

Rhymed and traditional audio description according to the blind and partially sighted audience: Results of a pilot study on creative audio description¹

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ABSTRACT

The study described in this article is based on rhymed and traditional AD prepared for the animated film *Boundin'* (Pixar, 2003). The cartoon with two kinds of AD was presented to blind audiences, both children and adults. Next, the audience was asked questions about the plot, the characters and some technical aspects of AD, including its general character, the vocabulary used and the narrator's voice. The aim of the study was to verify whether artistic AD is able to provide all the information necessary for the blind to understand the film on an equal level with the sighted. In addition, the study examines how attractive artistic AD can be to blind or partially sighted viewers and whether it is a source of additional aesthetic experience for them. It also considers artistic AD as an acceptable alternative to traditional AD, and helps to assess who accepts such an AD better: blind or partially sighted, children or adults.

KEYWORDS

Media accessibility, blind and partially sighted (BPS) viewers, audio description (AD), artistic/creative audio description, audio description dedicated to children.

Introduction

Audio description (referred to as AD) is a narrative technique which enables blind and partially sighted (BPS) people to have full access to a wide range of audiovisual products such as films, TV shows, theatre plays, museum and gallery exhibitions or sporting events. In the case of films and theatre plays, AD takes the form of an additional soundtrack placed between the dialogues providing blind and partially sighted viewers with the information which audiences without visual impairments acquire through their eyes (e.g. the setting, time of day/year, activities performed by the characters, their costumes, facial expression and gestures). As a result, by translating pictures into words, that is by a change from non-verbal signs into verbal ones, AD fits the definition of intersemiotic translation which was first offered by Roman Jakobson (1959) and then used in the context of AD, for example, by Jorge Díaz-Cintas (according to Chmiel and Mazur 2011)² and Teresa Tomaszewicz (2006). Since AD is classified as a type of translation, an audio describer has the same aim as the translator who translates from language A to language B, in order to make any given text comprehensible for a person with linguistic or other barriers. However, for an audio describer the difference is that the source code is a language of images and the target code is any language understood by the AD receivers (Branje and Fels 2012; Chmiel and Mazur 2011).

Research concerning AD as one of the forms of audiovisual translation has been conducted intensively in recent years not only in pioneering centres such as those in the United States, Great Britain or Spain, but also in other countries, including Poland, where the art of AD is still in the early stages of development. The main focus in the research has been an attempt to discover what style of AD is favoured by the BPS consumers of (audio)visual products. Especially language (narration, vocabulary, stylistic figures) and reader's voice are in the spotlight. On the one hand, a tendency can be observed among theoreticians and practitioners of the field to use those analyses as the basis for creating guidelines with clear and uniform rules for AD creators (which results in publication of multiple recommendations and strategies)³. On the other hand, more and more often in the discourse on AD, there appears a belief that such analyses, providing us with knowledge about the preferences of the various audiences, would (or should) render AD development more suitable for a wider target group, including people without impairments, for whom it could present an added value.

An audio describer is a translator, and a translator is traditionally expected to be invisible. Correspondingly, AD, as is often mentioned in various AD guidelines as well as by the BPS respondents to numerous questionnaires (e.g. Zabrocka 2014a and 2014b), should be as objective as possible in order to let the receiver interpret the audiovisual product freely. However, it is of great importance to ask what 'objectivity' in the case of AD really means, and whether too frequent avoidance of saying something straightaway does not distort the meaning, causing some sort of affectation or complete loss of the source text's poetics. Joel Snyder (2005) states that AD is an art indeed, a kind of poetry; as such, it should aim at rendering the character of the original product in as creative a way as possible. Similarly to an audiovisual translator, an audio describer is limited not only by the language but also by non-linguistic factors imposed by film construction: the number of dialogues and moments of silence, the intensity of the action or the influence of music on the audience's feelings. This is why AD requires the audio describer to be both talented (understood also as creative) and precise, which is listed by Snyder as a set of useful skills that should be used while preparing AD. Generally, the rules of the art discuss not only the content of an AD script, its vocabulary and stylistic figures, but also non-linguistic means of expression (e.g. intonation or pace), highlighting that a good AD should be compact: it must follow the film and not be ahead of the film's action, since no information should be revealed to the blind earlier than to others. Among the best-known AD guidelines are those published by RNIB and within the ADLAB Project, both mentioned in the bibliography.

Preparing a good AD is usually quite a cumbersome task for an audio describer, since such an AD needs to be both fully informative (thus fulfilling its basic function) and, at the same time, attractive, characterised by

atypical and unexpected language or form – a particularly important feature in the case of artistic AD. Among the factors necessary for making a good AD, Snyder (2005) first lists a well-developed sense of observation, which should help to 'record' the visual and render it into verbal form; equally important is an 'ability of wording,' that is an ability to choose the information that is crucial for understanding of the content, while keeping in mind both the time limit and the need to condense the text, so that it will fit the time code. Snyder likewise emphasises the role of an AD's language – the choice of the most suitable vocabulary (e.g. words, comparisons and metaphors) which is not necessarily neutral and can stimulate the blind or partially sighted receivers' imagination. As an equally important feature of a good AD, he lists a good quality recording. It should be borne in mind that not only the reader's ability to read or the high quality of the synthetic voice (as similar to the natural one as possible) matters, but also that the volume should be adjusted to the film.

The subject of this article is the functionality of artistic AD⁴, that is creative AD (both these terms will be used in this article as alternatives) whose language and form are adjusted to the character of the product it accompanies. It can be, for instance, first-person (Fels *et al.* 2006; Orero 2011; Benecke 2015) or rhymed AD (Zabrocka 2014a and 2014b); it can take the form of a poem, a song, be written in the same metre as the audio described product (Udo and Fels 2011), or be read by a somehow distorted voice which is adjusted to the audio described product. Such a creative AD, besides providing the necessary information, also reflects the atmosphere of the source product⁵.

On the basis of an analysis which I conducted in 2013, my aim in this article is to answer the question as to how the reception of rhymed AD differs between children and adults with different levels of sight loss. The research aimed at verifying whether artistic AD, despite the fact that it has an atypical form which usually strongly influences the audio describer's lexical choices, can provide the kind of information that blind people need in order to understand the plot and grasp the message of the film. Sometimes, because of its unusual form, it may be difficult or even utterly impossible to squeeze into artistic AD as much information as in the traditional one, which was the case with the rhymed AD described here. Consequently, I wanted to determine if it can allow for understanding the film to the same (or at least a similar) degree as the visual layer or traditional AD. Since artistic AD might be seen as a work of art in itself, the aim of the research was to answer the questions of how attractive it is for the blind, whether it gives additional aesthetic experience and whether it is accepted as an alternative to the traditional AD (and why, if not). Finally, the purpose of the research was to show by whom (and why) rhymed AD was favoured: children or adults, blind or partially sighted. As a side product of the test we also get to learn more about the (possible) influence of AD on children's linguistic

development. The data gathered from the research may shed light on the possibility of the future practical application of any kind of creative AD.

Description of the research and respondents' characteristics

The first part of the study was conducted on 15th April 2013 in the special education centre for blind and visually impaired children and teenagers in Krakow (the centre's name in Polish is *Specjalny Ośrodek Szkolno-Wychowawczy dla Dzieci Niewidomych i Słabowidzących w Krakowie*). For technical and logistical reasons, and because it was the first such study I had conducted with children, I considered it important to repeat it to obtain more reliable results. However, the second time I decided to change the form of the test slightly by using the recordings in a different order. This part of the study took place in the summer and autumn of 2013 and involved children who were completely blind or had severe visual impairment, and whose parents had answered an advertisement on the Internet. As a result, 37 children with different types of visual impairment took part in the research; because of various intellectual disorders, 8 of them were later excluded. Initially, my study was meant to be a test involving primary school children only; nevertheless, after analysing the results and observing a set of tendencies, I became interested in older respondents' opinions. Thus, blind and partially sighted adults were also provided with surveys sent to them by e-mail. To sum up, I analysed the responses of 29 children, 16 blind (12 congenitally blind, 4 who had lost their sight at pre-school or school age) and 13 with visual impairment (see Figure 1; their age structure is shown in Figure 2). The answers given by blind and visually impaired children were compared with the answers of children of a similar age without visual impairment (11 children aged 5-13) who watched *Boundin'* with no AD. What is more, 21 teenagers and adults (among whom the youngest respondent had little more than 13 years and the oldest was 30) also took part in the research – 11 blind (8 of them born blind, 3 who lost the ability to see at school age) and 10 with visual impairment (see Figure 3). The aim of the test was to learn about their preferences (attractiveness and level of comprehension) for traditional and for rhymed AD. As a side product of the test, we acquired some knowledge about the influence of AD on the children's language development.

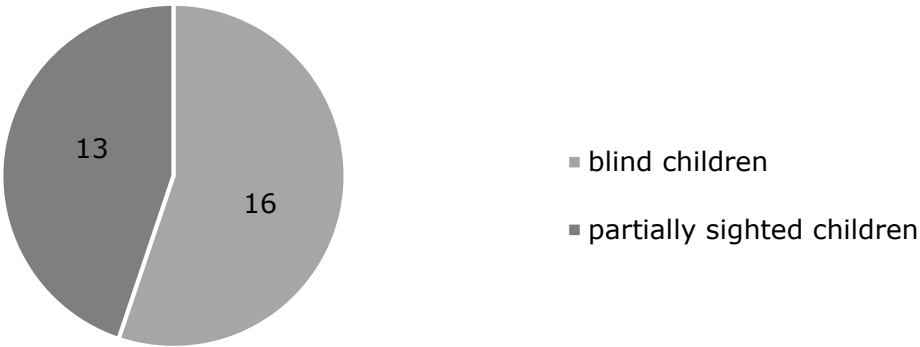


Figure 1. Participants: children.

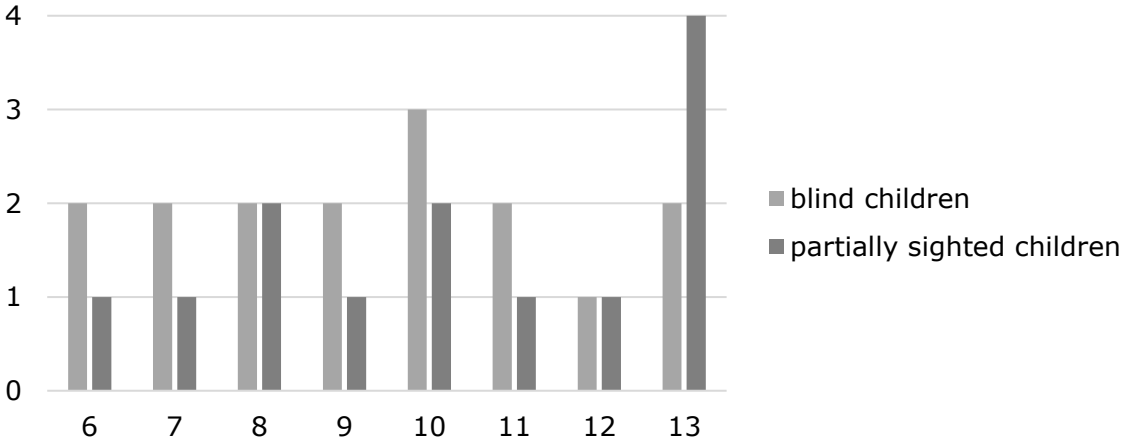


Figure 2. Number of BPS children who took part in the tests (divided by age: 6-13 years).



Figure 3. Participants: teenagers and adults.

In the research, a short animated PIXAR film, *Boundin'*, released in 2003 and dubbed into Polish, was used. For the purposes of this study, I prepared both traditional and artistic AD (some examples taken from the scripts are presented in the appendix). The latter in this case was rhymed, since *Boundin'* contains rhymed dialogues throughout, full of jokes and verbal humour, which is why I decided to provide respondents with a similar style in AD. Both AD scripts were produced in consultation with a blind person. For the traditional AD recording I used a synthetic but natural-sounding male voice JACEK (one of the voices from the *Ivona Reader* package). The rhymed script, in turn, was read by a professional reader (vividly acting with the voice). The participants watched the film twice, some of them first with the artistic AD and then with the traditional one, and others the other way around. After each version, they were asked questions about the plot (children) and technical and formal issues (children and adults). Children were provided with questionnaires and semi-structured interviews while adults were given a questionnaire with both open and closed questions.

Test involving children (respondents aged around 6-13)

Having seen *Boundin'* for the first time, children were asked questions designed to check whether each form of AD provided viewers with sufficient information to understand the cartoon. In other words, I wanted to see if children understood the plot. Moreover, young respondents were asked to share their personal opinion about the version of AD (rhymed or traditional) that they had heard. Most children found it easy to understand the plot of the animated film and summarise it irrespective of the version of AD with which they watched it. Children aged 8 or more could even interpret the overall meaning of the film. After seeing *Boundin'* again (with the second version of AD), the children were asked about their general impressions of the story, and they said that they found it interesting and funny. Respondents emphasised the fact that they are usually very keen on watching animated films and TV programmes, however they rarely have a chance to do it without any assistance. So far, in Poland there has been little choice of programmes and films with AD for young children available for the general public and, because of that, when watching TV, blind children commonly do it without any assistance or are accompanied by their siblings or caregivers who describe what they see on the screen. Since *Boundin'* is a cartoon with a message and full of jokes, as well as verbal humour, older respondents liked it too.

Then, the children were asked with which version of AD (rhymed or traditional) the film was easier to understand.

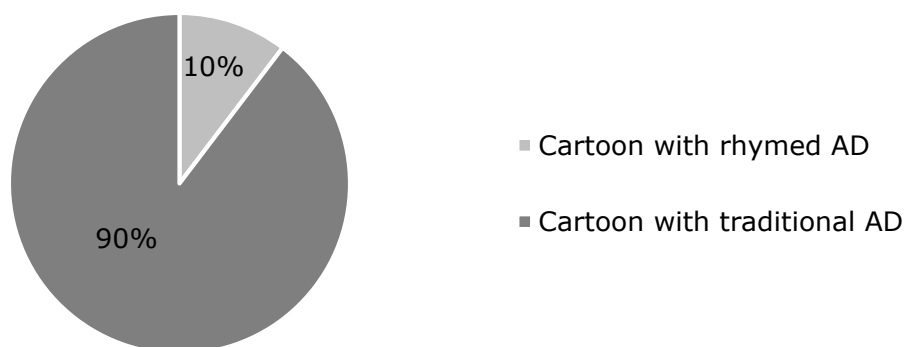


Figure 4. Assessment of the difficulty level of AD versions by visually impaired children.

As one can see in Figure 4, only three children (a blind 11-year-old girl and two partially sighted 11 and 12-years-olds) found rhymed AD easier to understand and thus more attractive. The rest of the respondents, even the children who liked the artistic AD more (see Figure 8), were of the opinion that traditional AD fulfilled its role better: it was easier for them to understand, as it did not require them to focus much or think intensively about the words they were hearing. Furthermore, some children were enthusiastic about the fact that the rhymed AD could blend into the original narration track and dialogues, while for others it was an obstacle as they wished to perceive AD as more separate and neutral. The second group of respondents claimed that the lack of a clear division between dialogues in the film and comments introduced by the AD track was distracting.

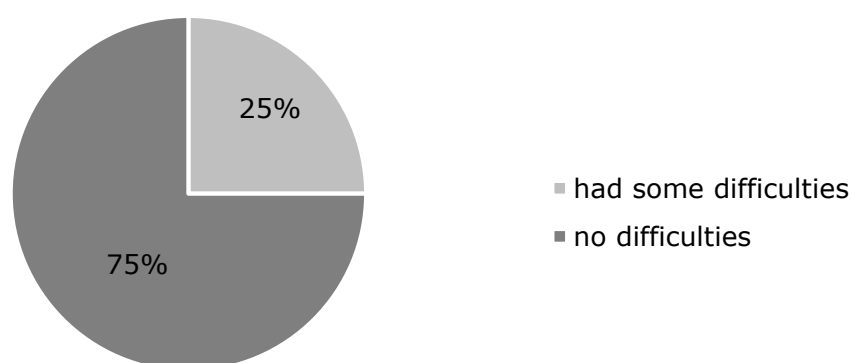


Figure 5. Blind children's understanding of the cartoon.

Among the blind children who had a problem with understanding the cartoon, there were one 5-year-old girl and two 6-year-olds (see Figure 5). However, among the sighted children aged 5-7 a similar level of incomprehension of the film could be observed. The fourth person who reported difficulties with understanding the plot was an 11-year-old girl who generally had trouble with expressing herself clearly and coherently, which made it impossible to verify the actual level of understanding in her case. However, while watching the cartoon for the first and second time, the girl

was very responsive to the dialogues and to the descriptions provided by both AD tracks. According to all four children mentioned above, rhymes made AD harder to understand. Partially sighted children also experienced some difficulties with comprehension of the plot and the message of the cartoon (see Figure 6), but this appeared to be far less problematic than in the case of blind children. Some of the partially sighted children also shared the opinion that rhymes were distracting. The same aspect was emphasised by children who understood the cartoon completely (both blind and partially sighted). Additionally, they were not always satisfied with the rapid pace of the rhymed AD or its inadequate volume. These comments showed how attentive and demanding children are, and helped me to prepare better AD scripts for my further research.

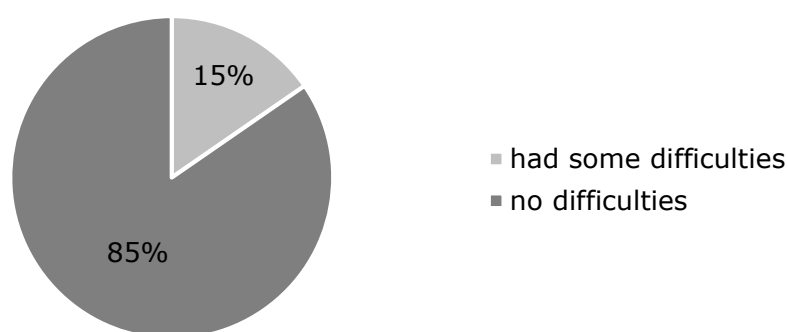
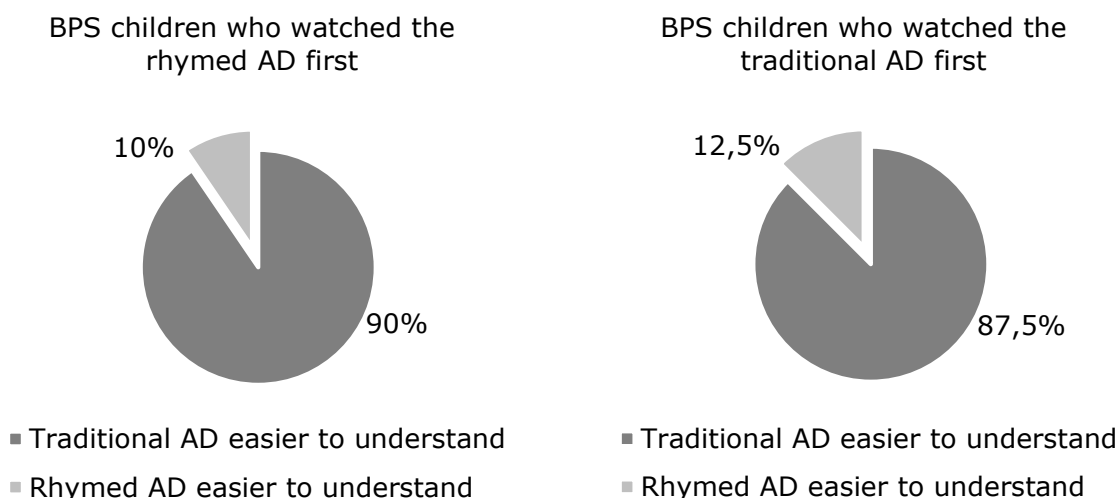


Figure 6. Partially sighted children’s understanding of the cartoon.

It is of the utmost importance that the research results were not influenced by the order in which the children had watched the audio described cartoons. (See Figures 7a and 7b, which show a very similar percentage of answers given by the children when they were asked which AD they could understand better.)



Figures 7a and 7b. Cartoon understanding in relation to the order of film and AD version screened.

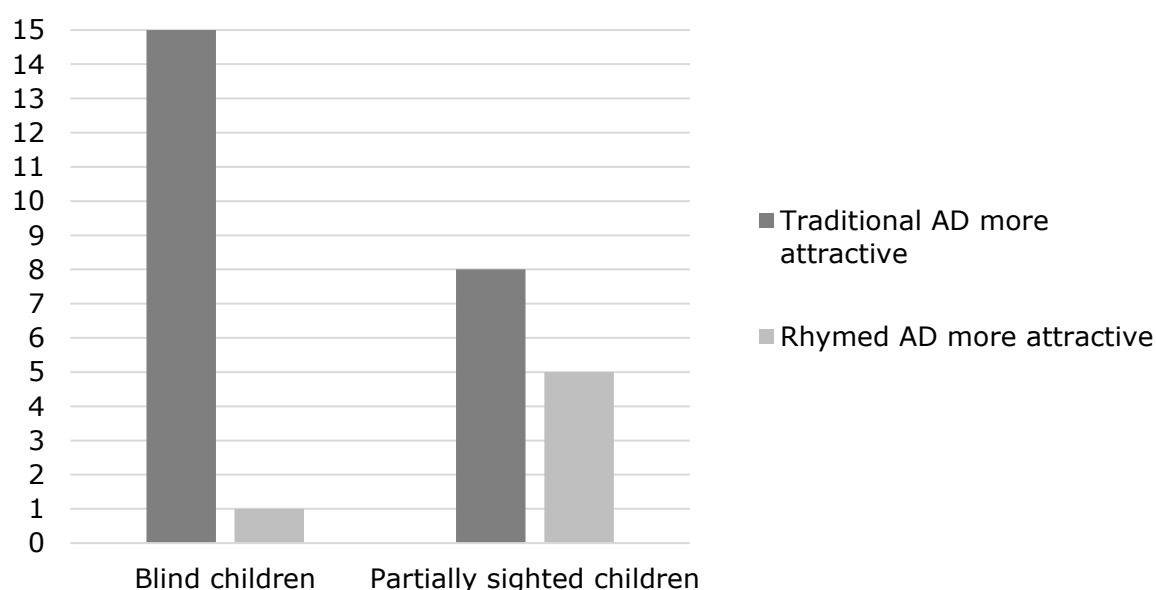


Figure 8. Attractiveness of two AD tracks according to BPS children.

As far as attractiveness is concerned, especially younger children gave the same answers to both questions: which version of AD they liked the most and which of them enabled better comprehension. Overall, children did not like things which they could not understand, and became easily discouraged when the AD script (or even the film itself) required too much conceptual processing. Older children (mostly the partially sighted rather than the blind ones), with better-developed language competence, expressed the opinion that rhymes were 'funny' and made the cartoon more attractive. However, for most respondents of primary school-age (23 children), traditional AD appeared to be more amusing. This can be explained by the fact that it is more accessible to them as they are able to understand more of the subtle nuances and situational jokes. Moreover, it requires less focus and effort, thus constituting pure entertainment for them. The children said that because of the changed word order in rhymed AD, as well as because of the appearance of words which they did not expect at a particular moment, some parts of the film were not immediately clear, requiring them to focus more on listening.

Interestingly, according to my research, children as young as 8-9 years paid attention to the voice in AD with full awareness, treating it as a factor which influenced their comfort in watching the film. Almost all children said that they liked the pleasant, natural voice in artistic AD, which made the cartoon 'catchy.' ('The man was fooling around while reading' said a 9-year-old girl). One boy aged 11 paid particular attention to the synthetic voice in the traditional AD. He could recognise it because he used it often and had grown to like it. This opinion suggests that children should start listening to synthetic-voice AD as early as possible to familiarise them with such voices, which in turn has a positive impact on their comfort in receiving synthetic-voice AD. Regular practice from an early age, involving various AD

techniques, makes children feel more comfortable as audience members, allowing them to be open to unusual artistic AD and—particularly—to the potential for one read by a voice synthesiser in the future. This, in turn, will positively influence their access to audiovisual cultural products, such as films, theatre plays or various exhibitions. It should be mentioned at this point that AD which is read by a voice synthesiser is easier and less expensive to produce than recording a reader. Hence, it can be more common and—most of all—much more suitable for private use. Although the synthetic voice can currently be far clearer and more correct than it used to be, it still lacks the expression typical of the human voice, and for this reason time is needed for its receivers to get used to it (Walter 2007). The results of the research carried out in 2010-2011 by Anna Jankowska and Agnieszka (Jankowska and Szarkowska 2011) prove that people who use synthetic voices regularly tend to accept synthetic-voice AD much more easily. Surprisingly, among the respondents there were both people who did not accept synthetic AD—even as a temporary tool—and one person who favoured a synthetic, not natural, voice. This should be a stimulus to simultaneous development in two fields: the improvement of synthetic voices and the promotion of AD. The latter could be realised by disseminating information about AD and by stricter legal regulations about supplementing films and TV programmes (especially those for children) with an AD track as a standard and obligatory procedure, similar to the choice of language options on DVD. At the same time, it should be remembered that each AD can be written to fulfil many different purposes.

When rhymed AD is analysed, one needs to ask whether it is sufficient for the understanding of the film. In general, this study seems to confirm that it is. In this case, the focus was on the answers given by the blind children. They reacted vividly to the descriptions appearing in AD. When retelling the story of the little sheep and answering questions about the plot, they described the same or similar pictures as their sighted age-mates. They also remembered a similar number of details (the cheerful fish, the owl's jumps, the sheep's bounding dance), but they concentrated on different elements or aspects. That is to say that children without visual impairment focused on the facial expressions of characters, their hilarious appearance or behaviour, while blind children gave their attention to their voices, amusing sounds in particular scenes as well as rhymes or 'funny' words which caused humorous situations. All BPS children used whole phrases employed in AD and in the original narration track (as they did with metaphors and comparisons, e.g. 'white like snow') to answer the questions about the cartoon; some phrases were quoted by almost all children and more than once. This means that AD has the potential to be an apt tool for improving children's literacy skills and developing their language competences. In short, it can be perceived as a stimulus for blind children in gaining their linguistic literacy.

Taking the above into account (see esp. Fig. 5 and 6), one can state that the cartoon was well-received, properly understood and interpreted by the audience with visual impairments. It follows that, on the whole, the presented rhymed AD suffices for fulfilling its assumed role. However, one creature appearing in the film caused some identification problems for all respondents. It was a good-hearted, funny and obese rabbit with antelope horns in the original version named 'jackalope,' and, in Polish, 'Hulajlama,' which is a combination of the imperative *hulaj* meaning 'carouse!' and a noun *lama* – 'lama.' The idea for this character came from North American folklore where it is a mythical animal having features of both a rabbit and an antelope whose origins were mentioned in the English version of the film; in the Polish one, in turn, the character was introduced only by his name and described as 'cheerful' and 'content.'

Blind adults swiftly link the name they hear in the film with such an unusual creature. Blind children, however, when asked who Hulajlama was, usually said that they had had no idea (19 respondents). Finally, after several additional supporting questions, they managed to link the name with the character who had helped the sheep. Only 10 children (older ones, aged 10-13) found it easy to immediately link the name Hulajlama with the mysterious stranger. Yet some children without visual impairment also failed to link the character with his name, which appeared a few scenes later. They also were asked additional questions and in the end managed to find out who he was.

At the end children were asked about their general impressions of the film: what they liked and what they did not. Their answers were only loosely related to the AD. Instead, blind and partially sighted children were very keen on the animals in the cartoon. They called them 'very funny'. Their favourite characters turned out to be the owl jumping happily around, the snake moving up and down as if it was a bed spring, the sheep (and its bounding dance), and the good creature named Hulajlama, which helped the sheep face its problems and encouraged it to stop worrying in low moments. The children paid attention to the happy ending and the message of the cartoon. They liked the fact that the sheep had its wool again and also that it stopped worrying about its appearance. As far as sounds (including AD) are concerned, respondents were enthusiastic about short and—in their opinion—playful rhymes. Especially younger children showed their interest in rhymes. The entire young audience liked clear sounds in the background (for instance those accompanying the sheep jumping) and the warm, gentle voices of both narrators: the one telling the story and the one reading the AD script.

Among the disadvantages of the film, children listed too few descriptions of nature, and criticised the existing ones as not very rich and not detailed enough. The children would be interested in getting far more information than it was possible to convey in either of the presented AD tracks, in

particular information about the appearance of the steppe where the sheep and other creatures from the film lived; some children asked about such details directly when answering the questionnaire.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of longer intervals between dialogues, an audio describer is sometimes compelled to provide very basic, undetailed descriptions. As I have already mentioned, younger children said that they could not understand the plot fully because of the rhymes, especially in long and complex sentences with reversed word order. According to some instructions for audio describers, the best practice is to form simple sentences, and each sentence should convey just one piece of information (Remael and Vercauteren 2010). In the AD described in this study, most sentences were short, but the original narration in the cartoon was full of complex sentences. Some children were dissatisfied because they failed to distinguish rhymed narration from rhymed dialogues. According to others, the pace of the narrator was too fast. One boy (aged 12) found the rhymes 'too childish.' Some children also complained about the volume, as either too loud or too quiet. Many responses focussed on the plot of the film rather than the style of the AD. For example, most children did not like the part of the story when the sheep was shaved because it made the main character sad and anxious. However, the most unbearable part of the plot for them was when other animals were laughing at the sheep after this happened.

After analysis of the research results, it can be observed that all the BPS children both liked and disliked the same things. It should also be noted that children talked mostly about the plot of *Boundin'*, and that both the respondents with visual impairment and the sighted ones who were watching the cartoon without AD gave similar answers. Obviously, respondents were very concerned about the sheep, which shows that they gave significant attention to the plot. AD was for them what it should be, that is, a tool for mediating between the visual message and its visually impaired receiver. It enabled children to appreciate the film fully and, most importantly, independently, and gave them the opportunity to create their own vision of the world portrayed in the cartoon. It often happens that children with severe visual impairments—as they pointed out themselves—are dependent on their parents, siblings or caregivers who, in turn, describe what they see, while the former would prefer to 'watch' films and programmes appropriate for their age independently. They are mostly interested in new productions which allow them to follow the same interests as their sighted peers. Although children made various pertinent comments concerning artistic AD, such as those quoted above in the previous sections, they also agreed that it—just like the other one—enabled them to be really *in the audience*. This is the aspect the respondents found the most important, although for many of them rhymed AD was a source of additional entertainment.

Test involving teenagers and adults (audience aged above 13)

Similarly to children, both blind and visually impaired teenagers and adults pointed out that, in rhymed AD, the narrator's voice was warm and pleasant. The way in which AD is read has been shown to have a major influence on its reception. For this very reason, people who often use AD appreciate the natural tone of the narrator, also in the synthetic version. Blind adults—even those who were sceptical about rhymed AD—said that the form was properly adjusted to the film's content. Everybody agreed that the length of the cartoon, just over four minutes, also mattered: maintaining the focus for such a short period of time was not a problem, but in the case of a longer film it could be tiring. For this reason, rhymed AD (perceived as more demanding) would be unacceptable there. According to the respondents, because the cartoon was humorous, it was possible to use an atypical and funny AD track. However, they claimed that for more serious films or programmes, they would prefer traditional AD, which they considered less varied in its forms of expression. Furthermore, they thought that artistic AD would be too overwhelming, which could be equal to treating AD receivers not seriously enough.

Teenagers and adults who took part in the research said that such forms of expression, as well as the inflection of the narrator's voice, strongly influence the way the film is received. From their point of view, it is a significant disadvantage, even though at the same time they admitted that, in this particular case, rhymes made some parts of the film—and the film as a whole—more attractive than traditional AD. Certain scenes (such as that when Hulajlama looks at the prairie dogs with anger in his eyes), which would probably not attract their attention, caused amusement thanks to rhymed AD. Even those respondents who were sceptical about rhymed AD at the beginning admitted—to their surprise—that it provided all the information needed to understand the plot, and blended well with the film. This is also shown by the way in which children were retelling the story of the sheep, as mentioned above.

People with partial sight loss were far less sceptical about rhymed AD, but they expressed some doubts about whether it could successfully replace traditional AD. Among the most frequent answers was that the rhymed AD is 'probably enough to understand the programme', but since they still make use of their eyes in their everyday life, they did not feel qualified to give a more definite statement. The respondents were also convinced that the pace of reading in such an AD should be slower than in the traditional one, whereas some parts of *Boundin'* were read too fast, which caused difficulty in understanding. This was caused not only by the rhymes but also by all the voice changes, which usually require more concentration. Partially sighted respondents, similarly to the blind ones, agreed that in the case of *Boundin'*, rhymed AD was a good choice. They found the AD itself 'funny' and the cartoon as a whole more attractive thanks to its inclusion. There

was also one person who expressed a surprising opinion, namely, that the AD was much better than the cartoon itself (while, of course, it is supposed to be just an addition). One might wonder whether this actually represents a disadvantage. It is commonly recognised that AD should be a tool which enables blind people to participate in artistic events and a way of supporting partially sighted people. However, AD can be also used by others, for instance elderly people who have lower vision due to their age, children with some difficulties other than visual (since AD can help them to focus attention on the crucial aspects, understand the plot and remember facts, or support them in other ways), as well as people who are simultaneously focused on other activities and cannot look at the screen continuously (see Chmiel & Mazur 2011). This means that viewers without visual impairments can also benefit from artistic AD; owing to its attractive character it can become a form of entertainment, and not just an additional (and sometimes rather distracting) narration.

The respondents' remarks concerning the impact of viewers' previous experience on the comfort of AD reception, already mentioned above (section "Tests involving children"), were supported by the results of the survey conducted among blind and visually impaired adults.

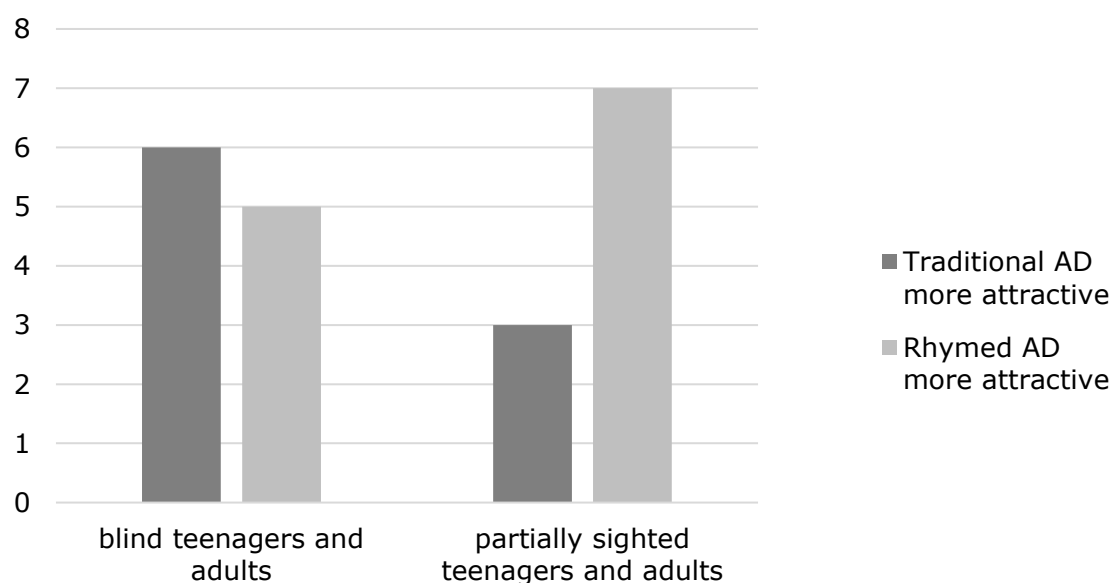


Figure 9. Attractiveness of different forms of AD according to BPS adults.

Additionally, BPS adults were asked to evaluate the rhymed AD on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest mark, 5 – the highest.

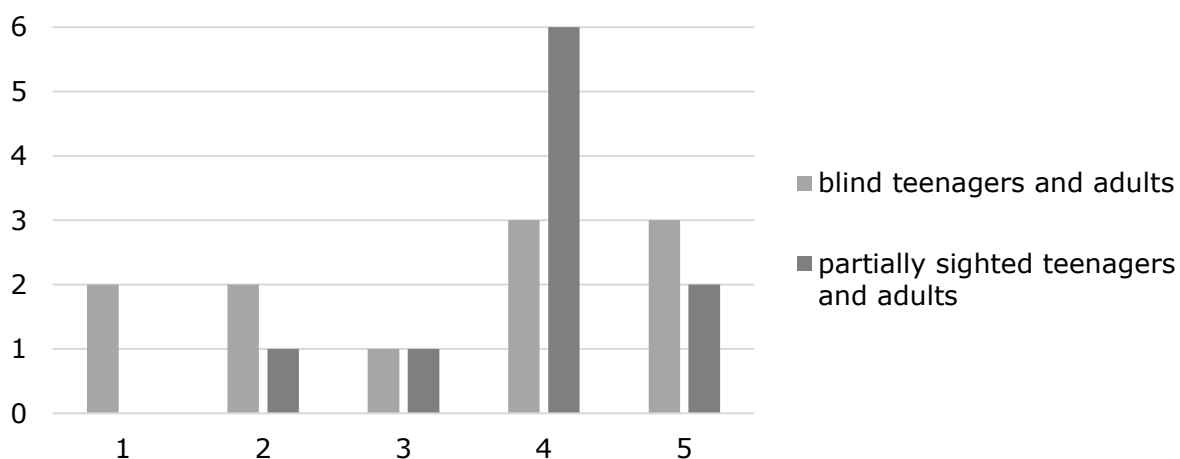


Figure 10. Artistic AD marked 1-5.

Five blind and seven partially sighted respondents out of 21 preferred rhymed AD, while traditional AD was chosen by six and three people respectively. BPS adults justified their choice similarly to children. They believed that artistic AD requires more concentration and that any non-standard word order, vocabulary or voice change can cause difficulties in understanding the text and be distracting for less experienced receivers. Consequently, images brought by AD can appear in their minds more slowly (or in a less automatic way) since receivers focus more on attempting to comprehend the construction of AD than on the plot. According to adults, rhymed AD is acceptable for such a short cartoon, but it would not be a good idea for longer films. For this reason, but also because they see rhymed AD as one which stimulates language better, they would welcome it in programmes for children, including silent cartoons. Most visually impaired respondents (see Figure 9) found artistic AD 'funny' and thought that it 'perfectly' matched a film which has the features of a comedy because rhymed AD made it humorous. However, it should be underlined that generally the level of satisfaction with rhymed AD depended on the degree of vision loss of its participants: partially sighted respondents generally rated it more highly than the blind. One explanation can be that since these respondents use their sight automatically, AD is barely an additional tool for them. The Figure 10 shows how the BPS respondents rated the presented traditional and artistic AD.

Discussion of findings

This research was carried out in order to assess whether, and to what extent, a creative type of AD may influence the interpretation of a film. While emphasis was placed on the use of rhyme, my analysis necessarily took into consideration issues of lexis and style. It also aimed to discover which AD, rhymed or traditional, stimulates the imagination better and which is more convenient and consequently more attractive to its receivers. Thus, my research was conducted to answer the question of whether artistic AD, whose form often determines choices made by an audio describer in

the translation process, has any potential to replace the visual layer in the way in which this is done in traditional AD. Another question was whether the rhymed narrative does not differ too greatly from the source text (image) due to numerous stylistic operations, making the plot more difficult to understand.

The results, without doubt, show that for the blind (even the youngest ones) the clarity of the description provided by AD is of the utmost importance. According to them, a well-produced AD should be pleasant to hear and easy to understand. Due to the fact that AD, together with the original film's soundtracks, forms its aural version, it should be as natural, instinctive and effortless for the blind as 'moving images' for sighted people (Mälzer-Semlinger 2012). For the respondents, the sound background of the film was an equally important carrier of information and an additional source of aesthetic experience. Two issues were underlined in the feedback given by the respondents: (1) AD should be loud enough to be heard clearly but at the same time should not overwhelm the background sounds, and (2) AD should not be too detailed in trying to provide too many descriptions; if there are no breaks, it can easily become tiring and annoying. All remarks mentioned above lead to the conclusions that, first of all, AD 'should not impose itself' on its target audience. As one of the respondents said, "AD should be a calm companion."

The vast majority of the people regularly using AD said that the objectivity of narration is crucial, which might be one reason why, in spite of the fact that all respondents were keen on the natural voice, some of them favoured a synthetic voice as one not showing any emotions and not adding anything unnecessarily. Interestingly, according to the same respondents, the most interesting fragments of AD were the ones which did not meet the criterion of objectivity and did not name emotions and gestures precisely. This should provide a reason for discussion of the essence of objectivity itself in the relation of the audio describer and the AD receiver, which is similar to the relation of the translator with the target text receiver.

Generally, traditional AD is far more appreciated than the artistic one, as it is more neutral, more predictable, and easier to receive, but according to the respondents, this should not discredit artistic AD. It would be perfect in films and programmes for younger audiences; especially since a well-prepared AD can be a useful tool which supports language development in children. In the case of the research here described, a quite richly rhymed AD had hardly any negative impact on the more experienced audience. It did not change the reception of the plot of *Boundin'*. However, the less experienced audience, that is, the less linguistically developed younger children, missed some of the detail. As a result, traditional AD could offer them much more than the artistic one.

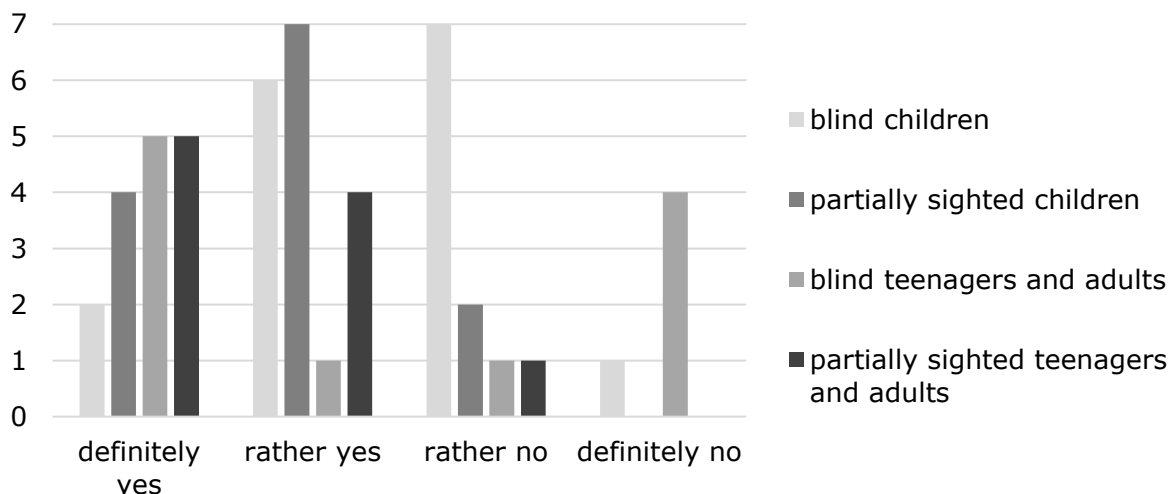


Figure 11. Rhymed AD reception by children and adults with visual impairment.

According to the results of the research, what people like and dislike in AD mostly depends on individual tastes and preferences, which are already shaped even in the case of really young respondents. Blind adults can be divided into people who very much liked artistic AD (5 people), those who disliked it (4 people), and only 2 people who expressed their doubts by the answers *rather yes* or *rather not*. There was also one person who thought that artistic AD was unnecessary and one who was positively surprised and who wished there had been more audiovisual productions audio described in more creative and atypical ways.

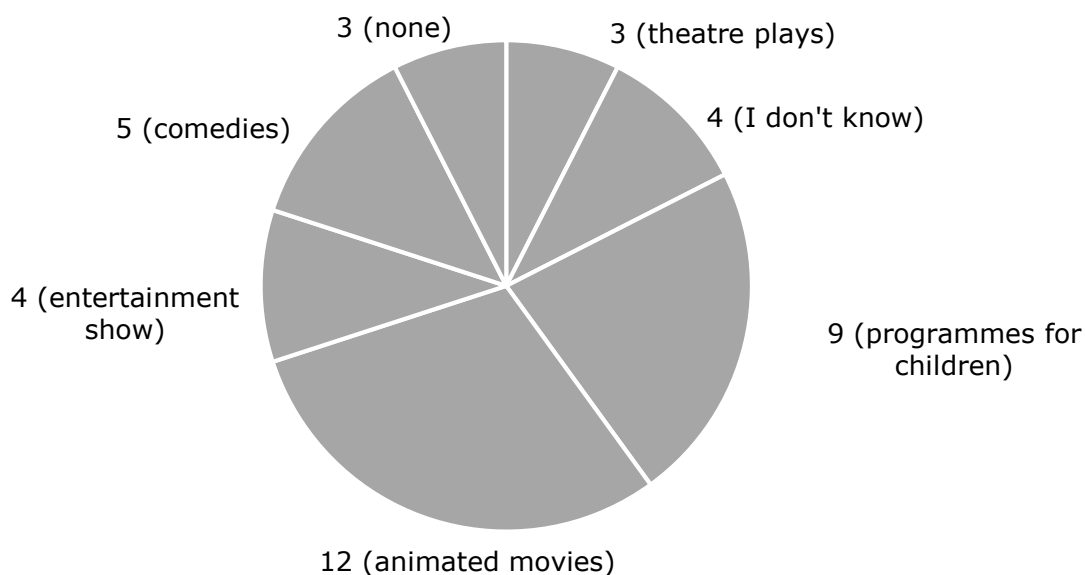


Figure 12. Artistic AD and its practical use – where? The views of BPS respondents.

Among programmes for which—in their opinion—artistic AD would be suitable, respondents listed mostly cartoons (especially ones without

dialogue, such as the old Polish cartoons *Bolek i Lolek*, *Krecik*, *Reksio*) as well as programmes for the youngest audience. Furthermore, atypical AD could also be used in entertainment programmes and theatre plays. Generally, respondents would prefer to use artistic AD in productions where the picture is far more important than the sound.

Artistic AD appeared to be more difficult, which can be one reason why it was more appreciated by the experienced audience and the partially sighted (who use AD just as an additional help). This type of AD is certainly worth using, but it needs to match the type of the programme and must not be overwhelming (by providing too much information) or use unnecessarily sophisticated vocabulary/form. Although rhymed AD turned out to be a challenge for most of the children, the programmes dedicated to them were mentioned by adult respondents as those for which artistic AD is best suited. This is because they considered artistic AD as enhancing the intellectual effort and contributing to the child's language development. The study strongly suggests that when preparing rhymed AD (especially for children) it should be borne in mind that the final product must be simplified as much as possible, in order to be attractive to children and, while entertaining them, educate them and stimulate their linguistic development. An audio describer who chooses the appropriate form of AD to suit the programme, film or play has the chance to enrich it aesthetically and, to a certain degree, compensate the audience for the lack of visual stimuli. However, it cannot be forgotten that for AD receivers, the informative function of AD is generally more important than its other functions. Moreover, in each case, the form and level of difficulty should be adjusted to the age, skills and expectations of the target audience. A sophisticated sentence construction requires advanced skills from its receivers. In order to gain these skills, blind individuals should deal with many different kinds of AD from an early age. However, to make this possible, constant work on AD development and dissemination is needed.

Summary and conclusions

To sum up, on the basis of the pilot tests concerning reception of rhymed AD, we can draw the following conclusions and reflections, which may be helpful to all those who participate in the AD creation process:

1. The interviewed children considered non-rhymed AD better because easier to understand, although it was the creative one which they found funnier: it was not boring, and it made them laugh, sing or repeat those parts of the text which were intended to entertain the audience, especially rhymes. This opinion was also shared by adult respondents.
2. Rhymed AD is more attractive for older children and adult viewers (including the partially sighted) than for young children.

3. Children who took part in the study were amused by new words (they willingly asked about their meaning).
4. Children participating in the study loved neologisms, especially if these referred to the things they already knew and when their description appealed to their imagination. Children showed their interpretation of those neologisms by hand movements. They described the movements of animals and referred to their most characteristic features (e.g. the movements of a snake and a bed-spring).
5. When criticising or praising rhymed AD, respondents usually touched on the key issue: the choice of AD type should depend on the type of the audio-described product. What is more, many respondents tended to consider objectivity less essential whenever they found creative (and usually non-objective) AD more entertaining.
6. Every kind of AD supports and supplements the visuospatial images generated by blind children despite the lack of visual traces, but rhymed AD is better-suited for more experienced audiences: it inspires children and has the potential to enhance their literacy, but it is also more difficult to follow.
7. On the one hand, adults were worried about the objectivity of creative AD (which is for them an important feature of a good or rewarding AD), but on the other, they saw its potential and treated it as a tool which can both entertain and educate (stimulate imagination and linguistic development).
8. When creating artistic AD of any kind, one has to remember cognitive load limits. Artistic AD must be simpler than traditional AD (amount of text, pace, the difficulty level of words). In the case of children, it should also be kept in mind that the pace of narration must be adjusted to the difficulty level of AD.
9. Artistic AD usually provides less information (the focus is on its form).
10. Some types of creative AD are better suited for short programmes and are less likely to be accepted in films for adult audiences.
11. An audio describer who chooses the appropriate form of AD for the programme, film or play has a chance to enrich it aesthetically and, to a certain degree, compensate the audience for the lack of visual stimuli. However, for receivers, the informative function of AD is generally more important than its other aspects. And finally, in each case the form and level of difficulty should be adjusted to the age, skills and expectations of the target group.

APPENDIX

Traditional AD	Literal translation of traditional AD	Rhymed AD	Literal translation of rhymed AD
Owieczka przegląda się w tafli wody. Jest dumna ze swojej puszystej, białej wełny.	The sheep looks at her reflection in the water. She is proud of her fluffy white wool.	Owca – świadoma swojej urody – przegląda się w tafli wody.	The lamb – aware of her beauty – looks at her reflection in the water.
Wąż grzechotnik trzęsie się jak sprężynka. Wymachuje na wszystkie strony fioletowym językiem.	The rattlesnake shakes like a spring. He waves his purple tongue on all sides.	Grzechotnik pręży się, wiję, <i>sprężynkuje</i> , jęzorem radośnie przy tym wymachuje.	The rattlesnake snakes, twists, moves like a spring, cheerfully waving his tongue.
Podjeżdża wóz. Czyjaś silna ręka chwytą przestraszoną owieczkę.	The cart is approaching. Somebody's strong hand grabs the scared sheep.	Nagle nadjeżdża furmanka, zaczyna się owiec łapanka.	Suddenly, a wagon arrives, a roundup of sheep begins.
Nadchodzi ulewa. Ten sam ktoś wrzuca ogoloną na łyso owcę do burzowej kałuży. Smutna owieczka przegląda się w niej. Załamana swoim wyglądem próbuje ukryć się za wielkim kamieniem. Pieski preriowe śmieją się z niej, wyglądając ciekawsko ze swoich nerek.	A downpour is coming. The same person throws the sheep, shaved bald, into a stormy pool. The sheep looks sadly at her reflection. Overcome by her appearance, she tries to hide behind a huge stone. The prairie dogs laugh at her, looking curiously out of their little burrows.	Po burzy przegląda się owca w kałuży. Na łyso ogolona wyglądem swym jest przerażona i przez pieski preriowe wyśmiana za kamień chowa się zapłakana.	After the storm the lamb looks at her reflection in the pool. Completely shaved, she is frightened by her appearance, and, mocked by the prairie dogs, hides behind a stone.

<p>Wielki, gruby królik z rogami chwyta owieczkę za chudą, łysą nogę i uczy ją skakać. Roześmiana owieczka odbija się wysoko aż do nieba. Owieczka podskakuje, a w tle zmieniają się pory roku. W międzyczasie owieczka na nowo obrasta w swoją piękną wełnę i gdy nadchodzi wiosna spokojnie czeka z wystawioną tylną łapką, za którą znów chwyta ją silna ręka postrzygacza.</p>	<p>The big, fat rabbit with horns grabs the lamb's thin, bald leg and teaches her to jump. The lamb, laughing cheerfully, jumps high up to the sky. The lamb jumps and the seasons change in the background. In the meantime, the lamb grows up again in her beautiful wool, and when spring comes, she waits calmly with her back leg stretched out. The strong hand of a shearer is catching her again.</p>	<p>Wielki królik z rogami jagniątko za nóżkę chwyta i uczy je, jak w górę wyrzucać kopyta. Jagnię szczęśliwe jak trzeba, skacze wysoko do nieba. Przy każdym zaś jego podskoku, zmieniają się pory roku. Jagnię tymczasem w wełnę obrasta i czeka, spokojnie – rzecz jasna, aż znowu przyjedzie furmanka i zacznie się owiec łapanka.</p>	<p>The huge rabbit with horns grabs the lamb's leg and teaches her how to throw up her hooves. The lamb happy as she can be, jumps high into the sky. At each of her jumps the seasons change. In the meantime, the lamb's wool grows again and the lamb waits, calmly – of course until the wagon arrives again and the roundup of sheep begins.</p>
<p>AD: Hulajlama spogląda groźnie na pieski preriowe.</p> <p>Dialogue, Hulajlama: Róż? Róż? A złego w tym cóż?</p>	<p>AD: Hulajlama looks sharply at the prairie dogs.</p> <p>Dialogue, Hulajlama: Pink? Pink? What's wrong with pink?</p>	<p>AD: Hulajlama spojrzenie śle im ostre, jak nóż.</p> <p>Dialogue, Hulajlama: Róż? Róż? A złego w tym cóż?</p>	<p>AD: Hulajlama looks at them sharply. (The way he looks at them is sharp as a knife.)</p> <p>Dialogue, Hulajlama: Pink? Pink? What's wrong with pink?</p>
<p>Ogolona owieczka otrząsa się z kurzu.</p>	<p>The sheep, shaved, shakes off the dust.</p>	<p>Owca, na łyso zgolona, z kurzu otrząsa się niewzruszona.</p>	<p>The sheep, shaved bald but still unmoved, shakes off the dust.</p>
<p>Wszystkie zwierzęta żyjące na stepie tańczą szczęśliwie, a owieczka wywija piruety w powietrzu.</p>	<p>All the animals living on the steppe are dancing happily and the lamb makes pirouettes in the air.</p>	<p>Na stepie znów radość trwa i balety, jagnię zaś w chmurach wywija piruety.</p>	<p>On the steppe there is renewed joy and dancing, and the lamb makes pirouettes in the clouds.</p>

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Biography



I am a PhD candidate in linguistics at the Faculty of Philology of the Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland. My doctoral thesis entitled *Efficacy of audio description dedicated to children within the functionalist approach to translation* (about to be submitted December 2017) concerns the language and form of AD prepared for children and teenagers. My academic interests focus on the topic of translation with a particular emphasis on audiovisual translation and media accessibility, including audio description and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing.
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¹ This text was written on the basis of two articles written in Polish and published in conference proceedings (Zabrocka 2014a and 2014b), as well as a talk given at the AD and Education Symposium, held on 23th and 24th September 2015 in Warsaw. The translation of both texts – first combined together and supplemented by the results of additional research, together with new bibliographical references to newer publications in the area of study – aims at reaching a wider audience interested in the subject of AD, especially the still not properly researched artistic AD.

² Agnieszka Chmiel and Iwona Mazur refer to Cintas's "Accessibility and/in translation training" speech given in 2007 in Ljubljana at 5th EST Congress *Why Translation Studies Matters*.

³ At the initial stage of my academic research on AD I strongly supported the view that each AD script should strictly follow the established rules, but now I rather argue that the most important is to adjust each AD to its planned functions, not neglecting the entertainment one.

⁴ Other authors call it also 'authorial AD' (Szarkowska and Wasylczyk 2014), 'beautiful AD' (Więckowski 2014) or 'experimental AD' (Benecke 2015).

⁵ The issue has not been discussed to a large extent in the literature, however—apart from articles mentioned in the text and concerning particular kinds of artistic AD— a few articles

have been published on the subject of the adjustment of the language and form of AD to the character and content of the audio described product, e.g. Szarkowska and Wasylczyk (2014), Künstler (2014) and Więckowski (2014). I have also devoted an article to this issue entitled 'Emocje odzyskane w tłumaczeniu: o audiodeskrypcji artystycznej i przekładzie humoru' ['Emotions restored in translation: about audio description and humour translation'] (in press).