Localisation guidelines for translating AD from Spanish into Chinese

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1. Preliminary remarks

In China, audio description (AD) started officially in 2007 with a live session for a film in Shanghai. A diverse landscape can be observed in different cities, among them, Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou are the leading ones as for AD is concerned. In China it has a volunteer-dependent nature and is mainly limited to films. The most common forms are live sessions or recorded versions based on prepared AD scripts. However, there are far more voice talents delivering AD than AD scriptwriters. Under these circumstances, AD translation is proposed as a possible way to increase not only the amount of available AD scripts, but also their creation speed. This method was already tested in Poland with the language pair English and Polish and promising results were obtained (Jankowska, 2015). However, according to previous research, localisation guidelines are considered necessary for AD translation (Jankowska, 2015; Jankowska, Milc & Fryer, 2017), therefore we present a proposal of guidelines for the translation from Spanish into Chinese. These guidelines are put forward by Yuchen Liu, Helena Casas-Tost and Sara Rovira-Esteva for translators to localise Spanish AD scripts into Chinese based on an empirical study consisting of the triangulation of different data sources: a corpus study (Liu & Tor-Carroggio, 2022; Liu, Casas-Tost, & Rovira-Esteva, 2022), online interviews and a focus group with key agents and stakeholders (Liu, under review), a reception study with Chinese end-users (Liu, Casas-Tost, & Rovira-Esteva, under review), and participant observation through a field study in China from February to June 2021 (Liu, Casas-Tost, & Rovira-Esteva, under review). This document is a working paper that reflects the situation of AD in China during the time of this study. Some changes may be incorporated in the future if there are new data from further studies. This set of localisation guidelines is one of the research outputs of Liu Yuchen's PhD thesis within the framework of the RAD project (PGC2018-096566-B-I00), funded by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades. We have published these guidelines at our university's digital documents repository as a working paper because we believe they constitute a contribution to knowledge transfer and thus have a scholarly value on their own.

2. Glossary

In this document, a series of specialised terms are going to be used. In order to clarify their meaning to readers, a brief definition is offered in each case.

(1) Audience: the primary AD users are people with total or partial sight loss. However, it may also include people without visual loss, such as foreign language students, and persons with cognitive difficulties.

(2) Audio description: the definition in the ADLAB guidelines (Remael, Reviers & Vercauteren, 2014) is adopted:

> AD is a service for the blind and visually impaired that renders Visual Arts and Media accessible to this target group. In brief, it offers a verbal description of the relevant (visual) components of a work of art or media product, so that blind and visually impaired patrons can fully grasp its form and content.

(3) Scriptwriter: the person who writes the AD script.

(4) Voice talent: the person who delivers live AD or records it.

3. Potential users and applications

The ideal target users of these guidelines are Spanish-Chinese audiovisual translators with AD training, although such professionals are hard to find in China today. At present, the potential users of our guidelines are AD scriptwriters without a background in translation or Spanish-Chinese translators without a background in AD.

Although, strictly speaking, these guidelines aim to localise AD scripts from Spanish into Chinese, three other plausible applications for the first profile are AD training, AD scriptwriting in Chinese or quality control. The guidelines also reflect the AD scriptwriting methodology in Chinese shared by several representative AD groups. However, users will need previous training on AD as a translation modality to understand some translation-related terms and concepts covered in the present guidelines. As for the second profile, translators should have previous complementary training in AD focusing on basic AD concepts. Notwithstanding, in the long term, the ideal users should be Spanish-Chinese audiovisual translators with a background in AD, possibly when AD translation is carried out as a mode of audiovisual translation in China.

4. Process

The following AD production process is adapted from the one presented in the ADLAB guidelines (Remael, Reviers & Vercauteren, 2014). The translator to whom these guidelines are targeted will only be involved in the first three steps below:

(1) Viewing and analysing the film in Spanish. This can include a blind viewing without seeing the image.
(2) Translating the source AD script from Spanish into Chinese and localising it according to these guidelines, where necessary.
(3) Revising the target AD script while viewing the film in Chinese. This can be done together with another person, preferably with sight loss.
(4) Rehearsing the AD with a voice talent and making final changes where appropriate.
(5)
    a. Delivering live AD with a voice talent.
    b. Recording the AD with a voice talent and mixing the AD with the original soundtrack in the appropriate format.

5. Aspects to be taken into account in the localisation of AD translation

The three most essential issues for AD scriptwriting are when, what, and how to audio describe. The localisation guidelines for AD translation from Spanish into Chinese are divided into two parts: content selection concerning what to audio describe and AD approaches about how to do it, with a total of thirteen proposals based on empirical data. Examples from the corpus of our study will be given to illustrate each point. The examples will be presented first in their original text in Chinese or Spanish, followed by their English translations done by us in brackets. The elements under analysis will be highlighted in italics in the Spanish AD, and shaded in the Chinese AD.

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. The following example is taken from *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014):

> (1_ZH)《模仿游戏》是英国黑熊 IG 影业公司出品的传记电影，讲述了英国数学家、计算机科学之父艾伦·图灵的传奇人生。影片采用时空交织的方法来展现图灵的人生轨迹。三个时空分别是 1951 年的曼彻斯特、二战中的布莱奇利和 1928 年的谢泊恩学校。影片末尾揭示了他的最终命运。本片入围多项奥斯卡奖提名。导演莫腾·泰杜姆；主演本尼迪克特·康伯巴奇、凯拉·奈特莉等。
>
> (*The Imitation Game* is a biographical film produced by the British Black Bear Pictures, which tells the legendary life of Alan Turing, a British mathematician and the father of computer science. The film uses the interweaving of spatio-temporal settings to show Turing's life trajectory. The three spatio-temporal settings are Manchester in 1951, Bletchley Park during the Second World War, and the Sherborne School in 1928. The end of the film reveals his ultimate fate. The film was nominated for multiple Academy Awards. Director: Morten Tyldum; protagonists: Benedict Cumberbatch, Keira Knightley, among others.)

(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. 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 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

characters per second (cps), depending on the pace of the plot, and the recommended average speed is about 4 Chinese cps. The following example corresponds to a half-minute silence from *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) in Chinese and Spanish, respectively:

> (2_ZH) 而这个时候丹尼斯开着吉普车，他正想把他偷来的胚胎赶快送到码头，他来到了一个大门旁，搬动了电闸，门被打开了，然后他又跑回来，坐在吉普车里面，大门缓缓打开。控制室一团乱，丹尼斯的工作台上到处都是垃圾。

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

> (2_ES) El gordito Denis, con un todo terreno, llega a la gran puerta marrón. Sale del coche y la abre manualmente. Vuelve al vehículo y se marcha, dejándola abierta. En el control, Ray se sienta ante la mesa de Denis.

> (Chubby Denis, with a jeep, arrives at the big brown door. He gets out of the car and opens it manually. He returns to the vehicle and drives off, leaving it open. At the control, Ray sits at Denis's table.)

The Chinese description (98 characters, about 65 words in Spanish) is much longer than the Spanish description (only 39 words), and gives more information, including eight actions, locations, and the character's objective. The Spanish AD does not mention the character's aim and describes seven actions. The actions described do not coincide in both languages.

(4) AD should provide more psychology-related information, especially feelings, but also attitudes, motivations, or even specific thoughts. This can be done by naming a nonverbal language (NVL) occurrence, such as a facial expression. Although 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. One example of naming an

emotion in Chinese is taken from *The Chorus* (Christophe Barratier, 2004), while the corresponding Spanish quotation opts for description:

(3_ZH) 佩皮诺失望地转身向后走了。(naming)

(Pépinot turns around and walks away *disappointedly*.)

(3_ES) Pépinot *vuelve cabizbajo sobre sus pasos*. (description)

(Pépinot *traces his steps with his head bent down*.)

Sometimes, a NVL occurrence can be named in the localised version despite its omission in the Spanish version. For example, in *The Chorus* (Christophe Barratier, 2004), when Mathieu knows about the unfortunate family background of a child, his facial expression is audio described, using description and naming, only in Chinese:

(4_ZH) 马修吃惊地睁大了眼睛。(description and naming)

(Mathieu *opens his eyes in surprise*.)

One example about naming a particular thought in Chinese is from *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988), while the Spanish AD only describes it:

(5_ZH) 他一边走一边发现了站在墙角的母亲，他用手捂着自己的脸，心说坏了。(description and naming)

(As he walks, he finds his mother standing in the corner. He covers his face with his hands and says to himself that things are not good.)

(5_ES) El niño *queda petrificado al ver a su madre* esperándole en la esquina de la plaza. (description)

(The boy *is petrified when he sees his mother* waiting for him at the corner of the square.)

Some descriptions about paralanguage can also be given, such as laughter, crying, shouting, sighing and gasping. One example of description and naming at the same time is Raymond's shouting in a scene from *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988):

(6_ZH) 查理硬拉着雨人要走，雨人害怕地大叫起来。(description and naming)

(Charlie forces Rain Man to leave. Rain Man *yells in fear*.)

(5) Lack of actions that transfer messages should be described. 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. For example, this happens when no one laughs after one of Turing's jokes in *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014):

(7_ZH) 没人被逗笑，不过大家用微笑、点头和眼神做出善意的回应。

(*No one is amused*, but everyone responds kindly with smiles, nodding and eyes.)

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, although their names are given much later. An example is Chu's naming in *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), whose introduction in the Spanish AD script happens fourteen minutes after the movie has started, right after his final on-screen naming. However, he has repeatedly appeared on the screen before. Chu's naming in Spanish is accompanied by the explicit explanation of his relationship with his daughters:

(8_ES) *Chu, que es el padre de las tres chicas*, se quita la cazadora por el camino.

(*Chu, the three girls' father*, takes his jacket off along the way.)

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

(8_ZH) 镜头转到了老朱家的院子。

(The camera turns to *Chu's yard*.)

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. For example, for *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014), both *Alan* and *Turing* are used in the Spanish AD to refer to a single character, while only Turing is used in the Chinese AD.

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. One example is *The Legend of Hercules* (Renny Harlin, 2014). Hercules is translated as Helakelesi (赫拉克勒斯), which is hard to utter in Chinese. Alternatively, Da Wangzi (大王子) 'Elder Prince' is used to refer to him in the AD, which means that he is the eldest son of his father, Zeus. In any case, consistency in the naming of characters is required.

(7) Simple and easy-to-understand *chengyu* can be used. *Chengyu* are concise fossilised idiomatic expressions in Chinese, usually formed by four Chinese characters. One example is the description of a facial expression in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (David Fincher, 2008):

> (9_ZH) 在舒缓的萨克斯乐曲伴奏下，黛西柔美的舞姿，让本杰明看得如痴如醉，沉浸在这温馨的甜蜜中。
>
> (Accompanied by soothing saxophone music, Benjamin looks at Daisy's delicate dance *fascinated as if he is drunk*, immersing himself in this warm sweetness.)
>
> (9_ES) Benjamin la mira boquiabierto.
>
> (Benjamin gapes at her.)

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

(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*. The following example is from *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014):

> (10_ZH) 画面转到 1951 年的曼彻斯特警察局。诺克警官匆匆走来，推开一间办公室。

> (*Cut to the Manchester Police Station in 1951. The policeman Nock walks hurriedly and pushes aside an office.*)

(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. The example below is from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (David Fincher, 2008):

> (11_ZH) 离别、失落、思念，使今天的相见更加充满激情，他们紧紧相拥，甜蜜亲吻，两颗心贴得更近。本杰明温柔地为黛西脱去了连衣裙。黛西褪去腿上的丝袜时，裸露的膝盖上赫然有一道长长的疤痕。本杰明轻柔地吻着黛西的肩背部。

(Farewell, loss and longing make today's meeting more passionate. They hug each other tightly, kiss sweetly, and their two hearts are closer. Benjamin gently removes Daisy's dress. When Daisy removes the stockings from her legs, there is a long scar on her bare knee. Benjamin kisses Daisy softly on the back of the shoulder.)

(11_ES) Se miran. Se besan en los labios. Ben le quita el cinturón y le baja la cremallera del vestido. Ella se quita la media descubriendo una gran cicatriz en la rodilla. Él le besa en la espalda y le acaricia la pierna. Daisy le coge la mano. Se besan. Él se queda en pantalón y camiseta y ella en combinación. Daisy se tumba en la cama y él se echa sobre ella.

(They look at each other. They kiss on the lips. Ben removes her belt and unzips her dress. She removes her stocking, revealing a large scar on her knee. He kisses her back and caresses her leg. Daisy takes her hand. They kiss. He stays in pants and a shirt, and she is in a combination. Daisy lies down on the bed, and he lies on top of her.)

For the same scene, the Chinese AD is more poetic without few detailed descriptions of the characters' actions during the sex, which are described in more detail in the Spanish AD.

(10) AD in Chinese tends to provide subjective comments expressing the scriptwriter's personal interpretation about the film's highlights using different rhetoric tools, such as metaphors, interrogative or exclamative sentences, making implicit information explicit, like moral lessons or symbolic meanings. One example is from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (David Fincher, 2008) when Benjamin gazes goodbye to Daisy and their daughter after being away for many years:

(12_ZH) 本杰明站在街上，一直目送着汽车消失在街角。本杰明的一生都充斥着这样的离别，也许这就是他的生活。

(Benjamin stands on the street and watches the car disappear on the corner. *Benjamin's life is full of such parting. Maybe this is his life.*)

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 in each particular case.

(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 implying the disclosure of narrative suspense and cause-effect relationships, which require a certain cognitive effort from the audience. An example of revealing a clue is from *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), where the identity of the person calling should be maintained as suspense until the movie's end:

(13_ZH) 这时电话响了，原来是邻居锦荣打来的。

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

Another example is from *The Imitation Game* (Morten Tyldum, 2014) when an unseen action is described in Chinese to sustain the narrative coherence making a cause-effect relationship explicit:

(14_ZH) 一辆黑色轿车停下，诺克警官冒雨下车。警局接到求援电话后，派他来盗窃案现场调查。

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

(14_ES) El detective calvo sale de un coche años cincuenta, conducido por él. Llueve. Luego, está en el piso desordenado.

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

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

However, according to interviews with different AD providers, there is also some debate concerning this phenomenon. Therefore, we would also rather leave 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. One example is the description of a national monument in Rome in *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988):

> (15_ZH) 镜头在一个城镇慢慢拉近，拉近一条街道。
>
> (The camera slowly zooms in *a town*. And then *a street*.)
>
> (15_ES) Al fondo aparece *el Altar de la Patria, monumento erigido por Victor Manuel II en la Plaza Venecia*. Apenas un par de vehículos circulan por *la Vía del Corso, una de las más concurridas de Roma*.
>
> (In the background appears *the Altar of the Fatherland, a monument built by Victor Manuel II in Piazza Venezia*. Just a couple of vehicles circulate *on the Via del Corso, one of Rome's busiest streets*.)

One reason that makes the Chinese AD shorter and more general than the Spanish AD may be that the cultural distance between China and Italy is greater than that of Spain.

An example of using a simile for a cultural element is from *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988):

(16_ZH) 雨人根本没在听查理在说，只顾着自己看电视，电视里正播放着两个男人说话的节目，类似我国的相声。

(Rain Man is not listening to Charlie at all, just watching TV on his own. *On TV two men are talking, a programme similar to the xiangsheng in our country.*)

(16_ES) Ven en la tele *el sketch de Abbot y Costello*.

(They are watching *the sketch by Abbott and Costello on TV*.)

Due to cultural distance, the Spanish audience may be more familiar with this sketch and the actors, so they are directly named in the AD. On the contrary, the description in Chinese is more general and a simile comparing it to *xiangsheng* (相声) 'crosstalk'— a Chinese traditional performing art in comedy made up by humorous dialogues—is used to enhance the audience's comprehensibility.

However, occasionally explanations can also be given about some cultural elements unfamiliar to the target audience, even from the Chinese culture but from a distant period of time, if the scriptwriter feels it is beneficial for the audience to provide them with extra information to learn.

(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. One example is from *The Invisible Guest* (Oriol Paulo, 2017), the film used in our reception study:

(17_ZH) 古德曼从公文包中取出文件。多利亚在她对面坐下。

(*Goodman* takes the documents out of the briefcase. *Doria* sits down opposite her.)

(17_ES) *Ella* saca documentos de su cartera y *él* se sienta frente a ella.

(*She* takes documents out of her bag and *he* sits down across from her.)
In the localised AD *ella* and *él* were substituted by the names of the two characters.

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