

Audiodescription research: state of the art and beyond

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Abstract

Audiodescription (AD) is a growing arts and media access service for visually impaired people. As a practice rooted in intermodal mediation, i.e. 'translating' visual images into verbal descriptions, it is in urgent need of interdisciplinary research-led grounding. Seeking to stimulate further research in this field, this paper aims to discuss the major dimensions of AD, give an overview of completed and ongoing research relating to each of these dimensions and outline questions for further academic study.

Keywords

Audiodescription, Intermodal Translation, Mediation, Multimodality, Media Access

1 Introduction

In a society which relies increasingly on audiovisual content as a source of information, entertainment and education, visually impaired people are at risk of being excluded from socially and culturally important discourses. Audiodescription (AD), a growing arts and media access service for blind and partially sighted people, tries to reduce this risk. On the one hand, museums and art galleries offer verbal descriptions of paintings, sculptures and other visual objects, often in combination with 'touch tours', to give blind and partially sighted people access to 'static' visual art (de Coster & Mühleis 2007). On the other hand, AD for live and filmed programmes and performances – including e.g. films, TV programmes, theatre, opera or dance performances – aims to 'translate' the essential visual elements of these performances into short verbal descriptions which are inserted into appropriate moments of the audiovisual source material, e.g. gaps in film or theatre dialogue. Non-verbal sounds which make no sense without access to visual information are also included in the descriptions (OfCom 2000).

While AD for museums and galleries and AD for live and filmed performances share basic principles, the latter has a range of specific problems. Films and theatre plays, for example, are dynamic events and combine different modes of expression – images, different types of sound, music, speech – to create meaning. Unlike the descriptions of paintings, the descriptions inserted into films, theatre plays, dance and opera performances need to link up with other modes of expression beyond the visual. They are also subject to timing constraints resulting from the variable pace and density of verbal communication, e.g. in different film genres. This paper will focus on 'dynamic' AD.

DVD and Blue Ray technologies and Broadband Internet have already made the distribution of AD for film easier. Improved technological equipment in cinemas, theatres and opera houses as well as the switchover to digital TV will improve technological support for the reception of AD in other settings. At the same time, legislation for the provision of AD is unfolding.

In this context, the publication of guidelines for AD in some countries (e.g. UK, Spain, Germany) has been an important step towards providing practising audiodescribers with a basis for their challenging and creative task. However, available guidelines are often still led by intuition and convention, giving little insight into *why* some descriptions are effective and others are less so. Hence, there is an urgent need for research-led grounding especially for students, trainers and beginning practitioners in this fast developing field. Research has begun to emerge in many countries, but it remains fragmented.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the major dimensions of AD, taking stock of research conducted to date and raising questions for future research, in an effort to establish a research agenda for this emergent academic discipline. In section 2, the essential features of AD will be outlined, arguing that AD is a specific form of intermodal translation and situating it within the context of Translation Studies. The subsequent sections will deal with the major steps involved in creating AD and research relating to each of these. The first step – the audiodescriber's comprehension of the audiovisual source – will be the topic of section 3. Questions related to the creation of the descriptions will be addressed in section 4, before section 5 will briefly look at one aspect which sets AD apart from many (but not all) other forms of translation, the spoken delivery of the descriptions. Section 6 will look at reception research. Questions relating to the wider social context of AD and the role of the audiodescriber will be addressed 'along the way'. Section 7 will conclude the paper.

2 AD as intermodal mediation/translation

Hyks (2005) has pointed out that translation and AD are two closely related activities. Many researchers agree that AD is a specific form of translation and have defined it *inter alia* as intersemiotic, intermodal or cross-modal translation or mediation (e.g. Benecke 2007, Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado 2007, Braun 2007, Orero 2005).

It is certainly the nature of the mediation, which is cross-modal, involving essentially a 'translation' of visual images into verbal text, that sets AD most distinctly apart from other forms of translation. Eco discusses some of the problems of "how to

render what one sees in words" (2003: 104), drawing on the study of hypotyposis. However, he voices some discontent with regard to the state of research:

Hypotyposis is the rhetorical effect by which words succeed in rendering a visual scene. Unfortunately all the rhetoricians who wrote about hypotyposis, from antiquity to the present, have provided only circular definitions. They have said more or less that hypotyposis is the figure by which one creates a visual effect through words – that is in order to answer the questions, they have restated the question as if it was the answer. Requested to say *how* it happens, they have simply stated *that* it happens. (Eco 2003: 104, emphasis in the original)

One of the underlying research problems for AD then is that it involves a process about which is little is currently known. An answer to Eco's question would constitute most useful input for the study and practice of AD. However, matters are in fact even more complex, since the cross-modal mediation taking place in AD is shaped (or constrained) by a range of specific conditions.

Firstly, the source text in AD (for live and recorded performances) is an *audiovisual*, i.e. multimodal text rather than just a (mono-modal) *visual* image or scene. In a rare attempt to describe the implications of this for AD, Doloughan & Rogers (2005) emphasise that AD first of all calls for an understanding of the meaning-making potential of both the verbal and visual modes of communication *and* of how they complement and undercut each other in a film, theatre play or other audiovisual performance, before considering linguistic solutions to recreate visual meaning.

Secondly, the descriptions produced in AD have to 'interact' with other modes of expression, e.g. the dialogue, sound effects or music. This is something AD shares with other forms of Audiovisual Translation. Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado (2007: 176) point out that the descriptions by themselves would not fulfil some of the Hallidayan criteria for textuality. According to Reiss's typology, however, the descriptions would fall into the category of 'multi-medial texts'. In fact they fulfil both of Reiss's criteria for this category, as they are texts "which are only part of a larger whole and are phrased with a view to, and in consideration of, the 'additional information' supplied by [another] sign system"¹ and, equally importantly, texts "which, though put down in writing, are presented orally" (Reiss 1981: 126). Both the non-autonomous nature of the descriptions and their oral delivery constrain the linguistic solutions in a number of ways.

The multimodal nature of source and target text in AD also has an impact on the interpretive element, which is present in AD as well as in any other form of translation (Gadamer 1960). Just as the production of any translation (i.e. target text) is based on the translator's interpretation of the source text (rather than on 'the source text'), so is the creation of an AD script based on the audiodescriber's interpretation of the audiovisual

source. Likewise, the reception of the descriptions is shaped by the target recipients' interpretation of the audiodescribed product. Arguably however, multimodal texts provide even greater scope for interpretation than mono-modal texts. The familiar lack of intersubjectivity in text interpretation is thus multiplied in AD because of the multimodality of both source and target text.

This is further compounded by the timing constraints governing AD and the richness of the visual mode. The 'golden rule' of AD that the descriptions should fit into gaps in the dialogue and should not overlap with important sound effects or music necessitates succinct descriptions and hence decisions and selective solutions on the part of the audiodescriber. Decision-making and selection involves interpretation. The rich amount of information offered by visual images makes this task highly demanding.

An additional consideration for AD is that the audience is bound to be heterogeneous, including partially sighted and congenitally blind people, and those who were once sighted. At the same time, it is likely to include sighted viewers, in particular friends and family of the primary recipients. In other words, the audience of audiodescribed material embraces recipients with different 'visual memories' and recipients with no, partial or full access to the visual mode. To a certain extent, AD is therefore 'vulnerable translation' in a similar way to subtitling (Díaz Cintas & Remael 2007: 57).

It does not come as a surprise that there are different views on how AD should be done. In the absence of established translation strategies or 'norms' this has led to different styles of AD, giving the audiodescriber a variable degree of 'visibility'. Yeung (2007) sees two global strategies for AD:

There are two possible positions describers can take. They can take the subsidiary role of co-narrators translating certain signs for the unsighted audience. Co-narrators perform a task similar to 'filling blanks'. But describers can also take the pro-active role of independent narrators, taking control of the overall product by making their own narration, the dialogues and the soundtrack work together. They might even incorporate an introduction to cinema or the film before the film starts and create a unique experience for the audience. Yeung (2007: 241)

Whilst genre considerations certainly influence the approach, York's (2007) and Matamala & Orero's (2007) opposing approaches to opera description are an interesting case in point. The Royal Opera House in London provides an audio introduction before the performance but does not insert descriptions into the performance itself (York 2007). By contrast in the Liceu Opera in Barcelona, experiments took place to provide comprehensive descriptions during the performance, even 'violating' the rule of no

overlap between AD and music (Matamala & Orero 2007). This calls for further research into audience expectations and preferences, but it also raises more general questions about the social conditions for AD practice, and in particular the question of whether and how the social context of AD encourages or suppresses particular strategies.

The 'translation' process involved in AD raises many challenging new questions for Translation Studies and other disciplines concerned with the study of human communication. On a global level, many of the key questions in AD revolve around notions such as 'interpretation', 'equivalence', 'rewriting', 'norms' and 'visibility', which are familiar from Translation Studies. However, Translation Studies has traditionally been concerned with the creation of meaning based on the use of verbal language. Further research needs to explore how these notions can be extended to include, as a new dimension, the mediation of audiovisual material.

To develop a fuller understanding of the various dimensions of AD, its study needs to be informed by insights from a range of neighbouring disciplines. The analysis of the first step of AD, the audiodescriber's comprehension of the audiovisual source text, is a good example of this. The following section will look into the key questions for this dimension of AD and how it can be informed by contributions from other disciplines.

3 Comprehension of the audiovisual source

One could argue that the purpose of AD is to provide a 'substitute' for the visual and that the audiodescriber therefore needs to focus on the meaning of the visual elements in an audiovisual performance. However, in audiovisual texts, signs from different modes of expression are used to create meaning jointly. The recipients of a film, for example, do not normally make themselves aware of where they rely on visual support to make sense of a dialogue exchange or of the many sound effects in which modern films abound.

Braun (2007) has argued that the comprehension of multimodal texts is 'holistic', drawing on input from all modes involved. The audiodescriber's task of identifying the contribution of visual cues to the meaning of the audiovisual text as a whole is therefore a difficult one. The audiodescriber has to 'single out' the information that is conveyed visually – as a basis for selecting what to describe. This is what distinguishes AD from Eco's concern with recreating mono-modal visual meaning through words.

This task may have to be acquired or practiced at least. In analogy to Nord's (1988) claim about the importance of source texts analysis in translation, it can be argued then that a multimodal analysis of the audiovisual source text, taking into account all modes of expression, is an important step in AD and hence worthy of further investigation. In the

emerging body of AD research, this issue has received little attention to date. However, other disciplines offer frameworks which can be adapted to suit the needs of AD research.

The major schools of Semiotics, based on the work of Saussure and Peirce, are concerned with the different modes of communication ('sign systems') and can in principle provide a useful framework for analysing multimodal texts (for a recent overview, see Chandler 2007). In line with its structuralist roots, Semiotics tends to analyse sign systems in terms of their meaning *potential* (as reflected in notions such as 'visual grammar', Kress & van Leeuwen 1996), lacking a processing perspective, i.e. an analysis of how people make sense of signs used in texts and contexts. A processing perspective would, however, be an important one for audiodescribers. It would provide them not only with insights into their own process of source text comprehension, but also with an understanding of how their target audience is likely to process the audiodescribed material (see section 6).

Film Studies has imported many concepts from semiotics but has focused on (the perception of) *moving* images and filmic techniques to create meaning. Barry (1997) gives a good description of this:

The art of film ultimately derives from the process of perception: from our ability to see a reflection of real experience in a single, two dimensional image, and from our perceptual bias for detecting movement. Whatever understanding can be brought to the still image – such as the meaning of close-ups, camera angles, lighting, and context – is also applicable to film, but to this is added the magic of motion. Because this movement depends on the joining of images, the art of film also implies the capacity to manipulate meaning through editing. [...] As the film frames continue to be physically replaced by succeeding ones, the shape of the whole begins to emerge as a gestalt, and the configuration takes on a unified meaning in which each separate element plays a significant part. This is how meaning is derived in film. (Barry 1997: 192)

What is missing in such analyses is the contribution of the verbal (and auditory) mode. Moreover, as in Semiotics, there is also little concern with *how* the separate elements are connected, how a 'unified meaning' is formed, i.e. how audiovisual texts are in fact *processed* by the recipient.

Models of verbal comprehension developed in Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics seem to be more elaborate in this respect. In Discourse Analysis, verbal text comprehension has been conceptualised as the construction of a mental or situational model of a text through the activation of knowledge (schemata) triggered by textual cues (Johnson-Laird 1983, van Dijk & Kintsch 1983). Similar approaches have more recently been adopted in Narratology (e.g. Herman 2002). Pragmatic models of communication

have emphasised the role of inferences drawn from a wide range of textual and extratextual sources to derive meaning (see in particular Sperber & Wilson 1995).

Multimodality research has begun to uncover how verbal utterances, visual images and sounds jointly create meaning (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, O'Halloran 2004, Ventola et al. 2004), itself drawing on a variety of linguistic and other frameworks. If combined with the insights generated by (linguistic) Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Narratology, multimodality research can generate models of multimodal text comprehension, which could be one of the pillars for researching AD and developing future audiodescribers' understanding of some of its difficulties. This could then be complemented by insights from Semiotics and Film Studies, which can provide the audiodescriber with more global knowledge about how films are created, e.g. how filmic techniques are used to convey meaning, create a particular atmosphere or suspense (Pujol 2007, see also Chaume 2004). Equally important input could come from Theatre and Dance Studies, especially for AD in live performances.

4 Creating the descriptions

After pinpointing the specific contribution of the visual to the meaning of the audiovisual source text as a whole, the next crucial steps for the audiodescriber concern the selection of the contextually *essential* visual cues and the decision of how to describe them. One of the major challenges is to create descriptions which provide the information that is essential to following a programme without overwhelming or patronizing the audience.

Selection is imposed by the timing constraints for the descriptions but equally so with the richness of the visual mode. In the description of fast-paced films and TV programmes it is normally impossible to provide all the detail that is conveyed visually (a character's location, his/her actions, appearance, details about the scenery etc). However, even in slower-paced programmes and performances, the amount of detail included needs to be considered carefully. Paivio (1986: 60) has noted that the elements which are simultaneously offered by a visual image are not necessarily simultaneously processed. It can be assumed that sighted viewers do not process everything they see, e.g. in a film, in detail. In other words, the visual mode is rather impressionistic. By contrast, the sequential nature of the verbal mode seems to encourage a more complete processing of the information offered. Extensive descriptions can, therefore, lead to a cognitive processing overload in the recipient.

The question then is how the audiodescriber's selection process can be conceptualised and what guidance research can provide for it. Based on Sperber &

Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory and Gutt's (2000) application of it to Translation Studies, Braun (2007) and Vercauteren (2007) have suggested that this approach, which distinguishes between explicitly and implicitly communicated assumptions, can provide a framework for analysing what needs to be 'spelt out' in the descriptions and what the audience is likely to be able to infer. This could be complemented by (at least) three strands of research.

Firstly, more information should be obtained about the processing strategies of the audience (or different audience groups). Yeung (2007) reports on Chao's research in Taiwan in relation to this.² The crucial point for further pragmatic and cognitive research is to determine under which circumstances a lack of access to the visual mode is likely to cause comprehension problems and where it may be compensated (e.g. through dialogue).

Secondly, more research is required into audience expectations with regard to type and amount of information in the descriptions. A revealing starting point for such research is Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado's (2007) comparison of the English and Spanish AD versions of the film *The Hours*. The two versions differ immensely in the length of the descriptions (7.800 words in English vs. 5.000 words in the Spanish version). Whilst both versions were found to "coincide in describing action and changes of scene", there was "comparatively little information in Spanish concerning character and setting", e.g. "detail with regard to clothes, expressions and situational context" (Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado 2007: 177). What remains to be done is to investigate whether current practice coincides with audience expectations and preferences.

Thirdly, we still know little about the overall narrative or 'story-telling' preferences of AD audiences. It can be expected these have an impact on comprehensibility, information retention and the general reception of a particular description style. As a first step, cultural differences in the (verbal) narrative reproduction of film are currently being addressed in the 'Pear Tree' project for AD, led by Pilar Orero in Barcelona (Orero 2007) and modelled on Chafe's (1991) 'Pear Stories' original project of narrative production.

Whilst research into the selection of relevant information in AD is still in early stages, the decisions on how selected visual cues are expressed in words have been more frequently the object of AD-related research to date. The focus has been on qualitative and quantitative product-oriented analyses of the language of existing descriptions.

In one of the first studies of this type, Piety (2004) applied a systemic-functional linguistic framework to identify the linguistic means of expression that were typically used in a small corpus of four American films to realise important AD-related information categories such as describing a character's appearance, action, location or relaying information about non-verbal sounds and others.

Fix and her team (Fix 2005) have conducted an in-depth analysis of the AD of one German film, including e.g. information structure (see also Benecke 2007), character identification and links between descriptions and film dialogue. Their study also investigated the AD script in terms of text type, showing, for example, that it includes descriptive as well as narrative elements.

In the framework of the TIWO (Television in words) project, Salway and his team compiled a corpus of *British English* AD scripts of circa 90 films. A quantitative analysis revealed a large number of "verbs that express a particular manner of doing something" (Salway 2007: 159), i.e. means of expression that are testimony to the physicality of many descriptions – as promoted by the AD guidelines – and to the importance of Piety's (2004) 'character action' category. Moreover, the analysis has provided interesting insights into the type of visual cues frequently selected for description, as discussed above. The analysis of the most frequent verbs in the corpus shows that these "tend to provide information about a character's current focus of attention" (2007: 160).

In a similar approach, using a growing corpus of currently circa 300 *Spanish* AD scripts, Jiménez Hurtado and her team (Jiménez Hurtado 2007a, 2007b) aim to elicit the characteristics of the language of AD, i.e. to give a systematic account of the lexico-grammatical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of Spanish AD.

The product-oriented analyses reported here have generated an interesting range of findings worthy of further investigation. In the words of Piety (2004: 11), such these studies have "provided evidence that audio description is a distinctive way to use language whose forms and functions are shaped by that use". Further issues to consider with regard to the language of AD may include, for example, register variation in AD in relation to film genre/style and the use of metaphorical language (discussed by Eco 2003 as a solution for hypotyposis), an analysis of cohesive links in AD (Yos 2005, Braun, forthcoming), but also an analysis of the macro structures of AD, applying a narratological framework (as suggested by Salway 2007).

Apart from that, the studies cited above are also a good illustration of how different methodological approaches can generate interesting and complementary results. As Salway (2007: 171) points out, quantitative, corpus-based approaches need to be complemented by the detailed, qualitative analyses characteristic of text/discourse-based methods in the study of language.

However, future research into the language of AD should also to be complemented by reception research to obtain more information about the effectiveness of the linguistic solutions elicited from current AD corpora. More studies involving e.g. alternative versions of descriptions would be useful (see also section 6). Specific user groups (e.g.

children) also need to be taken into account (McGonigle 2007). In general, there is a sense that AD may need to extend beyond describing what is explicit on screen or stage to include descriptions of (implied) thoughts as well as emotions (Matamala 2005, Salway & Palmer 2007).

With regard to audiodescribing art, another important aspect concerns the contribution of elements such as camera techniques in film-making or choreography in dance to the meaning of a work of art as a whole. One further question for AD is therefore whether or not these techniques should be 'translated'. In current AD practice this is usually proscribed. However, adequate descriptions of such techniques may enable visually impaired people to develop greater awareness of symbolism in art and enjoy audiovisual art at a deeper level.

What has received less attention is an examination of audiodescribers' strategies in deciding what to describe and how. Research investigating these strategies and relating them, on the one hand, to the social context in which AD is done, and on the other hand, to the verbal solutions found in text- and corpus-based investigations would require a distinct research design, possibly the use of interviews with audiodescribers, Think-Aloud Protocols, Eye Trackers or Logging software. When triangulated with findings from audience preferences, this research would enable us to identify the intermodal translation strategies that are most likely to yield effective solutions.

5 From script to performance

The final creative step in the production of AD is the oral delivery of the scripted text. In post-production AD for films and TV programmes, this is recorded and then inserted into the audiovisual source.³ In live events, the AD is delivered live to tie in with the timing of the performance, and the scripts are likely to undergo modification during the delivery (Udo & Fels, forthcoming).

The oral delivery raises further questions about how AD should be done, what kind of language should be used and how it should be conceptualised. On the one hand, features of written language lend 'credibility' and 'authority' to the descriptions, since the written mode has traditionally been regarded as the more prestigious mode. Moreover, due to the distance between author (audiodescriber) and audience, many of the features typical of (spontaneous) spoken language, e.g. discourse markers, which are rooted in the requirements of synchronous face-to-face interaction, have no place in AD. On the other hand, speakability is a major consideration for the scripting. The implications of this for AD as a text type have not yet been investigated systematically. But Reiss's (1981)

(revised) text typology and Snell-Hornby's (1997) discussion of Reiss's category of multi-medial texts would be a useful starting point.

With regard to the actual performance of the AD script, McGonigle (2007: 43) notes that "the way an audio description is read is as important as what is being said, since the sound of a voice can bring life to a text through intonational meaning, as well as conveying a certain image, intimating with or alienating the audience". She argues that rhythm, pace and intonation of the delivery are as important as gender choice, voice character, accent and other features. Research such as Couper-Kuhlen's (1993) investigation of speech rhythm (in English) as well as insights from Theatre Studies would provide a good basis for further exploration.

One aspects that needs to be studied more systematically is the impact of the nature and genre of a performance on the style of delivery. At the same time, it would be worth investigating to what extent differences in the performance of an AD script reflect different understandings of the role of AD (see also section 1). Furthermore, interesting differences seem to emerging between post-production AD for film/TV, using prepared scripts, and live AD for theatre, dance and opera, using semi-prepared scripts and improvisation. Whilst it seems to be acknowledged that Translation Studies can provide insights for AD at large (see section 2), the growing number of live performances with AD give rise to the question what Interpreting Studies has to offer to AD in this respect. In particular live AD may be better conceptualised as audiovisual interpreting rather than translation (see also Udo & Fels, forthcoming).

In the end, it is the audience who needs to have the final say on what is felt to be acceptable, appropriate and preferable. This goes for delivery as well as content of the descriptions. The final section will therefore take a brief look at reception research.

6 Reception of AD

Reception research needs to be at the very heart of research into AD, in particular since AD concerns an audience with special needs. It has also been at the very beginning of the development of AD as a professional practice (in the UK). Back in the 1990s, the UK Audetel project studied the TV viewing habits, difficulties and preferences of about 200 visually impaired informants (Pettitt et al 1996). This research has laid the foundations for the development of the UK guidelines for AD (OfCom 2000).

Other reception research has been more interested in comparisons of different audiences, viewing conditions or AD versions. Peli et al. (1996), for example, compared the reception of audiovisual material by sighted viewers with full access to the

audiovisual source, sighted viewers with access to the sound track only and partially sighted informants who followed an audiodescribed version of the material. Whilst the partially sighted informants scored better with regard to information retention than the 'soundtrack-only' group of sighted viewers, their retention was nevertheless found to be less comprehensive than that of the 'full-access' group of sighted viewers.

Schmeidler & Kirchner (2001) conducted a comparative study of visually impaired informants' reception of a TV programme with and without descriptions, showing that informants clearly gained and retained more information from the described version. Fels et al. (2006) compared the reception of alternative AD versions (traditional 3d person vs. 1st person narrative for an animated comedy). The informants found the 1st person more engaging but less trustworthy.

The findings from these studies provide ample empirical evidence for the value of AD. However, Peli et al.'s findings also make it clear that there is scope for improving descriptions. Fels et al.'s study is an interesting confirmation of the 'conflict' in which the audiodescriber is with regard to the use of features of spoken and written language and perhaps, more generally, with regard to the selection of appropriate means of expression. As was pointed out in section 4, more comparative studies regarding the effectiveness of linguistic solutions would be useful.

Most of this research has been questionnaire-based, eliciting general impressions, preferences and evaluating the retention of information. A useful complementary approach is Chao's approach (as reported in Yeung 2007), who used Think-Aloud Protocols to elicit the difficulties visually impaired people were facing when following performances with and without description. This design could also be used in comparative studies addressing alternative versions of AD.

A more general, but equally important finding from Schmeidler & Kirchner's study is that the visually impaired informants felt more comfortable discussing TV programmes with sighted friends and colleagues when these programmes had been audiodescribed. It does not need much more to confirm that AD is an important instrument of social inclusion. Further research needs to contribute to identifying the best possible way of audiodescribing different types of performances and, equally importantly, it needs to provide frameworks for analysing (and possibly explaining) why some descriptions are more effective than others.

7 Conclusion

This paper has aimed to review some of the growing body of AD research conducted to date and to outline further research questions for this emergent academic discipline. Both are by necessity incomplete. Much more research is currently under way. Thus, initiatives such as the Pear Tree project (see section 4) are likely to generate new findings in the near future. At Surrey, PhD research is currently in progress to analyse the use of filmic expressions in AD. Other PhD research is taking place at least all over Europe, demonstrating the growing dynamics in this field. The research efforts with regard to translating AD scripts, which is an important consideration in many countries outside the English-speaking world, the questions arising for the description of subtitled films (audiosubtitling) and the efforts to develop software for the collection, analysis and production of AD are only three of the many areas that have been omitted. However, it is hoped that the paper has demonstrated that there is a wealth of questions arising and that an interdisciplinary approach is required to answer most, if not all, of these. At the same time, it should have become clear that AD itself can be a useful 'test bed' to enrich current insights into intermodal mediation and that it generates new opportunities for research into diverse forms of (audio)visual and verbal communication and intermodal mediation.

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¹ In AD this concerns the dialogue, which is strictly speaking based on the same sign system (verbal mode), but also music and non-verbal sound effects (auditory mode).

² The results are currently available in Chinese only.

³ Different methods for this are used in cinema and on TV and across different countries. On British TV, for example, the film sound is dipped whenever a description is played. This has implications for the timing of AD, as it leaves even less scope for overlap of AD and film sound (including music) than AD in cinema and DVD.