Audio describing characters: what features do audiences remember?

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Abstract

Memory is the system responsible for receivers' encoding, processing and understanding of filmic narratives and, as such, it plays an important role in the reception of audio described films. In an attempt to study memory operation in audio description, this experiment explores which physical features of audio described characters are more frequently recalled and recognized by blind and visually impaired audiences in order to provide tentative criteria to present and prioritize information in professional scripts. The results of this research indicate that the age is the trait which shows a better recall and recognition by receivers, and that more physical features of characters are recalled and recognized when their descriptions are segmented.

Introduction

In the last years, reception studies in the field of AD have moved closer to Psychology and Cognition in order to explore how users receive and comprehend audio described products (Cabeza-Cáceres, 2013; Fryer & Freeman, 2012). Following this approach, Fresno et al. (2014) conducted an experiment aimed at analyzing the effect that the amount of information included in the AD and its presentation had on the recall and reception of characters by blind and visually impaired (BVI) audiences. The results of their quantitative analysis indicated that more information was recalled and recognized when short or segmented ADs were delivered, as opposed to long and unsegmented descriptions. In the current experiment we seek to expand our previous findings by exploring the nature of the information which is more frequently recalled and recognized.

Methods

Participants ➡ 44 BVI participants aged 18 to 76

Materials ➡
- ✓ 4 self-contained excerpts from two films and a TV series in Spanish or dubbed into Spanish: *Little Miss Sunshine, Caníbal* and *Breaking Bad*
- ✓ 2 versions of AD for each clip, which differed only in the presentation of the characters' physical descriptions:

  AD 1)))) **Unsegmented** — 8 traits presented as 1 block of info
  AD 2)))) **Segmented** — 8 traits presented as 2 blocks of info

- ✓ A questionnaire designed by our team to assess participants' free recall and recognition of the physical features of audio described characters

Procedure ➡
- ✓ Participants listened to the audio described clips. No image was available.
- ✓ Before each clip, a summary of the prior events in the story was read in order to avoid comprehension gaps.
- ✓ After each audio clip, the researcher read the questions in the questionnaire and wrote down the participants' answers.

The physical traits included in the character ADs were divided into 5 categories for the analysis:


Hair
Facial features
Age
Height + weight
Clothes + other items

Main results and discussion

- ✓ **Age** was the best recalled and recognized category.
- ✓ More categories were recalled and recognized when character ADs were **segmented**.
- ✓ No statistical differences were found in recall or recognition between main and secondary characters.
- ✓ These results might be taken as tentative criteria to present and prioritize info in professional AD scripts.

Figure 1. Mean proportion of correct recall as a function of category in the free recall and recognition tasks.
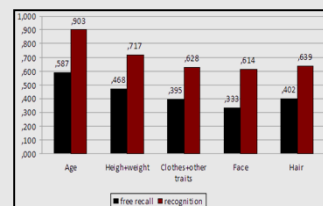
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