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## **AD in China at the crossroads: a set of guidelines for localising AD scripts from Spanish into Chinese**

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### **Abstract**

In light of the growing demand for audio description (AD) in China, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, coupled with the persistent shortage of qualified AD scriptwriters, this article advocates for AD translation from Spanish to Chinese, a type of indirect translation, as an alternative approach to addressing this issue, potentially benefiting from localisation techniques (Jankowska et al., 2017; Remael & Vercauteren, 2010). This article presents the development of a set of guidelines for localising AD scripts from Spanish into Chinese, resulting from triangulating a corpus study comparing Chinese and Spanish ADs, interviews with Chinese AD providers, a reception study with end-users, and participant observation through a field study. Additionally, it discusses three controversial elements related to AD scriptwriting, along with four norms that guide the script writers' decision-making process, which must be considered when localising AD scripts in Chinese. It concludes with a summary of the localisation guidelines.

### **Keywords**

AD translation, AD guidelines, localisation, indirect translation, triangulation

## 1. Introduction

Audio description (AD) shifted from a volunteer-dependent stage to a professionalisation stage in some pioneering countries – such as Spain, the UK and Germany – once their respective legislation started to enforce its provision on a regular basis at around the first decade of this century (Reviers, 2016). This shift was accompanied by a call for standardisation of media accessibility through guidelines under different labels like *standards*, *protocols*, and *norms* (Orero, 2012; Matamala & Orero, 2013, 2018). The contribution guidelines make to AD standardisation lies in their use as instructions for newcomers to the profession in the form of reference works for practitioners or standards for quality control (Pederson, 2020).

AD in China is still at its volunteer-dependent stage. However, in 2021, two legislative initiatives were introduced that could potentially provide a more suitable legal framework to address the copyright issue that has been a major obstacle to AD development in the country. Obtaining permission from the copyright holder of the original audiovisual work in China to create and distribute AD products is highly complex due to the lack of legal guarantees. This has significantly limited the production and dissemination of AD products, particularly since fair use of AD products is not explicitly included in Chinese law. Nonetheless, the amended version of the Copyright Law of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国著作权法, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Zhuzuo Quanfa*) (the National People's Congress, 2020 amendment) has added a new exemption for providing accessible formats of published works, including audiovisual products, to people with reading difficulties. Together with the ratification of the Marrakesh VIP treaty (WIPO, 2013), an international treaty on copyright intending to facilitate access to works for people with visual impairments, these two legislations seem to create a more promising context for AD development in China.

In addition, the transition towards professionalisation has already started, which has been fostered by efforts from individuals among AD providers to make it a profitable service. While there are unpublished in-house guidelines by service providers in China based on the personal experience of different AD groups who provide this service (Tor-Carroggio & Vercauteren, 2020), experience-based guidelines i.e., guidelines currently used in China, lack a sound methodological

foundation (Tor-Carroggio & Vercauteren, 2020) and are often too generic and vague to have a real impact on either the style or the quality of AD scripts (Orero, 2012).

According to the study by Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost (2020), most Chinese AD providers recognise the importance of AD guidelines. Furthermore, based on the frequent communications between the researchers of this study and AD stakeholders in China, three broad objectives can be observed as crucial for the professionalisation and standardisation of AD in China: first, to increase the quantity, variety, and quality of AD products while considerably reducing production time and cost; second, to have AD guidelines based on empirical data as an essential incentive and prerequisite for such a transition; and third, to produce more qualified AD professionals through systematic AD training.

Given these circumstances, we propose AD translation as an alternative to make it more widely accessible in China quantitatively and qualitatively, in our case, from Spanish into Chinese. AD translation could be seen as a type of indirect translation because the original AD script (written text 2) is first translated from the movie (multimodal text 1) before being translated into another language (written text 3) (Jankowska et. al, 2017; Remael & Vercauteren, 2010).<sup>1</sup> This proposal was already tested with other language combinations and promising results were obtained (Jankowska, 2015; Jankowska et al., 2017; Lopéz-Vera, 2006; Remael & Vercauteren, 2010). However, according to these studies, a set of localisation guidelines is deemed necessary to make this indirect translation meet user expectations for linguistic, historical, sociocultural and methodological differences in AD between different languages.

This study develops the first set of guidelines for localising AD from Spanish into Chinese based on empirical and experimental data and is divided into four parts. First, the methodology used for developing the guidelines is outlined. Next, we discuss relevant findings that emerged from the development of our localisation guidelines. This section is followed by a summary of the key points of the actual guidelines. To conclude, we indicate the limitations of this study and possible future implications.

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<sup>1</sup> The terminology used to describe translations of translations varies significantly. In this article, we have chosen to use the term *indirect translation* because it seems to be a comprehensive overarching term to encompass various hyponyms, such as compilative and second-hand translation (Rosa et al., 2017).

## 2. Methodology

The draft of the guidelines was based on the results of our empirical research consisting of triangulating four data sources: a corpus study comparing Chinese and Spanish ADs, interviews with Chinese AD providers, a reception study in Shanghai, and participant observation through a field study in China from February to June 2021. The whole research process was divided mainly into two stages, the first one being descriptive and the second one experimental.

Table 1 provides an overview of the methodology followed in this research according to the general chronological order of the different steps. This research used a sequential design, where each research step was conducted separately, and its results were fed into the design of the next step.<sup>2</sup> For reasons of space, steps 1, 2, and 5 of this research will be published separately, where their methodology will be explained in more detail. In this article, we will focus on steps 3 and 4: the interviews with a focus group and with an individual on the one hand, and participant observation through a field study on the other hand.

Table 1. Overview of the methodology followed in each stage of our research in chronological order

Time order	Research method	Research approach	Population	Objectives
1	Online semi-structured interviews	Qualitative	Six Chinese AD providers recruited through purposive sampling	To get an update on AD practice in China and gather Chinese AD stakeholders' opinions on AD translation.
2	Corpus-based study	Quantitative and qualitative	A pilot study based on two films with AD in Chinese and Spanish; A final corpus study based on eight films with	To identify and systematize the similarities and differences between Chinese and Spanish AD by creating a multimodal corpus of

<sup>2</sup> The exact time for each study is not indicated in Table 1 because it has been a long way from their design and analysis to publication, resulting in lots of time overlapping. This study has been conducted within the context of a doctoral research aiming to test the feasibility of translating AD from Spanish into Chinese that has been extended over time.

			AD in Chinese and Spanish	AD scripts with this linguistic combination.
<b>3</b>	Onsite interviews with a focus group and an individual	Qualitative	Six Chinese AD providers recruited through purposive sampling	To discuss three debatable issues related to AD scriptwriting in Chinese
<b>4</b>	Participant observation through a field study	Qualitative	N/A	To gain a deeper understanding of AD practice in China through a close contact with Chinese AD providers
<b>5</b>	Reception study (A questionnaire; an onsite pilot experiment; a final online experiment; an open discussion and personal feedback from the participants)	Quantitative and qualitative	153 people with visual impairments recruited through personal contacts and snowball sampling	To test Chinese users' acceptance of three types of ADs: Chinese AD, Translated AD, and Localised AD.

At the very beginning of our research (between 30 April and 13 July 2020), we conducted six online semi-structured interviews with a selection of key Chinese AD providers. The aim was to generate preliminary insights into the current situation of AD in China, as well as the potential feasibility of AD translation into Chinese. These preliminary insights informed the design of the next steps of this research (Liu, *in press*, 2023). The interview outline was based on initial observations from a pilot study that compared the Chinese AD and Spanish AD (Liu & Tor-Caroggio, 2022a). This pilot study is also part of step 2 as a preparation for the final corpus study. The six interviews were transcribed and analysed with Atlas.ti, a software for qualitative data analysis and basic quantitative analysis (Liu, *in press*, 2023).

A multimodal corpus was created and analysed using a labelling scheme developed from the above-mentioned pilot study. It consisted of eight movies with AD in both Chinese and Spanish. The goal was to explore the differences and similarities between the two ADs. The corpus was also encoded and analysed with Atlas.ti (Liu et al., 2022).

Importantly, there was a mismatch between the findings from our corpus study and the findings from our semi-structured interviews. In particular, three issues seem more problematic: information quantity, subjective comments and sensitive scenes. To address these issues, we conducted a focus group with five AD stakeholders. One AD stakeholder was not available for the focus group, so we interviewed him separately. The interviews centred on these three issues. We considered these issues to be controversial because, according to our corpus study, they are the aspects in which Chinese AD differs most significantly from Spanish AD. Moreover, the patterns observed on the three issues in Chinese AD seem incongruent to a different extent with the current AD methods advocated by some AD providers who participated in the semi-structured interviews. All the interviewees of the focus group were from Shanghai, which is amongst the top three Chinese cities in terms of AD provision. This is why we decided to conduct our field study in this city. The focus group was held on 17 March 2021, and the individual interview was conducted on 19 March 2021. The focus group and the individual interview overlapped in time with the pilot experiment of the reception study. Table 2 provides the basic information from our participants. Except for Qu, who preferred an individual interview, the remaining participants took part in the focus group. The transcript of both in Chinese is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/261061>. We compiled a summary of the main points mentioned by all the participants based on the three themes for further analysis, including some general observations.

Table 2. Basic information about the participants in the focus group and interview

Name	Profile
Han Yin (韩颖) <sup>3</sup>	Founder of Sound of Light Barrier-free Film & TV Culture Development Centre (SoL) (光影之声, <i>Guangying zhi Sheng</i> ). She is a person with sight loss and responsible for AD revising and training.
Han Dongxue (韩冬雪)	Director of the Shanghai Yier Information Co., Ltd (上海译迩信息技术有限公司, <i>Shanghai Yier Xinxi Jishu Youxian Gongsi</i> ). A company that offers accessible versions for audiovisual products, including AD and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing. She has experience in AD revising.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, Han Yin and Han Dongxue will be referred to by their full names to disambiguate. Others will be referred to only by their last names.

Huang Yiqing (黄一庆)	Secretary of the Shanghai Film Critics Society (上海电影评论学会, <i>Shanghai Dianying Pinglun Xuehui</i> ), the first formal AD group in China. He has experience in organising AD-related activities.
Ma Wei (马卫)	He has broad experience in AD script writing and AD revising in several AD groups.
Sui Pingping (隋萍萍)	Secretary of the Shanghai Vancouver Film School (上海温哥华电影学院, <i>Shanghai Wengehua Dianying Xueyuan</i> ). She is promoting the inclusion of AD training at an institutional level.
Qu Dapeng (曲大鹏)	Head of the volunteer team formed by radio presenters from Shanghai Media Group (上海广播电视台, <i>Shanghai Guangbo Dianshitai</i> ). Responsible for AD revising.

Finally, a reception study was conducted online through WeChat with 153 Chinese end-users to test their acceptance level of three AD versions of the Spanish film *The Invisible Guest* (Paulo, 2017): one AD script written from scratch in Chinese (Chinese AD), one translated from the existing AD script in Spanish (Translated AD), and one translated from the Spanish script and localised into Chinese based on our preliminary set of guidelines (Localised AD). The Localised AD was created based on a draft version of the guidelines for localising AD from Spanish into Chinese, derived from triangulating the results of the previous research steps. A questionnaire including questions on demographic information, comprehension, presence, and overall satisfaction with quality was used to measure participants' viewing experience (Liu, 2023). Some participants also informally provided their personal opinions directly to one of the researchers after the AD session (Liu, 2023). After conducting the reception study with end-users, we updated the guidelines addressing their feedback to come up with the final version.

Another data source for this research has been participant observation, defined as the researcher's engagement in events in the setting under study (Jackson, 2016, p. 251), mainly through a field study conducted in Shanghai from February to June 2021. The researchers have been in constant and close contact with different AD providers in Shanghai, either by informal personal communications or by direct observation when participating in activities run by the different

groups. As a result, they were able to obtain additional information to corroborate or complement the data obtained in the formal experimental part of our research.<sup>4</sup>

### **3. Results**

This section presents the results from triangulating the data collected for developing the localisation guidelines that constitute the basis for the indirect translation. It begins by summarising the main results obtained in steps 1, 2, and 5 (see Table 1). More in-depth analysis of these separate studies can be found in another three publications. Second, we will present a discussion on the three topics addressed in the focus group and the individual interview. Third, we will provide some general reflections on the AD methodology for AD scriptwriting in Chinese shared by all stakeholders in our study. These reflections are based on our observations throughout the research process, mainly during the field study, which can partly explain why they advocate for some AD methods over others, and the implications of such AD methods for AD translation.

#### **3.1. Evidence from previous research steps**

The semi-structured interviews (Liu, *in press*, 2023) with Chinese AD providers allowed us to reach three main conclusions. First, according to our interviewees, AD in China, being in its infancy, is full of opportunities and challenges, with copyright infringement as a central problem. Another problem mentioned by the interviewees was the shortage of qualified AD scriptwriters, which justifies our proposal of AD translation, considering that there are more translators than AD scriptwriters in China (Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022a). Second, the interviewees showed varying degrees of agreement on some issues related to AD scriptwriting, subjectivity versus objectivity being the most controversial one. Third, despite being unfamiliar with AD translation, almost all the interviewees showed a positive attitude towards our proposal of AD translation as a way to make AD more widely accessible in China.

Regarding our corpus study (Liu et al., 2022), many similarities in content selection were found between Chinese and Spanish AD, demonstrating AD translation from Spanish into Chinese as a feasible way to increase AD in China. However, some differences in AD approaches between this

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<sup>4</sup> The whole study design was approved by our university's Ethics Committee on 1 April 2020 (Reference Number: 5125) and March 1, 2021 (Reference Number: 5458).

language pair were also detected, suggesting the need for a certain degree of localisation when translating AD from Spanish into Chinese. The two major discrepancies were the information load and the degree of intervention by the scriptwriter. Chinese AD is longer and more detailed than Spanish AD, and Chinese AD scriptwriters tend to intervene more than their Spanish counterparts. This finding corresponds with the second primary conclusion of the semi-structured interviews. Two notable examples that demonstrate this trend are the inclusion of more explicit information related to cause-effect relationships and the allowance of more subjective remarks about the plot or characters in Chinese AD.

In our reception study (Liu, 2023), we found that the Chinese AD was the most subjective, the Translated AD was the shortest and most objective, and the Localised AD was the longest and had an intermediate degree of subjectivity compared to the other versions. Interestingly, comprehension and presence did not differ significantly across the three versions. However, participants who viewed the Chinese AD were more satisfied with the overall quality of the product than those who watched the Translated AD, while no significant difference was detected between the Chinese AD and the Localised AD (Liu, 2023). These results suggest that AD translation is acceptable to the Chinese audience and the three different AD styles can all give them a similarly immersive experience, but localisation could enhance their level of satisfaction and better meet their expectations.

### **3.2. Informants' views on controversial issues**

After our corpus study, three issues stand out as controversial, as noticeable differences were found between Chinese and Spanish ADs, namely, information load, subjective comments and sensitive scenes (Liu et. al, 2022). We consider them to be relevant for AD translation to better cater to Chinese users' expectations and tastes. Hence we conducted a focus group and one interview with representative AD stakeholders from Shanghai to give them the opportunity to set out their different arguments and eventually reach a consensus. However, while the participants agreed on the level of information load considered to be acceptable, the other two remain contentious issues.

#### **3.2.1. Information load**

All the interviewees agree on offering as much information as possible to users, primarily visual details rather than generic descriptions. They regard this as a valuable means to compensate for

viewers' visual loss, their relatively lower education level compared with the sighted audience and help to reinforce their understanding of the film, since the illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities was 43.23% according to the Second Survey on National Sampling of People with Disabilities (第二次残疾人抽样调查, *Di-er ci canjiren chouyang diaocha*) of 2006.<sup>5</sup> The top priority is assigned to the most narratively fundamental elements for content selection, including hints at suspense. For example, Qu prioritises actions over spatiotemporal locations, leaving descriptions of secondary information for when time permits. Visual information is considered more important than the original soundtrack, to the point that a certain overlap with dialogues is seen as unavoidable, especially if their content is not deemed relevant and the time for AD is limited because dialogues are too tense or too many actions are being screened. Anticipation, or foreshadowing, is also accepted in such cases. However, the golden principle is to always aim for synchronisation between AD and the images described.

As for information density, Qu advocates leaving no margin for silence by filling all the dialogue gaps with AD. He thinks that people with visual impairments can process more auditive information without feeling exhausted. However, Han Yin challenges the notion that individuals with visual impairments possess an exceptional ability for handling auditory information. She argues that they may also become fatigued or distracted if the film does not arouse their interest (personal communication, 20 March 2021). The rest of the participants agree that seven seconds is the maximum time for silence to prevent the audience from becoming anxious. Based on their experience, all participants agree that the average speech rate should be four Chinese characters per second (cps): when the plot develops very fast, it can reach six cps and when it is rather slow, three cps. Ma argues that the genre can be a deciding factor affecting the information quantity required for film comprehension. According to Han Dongxue, in some extreme cases the scriptwriter may believe that the temporal space is not enough to provide all the necessary descriptions. Thus, to maintain the synchronisation between images and AD, this space can be lengthened by inserting cut scenes during the filming process or by playing that part at a slower pace. Her group has purchased copyright permission from the film producer to make accessible versions so that they can have all the original project files used for the film production, and they

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/shehui/2006/html/fu3.htm> (consulted 6 February 2023)

can also contact the director directly. However, paying for copyright licenses is not common among AD providers in China, who are usually volunteers with little or no funding.

### 3.2.2. Subjective comments

All the informants admit that subjectivity in AD is inevitable at the macro-level—content selection built on the scriptwriter's interpretation of the film. They also agree that explanations about significant sociocultural elements unknown to the public should be given to make the AD precise and provide the audience with something new and valuable to learn. Discrepancies arise when considering subjectivity at the micro-level, i.e., subjective comments on certain plots or characters. Such comments are usually complete sentences, often using literary devices, sometimes with exclamative or interrogative sentences, to express symbolic, metaphysical, or moral meanings. An example of this is illustrated below using a metaphor.

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。

Gloss: The red bus, carrying Mathieu and Pépino, leaves the shady Fond de l'Étang 'Bottom of the Pond'. The car drives towards a bright place.

The bright direction implies a hopeful future for the movie characters as they leave a dark boarding school where they had many bad experiences.

According to SoL's internal guidelines, subjectivity is not allowed, and an objective style is required for people with visual impairments to have an experience similar to that of the sighted audience. As for AD of facial expressions, Han Yin advocates literal descriptions without naming them. Qu holds that AD can be omitted if facial expressions are too complicated for the scriptwriter to interpret, otherwise, they can be named directly, leaving more time for describing other narratively important information. Huang explains that since his group was formed by film critics, they tended to provide personal comments about the whole film in the AD after it finished. Others believe that a minimum number of subjective comments can be helpful when the audience has difficulty understanding the plot. Ma and Han Dongxue consider it appropriate to offer subjective comments at key points during the film, mainly on moral lessons or the characters' psychology.

Even so, they insist that scriptwriters should base their interpretations on being faithful to the original film without violating the objectivity principle. On the one hand, they can assure the audience captures the director's implicit meanings and enhance their immersion experience. On the other hand, they can help them improve their ability to appreciate cinema as an art form.

### 3.2.3. Sensitive scenes

Sensitive scenes are the last topic under debate, which includes politics, violence, sex, or religion. All participants start by asserting that all films available in the Chinese market have already passed the censorship of the National Radio and Television Administration (国家广播电视台总局, *Guojia Guangbo Dianshi Zongju*) before their release, so such scenes will not be too extreme or numerous to constitute a problem for the scriptwriter. Qu thinks that AD for sex should be short and indirect as the audience can easily infer it from the sounds and the context, while Han Yin and Ma are in favour of literal descriptions of sensitive scenes. Ma also claims that the linguistic formulations must be appropriate to avoid being rejected by the audience. Based on her experience with Netflix, Han Yin adds that politically or morally incorrect scenes—something detrimental to China's self-esteem—should be avoided, which may occur when coproducing with foreign companies.

## 3.3. Norms in AD creation in China and their implications for AD translation

In contrast to the previous section, which deals with the controversial aspects, this section aims to present some overarching norms that arise from the viewpoints of Chinese AD providers by engaging in an exercise of abstraction.

Toury (1995) defines *translation* as a norm-governed activity favouring a target-oriented framework for translation studies. Given the descriptive and explanatory nature of this definition, we consider it to be an appropriate point of departure for summarising our analysis of how AD is conducted in Chinese and justifying the necessity for localisation when translating AD from Spanish into Chinese as a type of indirect translation. Working from the information gathered from different AD stakeholders through interviews and the researchers' perceptions through participant observation on different AD-related events during the field study, four shared and interconnected norms guiding the scriptwriter's decision-making process at both macro-level and micro-level can be summarised as follows and should be considered when translating AD into Chinese.

First, as a mediator, according to Chinese AD providers, the scriptwriter is supposed to be loyal to both the film director and the audience, with a compromised position between the two in Nord's terms (1997). Nord introduced the notion of loyalty into functionalism as an ethical principle and an interpersonal category, referring to the commitment between the translation and the source and target sides (Nord, 1997). To be loyal to the audience, the scriptwriter should take into account their needs and preferences. To be loyal to the film director, the scriptwriter should intervene as little as possible, describing literally and vividly what happens on screen, although Chinese AD providers interpret the appropriate degree of intervention differently. The discussion on objectivity and subjectivity in AD started in China a few years ago, mainly due to the influence of AD in the West, where AD guidelines often require objectivity (Tor-Carroggio & Vercauteren, 2020). Therefore, Chinese AD being more subjective than Spanish AD can be due to the fact that they are in different periods of development. Chinese AD is undergoing its initial shift from a highly subjective style to a more objective style. This transition has already taken place in the West, where now a more subjective or interpretative style of AD has increasingly been argued for (Bardini, 2017, 2020; Fryer & Walczak, 2017; Kruger, 2010). One advantage held by some Chinese AD groups is that they can contact the film director when the interpretation of a scene or a plot is ambiguous. Nevertheless, pragmatic difficulties may emerge since cinema is an art form that plays a lot with film language, emotions, and nonverbal language (NVL), not to mention the particular traits of each director, making it a complex task for AD scriptwriters.

The second norm concerns the hierarchy of AD's functions. In our study, Nord's (1997) definition of *function* is adopted, which emphasises how AD users make of a text and derive meaning from it based on their own expectations, prior knowledge and situational circumstances. Chinese AD providers state that the narrative function of AD is the primary purpose as it reconstructs the story presented in the film so that people with visual impairments can understand and enjoy it. This is in line with the conclusion of other scholars who also explicitly regard functionalism as a fitting framework for AD studies, especially for content selection for which the narrative function is usually the prevailing one (Arma, 2011; Bardini, 2017; Mazur, 2020; Vercauteren, 2014, 2016). Given the relatively limited educational level of most users and their lack of exposure to cinema, AD providers insist that some degree of personal intervention can guarantee comprehension, including subjective comments. Afterwards, the scriptwriter can focus on the film's expressive function by trying to convey its aesthetics. Two secondary functions are also frequently mentioned

by the Chinese AD stakeholders in our study: socialisation and education. AD in China is mainly available in two forms for films: live sessions or recorded versions, usually based on prepared scripts (Tor-Carroggio & Casas-Tost, 2020). Live AD can give people with visual impairments an interaction platform to satisfy their social needs, as they are still a very exclusive group in China. This was also pointed out by some participants in our reception study (Liu, 2023) and might be explained by *social presence*—the impression of a shared experience with others (Fryer & Freeman, 2014). The educational function has two objectives: on the one hand, Chinese AD providers intend to give the audience complementary knowledge with subjective comments, which reveal some moral lessons or additional explanations of sociocultural elements supposedly unknown to the public. On the other hand, they hope to globally improve users' film appreciation skills, since AD facilitates their access to the audiovisual world they might have previously lacked due to their visual barriers.

These two norms, especially the education function intended by Chinese AD providers, are related to their paternalistic attitude towards users in the whole process of AD production, which can be regarded as the third norm affecting their decision-making, which should be borne in mind when translating AD from Chinese. For instance, Qu claims that his group tends to select morally encouraging films for AD because they think people with visual impairments need more positive input as their lives are already more difficult than others. The prioritised narrative function of AD and the paternalistic attitude Chinese AD providers hold may also explain why they tend to offer as many descriptions as possible to users aiming to compensate for their sight loss, while some participants from our reception study suggested limited information to reduce cognitive load for blind persons (Liu, 2023). In the West, Ororo et al. (2016, p. 235) stated that 'silence should be carefully considered, and its function and symbolism should be understood' instead of being automatically used to insert AD. This paternalistic attitude held by Chinese AD providers might be accounted for by the outdated medical model of disability and the traditional stigmatisation of persons with disabilities in China (Tor-Carroggio, 2020), possibly caused by 'a host of institutional, environmental, social, family-related and psychological factors, most of which have been inherited from previous generations' prejudices' (Lin & Yang, 2018, cited in Tor-Carroggio, 2020, p. 2). This paternalistic attitude goes against the universalist account of accessibility advocated by many scholars (Greco, 2018, 2019; Romero-Fresco, 2013). In fact, Chinese authorities emphasise collective human rights for protecting individuals' interests when

interpreting human rights (China Daily, 2005),<sup>6</sup> while the UN emphasises individual human rights, which are entitled to an individual for the sole reason of being human.<sup>7</sup> The individualism and communism divide may partially explain why persons with disabilities in China are still treated as a specific and marginalised group different from others, producing a *ghetto effect*: collective human rights are argued for in China, which can be related to communalism, and accessibility is still seen as a specific human right for persons with disabilities.

Interestingly, although it seems incompatible with this paternalistic attitude, all the Chinese AD providers advocate, to one degree or another, a user-centred approach as the fourth norm. The current volunteer-dependent nature of AD in China may account for the close contact between Chinese AD providers and users. This tendency was also observed by Tor-Carroggio and Vercauteren (2020) when comparing AD guidelines between China and Europe. The Chinese AD providers are in close contact with their AD users, and they confirm that users' needs for more varied AD products and styles are as diverse as their profiles. Although users do not usually participate directly in the AD creation process, their feedback after enjoying an AD product is often taken into account by Chinese AD providers for improving their future AD practice (Tor-Carroggio & Vercauteren, 2020). So, once the professionalisation stage is reached, AD providers should aim for customisation adapted to different user profiles. Ideally, users could have AD for more audiovisual products and maybe even AD with various styles for the same original work. At the same time, all the providers except Qu highlight the benefits of including people with visual impairments in AD creation either as AD reviewers for quality control or as voice talents. Isolated initiatives of including AD users by some AD groups for AD delivery or AD quality control are already happening. The SoL is already carrying out such practices, and the resulting AD has been positively received, although AD training for people with visual impairments is more challenging than for sighted persons. Furthermore, they also deem it an appropriate form of social inclusion and a new career option for people with visual impairments. However, this SoL initiative was criticised by a participant from our reception study who once took part in one of their activities. He argued that people with visual impairments would take longer to voice AD and that the quality would not be ideal because they would first have to listen to the screen reader (Liu, in press, 2023).

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<sup>6</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20071209093707/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/12/content\\_3908887.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20071209093707/http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/12/content_3908887.htm) (consulted 8 February 2023)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights> (consulted 8 February 2023)

This fourth norm corresponds precisely to the call for a shift from a maker-centred to a user-centred approach advocated currently within Accessibility Studies (Greco, 2018, 2019; Greco & Jankowska, 2019; Matamala et al., 2018).

As for our proposal of AD translation as indirect translation (multimodal text 1>written text 2>written text 3), translators should bear in mind the above-mentioned four norms during the localisation process. Furthermore, since the AD script to be translated is usually for a non-Chinese film, there is a further layer of interculturality. Therefore, the translator must first decide whether to follow the AD methodology of the source AD script through a literal translation or to adhere to the foreign culture where the film story is developed. For example, when translating an AD from Spanish into Chinese for a German film, the translator must decide whether to adapt the translation to the cultural context of the German film or to translate it keeping the style of the Spanish AD. Nord (1997) also emphasises that the cultural specificity in translation may require adjusting the relationship between explicit and implicit information in the text, as people may hold different expectations for the same text type. Remael and Vercauteren (2010) also suggested that the AD translator should first consider a new target audience considering their knowledge and expectations. They further suggested the quality of the source AD script would greatly affect the translation. Jankowska et al. (2017) explored the possibility of translating into English AD scripts created locally for non-English-language films. In line with Remael and Vercauteren (2010), they found that AD translation helps avoid a significant cultural loss, and they also viewed it necessary to take into account the original film and the AD style in the target language when translating an AD script as an indirect translation (Jankowska et al., 2017). Therefore, according to these studies, AD translators should double-check the target text, particularly cultural references, against the original film. This is due to the possible differences in cultural distance between the film, AD and translation, which is confirmed again in a case study comparing AD in Chinese and Spanish for the Chinese movie *Eat, Drink, Men, Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994) (Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022b). This study found that Spanish AD includes more descriptions of cultural elements, which may be attributed to the Chinese culture being more exotic and unfamiliar to Spanish speakers. The most common strategies used for describing such elements were adaption and generalisation (Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022b). The studies mentioned above, along with our research consisting of several steps, bring us to our proposal of AD localisation to ensure better use of indirect translation so that it is more acceptable for the target audience.

#### **4. Summary of our localisation guidelines for translating AD from Spanish into Chinese**

The complete version of the actual guidelines is available in open access at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/261061> and includes an introduction, a glossary, the profiling of potential users and possible applications of the guidelines, the suggested process of AD translation and the aspects to be considered when localising the AD translation illustrated with examples.

The last section of the guidelines is divided into two parts: content selection –what to audio describe, and AD approaches –how to audio describe, with a total of thirteen proposals based on the findings from our research. Below, is a summary of our proposal – for reasons of space, examples cannot be included but can be found in the full guide.

##### **Content selection**

- (1) A brief introduction of the film should be given before the actual AD begins. The introduction should be shorter than 200 Chinese characters and include information about the storyline and the main characters' names, the names of actors who play the main characters, and the director(s)' name(s). If time permits, it could include some of the film's metainformation, such as awards, etc.
- (2) Information about credits should not be given. The most important ones, such as the names of main actors and director(s) should have already been provided in the brief introduction before the proper AD starts.
- (3) The localised version should provide more information than the source text—in our case, the Spanish AD. Priority is given to the most narratively crucial information and suspense-related elements. When such information is already given in the source text and time is available, more information can be provided in relation to other secondary aspects, such as describing a character's appearance in more detail. Generally speaking, a Chinese AD script—counted with Chinese characters, could be about 1.5 to twice as long as a Spanish script—counted with words. It is also recommended to leave a seven-second maximum silence between the AD and the dialogues. However, when the scriptwriter considers the temporal gap insufficient to convey all the necessary information, AD can slightly overlap

with the original soundtrack. Speech rate can range from 3.5 to 6 Chinese cps, depending on the pace of the plot, and the recommended average speed is about 4 Chinese cps.

- (4) AD should provide more psychology-related information than the source text, especially feelings, but also attitudes, motivations, or even specific thoughts. This can be done by naming an NVL occurrence, such as a facial expression. Some descriptions of paralanguage can also be given, such as laughter, crying, shouting, sighing and gasping, usually as a way to identify the speaker in a conversation with more than two people. Three strategies can be applied for the AD of NVL: description, naming, or both description and naming, the most popular in our case is description.
- (5) Descriptions of actions that have not appeared on screen but transfer relevant messages should be provided. For example, a refusal attitude towards someone or something, or when used to create an atmosphere of tension or suspense. This could be done by explaining the reasons behind a reaction to a particular situation.

### **AD approaches**

- (6) The main characters should be named as soon as they appear on screen if their identities are not intended as suspense on purpose, even in cases when their names are given much later. At the same time, the naming approach for each character should be consistent throughout the AD. When in the Spanish AD both the surname and the given name are used to name a character, in the localised AD only one option should be used—the one used the most or the shortest one to save time. Besides, when a Western name is translated into Chinese, it is usually not only longer than common Chinese names, but also difficult to pronounce and to remember for the Chinese audience. So, if both the surname and the given name are complicated, other strategies could be adopted to facilitate both the voicing and audience recognition, for example, by referring to the character's profession or interpersonal relationship.
- (7) Simple and easy-to-understand *chengyu* should be used. *Chengyu* are concise fossilised idiomatic expressions or short phrases coming from classical Chinese.
- (8) Scene changes involving switches between different spatio-temporal settings should be indicated directly, for instance, a flashback or a flash-forward. In some cases, such a transition is pointed out with text on screen. In others, it is implied through changes in the

physical appearance of characters, decorations, or landscapes, among others. In these cases, it is possible to sporadically insert some simple and commonly known cinematic terms to signal the scene's change, such as *close-up*, *fast-forward*, and *flashback*.

- (9) AD in Chinese tends to offer vaguer and shorter descriptions without going into details for some sensitive topics containing violent or erotic images. However, through personal interviews with representatives of different AD groups, we have learned that there seems to be a changing attitude towards providing more literal descriptions about such elements, except for those considered to be politically incorrect. The degree of detail will depend on the translator/scriptwriter's personal assessment and criterion in each particular situation.
- (10) AD in Chinese tends to provide subjective comments expressing the scriptwriter's personal interpretation of the film's highlights using different rhetorical tools, such as metaphors, interrogative or exclamative sentences, making implicit information explicit, like moral lessons or symbolic meanings. However, according to the opinions of different AD groups, this practice is currently questioned and under debate. Therefore, we would rather leave it to the translator/scriptwriter to decide whether it is convenient for their audience to include such subjective comments.
- (11) AD in Chinese tends to give descriptions of information not visible on screen around the AD time. Such descriptions mainly include actions not visible on screen to maintain narrative coherence: information anticipation usually implies the disclosure of narrative suspense and cause-effect relationships, which require a certain cognitive effort from the audience. However, according to interviews with different AD providers, there is also some debate concerning this phenomenon. Therefore, we would also rather leave it to the translator/scriptwriter to decide whether it is convenient or not for their audience to make information explicit which is covert in the film.
- (12) Cultural references should be named directly if they are commonly known to the public. Otherwise, a more general or detailed description can be provided. Sometimes similes and metaphors referring to something or someone known in the target culture can enhance the cultural reference's comprehensibility among Chinese AD users.
- (13) Ambiguities caused by homophonic Chinese characters or words should be avoided. A typical case is the translation of pronouns such as *él* 'he' and *ella* 'she', all pronounced *tā* (他/她) in Chinese.

## 5. Conclusions

According to our reception study, AD translation is an acceptable option for Chinese end-users, but localisation can make this indirect translation a more enjoyable experience instead of only a literal translation of the original AD script (Liu, 2023). This article puts forward the first set of guidelines for localising AD from Spanish into Chinese based on the triangulation of four data sources: a corpus study comparing Chinese and Spanish ADs, interviews and a focus group with Chinese AD key agents, a reception study with end-users in Shanghai, and participant observation through a field study in China. Three controversial topics about AD approaches are also discussed and have been considered in the draft of the localisation guidelines: information load, subjective comments, and sensitive scenes. The dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity is also identified by Tor-Carroggio and Vercauteren (2020) as the most significant difference between the European and Chinese guidelines, the latter apparently tending towards subjectivity. However, in our study, we found a changing attitude on this topic among Chinese AD providers who advocate for a more objective AD style, mainly due to Western influence. We also propose four norms guiding Chinese AD providers' decision-making choices in AD creation that translators should also consider when localising AD scripts from Spanish into Chinese: being loyal to both the film director and the audience; prioritising AD's narrative function before its expressive, socialisation and educational functions; the paternalistic attitude AD providers adopt towards their users; and finally, the user-centred approach.

Sketching research into AVT norms in experience-based, descriptive and experimental cognitive stages, Pederson (2020) favours norms based on reception-based cognitive experimental research that reflect viewers' true preferences and abilities. Our guidelines can be considered as belonging to this group. They are also the first published AD-related guidelines specifically tailored for the Chinese context.

However, this study is not free from limitations. Firstly, our study involved only a few AD groups from cities where AD is more developed—Shanghai in particular. The information gathered from them could not represent the situation in the whole China, considering the huge imbalances between regions and between cities and rural areas regarding disability-related issues. Secondly,

the language combination in our study is Spanish and Chinese when there may be more imported audiovisual products in English. Therefore, another possible future development of this study would be replicating our study design with other language combinations to investigate the feasibility of AD translation in a more general scope.

All in all, we hope our guidelines can contribute to AD professionalisation and standardisation in China, for example, as a reference for AD training or AD quality control. Even though scholars and also translators and translation trainers may view indirect translation as a threat to quality (Torres-Simon et al., 2021), we believe it is a means to increase AD production on a large scale in the long run.

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