

Foreword

Prefacio

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This special issue compiles contributions that explore current audio description (AD) practices for animated films while also addressing the importance of professional and academic training and calling for a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills that align with industry standards. According to Génin and Martin (2023: online; our translation), “the term animation defines any composition of visual motion proceeding from a succession of phases calculated, produced and recorded image by image, whatever the system of representation chosen (cartoon, celluloid, articulated puppet, drawing-on-film, cut-out animation), whatever the means of reproduction used (lithography, photochemistry, magnetic recording, translation into digital information for the computer), and whatever the process of motion capturing (flip book, crown of prisms of the praxinoscope, motion picture projector, videotape recorder, computer graphics console).” Although animated cinema is still perceived today as an object of entertainment aimed at children’s audiences, animated films evolved to address a multitude of topics that not only entertain but also inform, raise awareness, influence, manipulate, confound censorship, poke fun at certain realities, make it possible to show what is unbearable to watch and command our attention. There are also instances where filmmaking and animated storytelling blended to produce astounding results, as we can see in movies such as *Tom & Jerry* (2021, directed by Tim Story), *Osmosis Jones* (2001, directed by Bobby Farrelly, Peter Farrelly, Tom Sito, and Piet Kroon), *The Mask* (1994, directed by Russell Chuck), or *Chip’ n Dale: Rescue Rangers* (2022, directed by Akiva Schaffer), to give just a few examples.

Audio description is a technique that “reconciles the terms *blind* [and] *spectator*” (Le Bihan 2020: 5). It makes the scrolling images on the screen accessible in words not only to legally blind and visually impaired people but also to non-blind people who turn to it for practical, informational, educational or

linguistic skills development reasons (e.g., children), for entertainment or research (Starr 2022: 476). Although audio description is about describing visual elements, as well as plot-relevant sounds that cannot be interpreted clearly without the image, the purpose of audio description is not only to facilitate comprehension by adding an explanatory spoken narrative but also to “enhance the pleasure” (Vercauteren 2016: 13) to recreate the audiovisual experience for the intended users. That is because watching a film is not “decoding a textual message conveyed by its author for their audience,” but rather a unique and subjective experience that “calls on all our faculties: sensory (there are films that *make the cut*), cognitive (we need to understand them well) and imaginative (they take almost all of us somewhere else, and they continue to fuel our daydreams long after we have seen them” (Jullier 2012: n. p.; our translation). What we perceive is not only done through vision but also with the whole body in what Gaudin calls the “image-space” (Seknadje 2016 in an interview with Gaudin): a dynamic, flexible and rhythmic space, “which is perhaps less pictorial in essence and more of a musical essence” (*idem*; our translation) and which is the coming together of sounds, images and personal subjectivity.

In their paper entitled *Ein Friedlicher Tag: Innovations in Academic Training in Audio Description for Animated Short Films among University Students*, **Silvia Toribio-Camuñas & Silvia Martínez-Martínez** investigate AD for animated short films as a didactic tool, focusing first on the interlinguistic translation problems from German to Spanish of an AD script for an animated film, and then on the discussion regarding the intra- and extralinguistic and cultural challenges involved, as well as the effectiveness of translation strategies when crafting effective, high-quality AD scripts. The sample of participants consisted of students in the bachelor’s degree program in translation and interpretation at the University of Granada, all native Spanish speakers with German proficiency at an A2.2 level.

Drawing on a limited body of comparative studies for various language combinations, the research underscores the need for strategies beyond linguistic expertise. These strategies should focus on accessibility and consider children as the intended audience since animated productions should convey concepts and meanings as if they were created for children only, argue the authors. The strategies should also apply core AD principles (tone of speech, descriptions, emotions, characters, structure vocabulary, or rhetorical devices) and adhere to linguistic and cultural norms while adapting to the idiosyncrasies of each film. The study also incorporates a brief analysis of existing AD guidelines and practices from Spain and Germany and an experimental study focused on comparing a series of examples from two children’s animated films with AD in both German and Spanish. Key differences between the two languages are illustrated and discussed.

The results underscore a critical gap in research on AD for specific subgenres, such as animated films. This lack of research, the authors argue, limits the development of specialized training programs, tailored resources, and methodologies, either for translation students or AD professionals,

which would otherwise ensure AD scripts fully address the unique linguistic, social, and cultural challenges associated with the translation of animated content.

For authors **Vicente Bru García and Cristina Álvarez de Morales Mercado**, animation should not be reduced to a children's genre or a type of cinema confined to a young audience. Still, it should be seen as a distinct technique with its characteristics in the broader context of the film industry and of live-action cinema. Animated films often tackle complex themes intended for adult audiences or depict dystopian worlds, demonstrating animation's potential for depth and sophistication. The integration of accessibility features, such as AD, should be recognized as a means of enhancing rather than diminishing the overall quality of animated films while expanding their audience.

In their article *"Tale as Old as Time": Animation as a Medium in Teaching Audiovisual Language and Audio*, the authors aim to establish and implement a quality methodology for animation AD teaching in university-level translation programs while also measuring if and how the proposed didactic sequence influences students' perceptions of animation seen as a technique rather than as a genre and students' interest in learning about animated films.

The study was conducted within the "Multimedia Translation" module at the University of Granada, the only module in the bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpreting that incorporates AD into its syllabus. Different teams consisted of a mix of Spanish—and French-speaking students who had at least a C1 level in Spanish and a B2 level in French.

The authors look at the most common errors made by translation students, drawing inspiration from Jiménez Hurtado's (2010) and Jiménez Hurtado and Martínez-Martínez (2021), who developed a three-level tagging system for AD texts (narratological level, image/film language level, and a grammar analysis of AD segments to identify the patterns followed by professionals) to which a fourth level focused on the acoustic mode was added later in 2021. To assess the students' audio description scripts (ADS), authors use four specific categories: technical parameters, narratological parameters, cinematography parameters, and sound parameters. In conclusion, the authors also remind the importance of training students in film language (film semiotics), accessible translation techniques, specific AD translation concepts and skills, and technology when teaching AD while maintaining a balance between theory and practice adapted to the professional market realities.

Finally, in their paper *Audiodescribiendo las emociones de película: accediendo "del derecho" a del revés*, **Rocío Ávila Ramírez y María del Mar Rivas Carmona** examine the production of an AD script for the animated film *Inside Out* (2015) by the National Organization of the Spanish Blind (ONCE), via the Audesc Mobile app, focusing on the analysis, interpretation and transmission of non-verbal stimuli into concise verbal descriptions for impaired viewers. Inspired by Díaz Cintas (2006), the authors argue that linguistic competence is the most critical skill among the four essential competencies an audio describer must possess, its importance being amplified particularly in films rich with emotional and psychological descriptions.

The psychological and emotional load in the animated film *Inside Out* is particularly intense. The protagonists themselves are the emotions that develop in the mind of Riley Anderson, a young girl who feels out of place and lonely after moving from Minnesota to San Francisco. Therefore, the film is also a profound reflection on humans' emotional complexity and identity development in childhood, argue the authors. Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust are the five basic emotions that dominate Riley's mind, and together, they steer her actions as she evolves into puberty, playing the role of a "control center" and narrating the story through visual metaphors.

Technology, explain the authors, has already developed to allow impaired users to benefit from the same film experience, either through apps or through specific devices such as specialized gloves that produce vibrations on the skin or augmented reality subtitle glasses, which project subtitles directly onto the lenses, the question is how to convey emotions with the same intensity by using language when interpreting visual images and metaphors along with the accompanying prosody of the film. To answer the question, the study focuses on three key scenes from the film, exploring how they shed light on Riley's emotional growth and cognitive development alongside the personalities of the characters around her.

The analysis of the AD script reveals careful attention to clarity, functionality, and emotion. However, technological constraints limit the ability to describe details like color, expression, and subtle gestures that carry deep emotional meaning. The lack of time to fully describe these elements can hinder the viewer's understanding, underscoring the need for a balanced approach between storytelling and visual description.