Dancing with words:
The emotional reception of poetic audio description in contemporary dance

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Abstract

Recent developments in Cognitive Translation and Interpreting Studies (CTIS) have stimulated experimental research, shifting the focus of Audio Description (AD) studies towards understanding the cognitive processes involved in both creating AD (e.g., Jankowska, 2021; Ramos & Rojo, 2020) and its reception by visually impaired users (Weaver, 2013). Among the latter, studies have analyzed the reception of different AD types or styles, manipulating parameters such as the type of language (e.g., a more creative and subjective AD against a more standard and literal one; Bardini, 2017; Ramos, 2016), the voice (e.g., female vs male or synthetic vs human; Matamala, Fernández & Ortiz-Boix, 2013) or even the intonation (Jankowska et al., 2022).

Experimental research has mainly focused on film AD, while AD in the performing arts has been mostly investigated from a descriptive point of view (Bläsing & Zimmermann, 2021; Cavallo, 2015; Margolies, 2015; Barnés-Castaño, Bernstoff & Vilches, 2021). This study addresses the gap in experimental research in the performing arts by introducing an experiment that explores the effect of different AD styles on the cognitive and emotional reception of contemporary dance.

Forty visually impaired participants listened to eight 5-minute audio described contemporary dance pieces (4 with a more neutral and technical AD vs. 4 with a more poetic and metaphorical AD). A within-subject design was implemented to control for inter-subject variability. Both self-report and physiological methods were used to measure AD reception, which involved the cognitive effort invested by visually impaired users (cardiac deceleration and self-reported effort), the pleasantness experienced (EDA and self-reported valence, arousal, sense of presence, engagement, and satisfaction), and their ability to recall AD details (a post-task tailor-made questionnaire). Mental effort was measured with Paas (1992) mental effort rating scale; sense of presence and engagement with the short form of the ITC-Sopi (Lessiter et al., 2001); perceived valence and arousal were assessed with the adapted Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) for visually impaired individuals (Iturregui-Gallardo & Méndez-Ulrich, 2019); and satisfaction was measured with a Likert questionnaire. EDA data was collected with Shimmer3 GSR+ Unit, and cardiac deceleration was collected with the H10 chest strap (Pfurtscheller et al., 2006).

Preliminary results show that a more poetic and metaphorical AD is easier to perceive, more pleasant and more helpful than a more neutral one. These effects point to the benefits of a more poetic style to audio describe contemporary dance and to its potential impact to enhance visually impaired people's experience, and hopefully also to foster their attendance to contemporary dance performances.

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