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Film language, film emotions and the experience of blind and partially sighted viewers: a reception study

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ABSTRACT

Film experience is a sensual, cognitive and emotional encounter between film and spectator. For viewers with blindness or visual impairment, access to film experience is made possible through audio description (AD). Conventionally, AD is an objective depiction of the images on screen, where audio describers refrain from interpreting what is shown or the way it is shown. This demand for objectivity has been challenged by some researchers and the study presented here is a contribution in this line. Forty five blind and partially sighted Catalan viewers experienced three AD styles: one conventional AD and two interpretative styles (cinematic AD and narrative AD). Results show that although conventional AD gives satisfactory access to the story, emotional aspects expressed through film language are rendered more effectively with an interpretative approach. In our sample, the cinematic and the narrative AD offer a film experience that is more satisfying than that offered by conventional AD.

KEYWORDS

Accessibility, audio description, audiovisual translation, blindness, reception research, visual impairment, blind and partially sighted audience.

1. Introduction: Film language and film experience

A spectator does not find herself 'receiving' a film:
she finds herself 'living' it.
Casetti (2011: 53)

Film experience is a sensual, cognitive and emotional encounter between film and spectator. Plantinga (2012: 470) describes it as "a way of being, a kind of recording of a possible conscious experience of the world, integrating perception, cognition, and feeling." Schmid (2014: 22) explains that, when watching a film, viewers are "combining the multi-layered verbal, visual and musical impulses to form a semantic, sensual, and emotional impression in which a maximum of symbols, icons and indexes of the multimedia-based cinematographic 'text' is foregrounded."

This interpretation of the filmic message is a personal and subjective process, which differs from viewer to viewer and is influenced by their sensory and cognitive abilities, as well as by their personality, experience and knowledge. Yet, film experience is designed by the filmmaker, who "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" (Plantinga 2010: 94). In short, it is not only what is shown, but essentially how it is shown, that gives rise to the film experience, and spectators have to understand film language to decode a message that is constructed through a combination of cinematic techniques (camera angles and

movements, editing) and other film techniques, such as shot composition, sounds, music, dialogues and narrative (Metz 1964; Casetti and di Chio 1991). Furthermore, filmmakers do not use cinematic and film techniques only to construct meaning but also to trigger emotions in viewers and they can “elicit – across diversified audiences – roughly the same or converging general emotional responses to the fictions on screen” (Carroll 2008: 156). Therefore, although emotions are subjective and personal, spectators of the same film should show similar emotional trajectories, which are the essence of their film experience (Carroll 2008; Plantinga 2009, 2012).

These insights from film studies point at the importance of cinematic language (i.e. the purposeful use of cinematic techniques by film directors) for film experience and therefore for AD. In our reception study, we tested how different ways of dealing with film language in AD affect the emotional response and the film experience of the blind and partially sighted (BPS) audience. In the following sections, we will present the theoretical background of the study, delineate the methodological outlines of the experiments and, finally, present and discuss the results regarding emotional reception, film experience and AD evaluation.

2. The audio description of film language

Although film theory points to film language as essential to film experience, it does not seem to be recognised as such in most European guidelines on AD. For example, the British *ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description* (Ofcom 2000: 6) rejects the use of cinematic terminology, that is, the terms used to refer to the cinematic techniques used by directors, such as ‘close-up’, and although it acknowledges the existence of cinematic language, it does not prioritise its description:

To many, expressions like in close-up, pan across, mid-shot, crane-shot etc., may not mean anything but it is important to try to understand why a director has chosen to film a sequence in a particular way and to describe it in terms which will be understood by the majority, if there is room to do so.

The German guidelines (Dosch and Benecke 2004) and the in-house guidelines of the Italian non-profit organisation Senza Barriere (Perego 2017) make similar recommendations, while the French *Charte de l’audiodescription* (Morisset and Gonant 2008: 2, our translation) lays more emphasis on the significance of cinematic language: “the describer should not only transmit the content of the images, but also their emotional power, their beauty and their poetry.” Yet, there is no indication about how to do so and the *Charte*, rather contradictorily, stipulates that describers should refrain from interpreting images and from using cinematic terminology (*ibid.*: 2, 3) as well as “from transmitting any subjective point of view” (*ibid.*: 8). Finally, in the Catalan context, AD is regulated through the Spanish UNE 153020 standard (AENOR 2005), which mentions neither film language nor cinematic terminology.

Perego (2014: 89) argues that the reluctance of guidelines to include film language “clashes with film theory, which suggests that the audience’s emotional engagement depends on the way films are shot and images are presented.” Indeed, as previously stated, film is more than a story told with moving images and to be able to live the film experience requires some complex cognitive processes. In this sense, AD is often essential to give BPS people the key to film interpretation, and provide them with an experience that is as similar as possible to that of sighted viewers. So far, it has proven difficult to do so without taking film language into account, especially when dealing with creative films, as several case studies have shown (Mälzer-Semlinger 2012; Orero 2012; McGonigle 2013; Perego 2014).

Beyond descriptive research, several scholars have engaged in creating and testing new AD styles, moving away from conventional AD in an attempt to offer better access to film language expressions and their effects. Kruger (2010: 233) defines audio narration (AN) as an alternative to conventional AD which “moves away from a strict fidelity to what can be seen on-screen in favour of a coherent narrative [...] supported by and integrated with the existing auditory signals.” In this accessibility mode, emphasis is laid on the “conceptual understanding of the way in which filmic narrative is created, and the role the visual plays in this narrative” (*ibid.*: 234). Although AN does entail descriptive elements, they are secondary to their narrative effect. AN has not been tested yet but Kruger (*ibid.*) does provide a comprehensive overview of this AD style and of the concepts from narratology and film theory on which it is based. Adopting a different approach, Fryer and Freeman (2013: 1) conducted a small-scale study in the UK to test conventional AD versus a “cinematic style that contravenes the guidelines by incorporating description of the camera work and editing.”. According to their results, “blind and partially sighted participants were largely in favour of ‘cinematic’ AD” as 66.7% expressed their preference for the AD version with cinematic terms (*ibid.*: 2). In Poland, Szarkowska (2013: 383) has developed the concept of *auteur* description as an alternative AD style for *auteur* films, which, in her words: “incorporates the director’s creative vision in the AD script through the use of a screenplay (or other available materials, such as interviews and reviews) and thus gives the audio describer the artistic license to depart from the dictate of objectivism.”

She tested the *auteur* description of Pedro Almodóvar’s *Volver* (2006) in an informal setting at the Polish Association of the Blind in Warsaw, and many participants expressed a positive opinion of this alternative AD style, “claiming that the juicy and vivid descriptions gave the film a more entertaining character and enabled them to gain a better understanding of the motivations of the characters and to follow the plot” (*ibid.*: 386). Finally, in Poland again, Walczak (2017a: 389) tested an alternative AD of Wojciech Smarzowski’s *Pod Mocnym Aniołem* [*The Mighty Angel*] (2014), a blunt social drama about alcoholism, in a creative style that opted for the use of

colloquial language and an explicit rendering of the scenes “to keep to the visual image.” As in the user tests mentioned above, most participants were enthusiastic about the alternative AD style.

The reception study reported in this article is a further contribution to the increasing body of empirical data on the possible benefits of such alternative AD styles, which do not limit themselves to describing images denotatively but rather contravene AD guidelines by awarding film language a central position in the AD.

3. Methodology

Our study adds to the body of reception studies on AD that have been flourishing in recent years, as a response to the need to involve end users in media accessibility research (Di Giovanni 2018). These studies include a wide range of topics and approaches, such as Fryer and Freeman’s (2013) on the use of cinematic terminology; Cabeza-Cáceres’s (2013) on the effects of speech rate, intonation and explicitation on comprehension; Fresno *et al.*’s (2014) on character description; Fernández-Torné and Matamala’s (2015) on natural vs. synthetic voices; Ramos Caro’s (2016) on subjectivity and emotions; Wilken and Kruger’s (2016) on *mise-en-shot* elements; and Walczak’s (2017a, 2017b) on creative AD and vocal delivery. The present reception study draws especially on those by Cabeza-Cáceres (2013) and Fernández-Torné and Matamala (2015), as their experiments were conducted in the Catalan context, using social research methods and a mixed-methods approach with questionnaires and interviews. Although a detailed article on the methodology of our study has been published previously (Bardini 2017), essential methodological aspects will be outlined here.

3.1. Material

The short film we selected, *Nuit Blanche*, directed by Arev Manoukian in 2009 (<https://vimeo.com/9078364>), makes substantial use of film language to express its message, so that we could effectively test this aspect. The short film has no dialogue and mixes black and white imagery with slow-motion and ultra-modern 3D-visual effects, to magnify the story of a fleeting look between two strangers (Hart 2010).

To create the three audio descriptions tested in the study, we worked with Carme Guillamon Villalba, a professional describer, who has described over a hundred feature films in Catalan and in Spanish for the Catalan public television TV3, among others. She drafted a first AD as she would have done for Catalan television, and modifications were then applied to this basic version to fit the three different AD styles defined below. To minimise possible alternative causes that could affect the participants’ film experience, parameters other than the script itself (voice, intonation, pauses, sound level) were kept as similar as possible in all three versions,

and we modified the basic AD only when it was strictly necessary to adapt the script to each AD style. The length of the three ADs is comparable and the final word counts are 388 words for the conventional AD (100%), 427 words for the cinematic AD (110%), and 400 words for the narrative AD (103%). The cinematic version is inevitably longer because cinematic terms are added to the iconic content being described.

The conventional AD is denotative, while the cinematic and narrative ADs are interpretative. The latter ones offer an interpretation of film language to render its meaning and feeling into words, instead of omitting or describing denotatively how cinematic techniques are used onscreen. Interpretative AD styles imply that the describer uses her subjectivity to describe what is shown and how it is shown, so it is a delicate approach that requires ethics and professionalism to ensure that an informed interpretation is provided, and not a personal vision of things. In our reception study, a denotative (i.e. conventional) and two interpretative AD styles (i.e. cinematic and narrative) were tested, the definitions of which are as follows:

Conventional AD style (AD1) is a denotative AD which describes what is shown at an iconic level, according to the WYSIWYS (What You See Is What You Say) paradigm (Snyder 2007), thus avoiding any kind of interpretation or mention of film techniques. The main aim of this AD style is to give a matter-of-fact depiction of what appears onscreen, so that BPS audiences can reconstruct the meaning of the images for themselves.

Cinematic AD style (AD2) is an interpretative AD style which offers a balance between iconic description, use of cinematic terminology and interpretation of film language. Cinematic terminology comes into play most particularly to describe elements that are specific to film, such as camera movements and editing techniques (Casetti and di Chio 1991). Besides, when the describer considers it helpful to interpret the meaning of a film technique, it can be done instead of, or in addition to, using cinematic terminology. The main aim of the cinematic AD style is to transmit both the iconic content of the pictures and the feeling and meaning of film techniques, in an attempt to boost the audience's immersion into the film's style and contents.

Narrative AD style (AD3) concentrates on interpreting film language and integrating the visual information into a coherent and flowing narration, which incorporates film dialogue and can be read as a single piece of text. It is an interpretative AD style, which does not always depict the images in full detail or in the exact moment they are shown but instead offers a narrative recreation of the feelings raised and of the meaning channelled through film language. Here too, the aim is to offer an immersive experience that is as similar as possible to that of sighted viewers.

To illustrate the differences between the three AD styles, the first minute of the short film will be used as an example. As seen in Figure 1, the title, "Nuit Blanche", appears in a font simulating handwritten letters over a cityscape illuminated by a full moon, in black and white. This image, the low-key lighting and the eerie violin music remind viewers of the atmosphere of a 1950's *film noir* movie.



Figure 1. Opening title

The frame then closes in and pans down a corporate building. In the next scene, a view of the street, with passers-by wearing coats and holding hats; the street is wet, and the wind carries tree leaves. The English translations of the three ADs of the opening of the film are reproduced below, while the original text in Catalan for all AD fragments can be found in Appendix 1:

[AD1 – CONVENTIONAL] Handwritten and slanted: "Nuit Blanche". In black and white. At night, it's full moon. The zinc roofs of a big city, with smoking chimneys. A three-storey building with large windows and light inside. Over the main door, made of glass, a company name.

[AD2 – CINEMATIC] "Nuit Blanche" appears onscreen in film noir style. In black and white on a full moon night, chimneys smoke on the zinc roofs of a big city. The frame goes down the front face of a three-storey office building, with large windows and light inside.

[AD3 – NARRATIVE] "Nuit Blanche". The city spreads out in black and white under the full moon. Chimneys smoke on zinc roofs. Men and women walk in the street, wrapped up in coats, passing by a three-storey office building with large windows and light inside.

The conventional version offers a denotative AD, mentioning both the title and the way it is written, and then offering a shot-by-shot description of what can be seen. The sentences are short, mostly nominal, as there is no action to describe. The corporate building is simply described as 'a building' and, in the end, when the sign appears onscreen, the describer mentions that there is a 'company name' over the main door. In both interpretative

versions, the describer interprets this element and speaks of an 'office building' from the beginning.

In the cinematic version, the reference to *film noir* is explicitly mentioned. This is both of cinematic interest, because it is associated to a particular visual style, and of narrative interest, as *film noir* can easily remind the audience of *film noir's* Golden Age in the mid-20th century (Jarvie 2006), which is consistent with other indicators (e.g. clothes, car model) and seems to be the time in which the film takes place. The fact that the camera pans down the building is explicitly described by mentioning that 'the frame goes down the building'. In addition to this, the cinematic version also translates filmic effects into words and, as the short film begins with a wide-angle view, the describer prefers to use a longer sentence than to fragment the description into shorter bits, as is done in the conventional version.

Finally, in the narrative version, the describer intends to transmit the atmosphere set up at the beginning of the film by retelling it. To do so, she does not insist on the title's aesthetics but on the cityscape that 'spreads out in black and white'. The most noticeable specificity of this version appears in the next fragment, where she gives priority to the general feeling of the exposition phase by bringing forward the people that are walking past the office building, although they are seen *after* the camera pans down. This can be justified from a narrative point of view as the building is certainly prominent at a visual level but not relevant at a narrative one: the street as a whole will be the setting of the story.

3.2. Questionnaire

Film emotions are essential to film experience and they are in great part conveyed through film language. By creating alternative cinematic and narrative AD styles, which include film language, we wished to offer the BPS audience better access to film emotions, and thus improve their film experience. We tested visually impaired participants' access to emotions at different key moments to analyse the effect of conventional and interpretative AD styles, and we asked them to evaluate their film experience and the AD version they heard, to find out if interpretative AD styles could provide BPS individuals with a better experience.

The questionnaire had five distinct parts: (1) socio-demographic questions, (2) questions on the emotional reception of the film, (3) questions on the interpretation of the film, (4) evaluation of the film experience and (5) evaluation of the AD. In this paper, we focus on 2, 4 and 5.

3.2.1. Emotional reception

Using a 6-point Likert scale, participants had to evaluate how intensely they had felt a set of emotions at key moments, which had been chosen after a careful filmic analysis (see example in section 4.1). The scale ranged from

1 (not at all) to 6 (very much) and avoided the neutral option, with respondents having to select 3 (rather no) or 4 (rather yes). Some of the emotions selected were direct emotions, e.g. surprise or sadness, which normally arise as a response to the content of the story (Plantinga 2009). By contrast, other emotions, such as admiration, were “artifact emotions” (*ibid.*: 74), i.e. emotional responses brought about by the film as an object. For each fragment, we asked participants about their feeling of ‘interest’ because it is a “global emotion” (*ibid.*: 69) that might be longer lasting and not related exclusively to a specific fragment. For Tan (1996, in Plantinga 2009: 68), interest is “the most characteristic emotion in spectatorship [and] the glue that holds the spectator’s attention, motivating him or her to continue viewing.” So, testing interest was a way to control if the AD succeeds at grabbing and maintaining the spectator’s attention.

3.2.2 Film experience

Participants had to evaluate their film experience on a 6-point Likert scale, according to four items: interest, enjoyment, aesthetics and emotion. Oliver and Hartmann (2010) argue that hedonistic motivations as well as the wish for meaningful experiences intervene in the viewers’ definition of good films, which is the reason for the inclusion of interest and enjoyment as two of the working parameters. On the other hand, as discussed, emotions too are essential to film experience, and the type of crescendo lyrical orchestral music used in *Nuit Blanche* can transmit an especially intense emotional experience (Jullier 2012). Furthermore, the elaborate 3D visual effects and the quality of the hyperreal cinematographic images used in the short film point to aesthetics being also crucial. According to the director, Arev Manoukian (in Hart 2010: online) “there are so many shades of grey between black and white that you can create extremely rich images. Because black and white photography is inherently pure, it’s a great way to tell a visual story and express emotion”, thus supporting the choice of aesthetics and emotion as parameters in our film experience evaluation scale.

As Likert scales are summative (Trochim and Donnelly 2006), the final score of each version is the sum of the 1-to-6 scores of the four items evaluated and will range between 4 and 24. To simplify the reading of the final scores presented in section 4.2, the final Likert scores have been converted from a 4-to-24 to a 1-to-10 scale.

3.2.3 AD evaluation

Following the model of the film experience evaluation scale, participants had to rate the access to the film through AD on a 6-point Likert scale with four items: (1) access to the elements necessary to understand the short film, (2) access to the stylistic and aesthetic elements of the short film, (3) access to the emotional aspects of the short film, and (4) access to an enjoyable experience. As in the case of film experience, the Likert scores

from 4 to 24 were converted to a 1-to-10 scale. In addition, BPS participants had to provide an overall rating of the AD on a 6-point scale, from very bad to excellent.

3.3. Participants

Forty-five blind and partially sighted participants were recruited with the help of two user organisations to listen to the ADs, answer the questionnaire and participate in focus group interviews. We contacted thirty-nine through the Department of Culture and Sport of the Territorial Delegation of ONCE (National Organization of the Spanish Blind) in Catalonia and five local ONCE offices located in Girona, Lleida, Manresa, Reus and Vic. Six further participants were recruited through ACIC, the Catalan Association for the Integration of the Blind, based in Barcelona. There were 28 men and 17 women, aged between 24 and 86 ($M=54$), of whom 11 were blind from birth. Six participants held a university degree, 14 had A-Levels and/or vocational training, 15 had no degree and 10 did not specify.

3.4. Experimental procedure

There was a total of fourteen group interviews and three individual ones, each session lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. First, the project was presented, and informed consents forms were signed, following the procedure approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia. Participants were then invited to complete the socio-demographic part of the questionnaire and to listen to one AD version played with VLC media player (90% volume) on an ASUS X540LJ laptop (85% volume, laptop speakers). Only the audio was offered, not the video, to guarantee that all participants would equally concentrate on the AD, even those with residual sight. After the listening, the researcher proceeded with the rest of the questionnaire. All scale questions were answered with the help of a specially made one-rod abacus with six beads (Figure 2), so that only the researcher had access to the answers.

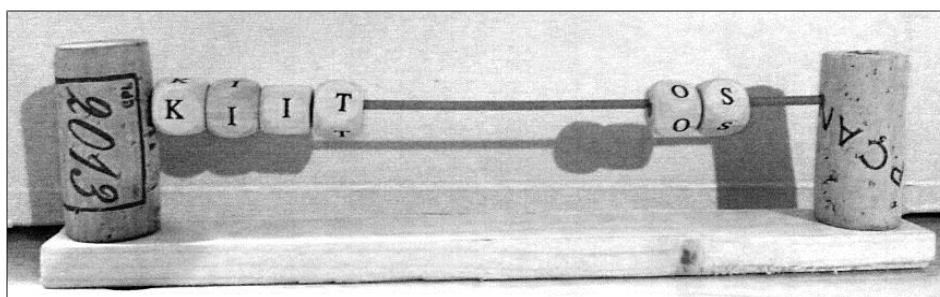


Figure 2. Abacus made for BPS participants to answer rating-scale questions

After the open-ended questions as well as after each of the sections, an open discussion took place, where the researcher acted as a moderator in a background position.

As far as group composition is concerned, we opted for a quasi-experimental design with a relative comparison between non-equivalent groups (Trochim and Donnelly 2006). In other words, the rather complex access to the study population did not allow for a random selection of participants and the decision was taken to form groups according to participants' availability to come for an experimental session. The groups were made by the collaborating user associations and were similar to natural groups, showing heterogeneity in terms of gender, age, and degree and type of blindness. Except for the three individual interviews, sessions unfolded with focus groups of two to four participants, who heard one of the three AD versions of the short film. Fifteen participants heard each version, constituting our three experimental groups.

The data collected in the experimental sessions were transcribed to an XLSX-datasheet, which was used to centralise the information gathered through the questionnaire and interviews, and to calculate mean values for all rating and Likert scale questions.

4. Results

In this section, we present the results on emotional response at the climax of the film, on film experience and on AD evaluation.

4.1. Emotional reception: the climax scene

After the opening scene of the film described above (section 3.1), the characters are introduced. A man in a suit, wearing a hat and carrying a briefcase, is walking in the street. He stops in front of the office building and looks to the restaurant across the street, where an elegant woman sits and drinks a glass of red wine. The man and the woman look at each other, and as soon as their glances cross, the film switches to slow motion. They start walking towards each other. The woman breaks through the restaurant window and the man is hit by a car, but they continue walking nonetheless, fixed into one another's eyes. When the story reaches its climax, the man and the woman are about to meet in the middle of the street. It is still in slow motion, and the lyrical orchestral music rises in crescendo until their faces are close and they are about to kiss, amidst glittering, floating glass shards (Figures 3 and 4):



Figure 3. The man and the woman walk towards each other



Figure 4. The man and the woman are about to kiss

Because of the emotional tension build-up, the climax scene is particularly interesting for a study of emotional response. The music intensifies the emotional rise, and the way in which the corresponding images are described should do justice to the moment. The three audio descriptions of this fragment read as follows (our emphasis):

[AD1 – CONVENTIONAL] Surrounded by pieces of glass that reflect light, they walk towards each other. She slightly reaches out her arms; he has **no hat and briefcase**. When they get closer, they shut their eyes and their lips come closer.

[AD2 – CINEMATIC] Surrounded by pieces of glass that **shine like sparks**, they walk towards each other **decidedly**. She slightly reaches out her arms. When they are getting closer, they look at each other's lips and close their eyes as **they are about to kiss**. The **frame closes in** on their lips.

[AD3 – NARRATIVE] Surrounded by pieces of glass that **shine like sparks**, they walk towards each other **decidedly**, like **two wax dolls set apart from reality**. Getting closer, they look at each other's lips and close their eyes as **they are about to kiss**.

The conventional description (AD1) refrains from any interpretation and offers an iconic description of the shots. Here, the absent hat and briefcase are mentioned, because they will later be indicators of the return to reality, while, on the other hand, both interpretative approaches omit this detail as they will explicitly mention the return to reality. Both AD2 and AD3 interpret the characters' state of mind, using the adverb 'decidedly'; they explicate that they are 'about to kiss' and use the metaphor 'shines like sparks' to refer to the light-reflecting glass shatter. In addition, AD2 uses cinematic terminology by stating that 'the frame closes in on their lips', to reflect the importance and aesthetics of this instant, which is showed in close-up. As for the narrative AD3, it focuses on the characters, with a metaphor comparing them to 'wax mannequins' walking towards each other.

Participants were asked the question 'What did you feel when they go towards each other and meet in spite of all the hurdles' and had to rate on a 1-to-6 scale how intensely they had felt joy, attraction, and interest at this moment. Three one-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effect of AD style on the intensity of interest, attraction and joy. The results are presented in Table 1:

Emotion AD version	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Interest		2, 33	0.41	.669	.024
AD1	4.2 (1.3)				
AD2	4.6 (1.2)				
AD3	4.3 (1.2)				
Attraction		2, 29	1.65	.210	.102
AD1	3.3 (1.0)				
AD2	3.5 (1.7)				
AD3	4.5 (1.6)				
Joy		2, 33	4.74	.016	.223
AD1	3.3 (1.4)				
AD2	4.7 (1.3)				
AD3	4.8 (1.2)				

Table 1. Emotional reception of the climax scene: Mean scores (standard deviation) and ANOVA results

As shown in Table 1, a majority of BPS participants felt interest in all versions and there is no main effect of AD style on interest. Although the mean score for attraction is one point higher with the narrative AD3, the ANOVA shows no main effect of AD style on attraction either. As for joy, the two interpretative approaches (AD2 and AD3) raised a more intense emotional response in most participants, with high mean scores for this item, and a significant effect of AD style on feeling joy. A post-hoc Tukey test (Table 2) shows that AD1 and AD2, as well as AD1 and AD3, differ significantly, while there is no significant difference between AD2 and AD3:

AD pair	M-diff	SE	q	p
				.016
AD1-AD2	1.41	.377	3.75	
AD1-AD3	1.53	.390	3.94	
AD2-AD3	0.12	.358	0.33	

Table 2. Post-hoc Tukey test for joy

These results show that cinematic AD2 and narrative AD3 both seem to guarantee a more emotional film experience than conventional AD1.

Altogether, in our sample, the high interest scores show that the participants were caught into the story with all the versions. Yet, the interpretative approaches characteristic of the cinematic and narrative AD styles aroused joy more intensely, coinciding with the cinematic intensity of the climax scene. In this sense, the descriptive techniques used in the cinematic AD2 version (cinematic terminology, interpretation of film language) and in the narrative AD3 version (interpretation of film language, use of symbolic language, focus on characters) appear to boost the emotional experience of the BPS audience. This positive effect of interpretative AD styles on the emotional response of the participants also reflects on their evaluation of the film experience and of the AD.

4.2. Film experience and AD evaluation

4.2.1 Film Experience

Participants had to evaluate their film experience on a 6-point Likert scale, in relation to four items: interest, enjoyment, aesthetics and emotion. The mean scores obtained for each item, as well as the results of a one-way ANOVA run on each item, are displayed in Table 3:

Rated item AD version	M (SD)	Df	F	p	η_p^2
Interest		2, 36	0.14	.873	.008
AD1	4.6 (0.9)				
AD2	4.8 (1.4)				
AD3	4.6 (1.5)				
Enjoyment		2, 36	1.13	.335	.059
AD1	4.5 (0.9)				
AD2	4.3 (1.6)				
AD3	5.0 (1.1)				
Aesthetics		2, 36	0.32	.731	.017
AD1	3.3 (1.0)				
AD2	3.4 (2.0)				
AD3	3.7 (1.4)				
Emotion		2, 36	2.50	.097	.122
AD1	3.5 (1.4)				
AD2	4.8 (1.8)				
AD3	4.7 (1.1)				

Table 3. Film experience: Mean scores (standard deviation) and ANOVA results

The mean scores for interest and enjoyment presented in Table 3 show a very homogeneous response for all AD versions, with high scores for all four aspects, and there is no main effect of AD version in any of these items. In other words, the three AD styles tested succeed at providing satisfactory access to the story conveyed by the short film. As for aesthetics, the results are also homogenous, but they are at best average, suggesting that none of the three AD styles was fully able to translate the beauty of the filmic imagery into words. Finally, a numeric difference can be observed between versions in the mean scores for emotion, with average scores for the conventional AD1 and high scores for the cinematic AD2 and the narrative AD3. Yet, a one-way ANOVA between the three groups on the item emotion does not show a statistically significant effect of AD style on emotion.

In line with our expectations, the differences observed in the evaluation of each item affect the total Likert score of each version, which is represented in Table 4:

AD version	FELS <i>M (SD)</i>
AD1	6.67 (1.31)
AD2	7.21 (2.03)
AD3	7.50 (1.69)

Table 4. Film Experience total Likert Scores: Mean score from 1 to 10

All AD styles scored high on the Likert scales, and the lowest score was reported in the case of conventional AD. Both the cinematic and the narrative versions obtained better film experience scores, mainly because they offered an experience which is not only interesting and enjoyable but, thanks to the interpretation of film language, also emotional.

4.2.2 AD evaluation

Following the same model as for the film experience evaluation scale, participants had to rate access to the film through AD on a 6-point Likert scale, based on four items: (1) access to the elements necessary to understand the short film, (2) access to an enjoyable experience, (3) access to the stylistic and aesthetic elements of the short film, and (4) access to the emotional aspects of the short film. The mean scores obtained for each item, as well as the results of a one-way ANOVA run on each item, are presented in Table 5:

Rated item AD version	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Film comprehension		2, 34	1.99	.152	.105
AD1	4.3 (1.0)				
AD2	4.9 (1.4)				
AD3	5.3 (0.8)				

Enjoyable experience		2, 34	0.05	.955	.003
AD1	4.9 (0.8)				
AD2	4.8 (1.9)				
AD3	5.0 (1.1)				
Aesthetics and style		2, 34	2.50	.097	.128
AD1	3.4 (0.9)				
AD2	4.8 (1.2)				
AD3	4.3 (1.1)				
Emotional aspects		2, 34	3.57	.039	.173
AD1	3.4 (1.3)				
AD2	4.8 (1.5)				
AD3	4.7 (1.1)				

Table 5. AD (access) evaluation: Mean value (standard deviation) and ANOVA results

As shown in Table 5, mean scores are well above average for AD1, AD2 and AD3. We found no main effect of AD style on access to film comprehension and to an enjoyable experience. In other words, all AD versions gave access to the information necessary to understand the story and enjoy the film experience.

By contrast, some differences between mean scores can be observed for the two other items: access to film aesthetics and style and to emotional aspects obtained lower scores with the conventional AD, with ratings on the negative side of the scale. A one-way ANOVA shows a significant effect of AD style on access to emotional aspects. A post-hoc Tukey test (Table 6) shows that AD1 and AD2 as well as AD1 and AD3 differ significantly when it comes to emotional aspects, while there is no significant difference between AD2 and AD3:

Rated item AD pair	M-diff	SE	q	p
AD1-AD2	1.40	.403	3.47	.039
AD1-AD3	1.29	.392	3.29	
AD2-AD3	0.11	.353	0.32	

Table 6. Post-hoc Tukey test for emotion

These results show that cinematic AD2 and narrative AD3 both seem to guarantee better access to the emotional aspects of film experience than conventional AD1.

As with film experience, differences in the individual item rating affect the Likert score of each version, and results are not as homogeneous as for the overall AD rating. Table 7 shows the total Likert scores on a 1-to-10 scale:

AD version	ADLS M (SD)
AD1	6.71 (1.25)
AD2	8.08 (2.17)
AD3	8.03 (1.55)

Table 7. AD total Likert Scores: Mean score from 1 to 10

Table 8 shows the overall rating of the AD on a 6-point scale (from 1-very bad to 6-very good):

AD version	AD rating M (SD)
AD1	4.7 (0.8)
AD2	4.8 (1.1)
AD3	5.1 (1.0)

Table 8. Overall AD rating (1-to-6 scale): Mean score from 1 to 6

As mentioned, the AD total Likert scores displayed in Table 7 are affected by differences in the item scores concerning aesthetic and emotional aspects, and both interpretative versions obtain better results than conventional AD1. This does not necessarily contradict the overall high satisfaction score displayed in Table 8, which can be explained by the fact that participants of all groups value above all the fact that they were given access to the short film in the first place. Cabeza-Cáceres (2013: 243, our translation) faced a similar situation and noticed that “to many participants, the information contained in the AD is good *per se* because they have nothing to compare it with”, which speaks in favour of the multiple-item scale approach for measuring user experience.

5. Conclusions

For the research presented in this paper, we tested three AD styles with blind and partially sighted users. The first AD was a conventional AD following guidelines in which a denotative description of images was offered, avoiding any mention of film techniques or interpretation of film language. The second AD included information on cinematic techniques and an interpretation of the meaning of film language. The third AD was in a narrative style, which combined iconic description and interpretation of film language into a re-narration of the film for the blind and partially sighted audience. While conventional AD is a denotative approach to film audio description, cinematic and narrative AD are both interpretative approaches.

Our findings show that conventional, cinematic and narrative AD styles can all offer blind and partially sighted viewers a satisfactory film experience. The good ratings obtained by all versions in the areas of interest and enjoyment demonstrate that our three AD styles provide up-to-standard access to the film used in our experiment. This observation is important for two reasons. First, this result indicates that conventional AD does fulfil the

purpose of making the film accessible to spectators who do not have access to the visuals. Second, even though interpretative ADs, such as cinematic and narrative AD, are not encouraged in guidelines, both approaches seem to be appreciated by the audience, which makes them alternatives worthy of interest for AD practice.

In our sample, both cinematic and narrative AD versions offered a clearly better access to emotional aspects of the film than the conventional AD, which translated into a better evaluation of both the film experience and the AD by BPS participants. Our results are in line with those of Fryer and Freeman (2013), Szarkowska (2013), and Walczak (2017a) insofar as the consumers of an alternative AD, which goes beyond the mere denotative description of images, report a better film experience. Whether it is the naming and/or interpretation of the film techniques (cinematic AD), the interpretative and narrative approach (narrative AD), the extensive use of cinematic terminology (Fryer and Freeman 2013), the adoption of the director's view (Szarkowska 2013), or the integration of the camera work and colloquial language into the AD (Walczak 2017a), studies seem to point to the need to approach AD from a filmic point of view and integrate film language into AD so as to offer blind and partially sighted viewers a better film experience.

In this sense, cinematic and narrative AD styles are promising alternatives to conventional AD. The shift from the visual to the audio reception channel implies a shift in the way the film is experienced by BPS audiences, which needs to be addressed in AD, and the interpretative approach is an important step in the right direction. Most participants who experienced the cinematic and the narrative AD reported an intense emotional response and high satisfaction levels with their film experience as well as with the AD. This may well point to a change of paradigm in AD practice, to embrace subjectivity as a means, not an obstacle, to drafting quality AD scripts. Further research could help determine the optimum way to combine description and narration, iconic depiction and film language interpretation, in order to offer the BPS audiences the most enjoyable, immersive and engaging film experience possible.

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Appendix 1

A1. Original Catalan audio descriptions of the opening scene of *Nuit Blanche*

AD1 – Conventional Style	En lletra lligada i al biaix: "Nuit Blanche". En blanc i negre. De nit, és lluna plena. Les teulades de zinc d'una gran ciutat, amb xemeneies fumejant. Un edifici de tres plantes amb grans finestrals, amb llum a l'interior. Sobre la porta principal, de vidre, un nom d'empresa.
AD2 – Cinematic style	"Nuit Blanche" apareix en pantalla a l'estil film noir. En blanc i negre, una nit de lluna plena, les xemeneies fumegen sobre les teulades de zinc d'una gran ciutat. L'enquadrament baixa per la façana d'un edifici d'oficines de tres plantes, amb grans finestrals i porta principal de vidre, encara amb llum a l'interior.
AD3 – Narrative style	"Nuit Blanche". La ciutat s'estén en blanc i negre sota la lluna plena. Les xemeneies fumegen sobre les teulades de zinc. Homes i dones passegen pel carrer, abrigats, per davant d'un edifici d'oficines de tres plantes i de grans finestrals, encara amb llum.

A2. Original Catalan audio descriptions of the climax scene

AD1 – Conventional Style	Envoltats pels trossets de vidre que reflecteixen la llum, avancen cap a l'encontre, ella amb els braços lleugerament endavant, ell sense barret ni maletí. Quan són a un pam l'un de l'altre, tanquen els ulls i acosten els llavis.
AD2 – Cinematic style	Rodejats pels trossets de vidre, que reflecteixen la llum com espurnes, avancen decidits cap a l'encontre, ella amb els braços lleugerament endavant. Quan són a un pam l'un 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.
AD3 – Narrative style	Rodejats dels vidres, que reflecteixen la llum com espurnes, avancen decidits cap a l'encontre, com dues figures de cera alienes a la realitat. Davant per davant, es miren els llavis i tanquen els ulls, a punt per rebre el petó.

Biography



Floriane Bardini is a translator and doctoral researcher. She has worked as a French teacher in Germany and Spain before completing her Master in Specialised Translation at the University of Vic – Central University of Catalonia, where she is now conducting research in the field of audiovisual translation and media accessibility. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on film language audio description and user experience.

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