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## **Made in China versus Made in Spain. A corpus-based study comparing AD in Chinese and Spanish**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article presents a corpus-based study comparing AD in Chinese and Spanish, as a first step towards testing the feasibility of AD translation from Spanish into Chinese. A bilingual multimodal corpus consisting of eight films with AD in both languages was first compiled, and then a labelling scheme was designed for the corpus annotation with ATLAS.ti. The results from a quantitative and qualitative analysis of this corpus show that there are many similarities in content selection between Chinese and Spanish AD, which justifies our proposal of translating AD scripts from Spanish into Chinese to increase AD in China. However, we also found that Chinese AD carries a higher information load than Spanish AD. There are also differences in the general approach to AD, in the sense that Chinese scriptwriters tend to intervene or interpret more than their Spanish counterparts. Therefore, such differences also suggest the need for a certain degree of localisation if AD is translated from Spanish into Chinese instead of created *ex novo*.

### **KEYWORDS**

AD translation, Chinese AD, contrastive analysis, media accessibility, multimodal corpus.

## **1. Introduction**

As a country with a huge population living with sight loss, China officially introduced AD in 2009 in Shanghai with a live session for a film. In some pioneering Western countries, such as the USA, the UK and Spain, AD formally arrived much earlier in the 1980s (Orero 2007; Rai *et al.* 2010; Fryer 2016: 15-17; Reviers 2016). AD in both China and the West began with the initiatives of individuals or non-profit organisations (Orero 2007; Rai *et al.* 2010; Fryer 2016: 15-17; Sanz-Moreno 2018; Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost 2020). Despite the diverse landscape observed between countries (Orero 2007; Rai *et al.* 2010; Reviers 2016), generally speaking, most Western countries are a step ahead of China. In the West, AD has become professionalised and boosted by the drafting of guidelines and laws to regulate its provision. Professionals, instead of volunteers, offer this service, and the rise of companies and freelancers providing AD has ended the dependence on non-profit organisations. On the contrary, AD in China is still essentially volunteer-dependent. The following elements show that China is still at an initial stage in comparison with the West: the non-existence of published guidelines, the absence of legal guarantee enforcing

AD provision, the copyright infringement problem with the products to be audio described—films' copyright, for instance—, few types of AD products available with film AD as the dominant form, the dearth of academic studies concerning Chinese AD, the lack of formal AD training at higher education institutions, the fragmented and usually sporadic offer nationwide, and the scarcity of scriptwriters, among others (Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost 2020).

Of all the issues related to Chinese AD's immaturity, the scarcity of scriptwriters is the element we would like to focus our attention on in this article. Moreover, the number of AD products and their benefited audience—people with sight loss as the primary group—is quite limited compared with the vast population with sight loss and their possible high AD demands (Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost 2020). Consequently, there may not be enough scriptwriters when the demand for AD increases with the ongoing transition towards professionalisation of AD in China (Liu *et al.* 2021).

In this context, we believe that AD translation as an alternative for creating AD scripts deserves to be explored in China to satisfy the future demand and increase in both its quantity and quality. The expected advantages of this proposal are to reduce the time and costs for AD production and introduce some expertise from AD pioneering countries. Another reason for our proposal is that as a country that imports many foreign audiovisual products, China has many more interlingual translators than AD scriptwriters since translation is a practice with a much longer history. The same situation is also encountered by some European countries where AD is relatively new (Remael and Vercauteren 2010; Szarkowska and Jankowska 2015). If AD translation from Spanish into Chinese can be validated as a viable method, it might also apply to other language pairs. At the same time, our approach would contribute to reducing the ethnocentric bias caused by English being the most widely used pivot language in audiovisual translation. Moreover, according to previous research (Jankowska *et al.* 2017; Liu and Tor-Carroggio 2022), the drafting of localisation guidelines is considered advisable to translate AD into Chinese due to differences in AD scriptwriting across languages. The first step to make localisation guidelines is to identify differences and similarities in AD approaches in both languages. In order to narrow the scope of our research, we focused on the AD content, including several specificities on how to audio describe. To reach this objective, we built a bilingual multimodal corpus which consists of eight films with AD in Chinese and Spanish and then, we performed a quantitative and qualitative analysis.

This article aims to present our findings in the following four sections. First, the relevant studies related to our topic will be examined. Second, the methodology used will be presented. Third, the main results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis of our corpus will be summarised and discussed. Finally, our study's main points will be highlighted and some limitations and possible implications for future research will be indicated.

## 2. Research background

AD translation is one of the most controversial topics in current AD studies (Hyks 2005). To date, there is limited research on this topic. López-Vera (2006) was the first to conduct an experiment translating English scripts into Spanish. His preliminary results showed AD translation was slightly less time-consuming than creating one from scratch. After analysing two Dutch ADs translated from English, Remael and Vercauteren (2010) emphasised the need to double-check the translated AD script with the original film, especially in the case of cultural references due to possible differences in cultural distance between film, AD, and their translated versions, considering AD translation as a pivot translation. Jankowska (2015) inquired about the feasibility of AD translation from English into Polish with a reception study. She concluded that AD translation is a time saving and cost-effective option that can also enhance AD quality, especially in countries where AD is at an initial stage. Furthermore, based on a case study, Jankowska, Milc and Fryer (2017) explored the possibility of translating AD scripts created locally in Polish into English. According to their research, a significant loss of cultural elements can be avoided by translating scripts created locally into a foreign language. Despite focussing on different aspects, the three studies reached the same conclusion on the possible advantages of AD translation in terms of time and cost. In the same line, Bourne and Jiménez Hurtado (2007) highlighted that the differences between ADs across languages should be considered when translating AD to meet the receivers' expectations. As a preliminary step to explore AD translation, they conducted a contrastive analysis of the English and Spanish ADs of *The Hours* (Michael Cunningham 1998). They claimed that the English AD is more detailed and uses more varied, concise, and sometimes unusual vocabulary. Similarly, some other contrastive studies of AD in different languages focus on specific AD issues, primarily based on case studies. Matamala and Rami (2009) compared the ADs in Spanish and German of the German film *Good-bye Lenin* (Wolfgang Becker 2003). One finding is that the Spanish AD is only half the length of the German AD, giving far fewer descriptions in shorter sentences. Arma (2012: 37-55) examined the English and Italian ADs of the film *Chocolat* (Lasse Hallström 2000). She observed that Italian AD is more subjective, and it uses more complex vocabulary and syntax, both characteristics of the Italian written language. After analysing the axiological load of the German and English ADs for *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle 2008), Limbach (2012: 266-290) discovered that the English scriptwriter intervened more violating the advocated principle of *neutrality*.

Apart from the aforementioned case studies comparing AD across languages, the use of corpus to conduct empirical research is not a novelty in AD studies. The TIWO (Television in Words) corpus was composed of 91 British AD scripts. As a result of an automated linguistic annotation process, Salway (2007) managed to define AD language as a particular language

with its own idiosyncratic features. Arma (2011) used 69 films from the TIWO corpus to conduct a lexis-driven corpus investigation focusing on the use of adjectives. Moreover, she also found that similes were used in films for both adults and children in different ways despite some guidelines expressly discouraging their use. To obtain a macro theory for multimodal analysis of the audio described film, the TRACCE corpus was created (Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2013). It consisted of approximately 300 audio described films in Spanish, plus 50 in German, English and French and their corresponding AD scripts. A labelling scheme was then designed, and the corpus underwent a manual semantic tagging process at three levels: narratology, film language, and grammar (Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2013). More recently, Sanz-Moreno (2017) built a corpus comprised of four American films with AD in Spanish and English to scrutinise how cultural references were dealt with in both languages. One of her findings was that Spanish AD and English AD coincide in particularisation—using the exact and most precise word possible to describe a cultural reference—as the most used technique. In line with Salway (2007), Reviere (2017) built the first Dutch corpus of 39 AD scripts (20 for films and 19 for TV episodes) to confirm the hypothesis that AD language has its own idiosyncratic lexico-grammatical features. Finally, the VIW (Visual into Words) corpus is the first open-access multimodal corpus comprised of 47 ADs for the same short video in Spanish, Catalan and English elaborated by professionals and students (Matamala and Villegas 2016; Matamala 2018). All these studies prove that corpus can be useful to find out AD commonalities and differences across languages or AD's own specificities.

So far in China academic studies embracing AD as a translation modality are scarce. Most of the few studies about Chinese AD mainly come from communication studies (Li 2013; Wu and Xie 2015). In this context, two PhD theses should be mentioned. Leung (2018) conducted a reception study to investigate the preferences of Chinese AD users in Hong Kong. Tor-Carroggio (2020) mapped state-of-the-art AD in mainland China and tested the application of text-to-speech in AD voicing with Chinese users. Another contribution worth mentioning is the one undertaken by Ma (2020), who provided a broad picture of AD's history and provision in mainland China and discussed some ways to write AD in Chinese based on his extensive scriptwriting experience.

Considering the studies mentioned above, we assume that historical, cultural, and linguistic differences inevitably imply differences in AD approaches. Hence, a contrastive study comparing Chinese and Spanish ADs' practices is unavoidable before testing our proposal with end-users.

### **3. Methodology**

In recent years, integrating corpus linguistics with multimodal analysis has proven a useful research method in audiovisual translation (see, for

example, Salway 2007; Arma 2011; Baños *et al.* 2013). In the following two sections, we will first illustrate how our corpus was compiled and then we will describe the annotation process.

### 3.1. Corpus creation

After an extensive search, only fifteen films with AD in Chinese and Spanish were identified. One reason is that both countries tend to audio describe more films produced locally. Eight films were selected to constitute the final corpus considering the availability of their AD scripts and with the intention of covering different genres and origins and analysing a wide range of elements, through a complex and exhaustive tagging system. Only one film—*Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee 1994)—is originally in Chinese. The dubbed versions were used in our study. All the ADs in Spanish were done by ONCE under the *Audesc*<sup>1</sup> system because it was the only Spanish AD provider who offered us a list of available AD scripts for purchase at that moment. So, consistency in the AD approach is expected in the case of the ADs in Spanish, while different groups did the ADs in Chinese. Table 1 summarises the basic information about the films included in our corpus.

<b>Title</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Genre</b>	<b>Chinese AD group</b>
<i>Cinema Paradiso</i>	Giuseppe Tornatore	1988	Italy	Drama	Unknown
<i>Rain Man</i>	Barry Levinson	1988	USA	Drama	Shanghai Film Critics Society
<i>Jurassic Park</i>	Steven Spielberg	1993	USA	Science fiction, adventure, thriller	Unknown
<i>Eat Drink Man Woman</i>	Ang Lee	1994	Taiwan (China), USA	Comedy, drama	Yangguang Volunteer Association in Wuxi
<i>The Chorus</i>	Christophe Barratier	2004	France, Germany, Switzerland	Drama, musical	Yangguang Volunteer Association in Wuxi
<i>The Curious Case of Benjamin Button</i>	David Fincher	2008	USA	Fantasy, romantic, drama	Shanghai Film Critics Society
<i>Frozen</i>	Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee	2013	USA	Animation, fantasy, musical, adventure, comedy	Shanghai Film Critics Society
<i>The Imitation Game</i>	Morten Tyldum	2014	USA	Historical, drama	Sound of Light

**Table 1. List of the films of our corpus**



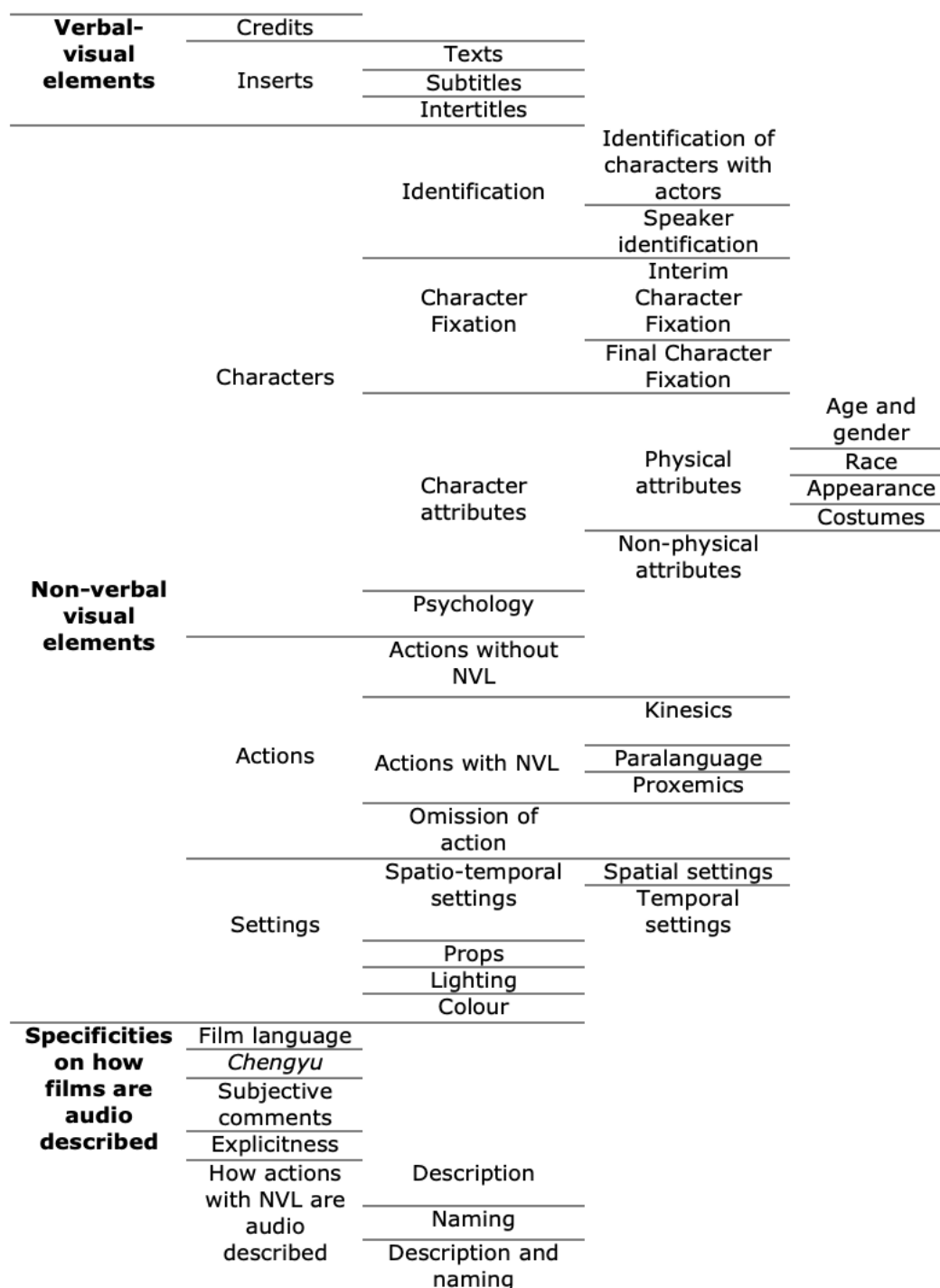
All the Spanish AD scripts were purchased from Tragacanto, the publishing house that holds the rights, while only three Chinese scripts were facilitated by the corresponding AD groups: *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson 1988), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (David Fincher 2008), and *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum 2014). We had to manually transcribe the remaining five because their AD scripts could not be found or because their source was not clear. Therefore, the production year of each AD was unknown either, though all the ADs in Spanish and Chinese have not been done recently. Consequently, we could not compare the production years of the Chinese and Spanish ADs. The AD scripts in both languages were in different formats. Some included time codes, the original dialogues or part of them as well as voicing hints. The same methodological problems were mentioned by Arma (2011: 315-327). Hence, we unified the format of all the scripts keeping only the content.

Along with the videos, the scripts were then imported into ATLAS.ti, a piece of software for qualitative data analysis and basic quantitative analysis. Time codes for AD were added as well, in order to match the image with the AD within the program's interface. Subsequently, we encoded the corpus based on a labelling scheme.

### **3.2. Corpus annotation**

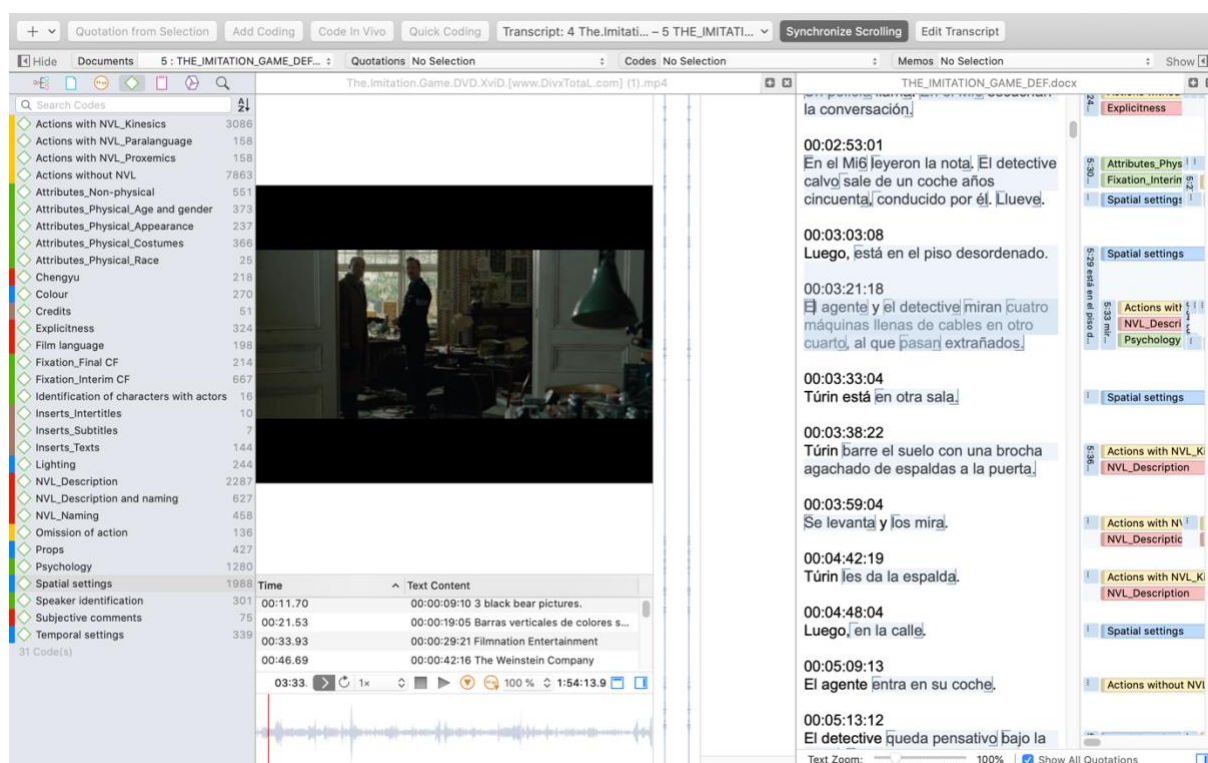
After building the corpus, a labelling scheme was devised for its annotation by a team of three researchers. The *narratology* level of the TRACCE scheme was considered to be an appropriate starting point for classifying the AD content in our research. We also consulted other studies to refine our scheme, such as Poyatos (2002), Benecke (2014), Mazur (2014a), Vercauteren (2014) and Fresno (2016). Then we tested our adapted scheme through a pilot study, based on the comparative analysis of two films from our corpus, where we provided more detailed explanations about the development of our scheme (Liu and Tor-Carroggio 2022). After the pilot study, the labels were revised and readjusted according to our results. A person was in charge of annotating the whole corpus. She made a list of all the cases that were not clear and sent it to the other two researchers for their revision. The three researchers ultimately agreed on the definitions of those labels after face-to-face debates, re-annotation of the whole corpus, and the revision of the final coded segments.

The adapted labelling scheme is comprised of verbal-visual elements (text on screen), non-verbal visual elements (characters, actions, and settings) and specificities on how films are audio described. We have 31 labels in total. Apart from the seven labels concerning how films are audio described, the other 24 labels are about AD content, divided into four blocks: four about text on screen, ten about characters, five about actions and five about settings. Figure 1 displays the final annotation scheme for our study.



**Figure 1. The conceptual map of our labelling scheme<sup>2</sup>**

Following this, we manually applied the final labelling scheme to encode the whole corpus with ATLAS.ti. One advantage of this software is that it permits working with a multimodal corpus, showing both the video and the AD script on the same interface. Figure 2 is an illustration of the annotation process of our corpus.



**Figure 2. Example of the interface of the annotation process**

For the quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were computed with ATLAS.ti and then imported into the SPSS (V.26), where a Mann-Whitney test was run to detect in which aspects Chinese AD differs relevantly from Spanish AD. The  $p$ -value threshold for declaring statistical relevance was set at 0.05. The  $p$ -values where statistical differences were found will be provided in section 4.1. Regarding the qualitative analysis, we returned to the original AD scripts to check the coded segments in context one by one.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Many similarities were found in content selection between Chinese and Spanish AD. However, differences were also found mainly in information density and how films are audio described. Since this empirical study includes a large variety of labels, for reasons of space in this paper we will focus on the most relevant ones, either because of the number of occurrences or their contrastive value—presenting a statistically relevant difference or being something specific for the AD in one language. This section will first present the quantitative results of our corpus study and will be followed by some qualitative findings. The examples used are extracted from different scenes of the films from our corpus. Translations in English will be provided after the original texts. In some examples, the description will be offered in only one of the working languages because there is no corresponding description in the other. The elements under analysis will be highlighted in italics in the Spanish AD script and their translations into English, and they will be shaded in the Chinese AD script.



#### 4.1. Quantitative results

Before focusing on more specific AD issues, we will first compare the information density of the ADs in both languages. Few studies have focused specifically on the information density—not a unified term used by scholars. Based on a film fragment, Arcos Urrutia (2017) measured the level of information saturation by a series of parameters, such as the speech rate, the number of AD units, the number of information types included in an AD unit, among others. Usually, the length of AD scripts is measured when analysing the degree of details as one of the many aspects studied for contrastive purposes, for example, when comparing AD in different languages (Bourne and Jiménez Hurtado 2007; Matamala and Rami 2009). Matamala (2018) calculated the number of words, the number of sentences and AD units to compare ADs created by professionals and students. However, the linguistic level is beyond the scope of our study. As a phenomenon requiring further research, in our case the information density is simply measured by the script length divided by the number of quotations. However, this parameter is used as a rough measure. Since a quotation can be tagged with more than one label at the same time, it should be taken as a mere reference. For example, a quotation corresponding to the final character fixation (CF) can be accompanied by descriptions of the character's physical appearance. It should be mentioned that, on average, in non-specialised texts, about 1.5 Chinese characters correspond to one word in alphabetical writing systems such as Spanish (see, for example, Yang *et al.* 2007). Therefore, we have converted Chinese characters into words in Spanish to make our data comparable. A *quotation* refers to a coded segment. It is usually part of a sentence and may contain more than one information type coded by different labels in our scheme (see, for example, Figure 2).

Table 2 shows the average values for the number of quotations, length, and information density in the languages under study.

	Quotations	Length	Information density
<b>Chinese AD</b>	1011.25	10,150.32 Chinese characters ( $\cong$ 6766.88 words in Spanish)	10.02 ( $\cong$ 6.68 in Spanish)
<b>Spanish AD</b>	956.63	4848.88 words	5.07

**Table 2. Means of quotations, length, and information density in Chinese and Spanish ADs**

The average number of encoded segments is similar in both languages, but Chinese AD is much longer than Spanish AD. Consequently, Chinese AD uses more words in a quotation. After carrying out a Mann-Whitney test, a statistical difference was found for information density ( $p=0.006$ ). That may

imply more information and, subsequently, a higher cognitive load for Chinese end-users. This finding is in line with Leung's (2018) recommendation of including more details in the AD after a reception study on users' preferences in Hong Kong. Due to time constraints, information saturation is closely related to AD effectiveness (Arcos Urrutia 2017). This author mentioned three information saturation situations: information repetition, complex lexicon, or syntax, and more than one information type simultaneously. It remains unknown if the current information density level contributes to Chinese users' understanding or, on the contrary, causes them fatigue, therefore, hindering their comprehension. Meanwhile, the relatively concise style of Spanish AD can be explained by the official Spanish Standards for AD—AENOR (2005), which suggest "avoiding causing the visually impaired listener to become tired due to saturation of information or anxiety due to a lack thereof."<sup>3</sup>

An example of this phenomenon is a scene from *Jurassic Park*:

(1\_ZH) 而这个时候丹尼斯开着吉普车，他正想把他偷来的胚胎赶快送到码头，他来到了一个大门旁，搬动了电闸，门被打开了，然后他又跑回来，坐在吉普车里面，大门缓缓打开。

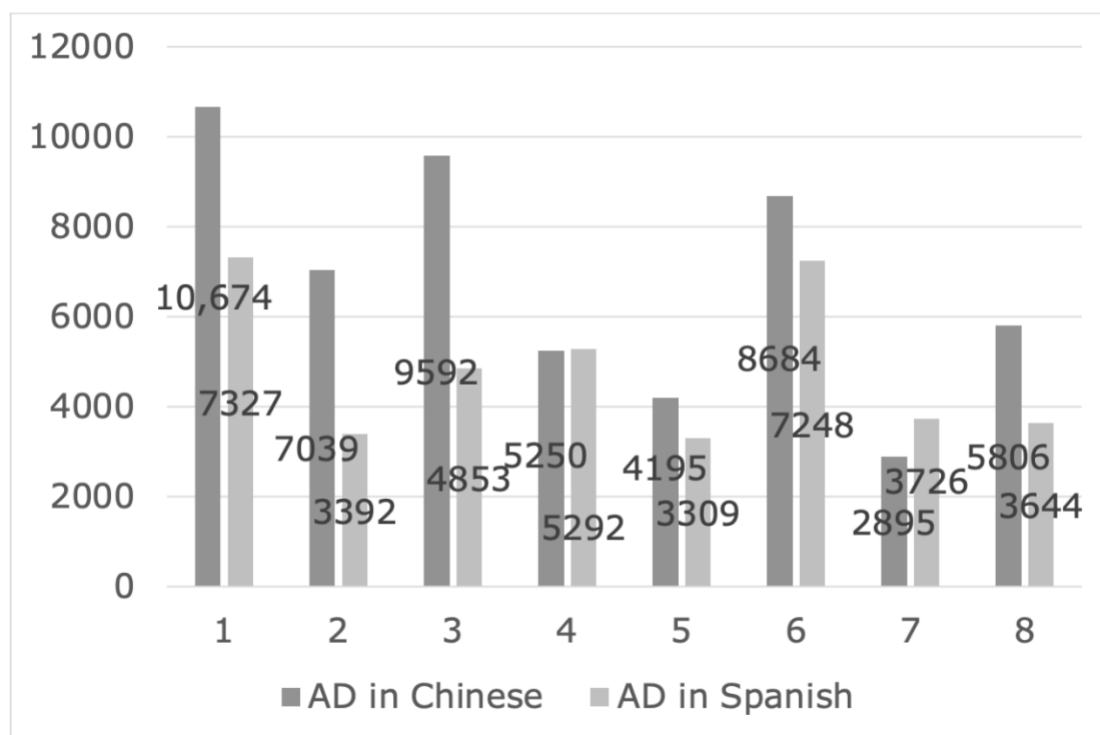
(At this time, Dennis is driving a jeep. He wants to send the stolen embryos to the dock as soon as possible. He arrives at a gate and moves the switch to open the gate. Then he runs back and sits in the jeep. The door slowly opens.)

(1\_ES) Dennis llega a la gran puerta doble de seguridad. La abre manualmente y se va, dejándola abierta.

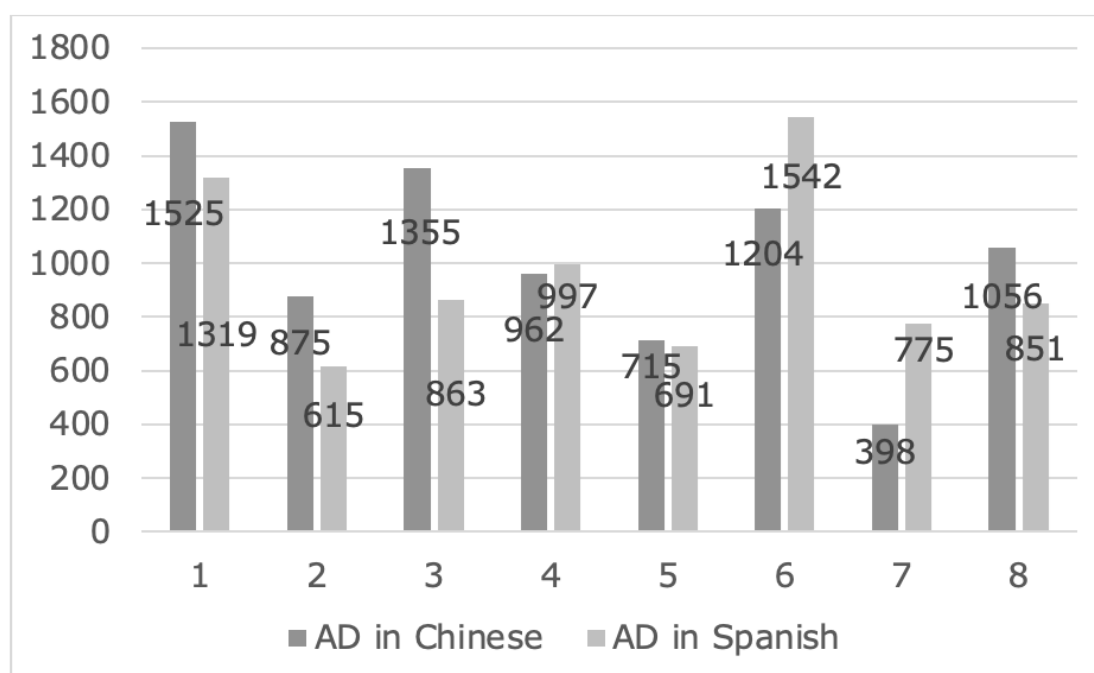
(Dennis arrives at the large double security door. He opens it manually and walks away, leaving it open.)

The Chinese description (76 Chinese characters, about 51 words in Spanish) is much longer than the Spanish description (17 words), and gives a greater variety of information, including seven actions, information on the setting and the character's objective. The Spanish AD does not mention the character's objective and describes only four actions.

Figures 3 and 4 display the distribution of length and quotations in the eight ADs from our corpus in both languages. The length of the Chinese AD is already converted from Chinese characters into words.



**Figure 3. Distribution of length in AD in Chinese and Spanish**



**Figure 4. Distribution of quotations of AD in Chinese and Spanish**

Compared to Spanish AD, Chinese AD uses more words for seven out of the eight films and more quotations in five of them. Spanish AD is only slightly longer than Chinese AD for the seventh film—*Frozen*, an animated feature. Actually, the number of quotations in the Spanish AD is almost twice that of the Chinese AD for this film. More research may be required to find out

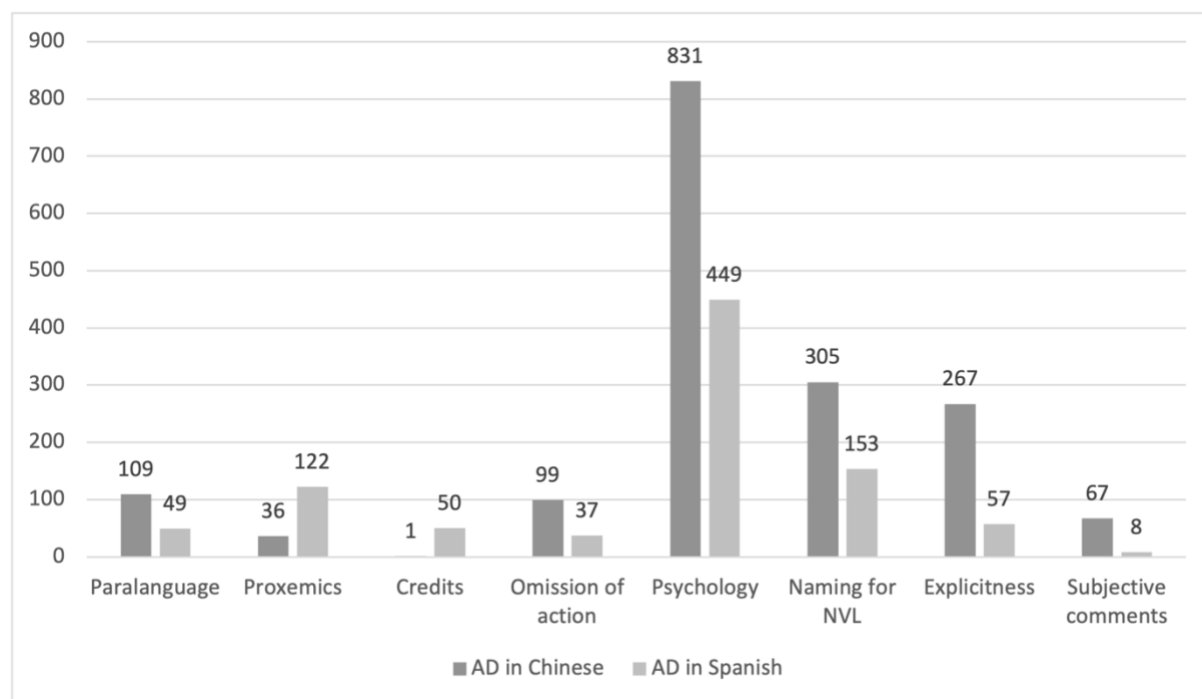
if the genre or the potential audience profile is a variable affecting the difference in information load between Chinese AD and Spanish AD.

Later, the occurrences of all the labels were extracted. Table 3 presents the most frequent ten codes concerning AD content (24 labels in total) in Chinese and Spanish.

	<b>AD in Chinese</b>	<b>AD in Spanish</b>
<b>1</b>	Actions without NVL (4044)	Actions without NVL (3819)
<b>2</b>	Kinesics (1571)	Kinesics (1515)
<b>3</b>	Spatial settings (865)	Spatial settings (1123)
<b>4</b>	Psychology (831)	Psychology (449)
<b>5</b>	Non-physical attributes (273)	Interim CF (408)
<b>6</b>	Interim CF (259)	Non-physical attributes (278)
<b>7</b>	Props (193)	Props (234)
<b>8</b>	Costumes (174)	Age and gender (222)
<b>9</b>	Speaker identification (171)	Temporal settings (218)
<b>10</b>	Age and gender (151)	Costumes (192)

**Table 3. The most frequent ten codes about AD content in AD in Chinese and Spanish**

Except for speaker identification for Chinese AD and temporal settings for Spanish AD, the other most frequent items coincide. Psychology-related information appears much more in Chinese, whereas Spanish AD gives more information about spatial settings, interim CF, age, and gender. A Mann-Whitney test was performed to determine the aspects in which Chinese AD differed from Spanish AD. Significant differences were found in eight aspects, among them five related to content selection: paralinguistic ( $p=0.027$ ), proxemics ( $p=0.009$ ), credits ( $p=0.001$ ), omission of action ( $p=0.013$ )—description of an action that has not appeared on screen, psychology ( $p=0.036$ ), naming for non-verbal language (NVL) ( $p=0.009$ ), explicitness ( $p=0.012$ ) and subjective comments ( $p=0.036$ ). The first five labels concern AD content, and the last three, AD approaches. Figure 5 displays the number of occurrences of these labels in Chinese and Spanish ADs, respectively.



**Figure 5. Aspects showing significant differences between AD in Chinese and Spanish**

Among the 24 labels concerning AD content, Spanish AD provides more information about proxemics and credits, while Chinese AD offers more descriptions about paralanguage, omission of action and psychology. These constitute the most remarkable differences between the two. The many similarities encountered regarding content selection in Chinese and Spanish ADs offer promising prospects for our AD translation proposal. Among the seven codes about AD approaches, apart from *chengyu*, a Chinese idiomatic expression not shared by Spanish AD, differences are found in naming for NVL, explicitness and subjective comments.

Explanations regarding AD approaches will be provided when presenting the qualitative results. Below we will focus on the most notable differences between Chinese and Spanish ADs which concern psychology from a quantitative point of view and its relationship with NVL.

#### 4.1.1. Psychology and NVL

One notable association was found between psychology and NVL. Among the 1280 occurrences of psychology in both languages, 1142 are also encoded with NVL, which is not strange, since in psychology, emotions, are usually expressed through NVL. We adopt the classification of strategies to audio describe NVL proposed in the ADLAB guidelines (Mazur 2014b: 10-13), namely, description, naming, and description and naming. Table 4 shows the number of occurrences of the three strategies for describing NVL in Chinese and Spanish.



	Description	Naming	Description and naming
Chinese AD	1070	323	305
Spanish AD	1217	304	153

**Table 4. Occurrences of the strategies for describing NVL in Chinese and Spanish**

Although *description* is the strategy most used in both languages, Chinese AD resorts to *naming* much more to indicate the message conveyed by NVL, which constitutes a statistical difference between AD in Spanish and Chinese ( $p=0.009$ ). This tendency to frequently name NVL—especially emotions conveyed by facial expressions and meaning of gestures—is also shared by a preference for naming gestures among AD users in Hong Kong (Leung 2018). After examining all the examples of *naming* and *description and naming* for NVL, we think that two factors should also be considered to better understand the differences in NVL and psychology in both languages. First, describing NVL is complicated when the NVL displayed changes quickly in the same scene, when it is complex and there is limited time for AD or when it bears fake or conflicting emotions (Igareda 2011). Thus, AD can include more than one piece of information embedded in NVL, for example, when the same facial expressions convey two different emotions. Therefore, when coinciding in naming NVL, Chinese AD and Spanish AD may indicate different kinds of information. Second, there may be different degrees of detail when *description* or *description and naming* are used for NVL in Chinese and Spanish. An example to illustrate these two cases is from *The Imitation Game* when Denniston and Turing met for the first time:

(2\_ZH) 丹尼斯顿抬手让玛格丽特出去。他表情严厉，警惕地盯着图灵，图灵看着他。

(Denniston raises his hand to let Margaret out. He looks stern, staring at Turing warily. Turing looks at him.)

(2\_ES) El comandante mira inquisitivo a Turing y despide con un gesto a Margaret.

(The commander looks questioningly at Turing and dismisses Margaret with a gesture.)

Three descriptions about NVL are given in Chinese and two in Spanish. Turing's look is not mentioned in Spanish. The gesture of raising the hand completes the discourse-filling function (Mazur 2014a) since it serves as a complete utterance on its own as no one talks at that time. Both languages use the strategy *description and naming* for this gesture, although the description in Spanish is far more general than in Chinese. The facial expression of Denniston is described in both languages. Nevertheless, two emotions (*stern* and *warily*) are highlighted in Chinese whereas there is only one (*questioningly*) in Spanish. Furthermore, the emotions overtly mentioned in the two languages are different. This is an instance of the case

mentioned above of complex NVL (Igareda 2011). The example illustrates that scriptwriters can interpret and describe the same NVL differently and correctly, possibly due to idiolectic reasons rather than linguistic, cultural, or stylistic differences between Chinese and Spanish ADs. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis of how NVL is described is beyond the scope of our study.

## 4.2. Qualitative results

During the tagging process, we were able to identify some differences in how AD is carried out. These elements can help us complement the quantitative analysis with a qualitative approach. In this section we will explain the five most noticeable differences regarding the scriptwriter's intervention: subjective comments, explicitness, CF, cultural references, and, finally, a linguistic aspect—the use of *chengyu* in Chinese AD.

### 4.2.1. Subjective comments

Many scholars have emphasised the impossibility of avoiding subjective descriptions due to linguistic and time constraints or reducing the cognitive load for the end-users (Igareda 2011; Mazur and Chmiel 2012; Vercauteren and Orero, 2013; Limbach 2012, 2015). Limbach (2012, 2015) discussed the inconsistent terminology referring to objectivity, neutrality, and subjectivity in AD studies. He advocated for the term *neutrality*, meaning that the film's communication value and function must be kept neutral despite having to resort to vocabulary charged either with a positive or a negative connotation (Limbach 2012, 2015). This concept is used in our study to delimit the labels *subjective comment* and *explicitness* (see section 4.2.2.)—two concepts frequently related to subjectivity in AD. Therefore, we view the use of axiologically charged words as neutrality instead of subjectivity if they transfer the communicative value reflected on screen correctly. A prototypical example is using evaluative adjectives to describe characters or facial expressions and adverbs to add meaning to a description (Mazur and Chmiel 2012)—for instance, describing characters as *elegant* instead of providing details about their appearance. We only consider subjective comments which include complete evaluations at sentence-level about plots or characters, excluding the lexical level, such as evaluative adjectives, because going into such detail is outside our study's scope. In total, Chinese AD has 67 occurrences of this label, as opposed to the eight occurrences in Spanish, showing a statistical difference ( $p=0.036$ ). Even though the number is relatively low in both languages, we consider it to be a notable phenomenon since subjective comments are only given for crucial parts of the plot affecting the interpretation of the whole movie, such as a film ending. One such example is that from the closing scene in *The Chorus*:

(3\_ZH) 红色的公交车载着马修，载着佩皮诺离开了那个阴暗的池塘教养院。车子向着光明的地方驶去。

(The red bus, carrying Mathieu and P epino, leaves the shady *Fond de l' tang* 'Bottom of the Pond'. The car drives towards a bright place.)

(3\_ES) El autob s se aleja por la carretera que atraviesa el bosque.  
(The bus drives away along the road through the forest.)

If one watches this scene, no lighting contrast can be observed. A metaphor is used in Chinese: the boarding school is dark due to the bad experiences characters have had there, and the direction in which the car is driving is bright because a hopeful future is waiting for them after they leave the school. On the contrary, the Spanish AD only describes what can be seen on screen, without adding further comments.

#### 4.2.2. Explicitness

As a concept closely related to *subjectivity*, *explicitness* is very vague and inconsistent in AD studies. Some researchers (Mazur and Chmiel 2012; Vercauteren and Orero 2013; Mazur 2014a) define naming emotions as *explicitness* employing great subjectivity from the scriptwriter. Others (Kruger 2010; Fryer and Freeman 2013) also consider the use of cinematic terminology or interpreting functions of cinematic techniques as *explicitness*. Adopting the concept of *neutrality* recommended by Limbach (2012, 2015) to avoid fuzzy limits between categories, we define *explicitness* as a description of information not visible on screen around the AD time. Such descriptions mainly include descriptions of actions not visible on screen to maintain narrative coherence, anticipation of information usually implying the disclosure of narrative suspense, and cause-effect relationships, which require certain cognitive effort from the audience.

In total, our corpus includes 267 occurrences of explicitness in Chinese AD and 57 in Spanish AD, showing a statistical difference between Chinese and Spanish AD ( $p=0.012$ ). A possible reason for the low proportion of both explicitness and subjective comments (see section 4.2.1.) in Spanish AD may be the clear guideline from the AENOR standards to avoid revealing an event beforehand or something that can easily be inferred or deduced. The following example, extracted from *Eat Drink Man Woman*, illustrates this difference in approach in Chinese and Spanish:

(4\_ZH) 这时电话响了，原来是邻居锦荣打来的。

(At this time the phone rings. It turns out that it is from the neighbour Jinrong.)

No description of answering the phone is provided in Spanish, possibly because it can be easily inferred from the ring sounds and the dialogues. Furthermore, the fact that Jinrong called is not directly stated during the whole film. Moreover, the loving relationship between her and Chu—the man who answered the phone—is not revealed until the end of the

film. When Jinrong’s identity is indicated in the Chinese AD at this point, the suspense is lost.

Another example is from *The Imitation Game* when an unseen action is described in Chinese to sustain the narrative coherence making a cause-effect relationship explicit:

(5\_ZH) 一辆黑色轿车停下，诺克警官冒雨下车。警局接到求援电话后，派他来盗窃案现场调查。

(A black car stops. Nock gets out in the rain. *After receiving the call for help, the police station sends him to investigate the theft.*)

(5\_ES) El detective calvo sale de un coche años cincuenta, conducido por él. Lluve. Luego, está en el piso desordenado.

(The bald detective gets out of the car he is driving, which is from the fifties. It is raining. Later on, he is in the apartment, which is messy.)

The sighted audience never sees a scene in which Nock is assigned to the case. Nevertheless, this can be inferred from the plot at this point. The Chinese AD makes it explicit, while the Spanish AD only describes what is happening on screen.

#### 4.2.3. Character fixation

Character fixation (CF), coined by Benecke (2014), refers to the process of naming characters in AD, where a difference is made between interim CF and final CF. The interim CF means choosing a significant attribute of a character to clarify who they are, and the final CF means referring to a character by their names (Benecke 2014). Table 5 shows the concordances between CF in Chinese and Spanish with descriptions of characters’ attributes.

	Non-physical attributes		Age and gender		Appearance		Costumes		Race	
	ZH	ES	ZH	ES	ZH	ES	ZH	ES	ZH	ES
<b>Interim CF</b>	155	227	87	180	23	28	10	12	8	12
<b>Final CF</b>	30	12	14	5	3	4	0	0	1	0

**Table 5. Concordances between CF in Chinese and Spanish with descriptions about characters’ attributes**

In total, Chinese AD has 259 occurrences of interim CF and 101 occurrences of final CF, as Spanish AD has 408 occurrences of the former and 113 for the latter. The number of interim CF is much higher than that of final CF in both languages because many secondary characters only have interim CF. *Non-physical attributes* refer to interpersonal relationships, personality,

profession, religious beliefs, among others. They are described mostly to identify a character by interim CF in both languages. Spanish AD uses much more *non-physical attributes* and *age and gender* for interim CF than Chinese AD, corresponding to the much higher number of occurrences of interim CF. Finally, both languages give characters' descriptions usually before their final CF.

The results from our corpus show two differences in CF. First, regarding the moment final CF is given, Chinese AD tends to name characters in their first appearance, regardless of their names being given again later in the film. This corresponds to the preference for naming the characters as soon as they appear on screen shown by AD users in Hong Kong (Leung 2018). However, the opposite happens with AD in Spanish. An example is Chu's naming in *Eat Drink Man Woman*, whose introduction in the Spanish AD script happens fourteen minutes after the movie has started, right after his final on-screen naming, although he has repeatedly appeared on the screen before. Chu's naming in Spanish is accompanied by the information about his relationship with his daughters:

(6\_ES) *Chu, que es el padre de las tres chicas, se quita la cazadora por el camino.*  
(*Chu, the three girls' father, takes his jacket off along the way.*)

Conversely, in the Chinese AD script Chu is named directly when he appears for the first time at the very beginning of the film even though his name is still not mentioned in that scene:

(6\_ZH) 镜头转到了老朱家的院子。  
(The camera turns to *Chu's* yard.)

In fact, a brief introduction about the film synopsis of about two minutes is usually provided before the film actually starts in Chinese, where the names of the main characters are already given.

The second difference is related to the naming of characters, more precisely non-Chinese ones. In Spanish AD both the surname and the last name are used to name a character, whereas in Chinese AD usually only one option is applied—the one used most often in the film or the shortest one to save time).<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.2.4. Cultural references

Systematic classification of cultural references and the techniques to audio describe them in Chinese and Spanish fall outside the research scope of this paper. However, we have noticed two remarkable and apparently contradictory phenomena when dealing with cultural references unfamiliar to the target culture: to describe them without naming them or to name



them. The first one is a preliminarily observed trend in both ADs as for the description of cultural references: when they are commonly known to the public, they are usually named as such in the AD. On the contrary, when they are not so well-known for the target culture, AD resorts to a description with different levels of detail. One example is the description of a national monument in Rome, Italy, in *Cinema Paradiso*:

(7\_ZH) 镜头在一个城镇慢慢拉近，拉近一条街道。  
(The camera slowly zooms in on a town. And then on a street.)

(7\_ES) Al fondo aparece el Altar de la Patria, monumento erigido por Víctor Manuel II en la Plaza Venecia. Apenas un par de vehículos circulan por la Vía del Corso, una de las más concurridas de Roma.  
(In the background appears the Altar of the Fatherland, a monument built by Victor Manuel II in Piazza Venezia. Just a couple of vehicles circulate on the Via del Corso, one of Rome's busiest streets.)

The Chinese AD is quite general and short, while the Spanish AD names the location and gives more information. One reason causing such difference may be cultural distance, as Spanish culture is much closer to Italian culture than Chinese is. Therefore, the Chinese scriptwriter might not have recognised these places. Another reason could be Spanish AD's tendency to use proper nouns for locations and historical characters as asserted by Sanz-Moreno (2017).

We have also observed a remarkable rhetorical tool used for describing cultural references in both languages: similes. This is an example from the film *Rain Man*:

(8\_ZH) 两人根本没在听查理在说，只顾着自己看电视，电视里正播放着两个男人说话的节目，类似我国的相声。  
(Rain Man is not listening to Charlie at all, just watching TV on his own. On TV two men are talking, a programme similar to the xiangsheng in our country.)

(8\_ES) Ven en la tele el sketch de Abbot y Costello.  
(They are watching the sketch by Abbott and Costello on TV.)

Due to cultural distance, the Spanish audience may be more familiar with this sketch and the actors involved, so they are directly named in the AD. Conversely, the description in Chinese is more general and a simile comparing it to *xiangsheng* 'crosstalk'—traditional performing art in comedy—is used to enhance the Chinese audience's understanding. Another example is from *Eat Drink Man Woman*:

(9\_ZH) 然后把碗扣在青菜当中。  
(Then he puts the bowl down over the green vegetables.)

(9\_ES) Vuelca el bol *como si fuera un flan* sobre un plato ya adornado con pequeños pimientos verdes.

(He turns the bowl over *as if it were a flan* on a plate already garnished with small green peppers.)

Turning a bowl full of food upside down over a plate is a typical Chinese gastronomical technique. A simile referring to a typical Spanish dessert—a flan—is used to describe this action. We have noticed that exoticism is a more prominent feature in the Spanish AD for this Chinese film than in the rest of Spanish ADs of our corpus.

The AENOR standards do not mention similes and metaphors. However, the ADLAB guidelines (Taylor 2014: 28) suggest using metaphors and similes when appropriate. Although not focusing on cultural elements, in the above-mentioned corpus study by Arma (2011: 438-459), she also found that using similes and metaphors can enrich the viewing experience beyond objectivity and neutrality. The use of metaphors and similes is also encouraged by Ma (2020: 221-223) for AD in Chinese to reinforce understanding by making associations.

The second observation about Chinese AD seems to contradict the previous finding, since sometimes *naming* is used for a cultural element which is unfamiliar to the target Chinese audience, whereas in the theoretically more familiar Spanish culture it is described. The following example is extracted from *The Imitation Game*:

(10\_ZH) 图灵骑车来到伦敦军区六处总部门前。

(Turing arrives at *the Secret Intelligence Service in the London District*.)

(10\_ES) Turing llega a *un edificio custodiado por militares*.

(Turing arrives at *a building guarded by soldiers*.)

The Secret Intelligence Service was not officially acknowledged during the Second World War. Naturally, its name does not appear on screen. Besides, a more detailed description is possible here with a long enough dialogue gap. However, the Chinese AD directly names it, whereas the Spanish AD provides a literal description. A possible reason explaining the Chinese AD approach in this case may be a scriptwriting principle advocated by Ma (2020: 84), who suggests explaining some cultural or historical elements presented in a film appropriately, even though it is not clear what he means by *appropriately*. This principle also reflects the education function aimed by some Chinese AD providers (Liu *et al.* 2021).

Our hypothesis concerning the two contrary AD approaches to cultural elements, in terms of Toury (1995), is that if the scriptwriter decides to

adhere to the target culture as the initial norm, the approach *description* will be used more, but occasional occurrences of the approach *naming* are also possible—on its own or combined with a description—when the scriptwriters’ extralinguistic knowledge enables them to convey a cultural element to the audience. Since our findings are not conclusive, further research is required to gain a deeper understanding of this topic.

#### 4.2.5. *Chengyu*

*Chengyu* are short fossilised idiomatic expressions in Chinese, usually consisting of four Chinese characters. The two advantages its use may bring to AD are: first, to save time giving information concisely; second, to elevate the register and make the AD more vivid (Liu and Tor-Carroggio 2022). However, only easily understood *chengyu* are recommended by Chinese AD providers.<sup>5</sup> In the eight Chinese scripts from our corpus 218 *chengyu* are used. One example is the description of a facial expression in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*:

(11\_ZH) 在舒缓的萨克斯乐曲伴奏下，黛西柔美的舞姿，让本杰明看得如痴如醉，沉浸在这温馨的甜蜜中。

(Accompanied by soothing saxophone music, Benjamin looks at Daisy’s delicate dance *fascinated as if he was drunk*, immersing himself in this warm sweetness.)

(11\_ES) Benjamin *la mira boquiabierto*.  
(Benjamin *gapes at her*.)

While the Spanish AD gives a more literal description of Benjamin’s gaze, the Chinese AD names his feelings with a *chengyu*, comparing fascination to the drunken state, implying losing control.

## 5. Conclusions

This article presents a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a bilingual multimodal corpus made up of eight films with AD in Spanish and Chinese. Many similarities on content selection have been found in this language pair, which proves AD translation from Spanish into Chinese is a feasible way to promote AD in China. This finding coincides with a study comparing several Western guidelines, all of them sharing four main AD components: when, where, who and what (Rai *et al.* 2010). However, there are also differences in the general approach to AD between Chinese and Spanish AD, which also suggest the need for a certain degree of localisation for translating AD from Spanish into Chinese. For example, as far as content selection is concerned, we have noticed that, in Chinese, psychological traits are described in much more detail than in Spanish.

The two most noticeable differences are the information load and the degree of the scriptwriter's intervention. For the latter, the aspects of content selection and AD approach are interwoven. Spanish AD is shorter and less detailed than Chinese AD. This is in line with previous findings by Bourne and Jiménez Hurtado (2007) when comparing Spanish and English AD, and Matamala and Rami (2009) when comparing Spanish and German AD.

Concerning the scriptwriter's intervention, Chinese AD provides more explicitness-related information like cause-effect relationships and more subjective comments about the plot or characters. A similar conclusion was reached by Arma (2012), who stated that Italian AD is more subjective than English AD based on a case study. It should be pointed out that AD in Italy was also in its early stages like Chinese AD back then (Arma 2012). Limbach (2012: 266-290) also found that the English scriptwriter intervened more based on a comparative study of the German and English ADs for *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle 2008). The tendency to give more information and intervene more may be due to Chinese scriptwriters' paternalistic attitude towards the audience with sight loss, which guides the whole scriptwriting process and could be considered as acting as a norm in Toury's terms (1995). This can be confirmed by Ma's claim (2020: 67-87) that giving implicit information is an unavoidable compensation for the audience with visual loss to enable them to capture the film's art and the deeper meanings behind the scenes. This attitude can also be observed in other audiovisual content for broader audiences. For example, a film's moral lessons are usually indicated in its trailer in Chinese.

Other differences revolve around CF, cultural references, and the use of *chengyu* in Chinese AD. The significant number of dissimilarities confirm the necessity of localisation guidelines for translating AD from Spanish into Chinese as a first step to test this proposal with Chinese end-users.

This study is the first one conducting a contrastive analysis of Chinese AD with Spanish AD based on a multimodal corpus. Our labelling scheme can also possibly be used in other AD studies for classifying AD content or identifying AD approaches. Notwithstanding, this study is not free from limitations, such as the relatively small size of our corpus. However, considering that there are very few films with AD in both languages, we think it addresses our research purpose well. Secondly, the ADs used in our corpus have not been done recently, and the ways to audio describe might have changed slightly in both contexts. Therefore, some differences present in this study might be partially explained by historical reasons. Besides, none of the films are originally Spanish. We hope to compensate for these limitations with a reception study, with a more recent Spanish film. Thirdly, all the findings about differences cannot be confirmed without a more in-depth knowledge of the scriptwriting process in both languages. Therefore, more studies with a focus on the AD creation process should be conducted. Most previous AD studies focus on AD products or their reception. More research on the translation process may help the training or enhance the

quality of AD. Interviews with scriptwriters could be an option. Systematic studies about AD for cultural elements may help get a more thorough understanding in this respect. Meanwhile, AD translation using CAT tools could be investigated as a step further to speed up the scriptwriting process. As a result, we believe a set of localisation guidelines for the translation of Spanish AD into Chinese should be drafted to guarantee the best possible reception by users. All the above-mentioned differences between AD in Chinese and Spanish and the results of the further reception study should be considered when elaborating the localisation guidelines. Although AD in China is still at a blooming stage with a volunteer-dependent nature, we also hope that our research can contribute to its AD's professionalisation transition with some input from an academic perspective in the long run.

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### Data availability statement

The data used for this analysis are available from <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/257651>.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The system *Audesc* is a system for creating AD developed by the ONCE since 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Source: adapted from <https://tracce.ugr.es/estudios-de-corpus-multimodal/> (consulted 21.01.2021)

<sup>3</sup> All the references to the Spanish, British, American, German and Greek AD guidelines are based on their translations into English provided in *A Comparative Study of Audio Description Prevalent in Different Countries* by Rai, Greening and Petré (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Jiang, personal communication, May 2, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Jiang, personal communication, May 2, 2020.