

**Ramos Caro, M. (2016). *La traducción de los sentidos: Audiodescripción y emociones*. Munich: LINCOM. 306 p.**

Although it is probably somewhat premature to say that audio description (AD) research is coming of age, it is definitely true that the field is expanding and diversifying. Whereas until recently most of the AD literature was based on extremely limited case studies and focused on the questions of ‘what’ and ‘how’ to describe, the latest developments include both larger scale studies based on corpora and contributions based on empirical, experimental research. *La traducción de los Sentidos: Audiodescripción y Emociones* is a good example of this evolution. In the past, authors have focused on the question of how to render facial expressions and emotions in AD (e.g., Igareda, 2011, Vercauteren & Orero, 2013). However, until now, the equally – if not more – important question of how audio descriptions can elicit emotions in the target audience has hardly been addressed. As Tan (1996) put it, “one of the major incentives for watching feature films is the emotional experience they offer” (p. 41). Therefore, the present work by Ramos Caro is relevant and timely. As is explained in the introduction of the book, the author wants to study emotions induced by audio descriptions by focusing on two main research questions: (1) Can audio descriptions elicit an emotional response that is comparable to the one created by the images? and (2) Do different kinds of AD (i.e., objective and subjective audio descriptions) elicit different levels of emotional responses?

Chapter 2 presents an extensive review of the existing academic literature on AD. After a short overview of the history of AD and a brief description of the position of AD in Translation Studies, the focus shifts to the questions that are relevant for the study of the emotional impact of AD. The author discusses the different national and international norms that are currently in force, looks at the function that AD serves and explores research on AD as a text type. She further touches upon an issue that is particularly prominent yet also highly contentious in AD, namely the question of whether an audio description should be objective or subjective. It can be argued that descriptions are always subjective and that it is impossible to achieve objectivity. Although the author recognizes this and the issue is paramount for the present work, it is also somewhat problematic in that it is difficult to define the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity in relation to the kind of language used in AD. The distinction between audio description and audio narration and the continuum between those two extremes, as defined by Kruger (2010), could have provided a more solid basis.

In Chapter 3, the author defines the core concept of the work: emotions, more particularly emotions as a response to works of art. After a thorough discussion of the various theories on emotion, the author

defines the concept of emotion and the different components that make up the complete emotional process. The most interesting part of the chapter is no doubt the section on emotions as a response to different art forms in general and film in particular. The author clearly explains the nature and importance of narrative emotions (another argument in favour of the framework developed by Kruger (2010)), focusing among other things on the power of language and the narrator to elicit emotional responses. This section of the book is definitely a must-read for anyone who wants to conduct further research on emotion and/in AD. It also offers a first avenue for future research: in Section 3.2.1 the author states that the emotions induced by (plastic arts and) music are not particularly relevant for the present work (p. 104). From the discussions in Chapter 5, however, it becomes clear that music and sound effects do have a clear effect on the emotional impact of audiovisual products on their audience. Further research into this issue could, for example, show what emotions have the strongest impact when expressed through music. This, in turn, could influence the amount and nature of the AD that is needed and/or wanted in scenes that are governed by that specific emotion.

In Chapter 4 the author describes the experiments she carried out to answer the two main research questions mentioned above. She starts by detailing the various questions she will try to answer and then describes what emotions and stimuli she will test and why, how the various materials are prepared and who the test audiences are. With regard to the preparation of the materials, one important question is raised. On page 125, the author states that the tone of the narrator's voice is vital for the emotional impact of AD, yet she decides to record the audio descriptions with a neutral voice. The reasons mentioned are that (1) the study of tone of voice is not one of the objectives of the work and (2) the author does not want to add an additional variable to the study. She also mentions that the Spanish AD norm insists on using a neutral voice that does not attract any attention away from the narrative. It may be argued, however, that a voice that is not emotionally in line with the rest of the scene does attract attention and may distort the results found in the study, since participants may feel less engaged and may not fully experience the emotions sought after because they are put off or confused by the tone of the voice. It would, therefore, be interesting to repeat the study described in this work with a voice that reflects the emotions present in the scenes that are shown to the participants and to see if and how the results obtained are different. In the same chapter, the author addresses the important question of how the participants' emotional response will be tested. Two methods are used: on the one hand, questionnaires asking the participants what emotions they felt and with what intensity, and, on the other hand, a physiological method: heart rate measurement. Particularly the last method is highly innovative in the field of AD. As already mentioned, AD research is moving in the direction of experimental research. Studies using eye tracking, EEG and fMRI, and galvanic skin response have all

been reported, but the present work is the first one in which heart rate measurements are used. Again, from the description of the method used by the author, additional research possibilities emerge. On pages 110 and 133, the author mentions that the emotions she will study (repulsion, sadness and fear) have clear corresponding facial expressions. As such, it would be an option to record the participants' faces as they watch the respective scenes to see if the results from the questionnaires and the heart rate measurement are confirmed by a possibly even more objective and uncontrolled parameter: the participants' facial expressions.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the results from the first experiment, in which both sighted and visually impaired people are shown different scenes presenting different emotions. Some of those results are not terribly surprising. For example, the author found that films without images and audio description (i.e., the 'traditional' viewing situation for visually impaired people) do not elicit an emotional response, and that AD can and does significantly increase the emotional impact of audiovisual scenes. In those situations, the impact on visually impaired audiences is similar to that experienced by sighted viewers in their normal viewing situations. However, the audio description does not seem to have the same effect for all emotions studied: while it proved to be highly effective for 'repulsive' scenes, the effectiveness (necessity?) of AD was lower in scenes in which sadness and fear were the dominant emotions. One explanation advanced by the author is that, in these scenes, the emotion is conveyed – to a much higher degree – by the music and the sound effects (hence the importance of studying the emotional impact of music mentioned above). Another striking finding – and a crucial one for any future empirical research in AD – is that the changes in heart rate do not seem to be predominantly related to the emotions of scenes, but to the naturalness of the viewing situations: the less natural the viewing situation (e.g., no images and no audio description for visually impaired audiences or blindfolded watching for sighted viewers), the higher the increase in heart rate. This finding, although maybe not all that surprising, is something that will have to be taken into account in future experimental set-ups.

Finally, Chapter 6 presents and discusses the results of the second experiment, in which two different audio descriptions are presented to the participants to test whether subjective audio descriptions are more effective at eliciting emotional responses than objective audio description. On the one hand, the experiment confirms what was already found in the first one: there are no significant differences in perception between sighted and visually impaired audiences. The experiment also shows that subjective descriptions generally have a higher emotional impact and are rated higher in terms of AD quality than objective versions. However, in this second experiment too, there seem to be differences between the three emotions studied. In cases where music and sound effects provide less information on what is happening in the scene (predominantly in the

repulsive scenes), the difference between the subjective and the objective audio descriptions is smaller, because the most important function of the audio description in these instances is to tell the audience what is happening. In cases where music and sound effects are essential for conveying the emotion of the scene, the form of the audio description seems to be more relevant. Two final and highly relevant findings: first, this study seems to confirm that subjective descriptions generally receive better scores in terms of quality. Participants are not put off or confused by them. On the contrary, these descriptions seem to facilitate the emotional responses from the audience. And second, comments by the participants concerning the quality of the AD point at the importance of the voicing of the descriptions. While the author mentions the necessity to study the target audience's preferences in terms of AD voicing, it could be argued that, in the light of the present work, it may even be more relevant to study how a different voicing impacts the audience's emotional response.

To conclude, this is a valuable, innovative and highly interesting contribution to the study of AD. Not only does it explore uncharted territory, it also uses experimental techniques that have not been used before in the field. It confirms that AD makes a difference for visually impaired audiences, not only in terms of comprehension but also in terms of enjoyment. It shows that word choice, that is, the form of the AD, impacts the audience's emotional responses to a scene. And finally, it raises a plethora of refreshing questions and opens up countless avenues for further research. Research that can help to make film fully inclusive and can truly make cinemas "one of the predominant spaces where societies [including visually impaired audiences] gather to express and experience feelings" as Plantinga and Smith (1999, p.1) put it.

## References

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