría centrarme en la última parte de este artículo en la obra de una artista chilena indígena que traduce con el cuerpo a través de la materialidad de los objetos.

4. Cecilia Vicuña, traductora sensorial

Cecilia Vicuña es una artista caleidoscópica, performer, poeta y traductora activista indígena, comprometida con las libertades y los derechos humanos, con el feminismo, con la ecología. Asumiendo la naturaleza extraordinaria de la totalidad de la obra de Vicuña, que ha recibido ya muchos premios y reconocimientos internacionales, me interesa destacar aquí que para transmitir sus mensajes utiliza todo el cuerpo tanto cuando escribe poesía como cuando crea arte: “My process is not thinking. My process is sensing, attending to that what is around us, in our field of love, I would say” (Guggenheim Museum, 2020). Su manera de comunicar es corporal, sensorial y sensual, por eso creo que es un ejemplo muy evidente de esas nuevas maneras de traducir a las que me estoy refiriendo en este artículo. Su poesía es táctil, como en *Saboramí* (1973), *PALABRARmas* (1984), *cloud-net* (1999), *Instan* (2002) o en *Word & Thread* (1996), un libro-escultura de solo diez páginas donde el “lector” siente, toca, porque las palabras están literalmente entrelazadas con hilos⁴. En su poesía, Vicuña juega con la materialidad de las palabras, que en muchas ocasiones se mueven por la página como si se tratara de seres vivos, objetos con vida propia con los que se está jugando, tocando, sintiendo. En *Spit Temple* (Vicuña, 2018, p. 41) relata lo que le contestó a su madre la primera vez que la encontró “escribiendo”: “No one had taught me how to write. ‘What are you doing, mijita?’ she asked. ‘I’m painting,’ I told her, and went on speaking to the signs”.

Vicuña también considera las palabras como objetos tangibles que, como tales traducen emociones. Para ella una traducción puede ser mejor que el original que permite al lector crear una tercera versión del texto, según afirma en una interesante entrevista con Amarante (2019, p. 234):

⁴ <https://www.ceciliavicuna.com/poetry>

Há traduções que são, muitas vezes, melhores do que original [...] A tradução, ao lado do original, permite que o leitor crie uma terceira versão do texto, que é uma combinação dessas duas. Tradução é uma grande arte, porque é a arte da interação, é uma arte profunda da imaginação humana.

La obra poética de Vicuña es, sin duda, ejemplo de traducción de emociones y de información a través de lo tangible. Como he señalado en otro lugar (Vidal Claramonte, 2025b) la artista traduce emociones y afectos con palabras que no son tanto elementos lingüísticos como objetos emocionales con vida propia que esperan ser tocados, imaginados, vistos, sentidos. Esto está en la línea de lo comentado anteriormente en relación con la materialidad de lo lingüístico. Un ejemplo es *Instan* un libro de poesía experimental, publicado en 2002, donde las palabras son objetos materiales en continuo movimiento, lo que obliga a quien tiene el libro en sus manos no solo a “leer” sino también a “sentir” esas palabras, tocándolas y observando cómo se transforman, crecen se pliegan y despliegan. *Instan*, señala Vicuña “e todo ele é a tradução de uma palavra, instan” (Amarante, 2019, p. 236). *Instan* no es un libro en el sentido occidental sino un objeto que se siente con todo el cuerpo. Se podrían mencionar otros muchos ejemplos, como *Spit Temple* (Vicuña, 2018),

Que traz transcrições das minhas performances orais; quem transcreve as minhas palavras também é uma tradutora [Rosa Alcalá]. Esse livro ganhou um prêmio de tradução, apesar de eu ter dito tudo em inglês. O que é a tradução? É a transcrição das minhas palavras, como foram ouvidas por quem as transcreveu. Então o prêmio foi para ela, pois ela olhou minhas palavras. Não há uma tradução do espanhol para o inglês, senão do inglês para o inglês (Amarante, 2019, p. 234).

Pero aquí me gustaría centrarme en sus traducciones tangibles y corporales a través de quipus. El quipu (que significa “nudo” en quechua) es un antiquísimo sistema quechua de codificación de información a base de nudos que se hacen en cuerdas de colores colgadas. Vicuña se sintió fascinada por la idea de que se pudiera transmitir información de una manera tan táctil y se preguntó por qué esa manera de comunicar se había borrado de nuestra cultura y de nuestra memoria. Como ella misma dice, los quipus son poemas espaciales, textiles, formas táctiles de recordar a través del cuerpo que los conquistadores decidieron destruir, aunque afortunadamente no lo consiguieron:

In the Andes people did not write, they wove meaning into textiles and knotted cords. Five thousand years ago they created the quipu (knot), a poem in space, a way to remember, involving the body and the cosmos at once. A tactile, spatial metaphor for the union of all. The quipu, and its virtual counterpart, the *ceque* (a system of sightlines connecting all communities in the Andes) were banished after the European Conquest. Quipus were burnt, but the quipu did not die, its symbolic dimension and vision of interconnectivity endures in Andean culture today⁵.

A Vicuña le interesa lo efímero, lo *precario*. Sus “basuritas” son obras de arte hechas con palitos, ramitas, palos de bambú, con lo que otros dejan atrás. Son una forma de resistencia a través de una cosmología de lo menor, de lo marginado por occidente:

⁵ <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/cecilia-vicu%C3%Bl/a/exhibition-guide>

The guiding metaphor behind her *precarios* series, begun in 1966, is that of correspondences, or reciprocity, as reflected in the textile, or weaving, process. Latin America's great gifts are often treated by Europeans and North Americans as "garbage," which inspired her *basuritas* (little rubbish) — fragile fragments of discarded beauty that she constructs and leaves in landscapes and cityscapes, evidence of humanity no matter how scorned. Looking at her larger concept, she wonders, "what is it to throw a little boat into the Hudson River, to touch and encounter the real *basuritas*, the condom with AIDS, the plastic plate that will live for a million years? Is it a recognition, a form of saying: this is us, our legacy, our remains, our shadow?" (letters to the author, 1988-89) [...] her anger is betrayed in their title, *Basuritas* ("little rubbish")—a reference to the prevailing view of Latino immigrants in the United States. Her reigning metaphor is weaving, or the "metaphysics of textiles," through which she can, like Spiderwoman, travel precariously on the threads that connect her two lives (Lippard, 1990, pp. 127, 128).

Lo precario traduce también mediante lo tangible, a través de lo material, pero esta vez son materiales que otros han desechado. Los *precarios*

Are visual poems, 'metaphors in space'. Scraps of stone, wood, feathers, shells, cloth, and other human-made detritus are gently juxtaposed. They are often shades of white, gray, black, and brown, bound perhaps with brightly-colored thread [...] Their 'fastening' is so loose [...] that the parts seem to have been blown together into a whole that might metamorphose into another at any moment (Lippard, 2020, p. 57).

Los nudos de sus quipus están también hechos de materiales precarios. Son para ella, además de una manera no occidental de transmitir información y conocimiento, un campo de energía en el que todo el mundo está conectado. Por eso considera que su público co-crea con ella, porque su arte es una invitación a compartir, a entrelazarse, a interrelacionar. Es un arte que sugiere que existen muchos puntos de vista, pero que aun así eso debe ser un acicate para trabajar en comunidad. Su arte es precario, como ella misma lo llama, porque es frágil, vulnerable y está hecho para desaparecer.

Todos sus quipus son traducciones sensoriales, corpóreas, de conocimiento indígena que en muchas ocasiones ha sido silenciado. La propia artista habla de sus quipus como una forma de traducción:

The first site-specific quipu that I did was in Santiago in the year 2000. It was in an exhibition called *Semiya*, and I called the quipu *Semiyo* because we were not yet ready to relate to the seed, just as we were not yet ready to relate to the quipu. So, I made this quipu almost invisible. It was a white gallery, white ceiling, white floors, white walls, and I put a very faint white thread, and from this white thread hung the tiniest of seeds, so people could come in the gallery and think: an empty room! That is what I wanted the quipu to inhabit, that in-between space between what is readable, what is not readable, what is translatable, what is translated, and what cannot yet be translated. And it is a translation in the sense of what the indigenous people of the Andes saw in the quipu. They saw a connectivity between their bodies and the world, the connectivity between their body and the cosmos, the illustration of the stars, all these things (Vicuña en Harvey, 2020, n.p.).



Es muy interesante destacar que, como ella misma señala en la cita anterior, en sus quipus la traducción de ese conocimiento marginal, *precario*, desdeñado, se hace a través de todos los sentidos, porque es:

A form of embodied language that takes shape like chords of music or visual poetry, with every colored string, knot, or shell a semantic unit to be read, heard, and interpreted in dialogue with the other knotted strings [...] the *quipu* for Vicuña is a powerful visual manifestation of the ways that fiber-based creations hold and organize information, as well as a tactile, spatial way to transmit memory” (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p. 111).

Un ejemplo es su *Chanccani Quipu* (2012), una obra muy especial:

Each *Chanccani Quipu* was produced entirely by hand. The poem was “printed” on unspun wool using stencils made by the poet who also knotted the threads. The quipu is tied or bound to a 16 in. bamboo spine from which it hangs to about 48 in. when installed. The work is housed in a hand-stenciled box (18 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 4 in.) made by Susan Mills. Silicon Gallery Fine Art Prints in Philadelphia printed the drawing and the pamphlet in full-color (Vicuña, 2012)⁶.

Vicuña describe el poema como “a prayer for the rebirth of a way of writing with breath, a way of perceiving the body and the cosmos as a whole engaged in a continuous reciprocal exchange”. *Chanccani Quipu* es un “libro” publicado por la editorial Granary Books (Vicuña, 2012) que juega con la materialidad, con lo tangible. Es un texto bilingüe, un libro/escultura que traduce a través de los materiales que utiliza —la lana, el bambú, los nudos— el choque entre dos culturas —el universo oral andino y el mundo occidental de la escritura. Acompañando a *Chanccani Quipu* se incluye un *Instruction Manual & Orientation to Various Meanings*, donde Vicuña hace comentarios muy interesantes, como los siguientes:

In *Chanccani Quipu* breath metaphorically imprints the unspun wool floating as a shadow or unstable mark on the outer hairs of a river of fleece.

The floating words take the place of knots, and the fleece takes the place of the twisted threads.

Chanccani Quipu may be a command or a plea (depending on the tone of voice).

It is a prayer for the rebirth of a way of writing with breath, a way of perceiving the body and the cosmos as a whole engaged in a continuous reciprocal exchange.

In Quechua the writer/reader of the quipu was called: quipucamayoc (khipukamayuc), literally: ‘the one that animates, gives life to the knot’ (Vicuña, 2012).

Otra obra fascinante es su *Brain Forest Quipu*, una instalación que se pudo sentir, ver, tocar, oír, en el Turbine Halle de la Tate Modern en 2022:

⁶ https://www.granarybooks.com/pages/books/GB_152/cecilia-vicuna/chanccani-quipu?soldItem=true

27 metres of pale, ghostly, quipu sculptures hang from the ceiling at opposite ends of the Turbine Hall [...] Woven together from different materials including found objects, unspun wool, plant fibres, rope and cardboard, the sculptures are combined with music and voice that emerge at moments as you move through the space. This multi-media installation is an act of mourning for the destruction of the forests, the subsequent impact of climate change, and the violence against Indigenous people, but also an opportunity to create a space for new voices and forms of knowledge to be heard and understood, as we take responsibility for our part in the destruction (Tate Modern, n.d.).

Brain Forest Quipu es, efectivamente, un quipu que traduce la violencia contra los silenciados y reescribe la destrucción de la naturaleza a través de todos los sentidos: su “Dead Forest Quipu”, dos esculturas esqueléticas colocadas en los extremos del Turbine Hall, traduce a través de su forma y color blanquecino, como el de los huesos, la destrucción de los ecosistemas, y también con su materialidad, ya está hecho de materiales orgánicos recogidos de las orillas del río Támesis “by women from local Latin American communities, the work extends her practice of assembling found, imperfect, and modest materials that Vicuña calls *precarious* (precarious)” (Tate Modern, n.d.). Las esculturas que conforman el “Dead Forest Quipu” están acompañadas por otro quipu, esta vez musical. El “Sound Quipu” crea una traducción del mismo contenido anterior, pero esta vez a través de músicas indígenas procedentes de diversas regiones, piezas de Ricardo Gallo y otros artistas y grabaciones de sonidos procedentes directamente de la naturaleza. Hay, además, un “Digital Quipu” que ofrece vídeos de activistas indígenas y personas que en todo el mundo defienden la naturaleza, traduciendo así, esta vez con plataformas digitales, la lucha por proteger los entornos y tradiciones ancestrales, porque, como dice Cecilia Vicuña, “the Earth is a brain forest, and the quipu embraces all its interconnections” (Tate Modern, n.d.).

5. Para no concluir

Lo que cabe deducir de todo lo dicho anteriormente es que los Estudios de Traducción han evolucionado mucho y están demostrando saber adaptarse a las nuevas situaciones comunicativas que se están produciendo en el siglo XXI, donde los límites entre las disciplinas se disuelven y los tradicionales binarismos que llevaban a una traducción equivalente han quedado atrás, como demuestran muchas publicaciones actuales. Por ejemplo, en el prefacio a la primera edición de su *Encyclopedia*, Mona Baker señalaba lo siguiente:

One of the most fascinating things about exploring the history of translation is that it reveals how narrow and restrictive we have been in defining our object of study, even with the most flexible of definitions. When we read about how African interpreters regularly translated African drum language into actual words, for instance, we begin to realize that the current literature on translation has hardly started to scratch the surface of this multifaceted and all-pervasive phenomenon (Baker en Saldanha & Baker, 2020, pp. xix–xx).

En cambio, en el prólogo a la tercera edición, que al contrario de las dos ediciones previas no tiene ya ninguna entrada para el concepto de equivalencia, las editoras destacan la importancia de reflejar en ese volumen “the many exciting developments that continue to take shape, sometimes in unanticipated directions, even as we write” (Saldanha & Baker, 2020, p. xxiv).



De ahí que sea tan importante la publicación de este número especial de *Cadernos de Tradução*, desde el que los editores nos animan a reflexionar sobre qué es traducir en el siglo XXI:

There is much discussion and little agreement within translation studies these days about its central concept. The ground is shifting, and considerably so. These tectonic shifts are causing tensions, ruptures and general upheaval as some territories recede and others emerge and become elevated. The meta-translational movements are not always clearly or immediately visible but can often be sensed or experienced. To many of us researching, teaching, studying, practicing, and otherwise dealing with translation, something feels different. Translation is not quite what it used to be (Blumczynski, 2023, p. 1).

Traducir implica arriesgarse a acercarse a versiones de realidades provisionales, coyunturales, interesantes e interesadas, que se van contextualizando, rectificando y traduciendo continuamente con trayectos hermenéuticos siempre en movimiento. Como dice Vicente Rafael, traducir es una experiencia transformadora que nos acerca a los demás:

How can we speak of translation as a kind of experience? [...] To what extent is translation, like experience itself, transformative of life? [...] In translating, one experiences the original in motion, already moving away and towards something else [...] To translate is to become other than what one was. In doing so, the experience of translation has the potential of linking individual acts to collective practices, for better or for worse (Rafael, 2023, p. 19).

Traducimos con todo el cuerpo y sin limitarnos a un solo sistema semiótico, el de las palabras. Al abrirnos a comunicar con todos los sentidos, descubrimos “a myriad of possibilities to carry form and sense from one culture into another beyond the limitations of words. At the same time, such processes impact on the source artefact enriching it with new layers of understanding” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. xxvi). Quien traduce se zambulle así en el texto de otro modo: “the full immersion of the translator in the text, with eyes, ears, skin, nose, limbs and heart” (Campbell & Vidal, 2019, p. 3). La traducción se adhiere así al cuerpo, se crea con el cuerpo:

We can think of encountering translation as language that adheres to the body. That is, it makes it possible to govern the body in relation to what constitutes the self in relation to others. Who am I? What am I? Who are these people I see? And how do they see me? How do they see me seeing them? Translation is inseparable from the formation of the realm of the imaginary. What must I do to translate, make legible my body—to transfer it socially, to transport it across physical and cultural borders, to move it safely across the sea of humanity? What language(s) must I use, what modes of address must I craft in order to reach the other [...] How does translation, in other words, allow me to survive? And what are the risks of failing to translate when words fail to form and render us illegible in a given social space? (Rafael, 2023, pp. 19–20).

Se traduce a través de un repertorio formado por “different semiotic orders” (Baynham & Lee, 2019, p. 18), en nuevos espacios que incluyen “the visual, the gestural, and what can be communicated with the body or, to be more precise, by the body” (Baynham & Lee, 2019, p. 97). Traducir significa acceder a significados que nunca resultan ser monocromáticos ni lineales. Traducir es estar y ser en el mundo:



If translation is a way of understanding the world, it is because translation is contingent upon the ever-shifting contours of that world, always contemporary in terms of the immediacy of connection and multi-layered complexity that mark what we might think of as its being in the world. That 'way of understanding', responsive and world picturing, sits at the intersections of interpretation and representation, the dual loci of the dialogical translational method. Translation and the world exist in a dynamic interaction that not always, but ideally, ignites hermeneutic engagement and prompts reflexivity; however, the core condition of translation's being in the world, its contemporaneity, means that it must seek to ensure that these energies do not turn in on themselves, become a closed conversation (Bassnett & Johnston, 2025, p. 3).

Traducir es darse cuenta de que todo significa, de que los gestos, los sonidos, los olores, las texturas, las emociones, se tienen que traducir porque en muchas ocasiones comunican mucho más que las palabras. Así entendida, la actividad de traducir lo es todo.

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