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Applying Feminist Translation Strategies in Audio Description: On the Negotiation of Visual Representations of Non-Normativity

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Abstract: Intersectional feminist translation provides visibility to the historically hidden or marginalized characters and narratives. This article interrogates the strategies we can apply to translate images into words, that is, to audio describe non-normative identities while adhering to the particularities of audiovisual productions. It poses the question of how to provide a feminist audio description that aligns with the creators' intent. The objective of this study is to analyse the strategies applied to create a gender-conscious AD of a documentary on lesbophobia where ten women share their experiences as non-normative persons. They are defined by a series of intrinsic features such as race, gender expression or age and present a myriad of differences that have irremediably influenced their experience of lesbophobia and how society reads and identifies them. The visual contents in this documentary provide essential information that complements the understanding of the problem by people with visual impairment. This action research study analyses the challenges emerged during the AD production. It aims to emphasize the mediating power of AD professionals and how they influence the understanding of blind audiences.

Keywords: audio description; accessibility; lesbophobia; feminist translation; queer translation; audiovisual translation; representation

1. INTRODUCTION

AD has been defined as an intermodal audiovisual translation service that primarily helps people with sight loss along with other secondary audiences understand and enjoy an original audiovisual product by translating the visual and aural elements otherwise inaccessible into a verbal commentary (Holsanova 2022; Vercauteren 2022). Several aspects of AD have been and continue to be studied such as the production process (Benecke 2004; Holland 2009; Bardini 2020), the reception of AD (Ramos 2015; Walczak and Fryer 2017), the combination of AD with other services (Braun and Orero 2010) and, importantly for the purposes of our paper, content selection (Vercauteren 2012; Remael, Reviers and Vercauteren 2015), AD style (Orero and Vilaró 2012; Bardini 2017) and the collaboration of creators and audio describers (Udo and Fels 2009; Udo and Fels 2010a;).

On the topic of AD content selection and bearing in mind the time and synchrony constraints of AD, earlier standards recommend following the main categories of information: ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘who’, ‘what’ (and ‘how’), in other words, setting the scene, naming the characters and describing the dramatic action (ITC 2000, 13; UNE 153020, 7-8), along with unidentifiable noises and text on screen. More recent recommendations (Remael, Reviers and Vercauteren 2015, 22) provide tools to select relevant information: “[i]dentify any unrealistic characters and determine their most prominent features”, “[d]etermine what actions and reactions of a character move the story forward to the greatest extent”, among others. To assess content selection, research studies have implemented eye-tracking to assess sighted viewers’ visual areas of interest in audiovisual productions and create ADs based on the experiment, with positive results among the participants (Di Giovanni 2014; Orero and Vilaró 2012). Most recently, Mazur (2020) presented a functional analysis proposal to deal with macrotextual issues in the source text, which not only include the selection of relevant content from the source text, but also its structure, filmic language, time constraints, etc. For the specific purposes

of our study, Section 3.1 discusses AD recommendation regarding the representation of gender, sex, race and disability in greater depth.

On the topic of stylistic choices, earlier standards and guidelines provide the general recommendations to utilise a simple yet vivid language, to avoid technical jargon, and to adapt the AD scripting style to that of the original product. The ADLAB guidelines (Remael, Reviere and Vercauteren 2015) provide more details, recommending figures of speech such as simile and metaphor, shorter sentences, and descriptions ordered from general to specific information. The traditional notion of accessibility and AD as an exclusive, neutral, non-auteur, third-party and post-hoc service (Fryer 2018, 172) has subsequently been challenged, with several experiments showing a high acceptance to director-centric (Udo and Fels 2010a)¹, auteur (Szarkowska 2013), creative (Walczak and Fryer 2017), integrated (Fryer 2018) AD, and accessible filmmaking (Romero-Fresco 2019). These proposals incorporate the directors' (and other members of the creative team) vision into the AD scriptwriting process, often from the very beginning of the creative process. On the topic of stylistic choices in collaborative AD, Udo and Fels (2009) recount the experience of a Hamlet production described—in collaboration with the director—in Shakespearian style and form (iambic pentameter). The point of creator-centric proposals and their link to this study is why produce objective descriptions when describers have the chance to collaborate with directors, producers or the cast and incorporate their creative vision and interpretations while striking a balance between creativity and accessibility (Romero-Fresco 2022).

In this sense, within the context of universal design, which refers to “the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (Connell *et al.* 1997, n.p.), Udo and Fels (2010b) argue that “traditional AD” (as opposed to integrated AD, which is created in collaboration with creative teams)

¹ Director-centric AD recognises that it is in fact the director's responsibility to safeguard their creative vision and style in the AD.

overlooks several of its principles². As traditional AD is built on a finished product, the flexibility in use principle and equitable use principle are (partiall)t overlooked. According to them, the AD should not be an add-on to the audiovisual product, an afterthought. Rather, it should be integrated throughout the production process, with audio describers collaborating with creators. As of now, the two main alternatives are being advocated for designing better accessible services: closer collaboration with creators, and the involvement of users in both the creative/production and accessibility processes (Di Giovanni 2018; Greco 2018). The current article focuses on the former. In our case, an integrated AD meant purposefully scripting a feminist AD adapting feminist translation strategies (see Section 4). Specifically, the AD of the documentary *Lesbofòbia* [Lesbophobia] by Creación Positiva³ (2019) is explored as a case for action research to shed light on the way certain non-normative identities are represented in AD and how involving creative teams can help create an AD in line with their creative and ideological intent.

The present article is structured as follows. Section 2 deals with the representation of minorities and non-normativity in translation from a theoretical perspective. Afterwards, Section 3 deals with the implications of gender representation in AD and how standards and recommendation deal with the topic. The object of study, the documentary *Lesbofobia*, is presented in Section 4. Section 5 focuses on the action research methodology followed in the creation process and the description of the feminist translation strategies applied in the AD. This interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework is followed by Section 6, which includes an analysis of the main visual features that shape diversity in the documentary: gender expression, race, disability, and age, as well as an analysis of the strategies used to convey the information in the AD script. Sexuality is not discussed in detail in the AD as all the protagonists (as the creators refer to the women interviewed

² The seven universal design principles are equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and appropriate size and space for approach and use.

³ <https://www.creacionpositiva.org/sensibilizacion-e-incidencia-politica/lesbofobia-documental/>

in the documentary) identify as lesbians and even if this can be linked to certain visual representations, it is not, in principle, a visual characteristic. The examples are extracted from the original Spanish script but are provided in English. The article places the focus on the intersemiotic (visual-verbal) translation. Finally, conclusions and future research avenues are found in Section 7.

2. REPRESENTATION AND TRANSLATION

The representation of minorities in the translated text and the agency of the translator when translating are not new issues in Translation Studies, especially from the so-called “cultural turn” in the 90s (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990; Tymoczko 2000) particularly when it comes to the representation of collectives such as women, racialised people, people under the “queer” umbrella and other collectives which escape from what culture traditionally considers the norm. For instance, in their edited volume, Castro and Ergun (2017) gather a series of works that aim to embrace the diversity of political feminist theories of resistance through translation. In the same vein, Epstein and Gillett (2017) curated a collection of studies that touch upon the representation and handling of the queer in translation as tool to fight back the historical and imposed heterosexuality (Epstein and Gillett 2017). Epstein and Gillett’s volume was followed by Baer and Kaindl (2018) work, in which a variety of case studies revolving around queer identities and narratives are presented, and by Baer (2020), with a more theoretical approach to the matter, and most recently by Rose (2021), who centres her attention on trans and intersex texts and authors in translation. All this literature shows the vast potential for reflexion of the discipline.

The study of the representation of minorities is accommodated under the umbrella term of gender studies. This field originates inside feminist studies, which have exponentially increased its interdisciplinarity nature to adjust the needs of society, addressing the big issues on the “global arena of international politics in which cultural, economic, political and social inequalities are played out”

(Woodward and Woodward 2015, 2). In other words, the study of gender is taken to refer to the study of social difference (Woodward and Woodward 2015). Castro (2008) mentions that feminist translation aims to validate different types of feminism and the same conception is adopted in queer translation since it “problematizes the representation of otherness, and translation studies highlights the otherness inherent in representation” to “productively destabilize not only traditional models of representation, [...] but also the authorial voices and subjectivities they project” (Baer and Kaindl 2018, 1).

When representing different identities, Hall (1996) rejects the idea of a completed and defined subject and calls for a constant dialogue with discourse-making in a historical, cultural, and social context. “Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, “that the «positive» meaning of any term —and thus its «identity»— can be constructed.” (p. 4). In fact, he proposes a critical approach to traditional universal identity policies since most often, dominant groups in society determine how identities are represented in relation to gender, class or race (Hall, 2018). By employing feminist and queer translation methodologies, non-normative identities, which have historically been confined within rigid and all-encompassing classifications, discover opportunities that facilitate the transcendence of preconceived notions, uncritical interpretations, and inherited stereotypes (Martínez Pleguezuelos, 2021, p. 693). Bringing Butler’s theories (1990, 2004) to translation and highlighting the contingency and performativity of this practice that allows for various versions or performances of the same text. Butler argues that the construction and representation of bodies and identities is a consequence of the language used to described them (Pérez Navarro, 2004). Therefore, identities are the result of a process of rewriting based on the established gender and sexual codes within a normative heterosexual paradigm. Non-normative identities, maintained in the margins, which cannot be placed within established discourses become no-identities (Pérez-Navarro, 2005) The translator then takes “interlocutionary

space”: they acquire an active role as mediator of a message.

As put by Castro (2008), feminist translation includes all practices deployed by translators to actively validate the different types of feminisms and ultimately eradicate gender discrimination. In the context of postmodernism, the awareness of the multiplicity of feminisms questions the possibility of creating faithful and objective translations, intended to a neutral ideology since this passivity might bring to the continuation of the established patriarchal system. Castro also creates a parallelism between feminisms and translation studies in which both share the fact of dealing with something secondary and which exists in the margins of a core item, thus implying that they are inferior on a social hierarchy: feminisms in relation to patriarchy, translation in relation to the original text. In this regard, translation or re-translation are deliberate and intentional, meaning they have a purpose (Von Flotow 2012).

In the specific field of AVT, the representation and awareness of gender has also captured researchers’ attention. Audiovisual content contains both visual and acoustic information and reaches a great portion of the population. AVT, a bridge between cultures and communities, is responsible for the reproduction and perpetuation of stereotypes too (de Marcello 2006). Martínez-Pleguezuelos (2018), for example, mentions the selection of dubbing actors for the dubbed versions of transgender characters that are in some cases either masculinised or feminised, perpetuating some stereotypes in the translated version of the audiovisual contents. Also, recent studies (Villanueva 2021; Villanueva and Chaume 2021), have systematically reviewed works from the last two decades in which LGTB representation was studied in AVT texts, offering a holistic overview of the methodologies and epistemological frameworks used by scholars in nowadays research on this direction.

We base our methodology on feminist translation practices that were first proposed in the 90s by Canadian feminist translators and translation scholars. Von Flotow (1991) proposed three key strategies of feminist translation with the aim of providing visibility and analysing the context in

which translations are made with an increasing number of self-identified feminist translators and feminist texts: supplementing, which calls for interventionist moves on the part of the translator to compensate losses; prefacing and footnoting, where the translator plays a didactic role; and hijacking, where the translator appropriates the original text. Later on, Castro (2008) reviews feminist translation strategies based on previous scholars (Godard 1990; Lotbinière-Harwood 1991; Von Flotow 1991) and synthesises four possible strategies that underline the role of the translator as an active mediator of message: *Compensation*, where the translator directly intervenes and counteracts the differences between the source and the target in terms of connotations, gendered wording, etc.; *metatextuality*, a strategy that gathers paratexts such as forewords, translator's notes, among others. These paratexts allude directly to the political intent of the translation, justify their interventions, and explain underlying meanings that could be lost in translation; *abjunction*, where the translator reclaims a text without feminist intent by introducing neologisms, changes or parodies in the plot, inclusive grammatical forms (such as sticking to a generalised grammatical female distinction), etc.; *close collaboration with the author* resulting in a process of co-authorship. Feminist strategies applied specifically to audiovisual translation (Von Flotow and Josephy-Hernández 2018) and even less so to the intersemiotic aspects of feminist translation in accessibility services, have been less explored.

3. AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND GENDER

The potential contribution of feminist studies to AD has hardly been explored. The intersection of these two topics, or rather, the application of a gender-conscious approach to the creation of AD should be regarded as crucial in contemporary practices. The massive production of audiovisual content and the easiness in which contents cross borders have resulted in a more plural representation of society. Recent audiovisual products have featured an increasing number of dissident and non-

normative characters. However, to the best of our knowledge, only few research papers have focused on the gender dimension in AD and how out-of-the-norm characters and their visual features are represented through the lens of AD (Villela and Iturregui-Gallardo 2020; Oppegard and Miguel 2022, Iturregui-Gallardo in press).

Villela and Iturregui-Gallardo (2020) analyse the AD of the Brazilian music video *Flutua*. The video portrays some scenes of a gay couple - one of them is deaf - and features two queer artists: Liniker, a black trans singer, and Hooker, a queer man. The article discusses the portrayal of non-normative and intersectional identities through AD and presents the final decisions reached by the team of audio describers based on a feminist approach. The article remains on the surface but serves as an important milestone on this research path by emphasising the figure of the audio describer as mediator as well as filter. On the other hand, Oppegard and Miguel (2022) focused on the gender dimension of audio description through questionnaires and the study of self-description. This study reveals the importance of gender discourses in society and the need for blind and visually impaired people to participate in such debates through visual appearance. They call for further research on gender-construction expressions. While this last study considers users' opinions, Iturregui-Gallardo (in press) proposes a queer feminist approach to accessibility services (particularly to AD, but also subtitles for the Deaf). In his study, he analyses some AD excerpts of Netflix series portraying non-normative identities. He shows how this gender-conscious framework of analysis proves useful when reflecting upon what is lost or modified in terms of minority representation.

Even if the contributions made by the authors referenced in the previous paragraph initiates the negotiation of the portrayal of diverse identities, their outcome falls short of practical solutions, and stand as proposals. This might be explained by a series of reasons based on two key factors: the very recent apparition of more diversity on screen and the development of a new and stronger social awareness on the topic. In the following section, we delve into the recommendations and guidelines

which advise on how to tackle gender, race, age and disability representation in AD scripts.

3.1. GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the beginning of the century, AD standards, legislation and guidelines have been introduced as countries began normalising the provision of access services. For illustrative purposes, the Accessometer tool from the MAP platform keeps a record of existing legislation, standards, and guidelines around the globe.⁴ Taking the standards and recommendations on content selection and style from Section 1 as a brief introduction, the present subsection will focus specifically on AD guidelines related to the representation of gender, race, sex, age and disability.

The British AD standards for television put forward by ITC (2000, 21) briefly discuss the topic of ethnicity and race in AD scripts. Specifically, “[i]f the colour or ethnic type of a person is central to a storyline, it should be mentioned. If it is incidental, it can be mentioned at an early stage”. However, these standards add that, if repeated many times, it can lead to the misimpression that the race/ethnicity of the character is more important to the storyline than it actually is. In terms of gender representation in AD scripts, the ITC standards (2000, 20) do not go into much depth, although they do include a warning about some possible sexist content subtext, namely the irrelevance of describing the “level of attractiveness” in certain TV programmes, as per their example: “although a female TV presenter may be pleasant to the eye, her appearance is not relevant to the subject of newsgathering (ITC 2000, 20)”.

Second, the guidelines developed in the context of the American Council of the Blind (Snyder 2014) do offer some insight into the representation of characters’ ethnicity and age. Namely, these

⁴ <https://mapaccess.uab.cat/> (Retrieved December 16, 2021)

guidelines recommend for the race of every character to be described. Most notably, white should not be considered the default. In practice, however, the race of every character is generally not acknowledged, and it is up to the audience to infer it from the context in which the production concerned is set. In this regard, characters from minority backgrounds are oftentimes “singled out”. When it comes to representing age, these guidelines discourage revealing the exact age of a character. Instead, the characteristics that suggest one’s age should be described. If there is little time for the description, some “shortcuts” can be: teenage, in his 60s, etc. Most recently, Singh (2021) published a manifesto for anti-racist AD where she argues that disclosing the actors’ race is always relevant, and it is always best to incorporate the actors’ self-descriptions.

Another comprehensive resource for audio describers is Fryer’s (2016) book *An Introduction to Audio Description: A Practical Guide*. In her book, Fryer discusses representation of gender, sex, race, and disability. Table 1 summarises the recommendations on identity representation put forward by Fryer, distinguished here between guidelines for the scriptwriting and guidelines for the voicing of the AD. In this paper, the focus is placed on the former.

Table 1. Recommendations in terms of representation in AD (adapted from Fryer 2016)

Gender	When a characters’ gender identity is hidden in the original production, the AD script should equally remain gender neutral.
	For the vocal delivery of the AD, it would be reasonable to choose a voice talent of the opposite gender of the narrator, if the production has one (see also ITC 2000). Alternating voice talents can also be a creative strategy.
Sex	Sexual (and violent) scenes should not be censored in the AD. However, AD scripts oftentimes include euphemisms, dysphemisms, or they either minimise or heighten the original visual content (145).

	As with any content that is being described, the AD should match the tone and the intention of the original. This is also true for content of sensitive nature.
Race	Audio describers are to portray the actors' race and appearance when it is relevant to the story. Arguably, and as pointed out by AD users in previous reception studies (Gerber 2007), race is always relevant to the casting and should therefore be disclosed.
Disability	As in the case of race, the description of a character's disability has to be handled with care. Some possible strategies are omission (or censorship), explicitation (with sensibility) or the "accessible filmmaking" approach, where the describer can ask the actor or the director for their input on the portrayal of the character.

One last set of recommendations worth mentioning was recently issued by the UK charity VocalEyes (Hutchinson, Thompson, and Cock 2020). This report deals precisely with diversity representation in the context of theatre AD and audio introduction (AI). AIs are pieces of prose lasting 5-15 minutes (Fryer and Romero-Fresco 2014, 11) which provide (factual and visual) information about the performance for blind and visually impaired users to better understand the play (Remael, Reviers and Vercauteren 2015). They allow the describer to present the aesthetics of the play, its characters, scenes and action in a lengthier manner than the AD alone. For the purposes of brevity, the report synthesises its findings in 12 principles for describing human characteristics in the audio introduction of a theatre play.

According to the VocalEyes report (Hutchinson, Thompson and Cock 2020, 61-62), the "default" race of the cast should be specified during the audio introduction, with a "clear and unambiguous description of the individual main characters". It is also suggested for the audio describer to explicitly acknowledge their subjectivity and, if they have it, to "use privileged information to name

the actor's ethnicity, disability, gender or other identity if you can, and with their input: it will help reduce ambiguity and avoid erasure". This is precisely the key issue to be discussed throughout the article.

4. OBJECT OF STUDY: THE *LESBOFOBIA* DOCUMENTARY

The object of study is a documentary produced by Creación Positiva, "a feminist organisation for social action that works to make effective the Sexual Rights of citizens through assistance programmes, awareness actions, training and political activity".⁵ Throughout their activist work, they detected a lack of materials and resources that deal with this specific type of violence: lesbophobia. The product was conceived as a video to post on social media but ended up becoming a short documentary. It was directed by Ines Terradellas, feminist communication designer, consultant, and producer, who collaborated with the organisation for the first time to orient and narrow down the idea they wanted to produce.

Ten lesbian women, Akelarre (Júlia and Maio Serrasolsas Moreno), Anne-Cath, Berta Frigola Solé, Brigitte Vasallo, Clara Peya Rigolfas, Claudia Fuentes Brito, Dolores Pulido León, Heidi Ramírez, Laura Freijo Justo and Marta Rodríguez Ayuso discuss what lesbophobia means to them and the ways in which they have endured it. Despite sharing their gender identity and sexuality, these protagonists show a wide range of identity features that have shaped their lived experiences, such as ethnicity or disability, which add to their identities as women and lesbians, highlighting the intersectionality of these women.

Intersectionality, which "describes a theoretical approach to the diverse and changeable aspects of the local, and in terms of feminisms, is deployed to describe, assess, and investigate the many

⁵ <https://www.creacionpositiva.org/> (Retrieved December 10, 2022)

different types of discriminations that a person can suffer, mitigating the effect of «gender» as a single important identity factor” (von Flotow 2012), is a key component in the documentary, and it is so due to two main reasons. First, intersectionality is widely discussed by the participants in their interventions as being the cause of numerous discriminations and forms of violence. Second, intersectionality is visible in the form of skin colour or gender appearance and therefore crucial when transferring the visual into oral description. The description of these ten protagonists thus required a certain awareness. The topic and purpose of the documentary demanded for the audio describer to pay attention to certain visual aspects that could have been omitted, had the documentary explored another topic, such as the specification of all the participant’s skin colour or the identification of queer features such as a shaven head. These women narrate their experiences based not only on the fact that they identify as women and lesbians but also because their behaviour and appearance are read as “out of the norm”.

The AD was completed by one of this article’s authors after consulting the agents involved in the production. Describing diverse identities in a documentary with such a social message and purpose urged debate and reflection. Therefore, the creators, producers and protagonists were involved in the drafting of the script with the aim of creating a piece of integrated AD (Fryer 2018). Though end users were not involved in the production of the AD —due to a lack of funding and tight time constraints—, the creators were advised to incorporate end-user perspectives in future productions.

5. METHODOLOGY

The present study is framed within an action research methodology, combining the creation of an “integrated AD” for the documentary itself with a second theoretical stage where several of the feminist AD strategies applied are described. Action research has been applied to Audiovisual Translation (Neves 2005) and, increasingly, to Media Accessibility (Neves 2016; Dawson 2020;

Barnés-Castaño, Bernstorff and Vilches 2021). The present study followed Neves' workflow (2016, 238), that is, a problem or need is first identified, the partners come together to find solutions and a researcher—who has the theoretical knowledge and practical competences—also finds and test solutions, reflecting on them and incorporating their expertise, and then gets back to the rest of the partners to allow for a cyclical research framework which is typical in the action research paradigm. In our case, the identified problem was how to describe the appearance of the protagonists of the documentary in a way that resonated with them; the describer and the protagonists came together to draft and re-draft those descriptions; and the researchers (one of whom was the audio describer) reflected upon the utilised translation strategies to open up the discussion to AD researchers.

For the creation of the AD, an approach that consciously situated gender at the core of the production was adopted. The intention of the describer's work then had to serve the purpose of minority representation. The demands of both the product, its creators and the audio describer found their responses in the strategies used in feminist translation (Von Flotow, 1991; Castro, 2008). For this study the strategies have been adapted to the needs of the AD text, which is described as a kind of intersemiotic translation (Braun 2008), meaning that the visual component of an audiovisual text is converted into a verbal component (cf. Zabalbeascoa 2008). Iturregui-Gallardo (in press) adopts such perspective when analysing commercial ADs of some Netflix shows that portray non-normative identities arguing that this theoretical and methodological framework proves useful when discussing the implications of a gender-conscious AD in the representation of minorities. Some examples are the first scenes of the series *Special*, directed and starred by an actor with cerebral palsy, in which the protagonist's way of walking is never described even though the camera provides close-ups of this movement, or the way the AD of *Heartstopper* systematically mentions the ethnic features of each protagonist when introduced for the first time.

For the purposes of AD, we propose theoretical adaptations of feminist translation strategies, namely

compensation alludes to what can be referred to as explicitation, where the blind audience has more information about meanings and symbolisms than the sighted audience; *metatextuality*, which takes the form of audio introductions that play the role of prefaces and footnotes (extra information about the visuals and the context of the work); *abjunction*, which entails the reshaping and potentiating of the description of visual content in order to suit the requirements of the message (this strategy surely works against some AD standards, particularly those presenting a more conservative approach); and finally, *close collaboration with the author*, which resonates with the creation of integrated ADs where artists and creators work hand in hand with audio describers to find the best solutions to transfer their creative vision to AD users.

6. CASE STUDY

In this section, the decisions made by the audio describer through the whole process are discussed under the light of a feminist perspective. These women share their sexuality, that may go beyond their own sexual preference to the way they relate to others and how they behave and present in society. Their sexuality, though silent, may potentially become codified visually and behaviourally (gender expression, showing affectivity, etc.) and thus, adds to other aspects to be mentioned in the AD. Their experiences of discrimination are shaped by race, gender expression, disability, and age, which were the features deemed to express the visual dimension of diversity, crucial to the present study. In order to address the translation/AD choices, the feminist translation strategies proposed by Castro (2008) are applied. Based on these strategies, the describer is set to reflect on how these strategies would be applicable and adapted to the intersemiotic needs of AD.

The decisions were not taken individually by the audio describer since the fourth feminist strategy described by Castro (2008), close collaboration, was followed from the beginning. A first draft AD proposal was sent to the creators of the documentary, the director and the protagonists, who were

asked to provide feedback. The final version of the script was issued considering the feedback and, in some cases, after some discussion.

6.1. RACE AND ETHNICITY

The protagonists of the documentary are not all from the same race or ethnicity. It does not come as a surprise that the only women mentioning racial discrimination are those racialised who diverge from the white Caucasian default in Spain: Anne-Cath and Heidi Ramírez. There is a third protagonist that differs from the white Caucasian default, Claudia Fuentes, who is Chilean and shows some non-Caucasian traits. However, while the former two address racism during the documentary, the latter protagonist does not. The more traditional AD standards and recommendations (Section 2.1) advise to mention ethnic features when they play a role in the content or there is a specific purpose in the selection of the cast. Race-conscious AD guidelines (Singh 2021) disagree with this statement, suggesting that disclosing the character's race is always relevant and advocate for auto-description when possible.

The feedback received by the creators was to mention the racial and ethnic features in all the protagonists, not only those discussing racism in their interventions, which was very useful since this was used as a political statement, implying that we all possess ethnic features. This can be well-illustrated with the feedback received from Anne-Cath, who suggested she be described “with phenotypes typical from Nepal and Bangladesh”. This was the final description included in the script since this was the wish of the protagonist, however this decision has some implications when providing information to the end user.

Such information might be completely unknown by any member of the audience, regardless of their vision. This is a clear example of the mediation carried out by the translator/audio describer and the

intention of this transfer of knowledge. In this decision, the wish of the person being described, a racialised person talking about her discrimination, surpassed the mere transfer of a colour, and it was used to complement the regular description of skin colour and ethnic features. It certainly has a political load that the audio describer considered suitable for the contents of the product being described.

6.2. GENDER EXPRESSION

The protagonists in the documentary identify as women. However, they show a diversity of features in relation to their gender expression, to which their sexuality may have some implications, such as, for example, the masculinity in masculine and queer lesbians (Trujillo 2014, 2020). In general, they do not speak about the way they express themselves in terms of clothing, hairstyle and other ornamental features. This is only commented on by one of the protagonists, Brigitte Vasallo. She mentions her appearance as being less feminine and how this trait has led to discrimination and both oral and physical violence. She argues that in her experience some cis-straight men, even if they openly acknowledged her as a woman, considered that it was “right” to abuse her verbally and physically because she had a more “masculine” look. She wears short hair, big glasses and wears a bomber jacket and jeans.

Another protagonist, Clara Peya also presents an appearance that is somehow different from what is canonically thought of feminine. She wears baggy clothes, has shaved hair, and wears a thick chain-shaped necklace. She does not mention her appearance at any point, but it was deemed useful to remark it as she shows a diversity that escapes the norm.

The description of the appearance of the protagonists follows the same order and structure in all of them but certain features have been highlighted. It is important to bear in mind that AD users, and

particularly those of a certain age, will understand the representation of the “female” appearance based on stereotypical representations. Just like with race or ethnic features, all appearances are described but those conveying queer non-normativity are highlighted and reinforced in line with the strategy of compensation, such as the shaved head instead of short hair. Furthermore, the creation of an integrated AD (cf. collaboration with the author) let us show the description to the protagonists, who validated the way they were portrayed in the description.

6.3. *DISABILITY*

In the context of disability, and as acknowledged by the documentary creators themselves, it is worth noting that activism and research have also intersected with the question of gender and queer representation: “social norms related to gender, sexuality and disability co-construct one another” (Kimball *et al.* 2018, n.p.). Yet, as argued by Schalk (2013), feminist texts are not exempt from being ableist too. She specifically illustrates that certain feminist texts “use metaphors of disability to represent the negative effects of patriarchy” (n.p.). Such ableist metaphors undermine the message that is being conveyed.

In terms of disability-conscious translation practices, translators are to keep with the preferred terms of the concerned collective, that is, to make a conscious effort to avoid ableist terms and, more generally, a patronising or vilifying language. Associations, government bodies, and activist groups keep inclusive language guidelines updated. The Office of Disability Issues in the UK, for instance, recommends avoiding medical and victim labels and, overall, negative phrases.⁶

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability> (Retrieved December 10, 2022)

As for the representation of disability through AD, some notions have been discussed in the aforementioned guidelines (Section 2.1.). It is a particularly sensitive point in the current analysis since the AD service is primarily targeted at people with disabilities, therefore, members of the same community that may receive with special attention this information. Furthermore, it has been argued that the notions of disability, gender, and sexuality co-construct one another (Kafer 2013). In the documentary, two people with a disability that can be seen are portrayed, Berta and Marta, since they are Deaf and use sign languages to communicate. These two protagonists belong to more than one minority group and the violence exerted by social structures are multiplied, as mentioned in their interventions.

The sign languages are subtitled in Spanish in the original video and the translation provided by subtitles is rendered in the form of audio subtitles. The guidelines analysed in this paper suggest handling the description of disability with care, distancing ourselves from a medical definition and making allusion to the visual side of it (Fryer 2016). In the AD script the sign language they use is stated: Berta is using Catalan Sign Language, while Marta uses Spanish Sign Language. By using an abjunction strategy here, the AD is furnished with a piece of information which will most likely be missed by the general audience.

This solution was made easier thanks to the integrated AD, by which the feedback from the creators and featured women asked for the specific type of sign language to be included. The audio describer was not familiar with sign language, so the detail had been completely missed. The provision of extra information encourages sign language awareness since some people ignore the fact that there are several sign languages (Spanish and Catalan Sign Languages in Spain, for instance). This poses yet another clear example of the benefits of the involvement of the team in the AD creation process.

6.4. AGE

The last feature identified that related to diversity in the documentary was age. It can be argued that age does not carry the same stigma that gender expression or disability do. However, there is a certain idea of homogenisation when discussing LGBTQ+ characters, the idea of youth (King 2016). The women in this documentary cover a vast range of age, from the youngest, who are in their early twenties to the oldest, who are almost in their sixties.

Back in the 90s, as put by the disabled feminist Jenny Morris (1993), feminism at that point had forgotten two main groups of women: disabled and old women. It should be noted that the current growing awareness of intersectionality in the studies of both feminism and LGBTQ+-related theories is resulting in new research paths that take minorities into account. While this is true for disability (cf. McRuer 2006), age, and particularly advanced ages, continue to be an issue within the LGBTQ+ community with elder members remaining in the margins of research and policy making (King 2016). Despite their age difference, the protagonists of the production all share the experience of lesbophobia, which is proof of the need for change, of the hegemony of society that seems to remain still in certain aspects. These experiences of discrimination, however, might have been shaped into new forms of violence along the years, making age one of the key factors in the documentary.

On the topic of age, the guidelines explored in this paper and particularly those issued by Snyder (2014), call for the avoidance of mentioning the exact age and that some shortcuts may be used. For the description of the documentary, approximate ages were provided for each of the protagonists in a more precise and systematised manner by stating either the tens (e.g., 30) or half tens (e.g., 35). Again, the practice of integrated AD granted that these approximations were approved by the people being described. It goes without mentioning that AD users thus receive more information than people accessing the AV material in its standard form, applying the strategy of compensation.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Building on the existing literature on feminist translation strategies (Castro 2008), this article proposes AD solutions to tackle a series of gender-related characteristics through an action research study in which both the audio describer, the documentary creators, and the protagonists of the audiovisual product take an active role in the decision-making process. The creation of this AD is supported by the praxis of integrated AD (Fryer 2018), which is based on the collaboration with the creators and artists to come up with agreed strategies to describe the audiovisual contents. In the case of *Lesbofobia*, the documentary creators present a product that is not ideologically neutral and that provides a political message. Therefore, the AD does not only adapt to the milieu in which it unfolds but also heightens characteristics that were the causes of discrimination or that are perceived as non-normative in current mainstream society. The audio describer detaches from neutrality and creates a script which enhances the information carried by the audiovisual product. The contents of the source text, the documentary, are overtly feminist and queer, and they should be accompanied by a deliberate queer and feminist AD, which adapts feminist translation strategies that are able to render visible the historically hidden or marginalised as postulated by feminist and queer translation theorist and professionals (Castro and Ergun 2017; Epstein and Gillett 2017; Baer and Kaindl 2018; Baer 2020; Rose 2021; Martínez Pleguezuelos 2018; Iturregui-Gallardo in press).

In order to create an AD both in tune with the audiovisual contents and aware of the requirements of the creators and the potential audience of the documentary, the audio describer acts as a mediator and filter, who consciously and actively leaves their trace in the process. The creation of the script was based on two main pillars. First, the methodology was framed within action research and integrated AD (Fryer 2018). This was the starting point of the creation process, the collaboration with the creators and the featured women. Second, the AD script was issued by applying other strategies deployed in feminist translation. These strategies aim to enhance the feminist intent of the text and point out the agency of the translator, in this case the audio describer. Furthermore, existing guidelines on the treatment of diversity in audio description were observed, and in certain cases,

even defied or overlooked, not because the recommendations were insufficient or wrong, but because the AD contents prioritised the alignment with the purpose of the documentary.

The intimate relationship between the social construct regarding people with disabilities and the LGBT community, as well as their intersection, has been discussed before. People belonging to any of the two umbrellas share one main principle: diversity. Such diversity has been historically linked to stigma and marginalisation. The documentary is *per se* a piece of denounce and criticism. Consequently, making this documentary accessible surges from activism, leading to visibility and advocacy.

Even though these minoritised collectives share or have shared similar “abjected” positions in society, as put in Butlerian words, research on the topic is virtually nonexistent. In the field of translation (Epstein and Gillett 2017; Baer and Kaindl 2018; Baer 2020; Rose 2021) and audiovisual translation specifically (Martínez-Pleguezuelos 2018; Villanueva 2021; Villanueva and Chaume 2021) work is being developed to address such matters. However, less studies have been published within the neighbouring fields of accessibility and media accessibility (Marcelino Villela and Iturregui-Gallardo 2020; Oppegaard and Miguel 2022; Iturregui-Gallardo in press), which is particularly relevant due to the traditionally ableist representation and understanding of disability. This article wishes to open new avenues of research able to navigate this crossroad of knowledge fields, naturally emerging from the social processes of diversity visibility and representation.

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