Abstract:

In this article, the methodological aspects of a reception study on audio description (AD) are presented. Our hypothesis is that interpretative audio descriptions offer a better experience to AD users and we have tested it with visually impaired participants in Catalonia. We have compared three different audio description styles: a denotative, a cinematic and a narrative AD style. Firstly, we present our experimental material: the selected film, Nuit Blanche (Arev Manoukian, 2009), and a threefold narrative, cinematic and AD-oriented analysis to inform audio description creation. Then we detail the framework based on functionalist translation theory in which we defined our three AD styles. After that, we describe and discuss our experimental design: participants selection, questionnaires designed to get insights into the emotional and cognitive film reception, focus group interviews. The study is still ongoing but we can end the article with preliminary findings, which indicate that comprehension enjoyment and emotion are closely linked in the film experience and can be affected by the audio description.

Keywords

Audio description, accessibility, subjectivity, film experience, user research.
1. Introduction

Empirical research in audio description (AD) has been flourishing over the last decade. The aim is to improve professional practice and training on AD but research outcomes sometimes challenge existing AD standards and guidelines. One controversial issue is how objectivity and subjectivity are handled in European AD guidelines such as the British Independent Television Commission Guidelines (Ofcom, 2000), the Spanish Audio Description Standard AENOR, 2005) or the French Audio Description Charter (Morisset & Gonnant, 2008), to cite only a few.

1.1 Objectivity, subjectivity and interpretation in audio description

Mazur and Chmiel (2012) give an overview of the complexity of the debate and remind that “the issue of interpretation in AD is most controversial in cases where the difference between objective and subjective is less obvious and where objective description is impossible due to linguistic or time constraints” (ibid.: 174). Although these authors refer especially to facial expression and evaluative vocabulary, their remark applies to cinematic and film language as well. As film viewers, we are constantly decoding a complex message composed in “a colourful language that blends different types of signifiers (images, music, noises, words, and texts) and different types of signs (icons, index and symbols)” (Casetti & Di Chio, 1991: 73, our translation). It seems hard to render the meaning of such a multi-layered language into words without interpreting cinematic language or mentioning film techniques. Nevertheless, according to Perego, European AD guidelines are reluctant to have cinematic techniques included in audio description (Perego, 2014: 89-90). The same guidelines also reject interpretative descriptions, to protect AD users from patronizing retelling and judgmental depiction (Mazur & Chmiel, 2012: 173). The French Charter, for example, though it affirms that audio description is “a full-fledged work of creation” (Morisset & Gonnant, 2008: 2, our translation), warns describers that they should “not interpret images but describe them” (ibid.), i.e. they should produce objective descriptions. However, several case studies show that the interpretation of film language into words in audio description may be necessary to render the full meaning of a scene. Orero (2012) points out that audio describers should ‘read’ a film and interpret its meaning to include it in their audio descriptions, Mälzer-Semlinger (2012) studies ways to include symbolic elements of films in AD and Perego (2014) suggests different strategies for the translation of cinematic language into words in audio descrip-

1 We distinguish between ‘cinematic language’ as the expression through devices that are proper to the cinema (camera movement and editing techniques) and ‘film language’, which encompasses all devices used to construct meaning in film including those that exist in other art forms (e.g. mise-en-scène, music, etc.).
Such observations led to new approaches and recent guidelines, such as the ADLAB Audio Description Guidelines (Remael et al., 2014), look at the objectivity/subjectivity divide from a strategic point of view and consider that finding a balance between a personal interpretation and personal phrasing (subjectivity) and more text-based interpretation and phrasing (objectivity) that leaves room for further interpretation by the blind and visually impaired users is part of mastering the AD decision-making process and writing skills. (Remael et al., 2014: 9)

Similarly, in her Introduction to Audio Description, Fryer (2016) says that “the pursuit of objectivity in AD would appear to be doomed” (Fryer, 2016: 172) but she still lists the objectivity/subjectivity divide under the label “Contentious issues and future directions in audio description”, encouraging user research to dig into the matter (ibid.: 164-166, 170-172).

1.2 Reception research on subjectivity in AD

Only a few reception studies have dealt with subjectivity so far. Ramos Caro (2016) studied the emotional reception of AD with neutral vs. subjective descriptions, concentrating on fear, sadness and disgust. She found that subjective AD conveyed fear and sadness more efficiently and that it found good acceptance among users. Wilken and Kruger (2016) studied the effect of mise-en-shot elements on a sighted audience and compared their reaction to that of a blind audience hearing an AD where mise-en-shot elements were mostly omitted. Their findings suggest a correlation between mise-en-shot elements and character identification which is worth further investigation. Finally, Walczak and Fryer (2017a) have studied the impact of creative audio description on presence. They defined creative AD as an AD style that combines the inclusion of cinematic terminology, deviances from standard language and subjective description to produce a tailor-made AD that does justice to the cinematography and content of a specific film. They found that the creative AD reached better marks on the presence scale and was preferred by most of the study participants (Walczak and Fryer, 2017a: 13-14).

All in all, the findings of these studies point at the need to further develop alternatives to conservative audio descriptions in order to account for all dimensions of the filmic expression and enhance user experience.

In our view, describers should engage in analysing and interpreting the film’s language and its message before writing their AD script, to transfer the filmmaker’s style and vision into the audio description. We expect such subjective (or interpretative) audio descriptions to offer a better film experience to the visually impaired audience and our reception study aims at testing this hypothesis in the

Presence is defined as “the illusion of being located somewhere other than the physical environment” (Walczak and Fryer, 2017b: 3).
Catalan context. We take a new approach by comparing three different AD styles (one is conventional and two are interpretative) and introducing focus group interviews. In this article, we will first present our experimental material: the selected film and our analysis methodology, followed by our functional framework for the definition of the tested AD styles and the creation of the audio descriptions. After that, there will be a detailed section on our experimental design with questionnaires and interviews. The study is still ongoing at redaction time but, before concluding, we will present some preliminary findings.

2. Experimental material

To carry out a reception study to test our hypothesis, we needed a film with a creative direction where the use of cinematic language was prominent enough to lend itself to being described in different styles. We also needed to develop a solid framework to create three audio descriptions of the same film without varying too many parameters at a time.

2.1 Short film selection and analysis

We chose Nuit Blanche, a short film by Arev Manoukian (2009). This choice was motivated both by the opportunity to work with a complete filmic unit and with an extreme form of use of cinematic language, as the short does not have any dialogues supporting the story. The film’s visual style is anchored in contemporary audiovisual culture and we expect our results to be extrapolatable to other contexts of audio description of cinematic language. Nuit Blanche, a 4'41 minutes film in black and white, presents a film noir atmosphere and protagonists that remind of Bogart and Bergman in Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942), and blends those with state-of-the-art visual effects. The result is a surrealistic fantasy filmed with hyperreal imagery, crescendo lyrical music and impressive visual effects of glittering, floating glass shatter, at a slowed down pace that suspends time. In an interview to Wired (2010), Manoukian commented that

The idea for Nuit Blanche came from the notion of having a special moment with a total stranger [...]. It lasts for a split second, then things get awkward, so we turn away. I wanted to take that moment of attraction and stretch it in a hyperreal fantasy where things unfold like slow-moving photographs. (Manoukian, 2010)

3 Nuit Blanche is available on YouTube (https://goo.gl/O7E67V) and Vimeo (https://goo.gl/wWqG5G).
4 I am indebted to Lucila Christen for this remark.
Illustration 1 (below) provides a visual summary of Nuit Blanche.

Frame 01. Title appears on black and white view of a city.
Frame 02. The frame goes down the face of a building.
Frame 03. A man steps on the sidewalk.
Frame 04. A woman sits in a restaurant.
Frame 05. He looks at her.
Frame 06. She looks at him.
Frame 07. He walks in a puddle crossing the street. (slow)
Frame 08. She drops her glass of wine. (slow)

5 We want to express our thanks to Stellar Scene Pictures and Arev Manoukian for authorizing the reproduction of these images in this article.
Before writing the AD scripts, we performed a threefold analysis of the short film to make sure that all relevant narrative and cinematic aspects would be taken into account in the audio descriptions. First, we carried out a narrative analysis following Branigan’s schema (Branigan, 1992), which informs about the key elements of the story that need to be reflected in any audio description (see Table 1 below).
Audio Description Style and the Film Experience of Blind Spectators

Table 1. Narrative analysis of Nuit Blanche

Secondly, we proceeded to a cinematic analysis inspired by Taylor’s phasal analysis (Taylor 2014). The aim was to identify the audiovisual information delivered in the different modes (verbal and non-verbal) and channels (audio and visual), and group them into phases, which are themselves divided into fragments. In Nuit Blanche, there are two phases (‘reality’ and ‘vision’) and eight fragments, plus the opening and end titles. This cinematic analysis allows to complement the narrative analysis with elements that are specific to the medium and hence points out the cinematic aspects that may be handled differently in our three AD versions. Table 2 (below) represents the cinematic analysis for the ‘climax and resolution’ of Nuit Blanche.

Table 2. Cinematic analysis of the ‘climax and resolution’ of Nuit Blanche.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fragment number and name</th>
<th>Time Code Record</th>
<th>Nonverbal visual elements</th>
<th>Nonverbal audio elements</th>
<th>Transition to fragment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2d Coming closer</td>
<td>00:03:10 – 00:03:24</td>
<td>(Still in slow motion) They close their eyes and their faces get nearer as if they were about to kiss.</td>
<td>Lyrical orchestral music reaches climax</td>
<td>(Continuity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d Return to reality</td>
<td>00:03:25 – 00:03:37</td>
<td>Return to normal speed. She sits at the café; her glass of wine is intact. He stands on the other side of the street in front of the corporate building. Their faces are expressive.</td>
<td>No music Sounds of the street (cars pass by)</td>
<td>Editing technique: dissolve Music cut: lyrical orchestral music stops, sounds of the street resume</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, we performed an AD-oriented analysis based on Maszerowska et al.’s matrix proposal (2013: 5, 7-11). These authors worked from a bottom-up perspective and identified critical categories of elements that could demand specific attention from the describer. They developed a matrix with 12 categories: text on screen, music and sounds, intertextual relations/cultural references, secondary elements/content prioritisation issues, gestures and facial expressions, cinema tools and techniques, spatio-temporal characteristics, characters, AD wording, language and style (Maszerowska et al., 2013: 7-11). We added the category ‘internal references’. The matrix complements the cinematic analysis by focusing only on items that are of critical importance or may represent a difficulty for AD drafting. In Table 3 (below) the AD-oriented analysis of the climax and resolution of *Nuit Blanche* is represented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music and sounds</th>
<th>Cinema techniques</th>
<th>Internal references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sounds of the street</td>
<td>Cinematic emphasis on the kiss situation Dissolution Slow motion/normal speed</td>
<td>Same character placement as in the beginning Broken wine glass is sound again Man wears hat and briefcase again</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. AD-oriented analyses of the ‘climax and resolution’ of *Nuit Blanche*.

In section 3.3, we will explain how the information delivered by this multi-layered analysis is transferred into the AD. Before that, we will see how functionalist translation theory helped us set up a framework for the creation of three audio descriptions of the same film in different styles.

2.2. **Functionalism and audio description style**

To test interpretative audio description versions against a more conventional, denotative audio description, we drew on a functionalist framework inspired by Nord (2006) and by the ADLAB project. The key element of a functional framework is a *translation brief* – or *AD brief* in our case. In Nord’s theory, the “client who needs a translation usually defines the translation purpose in the translation brief”. If the commissioner (e.g. a TV station) does not provide their own set of guidelines, audio describers can find orientation in national audiovisual accessibility guidelines. In the Catalan context, it is the Spanish audio description

[6] ADLAB was a European project conducted from 2011 to 2014 that aimed at analysing and improving AD practices across Europe (http://www.adlabproject.eu/home/). The ADLAB *Audiodescription Guidelines* (Remael et al., 2014) adopt a strategical approach inspired by functionalist principles (Vercauteren, 2015).
standard (AENOR, 2005) that prevails and it indicates that AD should allow visually impaired spectators to “perceive the message as a harmonious work which is as similar as possible to that which is perceived by the sighted” (AENOR, 2005: 4, translation by Utray et al., 2009: 249). In our opinion, this statement is a perfect primary AD brief as it considers the accessibility to an experience – and not only to information – when it mentions the way the message should be perceived. According to Nord’s functionalist theory, “the purpose of the target text [the audio described film] determines the choice of method and strategy in the translation [audio description] process” and “the methods and strategies to choose from are part and parcel of the translator’s [audio describer’s] professional competence” (Nord, 2006: 30). A translation (or audio description) will be deemed functional if it achieves the intended purpose (ibid.: 31). One possible ‘method’ or macro-level strategy to fulfil this goal is to follow the standard. The operative strategy will then be to describe objectively what is shown on screen and the corresponding operative AD brief will be to write a denotative AD. Another possible macro-level strategy is to take into account the findings of recent research in Audio Description and Film Studies and stray away from conventional AD guidelines to include the meaning and aesthetics of cinematic language in the audio description. This opens the possibility of several operative strategies. One possibility is to engage in a path similar to Fryer and Freeman’s (2013) and describe cinematic techniques in addition to interpreting the meaning of cinematic language into words. In this case, the operative AD brief will be to write a cinematic AD. Another possible operative strategy is to follow Kruger’s audio narration proposal (Kruger, 2010) and to interpret cinematic and film language to re-narrate the story for the visually impaired audience, so that the operative AD brief will be a narrative AD. The operative strategy chosen by the audio describer brings forth the operative AD brief – or AD style, which will determine the content selection strategies, AD strategies and semantic and textual strategies he or she will use to craft the AD. So, applying a functionalist approach to AD creation and concentrating, for this research, on the interpretation of cinematic and film language, we can define three operative AD briefs – or AD styles:

- **Denotative AD style**: Conventional audio description that describes what is shown on screen at a denotative level.
- **Cinematic AD style**: Audio description that offers a balance between interpretation of film language, description of cinematic techniques and denotative description.
- **Narrative AD style**: Audio description that concentrates on interpreting film language and integrating the visual information into a coherent narration.

Our functionalist framework is summarized in Illustration 2 (below).
2.3 One film, three audio descriptions

Within this functional framework, it is possible to craft three viable audio descriptions of the film. Nevertheless, the different versions could differ from one another so widely that, in a reception study, there would be a range of alternative causes to the different experiences of participants. To avoid this situation, and make sure that the degree of inclusion and interpretation of film language is the only parameter at stake, we asked a professional describer to create a first audio described version of the short film. She drafted a rather denotative AD that included several cinematic terms. We asked her to modify this first draft to adapt it to the three AD briefs, so that modifications were made at key moments of the short film, but the rest of the description was identical. The timing and length of the description were comparable too. The cinematic version, being a mix of describing and interpreting cinematic language was somewhat longer\(^7\), but the absence of dialogues allowed for some flexibility. This notwithstanding, in all three versions, attention was paid to leave enough space for AD users to enjoy the film’s music. Besides, the describer kept her voice and tone similar in all versions, voicing in a neutral intonation as recommended by the Spanish AD standard (AENOR, 2005: 9)\(^8\).

To exemplify in this article the three AD styles defined section 3.2, we chose the ‘climax and resolution’ or *dénouement* of *Nuit Blanche* (analysed in section 3.1) because it involves subjectivity and interpretation at different levels. The key aspect of the *dénouement* is the return to reality: accompanied by a lyrical orchestral

\(^7\) The denotative AD has 388 words (100%); the cinematic AD has 427 words (110%) and the narrative AD has 400 words (103%) in Catalan.

\(^8\) The three audio description versions were drafted and voiced in Catalan by Carme Guillamon.
music, the characters have survived surrealistic events of window breaking and car crashing and they meet in the middle of the street. Amid of sparkling glass pieces that float around them, the music reaches its climax as they are about to kiss, when this vibrant shot dissolves into one of the woman sitting at the restaurant, smiling to the man, her glass of wine on the table. The next shot is one of the man standing on the other side of the street, looking at her. As the visual transition to the character’s original placing happens, the music stops, the sounds of the street can be heard again and a car passes by. The transition from one phase (‘fantasy’) to the other (‘reality’) is announced by different filmic devices. The first one, purely cinematic, is the switching from slow motion to normal speed. A second cinematic technique is the editing effect that juxtaposes two shots of different phases by dissolving one image into the other. Parallel to this cinematic cut, there is a music cut. Finally, the fourth way of indicating a return to the initial phase lies in the mise-en-scène: the characters have returned to their original position and have items back that were broken (the glass) or lost (the hat and briefcase) in the fantasy. All these hints allow sighted viewers to interpret that the phase switch is a return to reality. It is important that the audio description gives the visually impaired audience enough cues to draw the same conclusion. Note that the symbolic meaning of this return to reality (the ‘epilogue’) may be interpreted differently by each spectator. Although the filmmaker has a vision (it was a fleeting moment of attraction between two strangers, Wired 2010, see above), viewers are free to have their personal interpretation of the short film and the AD should guarantee the visually impaired audience the same liberty. The three audio descriptions of the dénouement and their translation into English are reproduced in Table 4 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denotative AD style</th>
<th>Cinematic AD style</th>
<th>Narrative AD style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quan són a un pam l’uns de l’altre,</td>
<td>Quan són a un pam l’uns de l’altre, es miren els llavis i tanquen els ulls, a punt per rebre el petó. L’enquadrament se centra en els llavis, quasi a tocar.</td>
<td>Durant per davant, es miren els llavis i tanquen els ulls, a punt per rebre el petó. De cap, tot torna a la realitat: el vent blava, i la dona seu al Cafè de Flore, somrient. L’home, amb barret i maleït, resta dret a l’altra vorera. Es miren als ulls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tancuen els ulls i acosten els llavis.</td>
<td>Els depassa, i torna a la realitat, a velocitat normal: la dona seu al Cafè de Flore i somriu mirant cap a l’home, que resta dret a l’altra vorera. Es miren als ulls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A velocitat normal. La dona seu al Cafè de Flore, i somriu mirant cap a l’home, que resta dret a l’altra vorera, amb barret i maleït, mirant-se-la.</td>
<td>When they are a few inches from each other, they close their eyes and bring their lips closer. At normal speed. The woman sits at the Café de Flore and smiles, looking at the man, who stands on the other side of the street with his hat on his head and his briefcase in the hand, looking at her.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When they are a few inches from each other, they close their eyes and bring their lips closer. The frame focuses on their lips, which nearly touch. It passes beyond them and returns to reality, at normal speed. The woman sits at the Café de Flore and smiles, looking at the man, who stands on the other side of the street. They look into each other’s eyes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Audio description of the denouement of Nuit Blanche in denotative, cinematic and narrative style.
In the *denotative AD*, the describer does not interpret the return to reality. She mentions the “normal speed”, as the switch from normal speed to slow motion and vice versa is a common cinematic technique that is usually named in conventional audio descriptions. She also describes the position of the characters (‘sits at the Café’ / ‘stands on the other side of the street’), which is an internal reference to the beginning of the short film. Moreover, she mentions that the man wears his hat and carries his briefcase, two elements that he had lost in the depicted events and that are now also back in place. This denotative description gives enough cues for the visually impaired audience to understand the return to reality although it does not render the full cinematic features of the moment.

In the *cinematic AD*, the describer both describes the editing technique and interprets the cinematic return to reality when she says that “the frame focuses on their lips” and then “passes beyond them” to “return to reality”. Here too, the return to normal speed is stated. Furthermore, she also mentions the internal reference to character placing but the hat and briefcase must be left out for time reasons – though as the return to reality is clearly mentioned, they become unessential cues. Besides, the describer deals with the way characters look at each other in a different manner. In the denotative AD, she states separately that the woman is looking at the man and vice versa, because the shot reverse shot technique is not direct in this scene; the camera lingers on the woman, then on the man. Nevertheless, the cinematic version allows itself to be more interpretative by saying that “they are looking into each other’s eyes”, because the characters have just shared an intense moment and their last look for one another is important to the symbolism of the film.

Finally, in the *narrative AD*, the cinematic techniques as such remain secondary but their effect is interpreted into words: “Suddenly, everything goes back to reality”. In addition to character placing and the hat and briefcase, the describer mentions that “the wind blows”, thus using another internal reference, one that appeals to senses other than vision and reminds of the atmosphere of the beginning of the short film. In this version too, she insists on the fact that “they look into each other’s eyes”. All in all, she accounts for the events on-screen in a more literary fashion to render the meaning and feeling of the moment as loyally as possible. As a matter of fact, despite being subjective, and thus deviating from current standards, our two interpretative audio descriptions can be deemed ethical as they do not serve the purpose of expressing personal views or of patroniz-

---

9 Nord coined the term loyalty to counter the controversy around the faithfulness or fidelity of functional translations. “Loyalty always refers to the attitude or behaviour of the translator during the process of translation. [...] [It] is an interpersonal category affecting the relationship between people” (Nord, 2006: 40). The translator is “acting loyally with regard to the communication partners [...] and with regard to one’s own ethical principles” (ibid.). In our case, a loyal audio describer produces an AD that respects the primary and operative AD briefs, the filmmaker and the visually impaired target audience.

---
ing end users but that of providing them with an experience as close as possible to that offered by the original short film.

All three descriptions have a similar structure and some elements that are expressed in a similar manner but they also have targeted differences. These differences should affect the film experience of blind and partially sighted viewers in different ways, which our reception study means to explore.

3. Experimental Methodology

In this section, we will detail the experimental procedure which we have been following to conduct the reception study. The study has the ethical approval of the Ethical Committee of the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia.

3.1. Design and Sampling

In audio description research, reception studies usually draw on methods from psychology (e.g. Fryer and Freeman, 2013; Fresno et al., 2014; Ramos Caro, 2016; Walczak and Fryer, 2017a) or social research (e.g. Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013; Fernández-Torné & Matamala, 2015) and the latter is also the case of our project. So far, we have contacted participants through the Department of Culture and Sport of ONCE Catalunya (the Catalan delegation of the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind). Contact was made with five local ONCE offices in Catalonia: Girona, Vic, Manresa, Reus and Lleida. We have worked with 39 participants so far: 25 men and 14 women, 8 were born blind, 13 reported to have lost sight more than 5 years ago and 2 usually rely on their residual vision to watch TV. 13 participants have heard the denotative AD and participated in the focus group interview although only 9 of them have also answered the questionnaire; 11 have heard the cinematic AD but only 10 participated in the study; 15 have heard the narrative AD and participated in the study. Groups were not randomized: they were set up by the directors of the local offices according to participants’ availability to come for a focus group interview, which was held in the localities of the ONCE office. In this context, access to the study population was too limited to design an experiment with random selection, so we opted for a quasi-experimental design with a relative comparison between nonequivalent groups (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006: 10)

10 We want to express our heartiest thanks to Josep Pitarch, Head of Culture and Sport at ONCE Catalunya, to the directors of the local ONCE offices and to the participants of the study for their time and effort.

11 For time reasons, participants 8, 9, 10 and 11 answered the sociodemographic questions but proceeded to the discussion directly after hearing the audio description.

12 Participant 20 reported to have a strong hearing problem and retired from the study at an early stage.
where each group listens to one AD version. The term nonequivalent refers to the absence of randomness in participants selection, yet the groups share a comparable heterogeneity (see section 4.2 below). In addition to the comparison between experimental groups hearing different AD versions, we gathered reference data with a control group of 100 sighted people who had watched the short film without AD and answered an online survey.

3.2 Data Gathering

Though not replicating their experiments, we followed other researchers in the field (e.g. Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013; Fresno et al., 2014; Fernández-Torné & Matamala, 2015; Ramos Caro, 2016; Walczak & Fryer, 2017a, 2017b) and adopted a dual approach with questionnaires and interviews, to complement quantitative information with qualitative insights. Individual questionnaires were mainly composed of Likert scale and multiple-choice questions, while interviews were held in a group setting. Each experimental group was divided into focus groups of 2 to 4 participants who took part in an experimental session lasting between one hour and one hour and a half. Before starting, participants were explained the aims of the study and informed consent forms were signed. At the beginning of the session, each participant was given a small bottle of water and, in an informal atmosphere, we started with the sociodemographic questions so that all participants could get acquainted with each other. After that, we proceeded to hearing one of the AD versions and to answering the questionnaire. To prevent an altering of the study results by a contamination effect in the group, participants answered questionnaire items individually with a one-rod abacus with 6 beads that was designed and made for this purpose. Discussion took place after each section of the questionnaire, after open-ended questions and at the end of the session.

3.2.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire was designed to get insights into AD users’ film experience. Spectatorial activity entails the processing of filmic input at all semiotic levels, using the information of all modes and channels involved, decoding and reordering it according to one’s knowledge and experience – but also one’s feelings and emotions (Schmid, 2014: 22). As Plantiga points out, “the filmmaker can affect the spectator through all of the various parameters of film style, from shot composition, to movement, to editing, to colour, to sound and music” (Plantiga, 2010: 94). Carroll and Plantiga argue that filmmakers do not only use these devices to construct meaning but also to trigger emotions in viewers (Carroll, 2008; Plantiga

13 Attached as Appendix 1.
and that they can “elicit – across diversified audiences – roughly the same or converging general emotional responses to the fictions on screen” (Carroll, 2008: 156). Therefore, in the questionnaire, we approached film experience both from an emotional and from a cognitive point of view, asking participants about how they interpreted the short film and how it made them feel. The questionnaire had five sections: sociodemographic data, emotional reception, cognitive reception, evaluation of the film experience and evaluation of the audio description.

The first section included sociodemographic questions on gender, age, education and profession as well as questions about the degree and origin of blindness. The answers to these questions allow us to ensure that the heterogeneity of the blind population is represented in our experimental groups and that a comparable sample of participants has been assigned each AD version (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006: 216; Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013: 157).

The second section was devoted to the emotional reception of the short film. Participants first had to evaluate, on a 6-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “a lot”, how intensely they had felt a range of emotions at four key moments of the short film. Several emotions were grouped under one label: the labelling of emotion categories was informed by works from the field of Emotional Theory by Ekman (1977), Demos (1995), Plutchik (2001) and Goleman (2005). For example, ‘interest’ was the label for ‘interest, curiosity and expectation’. Following the same model, participants were asked how they felt after watching the short film. Then, there was a multiple-choice question on which elements of the audio described short film had transmitted emotions and, finally, they were asked if emotions had arisen rather because of the film itself or because of their personal experience (single choice question).

The third section concerned the interpretation of the short film. We tested three kinds of elements: spatio-temporal setting, key aspects of the narration and overall interpretation. We asked participants about the estimated place and time to check if the details provided in the AD helped situate the action (open ended question). We asked if they had noticed the attraction between the characters, if they had noticed that the action got out of reality and when (open ended question), as well as which effect(s) they thought the slow motion had (multiple choice). Finally, participants had to state what the aims of the short film were according to them (multiple choice).

Finally, in the fourth and fifth sections, we asked for an evaluation of the film experience and of the audio description on a six-point Likert scale with four items. Participants had to rate from “not at all” to “very much” how interesting, aesthetic, emotional and enjoyable their film experience had been. The items ‘interesting’ and ‘enjoyable’ could apply to any film whereas ‘aesthetic’ and ‘emotional’ were chosen for Nuit Blanche specifically. Also on a six-point Likert scale with four items, participants had to rate if the AD had given them access to the necessary elements to understand the film, to its aesthetic and stylistic aspects, to its emotional aspects and to an enjoyable experience. Finally, participants had
to rate the sound-mix and to give an overall rating of the AD, both on a 6-point scale from “insufficient” to “excellent”.

3.2.2 Focus group interviews

At the end of each questionnaire section, and after the open-ended questions, there was an open discussion with a “sharing and comparing” approach (Morgan, 2012). In this setting, there is no structured interview, the information is gathered through the discussion that arises between participants, building on their thoughts and comments on the film and on their experience. The researcher remains in a secondary position, reorienting the discussion when necessary, encouraging participants to develop their thoughts, making sure that everyone has their say if they want to – and respecting their silence if they do not seem to feel like taking an active part in the conversation. The group approach has been fruitful to clear doubts about critical comprehension questions, with participants reconstructing the story together in the discussion. And as the focus group interviews built on participants’ observations, each session was unique and different group discussed different topics more thoroughly: the emotional experience, the symbolic meaning of the film, the quality of the description, etc. As participants are not necessarily directly talking to the researcher in group interviews, he or she is in a more convenient position to observe participants’ body language and the way they relate to each other to notice, for example, their wish or reluctance to express themselves, or to identify a “dominant voice” influencing the others (Smithson, 2000: 107). This happened for instance in a three-participant group: participant 21 commented that she had liked the AD of the beginning, which was rich in details, and that she did not expect the film to be over so quickly. The researcher expected and encouraged her to develop on her thoughts. However, participant 22 was very assertive about the lack of interest presented by the film for the collective of the Blind and about the bad quality of the describer’s voice. On the latter point, he was strongly supported by participant 23. In this context, it is possible that participant 21 did not feel at ease to express her opinion, to avoid starting a debate. Other times, there might be followers of the dominant voice, as was the case with participants 1, 2 and 3. Participant 2, who was very active in the discussion, interpreted that the man and the woman were dead in the events and that they reunited in the afterlife. Participant 1 and 3 agreed to this interpretation but their reaction seemed more of acquiescence than of conviction. All things considered, the focus group approach delivered valuable information because the outcomes were not limited by the researcher’s expectations but, in the analysis of the collected data, the group context must not be neglected.
4. Preliminary observations

The study is still ongoing and the final content of questionnaires and interviews will undergo an in-depth analysis to reconstruct and contextualize participants’ film experience and relate it to the audio description style they were confronted to. Nonetheless, the results obtained up to now allow for some preliminary comments on the film experience of blind spectators.

A first significant observation concerns the relationship between emotion and enjoyment. According to our analysis, the original short film *Nuit Blanche* is designed to elicit emotions so it is important that the audio described version does so. Fifteen participants reported that their film experience was ‘quite a lot’ or ‘very much’ emotional. In the discussions, thirteen of these participants were very enthusiastic about their experience and reported more enjoyment and immersion than the rest. For instance, participant 13 stated: “Emotion comes to you, a lot. It reminds me of a book that takes you into the story, it’s not a cold description.”

Participant 6 said “Very good! I felt transported into another world, it was thanks to the audio description.” On the contrary, only one participant that had reported a less emotional experience in the questionnaire gave a clearly positive feedback in the discussion. These observations indicate that emotion is strongly linked to immersion and enjoyment. It is worth noting that, out of the fifteen participants who reported a highly emotional experience, nine had heard the narrative AD, five had heard the cinematic AD and one had heard the denotative AD. This seems to point at narrative audio description as the better option to transmit emotions and offer an immersive film experience, while denotative AD does not seem to transmit much emotion but, so far, a few more participants have heard the narrative version (see section 3.1), so we need to complete the study before drawing conclusions.

Secondly, our first observations also confirm that emotion and comprehension are closely linked, as cognitive film theorists explain (see section 3.2.1). One prominent result in this sense concerns the moment when the car crashes into the man. Ten participants have ascribed this fragment a preponderant narrative importance. Out of these ten participants, nine had reported to have felt ‘quite a lot’ or ‘very much’ ‘sadness’ or ‘fear’ at this moment. To these participants, this event became of key importance and they tried to explain the whole short film around it. For example, after hearing the audio described short film, participant 28 concluded that “it is a staged run-over that ends up in a romantic scene”. But the car crash seems to have more of a symbolic and aesthetic purpose than a nar-

14 Participant 13: female, age class 31-45, blind from childhood, heard the narrative AD version. Comment translated from Catalan – “Arriba molt l’emoció, molt. Em recorda un llibre que se t’emporta en el relat, no és una descripció freda.”

15 Participant 6: male, age class 46-60, acquired blindness, heard the cinematic version. Comment translated from Catalan – “Molt bé! M’he sentit transportat en un altre món, ha sigut gràcies a l’audiodescripció.”
It is possible that the answers of visually impaired participants were partly induced by the car crash scene: in the discussion, car traffic appeared to be a very sensitive issue mentioned by several participants as a major danger with which blind persons must deal in their daily lives. However, this could also be an indicator of a significant difference in the way blind audiences engage with film as compared to sighted audiences and it may require further exploration.

Finally, another prominent observation is the importance of personal experience in film emotions and film experience in visually impaired participants compared to sighted viewers. In our online survey with sighted participants, 53% reported that emotions arise exclusively because of the short film and only 7% reported emotions to have their origin principally in their own experience. On the contrary, among visually impaired participants, only 25% reported the film as the sole emotional trigger, 34.4% stated it was equally the film and their own experience and 28.1% reported their own experience as the most important source of emotion. The complete figures are transposed in Table 5 (below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your opinion, what originated the emotions you felt?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only the film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sighted participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Origin of film emotions in sighted vs. visually impaired audience.

It is possible that the answers of visually impaired participants were partly induced by the car crash scene: in the discussion, car traffic appeared to be a very sensitive issue mentioned by several participants as a major danger with which blind persons must deal in their daily lives. However, this could also be an indicator of a significant difference in the way blind audiences engage with film as compared to sighted audiences and it may require further exploration.
Conclusions and further research

These first observations confirm that an approach to user experience with AD through the mirror of film experience is enlightening and suggests that more research into the relationships between emotion, comprehension, enjoyment and immersion is needed to tailor AD for a better film experience for visually impaired users, as Fresno (2017) also suggests.

At this preliminary stage, we have already gathered insightful information on the film experience of blind and partially sighted spectators. Nonetheless, as other scholars in the field, we have been confronted with the difficulty of accessing the study population, which has impeded a random selection of participants. To increase the generalisability of the outcome of AD reception research, it would be interesting to work on a “proximal similarity” framework (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006: 43) for our field, i.e. a set of conditions that reflect a “gradient of similarity” between our population of interest and our tested sample.

We would like to close this article acknowledging the usefulness of the functionalist approach to study audio description. Functional theory provides a solid framework for developing new audio description styles that deviate from conventional guidelines but take users’ needs and source texts properties into account. That is why the functionalist approach could also help develop the concepts of loyalty of audio describers and ethicality of audio descriptions to introduce them as part of audio description quality standards.
Bibliography

AENOR (2005) UNE 1530220. Audiodescripción para personas con discapacidad visual. Requisitos para la audiodescripción y elaboración de audioguías, Madrid, AENOR.


Appendix 1: Evaluation questionnaire on the experience provided by an audio described version of the short film *Nuit Blanche*

[Participant number: ____ ____ ____]
[AD version: ○ Denotative ○ Cinematic ○ Narrative]

A) Sociodemographic questions
1) Gender: ○ woman ○ man
2) Age:
3) Place of residence:
4) Education:
5) Profession/Employment:
6) Type of blindness
   a) From birth ○ Acquired ○
   b) If acquired, since when?
   c) Do you have residual vision? Yes ○ No ○
   d) If yes, do you use it to watch films? Yes ○ No ○
   e) Pathology:
7) How many films do you watch every month (TV, DVD, cinema):

B) Questions on the emotional reception of the short film
1) What did you feel when the woman broke through the window? (Rate on a scale from 1 to 6, 1=not at all, 6=very much)
   Surprised (includes surprise, astonishment, stupefaction)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Admiration
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Fear (includes fear, anxiety)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Interest (includes interest, curiosity, expectation)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Something else:
2) What did you feel when the car crashed into the man?
   Surprised (includes surprise, astonishment, stupefaction)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Sadness (includes sadness, preoccupation, disappointment)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Fear (includes fear, anxiety)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Interest (includes interest, curiosity, expectation)
      ○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
   Something else:
4) What did you feel when you realized that the man and the woman haven’t moved from their original spot?
Joy (includes joy, enthusiasm, satisfaction)
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Relief
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Acceptance
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Sadness (includes sadness, deception)
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Nostalgia or melancholy
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much ○ Something else:
5) How you feel after watching the short film?
Joyful
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Happy
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Sentimental
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Admirative
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Sad
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Disappointed
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Pensive
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
Nostalgic or melancholic
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much ○ Nothing special ○ Something else:
6) According to you, which elements of the short film transmitted emotions? (1=NO 2=YES; multiple answers)
○ The story
○ The characters/actors.
○ The visual style that is described.
○ The original soundtrack.
○ The style of the audio description.
○ The voice of the describer.
○ Other elements:
7) What brought forth the emotions you felt? (1=NO 2=YES; one answer) [read at least twice]
  ○ The short film itself.
  ○ Above all the short film, but also my personal experience.
  ○ Equally the short film and my personal experience.
  ○ Above all my personal experience.
  ○ I don’t no.

C) Questions on the interpretation of the short film
1) Even if it is not clearly mentioned, some elements can suggest the place where the story happens.
  ○ 1- I have not given importance to the place.
  ○ 2- I think it happens in:

2) Even if it is not clearly mentioned, some elements can suggest the time when the story happens.
  ○ 1- I have not given importance to the time.
  ○ 2- I think it happens in:

3) Have you felt the attraction between the characters?
  ○ 1- No.
  ○ 2- Yes.

4) Did you notice that the action was going out of reality?
  ○ 1- No.
  ○ 2- Yes. When?

5) What sensation did the mention of slow motion give you? (1=NO 2=YES; multiple answers)
  ○ None.
  ○ That time stopped.
  ○ That something important would happen.
  ○ That the action was going out of reality.
  ○ An aesthetic sensation.
  ○ Something else:

6) According to you, what are the aims of the short film? (1=NO 2=YES; one answer) [read three by three]
  ○ Showing the thoughts of the man.
  ○ Showing the thoughts of the woman.
  ○ Showing the thoughts of both of them.

  ○ Materializing physical attraction between two people.
  ○ Offering a representation of love at first sight.
  ○ Playing with the laws of space and time.

  ○ Showing the possibilities of visual effects.
  ○ Offering an aesthetic experience.
  ○ Offering an emotional experience.
○ I don't know.
○ Something else:
D) Questions on the experience offered by the short film (Rate on a scale from 1 to 6, 1=not at all, 6=very much)
1) This short film provided you with an interesting experience
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
2) This short film provided you with an enjoyable experience
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
3) This short film provided you with an aesthetic experience
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
4) This short film provided you with an emotional experience
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
E) Evaluation of the audio description (Rate on a scale from 1 to 6, 1=not at all, 6=very much)
1) The audio description gave you access to the necessary elements to understand the short film
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
2) The audio description gave you access to the stylistic and aesthetic elements of the short film
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
3) The audio description gave you access to the emotional aspects of the short film
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
4) The audio description provided you with an enjoyable experience
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
5) Did you like the sound mix between the audio description and the original soundtrack?
○ 1- Not at all ○ 2- Little ○ 3- Rather no ○ 4- Rather yes ○ 5- Quite a lot ○ 6- Very much
6) Rate the overall quality of the audio description on a 6-point scale:
○ 1- Very low ○ 2- Low ○ 3- Insufficient ○ 4- Acceptable ○ 5- Good ○ 6- Very good
F) Do you have any additional comments on your experience with the short film and the audio description?

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------