

Book Review: *Audio Description for the Arts: A Linguistic Perspective*, by Elisa Perego, London, Routledge, 2023, 204 pp. \$57.99, ISBN 978-1-000-96998-6

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The book is made up of an introduction and methodological considerations, six chapters and a conclusion to offer a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis based on a corpus of descriptive data, unveiling prevalent linguistic patterns in specific types of art texts found in museums or art galleries. Furthermore, its aim is to assess guidelines for oral scripts, propose viable solutions and innovative methods for static art tailored for visually impaired individuals.

In the 21st century, the mediums of cinema, television, and short videos have played a pivotal role in facilitating cultural exchange, giving rise to the field of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), which has attracted significant attention within translation studies. Audio Description (AD), then, serves as a crucial component, offering language services tailored for the visually impaired and enriching the breadth and depth of research in AVT. Associate Professor Elisa Perego, from the University of Pavia in Italy, specializes in English Language and Translation, and has co-directed numerous audiovisual projects as a trailblazer in the field. Her seminal work, *Audio Description of Artworks: A Linguistic Perspective*, delves into the linguistic representation and translation of AD in static artworks such as paintings and sculptures. Perego's exploration encompasses three distinct methods of AD for presenting artworks in museum and gallery settings: live narration, pre-recorded AD, and tactile guided tours.

Introduction and Methodological considerations (pp. 1-8) briefly retraces the development of AVT, the service of visually impaired people receiving AD of artifacts in museums and galleries, and the research background, main ideas and important values of each chapter. In addition, the section explains the methodology of the whole book including corpus collection and analysis. Three tools, LancsBox, WordSmith Tool 8 and Analyze My Writing, were used to collect data and to analyze the oral texts in terms of vocabulary variation, sentence expression length, sentence rhythm and complexity, and text readability. “Although LancsBox and WordSmith Tools 8 calculate similar data, we primarily relied on LancsBox to compute complexity statistics” (p.3). Ultimately, it intends to provide learnable training content and techniques for providers and researchers of AD.

Chapter 1 introduces the view that AD are both complex symbolic and multimodal texts in an accessible form. The most meaningful visual elements from the source text are converted into language, so that it can be read by visually impaired people to achieve comprehensibility, conveyability and communicability. Initially, relevant research explored AD texts of films, exploring specific conditions and limitations. It was found that accessible AD describers provide language subtitling, re-dubbing, or live subtitling for visually impaired people, as well as translating from standard language into sign language or simplified language. However, the practice of AVT predates research, with professional audiovisual services “first documented in Spain in the 1940s, and more than 50 performances of AD services in the U.S. after 1980, and an increase in the number of hours of audiovisuals offered on blogs, television, and even the legalization of the process in the U.S. after 1990” (pp. 14-15). At the same time, Russia explored the terminology, literature, norms and processes of AD. In the 21st century, scholars such as Braun, Starr, Perego, Pacinotti, and Taylor, have researched AD productions of theatre, live, dance and artwork, and even co-founded ADLAB (Audio Description: Lifelong Access for the Blind (2011-2014)) project and the ADLAB Pro Lab, as well as the EASIT (Easy Language for Social Inclusion Training) training component (pp.

16-17). The emergence of AD providers such as Art beyond Sight in the UK and VocalEyes in the US has led to the development of systematic language services for visually impaired people in museums, on stage and even at performances. As a result, even though AD is complex and even requires the re-creation of texts, it ultimately contributes to the understanding of visual art by visually impaired people. In addition, the direction of AD research extends to the design of language education such as second language acquisition, the improvement of linguistic ability and the enhancement of visual quality, which can help to improve cross-cultural communication. All in all, AD is user-oriented, and the content is delivered through narratives with adjectives, adverbs, or verbs to enhance the details of the story and evoke emotions.

Chapter 2 examines AD of Artworks. The concept of art is ambiguous, at times exploring art and aesthetics, at other times emphasizing the audience's response to art. Therefore, the author has chosen to define art broadly and aptly as the most effective and basic form of communication between artists and viewers. AD describers need to understand the elements of art, explain their combinations or syntax, and effectively describe the aesthetic qualities of a particular artwork in a way that provides the best experiential results for the visually impaired and stimulates their sense of cultural engagement. "In Europe, museums and galleries have been in existence since the 17th century" (p. 39). They display and contain countless works of art, fulfilling the communicative function of art, and are suitable for any group of people to experience the aesthetics of art and embody inclusivity. Both venues have designed and implemented physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural, emotional and economic accessibility that facilitates rapid wheelchair access and clear guided tours. The communication function captures the visitor's attention with multiple senses such as hearing, sight, touch and smell, and increases engagement with simple and straightforward content. "Currently, the 'hands-on' approach, increased sensuous awareness, and a more selective and creative presentation of exhibits, have contributed to making museums and galleries more attractive to a wider" (p. 44). The inclusiveness

of museums is complemented by the artistic content of AD tours, which provide an inclusive and accessible tool for visitors who have difficulty engaging with the museum experience, such as the visually impaired. The practice and use of AD requires constant revision and enhancement based on user feedback, resulting in a detailed, accurate, concise, visually appealing and coherent spoken text. Therefore, the use of spoken word video is used to deliver relevant art information to museums, galleries and other art exhibitions by means of advanced recording and on-site guided tours, building bridges with visitors. However, the two approaches test the skills and abilities of AD machines and authors. They need to consider the audience's interactivity, informativeness and applicability to convey the important information and content of artworks and avoid boring texts. Secondly, the equipment for the reception of spoken images is particularly important in the exhibition process, involving the visually impaired audience's understanding of the art exhibition, and needs to be intuitive and minimalist, prompting the user to be flexible in its use. "Expert live spoken accompaniment can help visitors navigate a painting reproduction physically by positioning their hands on it. This can also help better orient visitors in the museum space more effectively than pre-recorded instructions" (p. 52).

Chapters 3 to 6 explore the individual AD for artwork and AD and Tactile Tours. Firstly, the individual AD for artwork provides the opportunity for specific artworks and sculptures to be used independently, in any order, to enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of the cultural environment. Secondly, the AD and tactile tours are multi-sensory to facilitate the visually impaired to interact with the artworks and immerse themselves in the art atmosphere. In the four chapters, they use three tools, LncsBox, WordSmith Tool 8 and Analyze My Writing, to collect data and analyze the text, following the same corpus analysis model. The quantitative data are provided and briefly discussed to infer possible complexity and informative judgment as well as text-type specificities, providing a qualitative overview of their main linguistic features.

An AD corpus of paintings and sculptures collects exhibition content. “A collection of 55 audio descriptions of paintings exhibited in different museums and galleries for our analysis of the language of standalone painting ADs” (p. 73). It was found that sensitive words such as see and appear were less likely to occur to avoid misunderstanding by the visually impaired. In addition, color and tools were used in various tenses in the AD of oil paintings. The color vocabulary of oil paintings is rich, with white, blue and black predominating. Sculpture, on the other hand, talks less about color and more about sculpture materials, components, body parts, etc. A collection of approximately 30 ADs of statues, statuettes, and sculptures collected in different museums and described professionally in British and American English by different audio describers and service providers (pp. 104-106). Specialized verbs related to the above two kinds of art are less frequently used, and intonational auxiliaries appear less frequently, but more use is made of easy-to-understand third forms of expression, as well as the use of simple and declarative sentences to achieve the purpose and effect of communication.

AD and tactile guided tours are based on a public audience and provide professional and comprehensive guided tour content. Firstly, the AD tour guide is divided into three stages: “the pre-writing stage” (p. 123) requires fieldwork, selection of the original text, itinerary, research and interviews, and expansion of the AD video content; “the writing stage”(p. 123) requires planning, drafting, and editing of the text of the AD video; “the post-writing stage” (p. 123) requires feedback and adjustment of the text by the users, their peers, and the professionals, and finally, providing the content of the AD tour guide in the form of a live or prerecorded recording. The narrator should provide an accurate, factual and concise description of the tour, whilst verbally assisting and encouraging the visitors, making them feel comfortable and supported, but also independent. Regarding the content of the AD tour guide, the author collecting a corpus of museums and galleries found that words for room facilities appeared more frequently, black and white colors appeared more often, and orientation vocabulary continually indicated the direction of viewing to visually impaired people.

Tactile guided tours work to provide another channel for visually impaired people to perceive the beauty of artefacts “In all human beings, touch is a crucial sense for learning and communicating as well as a primary means of experiencing the world” (p. 157). Not all museums or heritage sites offer tactile guided tours or stand-alone tactile experiences. This service is costly and time-consuming and requires extensive interdisciplinary networks and the full co-operation of a solid team of experts in complementary fields. Tactile materialization of sculptural and painted works of art for multisensory stimulation of the visually impaired has been investigated in “the EASIT (2021) and ADLAB PRO (2019a) projects” (p. 159) and their feasibility has been recognized. The author’s collection corpus of relevant haptic guided tour content revealed that verbs related to haptic actions performed on objects to be discovered mostly prepare the objects for discovery. There was less color vocabulary content, but rather an increase in vocabulary for body touch and artefact material. The content of the haptic guided tour of the tactile images was also divided into three phases: “the pre-exploration phase” (p. 171) consisted of adjusting the position, offering choices, displaying the content, and stopping time; “the while-exploring phase” (p. 171) consisted of general to individual, external to internal, left to right, and above to below; and “the touch phase” (p. 171) consisted of wrist, hand, and finger maneuvers as well as fingertip finesse training.

The Conclusion re-emphasizes the purpose of this book. Today, we live in a world that has recognized the importance of communicative inclusivity and is implementing it in more than one field. Based on new forms of accessibility such as spoken word, it is possible to provide listeners who need language support in knowing, understanding, and learning about art in a more or less simplified way by obtaining appropriate guided spoken-word tours in museums, galleries, and other art centers. This book can therefore be seen as a first step in thinking deeply about the accessibility of art languages.

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