More than words
Voice in audio description

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Rationale

AD research: focus on content selection and AD writing.

Voice has been researched in relation to technology (TTS AD), but what about prosodic features?
Aims

To revise recommendations related to voice in different guidelines.

To analyse the prosodic features of a corpus of AD.

To identify user preferences in terms of voicing.
The literature says...

Fryer (2016: 88): describers have been traditionally “encouraged to use a particular neutral way of speaking” and a “neutral delivery has come to be recognized as the norm”. However, specific features of each production should be considered.

Snyder (2014): vocal skills, one of the four fundamental elements of AD. “We make meaning with our voices”, “voicer’s delivery should be consonant with the nature of the material being described”
Research shows...

Cabeza-Cáceres (2013):
• Spanish and German: “uniform”
• British AD: “adapted”
• USA AD: “emphatic”.

None of these prosodic styles seem to impact on comprehension, and user preferences do not always coincide: same percentage like and reject uniform and emphatic intonations (ibid: 331).
Guidelines say...

Spanish guidelines: clear voice and voicing must be neutral with appropriate intonation, rhythm and vocalisation.

ISO: good native skills and ability to articulate, the voice should complement the content being described, and acknowledges different styles can be used.

ADLAB: voice qualities match the film’s genre and style. “Little or no research on which voices fit which film genre best”, but generally based on contrast with the film voices.
Guidelines say...

Ireland: neutral voice, emotion can be added at certain points.

German: neutral voicing, but change in humorous productions?
Guidelines say...

French: voice adapted to the emotion of the scene but shall keep certain neutrality.

ITC: clear, pleasant and expressive voice, unobtrusive and neutral, not lifeless or monotonous.

Poland: not distract users, relation to nature of the programme, neutral and discreet, not monotonous.

etc.
Summary

Voice is a key element in AD.

“Neutral”, “adapted”... what does it mean?
Our research

1. Prosodic analysis of a corpus of AD in Spanish.

2. Analyse user perception
The corpus

VIW corpus

http://pagines.uab.cat/viw/

10 professional Spanish ADs based on the same input: compare the result in terms of prosodic features?

http://pagines.uab.cat/viw/content/spanish-audio-descriptions
The Corpus

The VIW corpus is made up of audio descriptions in different languages of the same short film, and it incorporate a search engine (forthcoming). It currently includes 10 professional audio descriptions in English, 10 professional audio descriptions in Spanish and 10 professional audio descriptions in Catalan. All 30 audio descriptions were commissioned to professionals, who were remunerated. It also includes 10 audio descriptions in Spanish and 7 audio descriptions in Catalan made by students (text only, not recorded audio/video files). We hope to expand it in the near future with more audio descriptions. You are invited to read the section “Contribute”.

Audio and video files with audio description by professional describers

- English
- Catalan
- Spanish

Text files of audio descriptions by students

- Catalan
- Spanish

ACCESS TO THE CORPUS SEARCH ENGINE

All materials are also available at UAB’s open access repository: https://ddd.uab.cat/record/147267.
SPANISH AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

English audio descriptions  Catalan audio descriptions  Spanish audio descriptions

All materials are also available at UAB open access repository: https://ddd.uab.cat/record/147267.

Aptent:

Aristia:

CEIAF:
List of available corpora

You can also use the BROWSE facility to look for a specific file.

- **WHW-EN-Pr**: The WHW-EN-Pr corpus contains professional audio descriptions in English for the short movie "What Happens While". [access](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/web/)

- **WHW-ES-Pr**: The WHW-ES-Pr corpus contains professional audio descriptions in Spanish for the short movie "What Happens While". [access](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/web/)

- **WHW-CA-Pr**: The WHW-CA-Pr corpus contains professional audio descriptions in Catalan for the short movie "What Happens While". [access](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/web/)

- **WHW-ES-St**: The WHW-ES-St corpus contains audio descriptions in Spanish for the short movie "What Happens While" made by students. [access](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/web/)

- **WHW-CA-St**: The WHW-CA-St corpus contains audio descriptions in Catalan for the short movie "What Happens While" made by students. [access](http://transmediacatalonia.uab.cat/web/)
The methodology

Audio files of all 10 AD, segmented into intonation groups.

Analysed with PRAAT.

Duration, Pitch, and Amplitude, which are indicators of speech rate, voice quality, volume and loudness of the sound.

Results

50% female, 50% male.

Prosodic values available (please email us).

Examples to be shown on the presentation.
Results

- **Aristia**: lowest pitch, high volume, low speech rate.
- **Aptent**: highest pitch and volume, speech rate slightly above average.
- **Kaleidoscope**: low pitch, low volume and fast speech rate.
- **Edsol**: low pitch, average volume, fast speech rate.
- **Ericsson**: high pitch, low volume, lowest speech rate.
- **Sonidos**: highest pitch, highest speech rate, fastest speech rate.
User perception: the test

60 participants (29 sighted, 31 with sight loss).
Online lab test: not in context (future research).

The most different voices were chosen: 3 male, 3 female.

Part 1: Participants listened to short excerpts with 18 pairs of voices and selected the most pleasant voice.

Results

FEM: Sp_1 (Aptent), Sp_2 (Aristia), Sp_3 (Kaleidoscope).

Sp2, preferred. Sp_3, less pleasant (low pitch and volume and high speech rate).

Sp1 and Sp2: no statistical differences. Sp1 preferred by sighted users and Sp2 by users with sight loss.
Results

MALE: Sp_1 (Edsol), Sp_2 (Ericsson), Sp_3 (Sonidos).

No differences sighted versus persons with sight loss. More pleasant: Speaker 2.
Next steps

Neutrality and user perception: ongoing analysis.
Next steps

Neutrality and user perception.

Differences among languages?

Advance in prosodic analysis, beyond impressionistic descriptions.
Disclaimer

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