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The audio description of sex scenes in *Élite*¹

Margherita Dore

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Margherita.dore@uniroma1.it

Fabio Ciambella

Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

Fabio.ciambella@uniroma1.it

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Abstract: The literature regarding the Audio Description (AD) of sex-related scenes appears to be quite limited. For instance, Fryer (2016) devoted a full chapter of her monograph to issues relating to AD and censorship, whereas, more recently, Rojo López et al. (2021) carried out an experiment on the reception of audio-described sex scenes by visually impaired participants. From a comparative standpoint, significant research was carried out by Sanderson (2009), who compared the English and Spanish ADs of sex scenes, and Sanz-Moreno (2017, 2018), who examined taboo language in a corpus of films audio described in English and Spanish. Sex has become an important feature of many films as well as a concern and central topic in many teen dramas streamed online (e.g. *Sex Education*, *Baby*, *Sex/Life*, to mention a few). Besides, sex scenes and strong language are normally allowed in this audiovisual content as it is not subject to the traditional TV watershed. Hence, we chose to analyse and compare the Spanish and English ADs of Season 6 of the Spanish TV series to determine how sex scenes have been handled. The comparative analysis offers insights into the challenges that the AD of this taboo topic poses, and how they are dealt with in different cultures and languages.

Keywords: Audio description, media accessibility, sex scenes, *Élite*, LGBTQ+ representation.

1. Introduction to the TV series

The Spanish thriller teen drama *Élite* (Montero & Madrona, 2018-2024) has garnered widespread attention and acclaim since its debut, captivating audiences with its gripping plotlines, complex characters, and provocative themes, especially from a gender-oriented perspective, which is one of the main focuses of this article. Produced by Zeta Producciones for Netflix, it tells the stories of a group of young students of the bilingual (English and Spanish) school Las Encinas, an exclusive private high school in the suburbs of Madrid, Spain. Here, wealthy young teenagers and marginalised poor students who were granted bursaries to attend the prestigious school live their troubled lives between love, sex, drug addiction, and serious family issues.

¹ Although the research was carried out jointly by the two authors, Margherita Dore wrote Sections 2 and 4, while Fabio Ciambella wrote Sections 1, 3 and 5.

One aspect of the show that has sparked considerable discussion is the explicitness of its sex scenes, which focus on heterosexual relationships as well as homosexual, transgender, and all the range of possible sexual inclinations within the LGBTQ+ world (see Díaz-Fernández, 2022 for further details).

One of the most striking aspects of *Élite* is its willingness to explore taboo subjects and challenge societal norms regarding sex and relationships. The series tackles issues such as infidelity, sexual identity, and power dynamics with a nuanced and thought-provoking approach, prompting viewers to confront their own beliefs and prejudices. By presenting sex scenes in a candid and unfiltered manner, *Élite* forces audiences to confront the complexities of human desire and the consequences of acting on it. Best-known examples, which are analysed in this article, are, for instance, one of the protagonist's homosexual love-sex relationship with both father and son at the same time (respectively Patrick, Cruz and Iván), or the attraction-repulsion of one of the heterosexual protagonist girls (Ari) for a transgender person who is still waiting to complete their transition from female to male (Nico).

However, the explicitness of the sex scenes in *Élite* has also sparked debate and controversy among viewers and journalists alike. Some argue that the graphic nature of these scenes is gratuitous and unnecessary, detracting from the overall quality of the show and overshadowing its other merits. Others contend that the explicitness of the sex scenes is integral to the storytelling process, serving to underscore the intensity of the characters' emotions and the moral dilemmas they face (e.g. Marcos, 2018; Thomas, 2021).

It is essential to consider the context in which these sex scenes are presented within the narrative of *Élite*. The series is set in a privileged and often decadent environment where the characters' actions are driven by their desires and impulses. The explicitness of the sex scenes serves to underscore the hedonistic nature of this world, where pleasure and gratification take precedence over societal norms and moral values. Furthermore, the explicitness of the sex scenes in *Élite* can be seen as a reflection of changing attitudes towards sexuality in contemporary society, as the many remakes or TV series inspired by *Élite* all over the world demonstrate (see e.g. Naahar, 2023 about the Indian remake titled *Class*). As taboos surrounding sex continue to erode, television shows such as *Élite* have become increasingly bold in their portrayal of intimate relationships.

This article examines how sex scenes, crucial for plot and character development in *Élite*, are handled in audio descriptions for blind and visually impaired viewers. By comparing the English and Spanish audio descriptions, the aim is to analyse the challenges posed by this audiovisual translation (AVT) technique, especially when addressing taboo topics. The exploration sheds light on how different cultures and languages handle these challenges, with the goal of improving the practice. This research is particularly relevant for languages like Italian, for which AD is currently unavailable for *Élite*.

Our analysis focuses on heterosexual, homosexual, and transgender sex scenes from Season 6, which is the first season where a transgender character, Nicolás (aka Nico) Fernández de Velasco Viveros (played by Ander Puig), enters the cast. The paper focuses on Season 6 only, because the character has not completed his² gender transition yet and the fact that he tries to have sex with a plastic penis increases the difficulties in the audio description of sex scenes where he is involved.

² The use of masculine personal pronouns is motivated by the fact that Nico wants to be always addressed as he/him in the series.

Alongside the heterosexual love and sexual relationships of characters like Sara and Raúl, Ariadna (Ari) Blanco Commerford (Carla Díaz) has a complex relationship with men and a conflicted attitude toward sex, which the story explores in depth. Throughout the season, Ari's portrayal reveals a deep-seated obsession with both men and the physical act of sex, reflected in her relentless pursuit of pleasure and validation. Her character arc delves into the underlying motivations driving her behaviour, which stem from a combination of insecurity, a desire for control, and a search for identity. As she navigates various romantic entanglements and explores her own desires, Ari grapples with the consequences of her actions and the emotional toll they take on her and those around her.

The exploration of homosexual relationships, notably between Patrick Blanco Commerford (played by Manu Rios) and the Brazilian Iván Carvalho (André Lamoglia), delves into themes of trust, betrayal, and reconciliation. Building upon the tumultuous events of Season 5, where Ivan's infidelity with Patrick's sister Ari strained their bond, Season 6 deals with the complexities of rebuilding trust and navigating past wounds. Despite the hurt and betrayal, Patrick and Ivan's relationship evolves as they grapple with forgiveness and understanding. However, their journey is further complicated by Patrick's affair with Ivan's father, Cruz (Carloto Cotta), adding another layer of tension and conflict to their dynamic.

Finally, Nico's transgender character brings forth a unique and nuanced perspective about sex. In a storyline that unfolds around his ongoing transition, the series daringly explores the intricacies of his love and sex life, notably with female characters like Nico's crush Sonia Naranja Xec (Nadia Al Saidi) and the transphobic Ari, who is both attracted and repulsed by Nico at the same time.³

As already hinted at, one of the distinctive aspects of Nico's character arc is his incomplete transition, a narrative choice that sheds light on the diverse experiences within the transgender community. As the series unfolds, viewers witness Nico's journey of self-discovery, capturing the challenges and triumphs that come with embracing one's authentic identity. This journey becomes even more interesting and complex: While Nico's parents are extremely supportive, his father, Alfonso (Pepe Ocio), who is also his son's gender affirmation surgeon, is against his complete transition (i.e. phalloplasty), because he deems it too risky.

In the realm of Nico's intimate relationships, particularly with Sonia and Ari, the series delicately addresses the complexities of physical intimacy during the transition process. The decision to show Nico's sexual encounters with a prosthetic device emphasises the psychological exploration of the character, particularly when he grapples with the feeling of incompleteness from a sexual standpoint. It is a departure from traditional storytelling, pushing the boundaries of representation and challenging viewers to face their preconceived notions about gender and sexuality. In an interview about challenges in the representation of transgender sex on TV, Ander Puig, the actor who plays Nico, said:

I think it's handled very well. They've done it very carefully. I'm also trans myself and I haven't felt offended or anything like that. There are people who are like Nico and people who are not. Some will identify with him. Some won't. Ever since I saw the script and started filming, I felt very comfortable. (Qtd. in Prance, 2022)

³ Season 7 also features Nico's attraction for Clohe Silva (Mirela Balic), but their one-night-stand affair goes beyond the scope of this article.

Nico and Ari's relationship becomes one of the focal points for exploring the dynamics of love and acceptance in the face of societal expectations, since the girl is transphobic at the beginning. The series navigates this sensitive territory with empathy, portraying the emotional and physical aspects of their connection with authenticity and respect, as we will attempt to show in our data analysis.

2. Audio description and sex scenes

Audio Description for the blind or visually impaired is a relatively recent field of study, which started gaining scholarly interest at the turn of the 21st century, primarily to establish standardised practices. This has resulted in a growing amount of literature and data-driven research. An exhaustive review of AD literature would be impossible here and would also fall beyond the scope of this work. Readers may like to refer to *The Routledge handbook of audio description* (2022) by Taylor and Perego for an overarching account of most aspects connected to this complex profession and the type of material to be audio described, although others remain largely unexplored. For instance, a cursory search for the word 'humour' in this handbook returns zero results. Indeed, the AD of humour has received limited attention so far (Martínez-Sierra, 2009, 2010, 2020; Dore, 2019). Similarly, taboo subjects have been largely neglected in AD, with only discussions about sex garnering significant attention (Fryer, 2016; Dore, 2019; Rojo López et al., 2021). When considering audiovisual content featuring taboo topics and sex scenes particularly, Snyder's (2007, p. 102) famous 'WYSIWYS' (What You See Is What You Say) approach may not always be the easiest or most viable option. This is because there are a variety of factors to consider. For instance, Fryer (2016, p. 144) contends that:

In UK English, saying what you see can be problematic in sex scenes, as there would seem to be paucity of acceptable sexual terms, leaving describers a choice between the anatomical specifics and playground obscenities. There are also differences according to gender. There are many words for penis that might be deemed acceptable; far fewer for female sexual organs.

Interestingly, Fryer's comparison of the AD of sex scenes as part of a drama or comedy and the one for porn shows that the latter appears more 'robust' and rhythmically in tune with the unfiltered image (p. 146).

The AD of taboo scenes has also been discussed in Franco and Monteiro's (2013) paper. They focused on the analysis of the Brazilian AD of sex scenes in the film *O Signo da Cidade* (Riccelli, 2007) showing that the describer omitted some information even when there was ample time for additional description. The authors suggest this is the result of self-censorship. Although it may be difficult to ascertain that such choices stem from conscious self-censorship, we agree with Franco and Monteiro that omissions deprived the impaired audience from important information as compared with typical viewers.

A key question is whether describers should adhere to the objectivity standard followed in many countries (Rai et al., 2010) or whether they should have the freedom to offer their personal interpretation of the task at hand. Snyder (2013, p. 69) maintains:

It's critical to maintain that sense of objectivity (...) [W]e avoid labeling with overly subjective interpretations and let our visitors conjure their own images and interpretations, as free as possible.

Fryer (2016, pp. 165-166) recognises that objectivity is a reasonable approach to prevent imposing personal and unnecessary viewpoints on the audience, who should have the right to form their own conclusions. However, she also points out that subjectivity is unavoidable in AD practice and can enhance the AD experience by reducing the risk of producing generic, indistinct (and, we dare say, dull) outputs. This is consistent with Schaeffer-Lacroix et al.'s (2023, p.1) view that, while objectivity has always been considered a key norm of quality, the idea of subjectivity/objectivity in AD should be seen more as a continuum that can give way to different perspectives and alternatives. In this light, Marcelino Villela's (2019, p. 276) investigation of the AD of homosexual erotic scenes in the film *Praia do Futuro* (Aïnouz, 2014) in Brazilian Portuguese appears to be particularly relevant to the present discussion. The author contends that sex scenes conveying strong action and feelings require AD that is equally bold and subjective.

A further step in the understanding of AD practice from an alternative standpoint is by comparing ADs of the same audiovisual content in different languages. Such research outputs are rarely considered as many contend that different languages and cultures have their unique ways of audio describing visual content (Dore, 2019, p. 266). Yet, cross-cultural and cross-lingual comparisons can help us to learn more about this practice, especially when dealing with taboo topics. For example, Sanz-Moreno (2018) offered an interesting comparative analysis of references to sex, nudity and related topics in the English and Spanish AD versions of *The Hangover* (Phillips, 2009) and *The Hangover Part II* (Phillips, 2011). She shows that both versions tend to describe taboo images using neutral language, thus aligning with the objectivity rule commonly found in AD guidelines. However, it is noteworthy that the English AD version includes instances of explicit language (e.g. blowjob, cock, ass, hooker), while the Spanish version opts for anatomical terms (e.g. penis) and euphemisms to describe sexual acts and prostitutes. Sanz-Moreno's (2018, p. 100) analysis underscores the different treatment of taboo topics in translation in different cultures. She notes that in the case of the Spanish AD, the decision-making process appears to be driven by a concern for political correctness, despite the films being politically incorrect themselves. This choice risks undermining an essential goal of AD, which consists of replicating approximately the same effects as experienced by a typical audience (Rojo López et al., 2021, p. 9).

Bearing all this in mind and in an attempt to fill this gap in research regarding the AD of taboo topics and particular sex scenes entailing homosexual intercourse, we have decided to focus on the comparison of the Spanish and English ADs of the dramedy *Élite*, as further expounded below.

3. Methodology and corpus selection

In the pursuit of understanding AD practices within TV series, this study adopts a contrastive and qualitative approach, building upon previous research (e.g., Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado, 2007; Perotti & Valero Gisbert, 2017; Sanz-Moreno, 2018; Dore, 2019; Marra, 2023). As mentioned earlier, the focus is on Season 6 of *Élite*, examining the portrayal of heterosexual, homosexual, and transgender scenes within the Spanish and English AD tracks. As with any

Netflix production, the audio descriptions for this series were likely developed following the highly concise guidelines set by this streaming platform. Netflix suggests that the AD of sex-related scenes must be “straightforward when addressing nudity, sexual acts, and violence” (Netflix Audio Description Style Guide v2.5a)⁴. Similarly, the Spanish version of the Netflix guidelines says: “Las descripciones de las escenas de desnudos, sexo y violencia deben ser explícitas (The descriptions of scenes featuring nudity, sex and violence must be explicit; *Guía de estilo para la audiodescripción* v2.5b).

The methodology used for the analysis involved individual viewing of all eight episodes by the authors, separately examining either the Spanish or English AD versions. Subsequently, collaborative discussions were held to compare findings and identify differences and similarities between the two versions. These discussions allowed the co-authors to share insights, exchange perspectives, and jointly identify key themes and patterns in the AD. Special emphasis is placed on scenes involving Nico’s character, given the complexities of his transgender identity and the use of a prosthetic penis in intimate moments. Through dialogue and analysis, the authors aim to uncover nuances in the portrayal of Nico’s character across language versions and assess the effectiveness of AD in conveying his narrative arc.

Ultimately, the contrastive analysis allows for the identification of linguistic, cultural, and narrative differences between the two versions, shedding light on the intricacies of audio description practices. By examining scenes depicting diverse relationships and identities, the study aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities inherent in audio describing sensitive and complex themes within television series.

As mentioned earlier, this paper focuses on Season 6 because, apart from featuring heterosexual and homosexual sex scenes, it introduces transsexual sex scenes involving Nico, Sonia and Ari. Our comparative analysis is therefore divided into three subsections that discuss the three types of sex scenes. There are 14 sex scenes in total, amounting to 22 minutes and 11 seconds. The Spanish AD of these scenes comprises 1620 words, while the English AD features 1627. As the word count is practically identical, an in-depth qualitative analysis is better suited to capture the specific features of the AD in each dataset. Although limited in number, these sex scenes feature interesting aspects worth considering. For instance, although heterosexual scenes appear more frequently (7), followed by transsexual scenes (4), the homosexual scenes (3) are more visually explicit. While female breasts are never exposed and the actresses are also pictured having sex wearing a bra, or in a bath full of foam, male homosexuals can be seen fully naked, walking or engaging in oral and anal sex. It could be argued that this may be a Netflix policy to avoid the actresses’ objectification, but this is mere speculation that needs to be further investigated. The heterosexual scenes include a scene in which Isadora is having a nightmare that recalls the night she was raped by Alex, Javier and Hugo, one in which Alex and Hugo are trying to rape another girl, and one in which Ari has sex with Iván, her brother’s boyfriend.

To carry out a detailed comparative analysis, both the Spanish and English ADs were transcribed using the speech recognition add-in available on

⁴ They are in sharp contrast with the British *Guidance on Standards for AD* issued over twenty years ago stating the following: “As a general guide, the describer should try to convey the kind of sexuality (loving, aggressive, tender, tentative, etc.) without embarrassing the viewer” otherwise “they may be embarrassing, crude or just very dull” (ITC 2000, pp. 31- 33, quoted in Sanz-Moreno, 2018, p. 94).

Microsoft Word (Dictate) and subsequently refined through manual editing.⁵ Due to space limitations, we only discuss selected examples from each category that pose significant challenges from an audio description perspective. These examples are intended to effectively illustrate our argument.

4. Data analysis

This section has been divided into three subsections discussing sex scenes pertaining respectively to heterosexual, homosexual and transsexual intercourse.

4.1. Heterosexual sex scenes

As mentioned above, the heterosexual sex scenes amount to 7 in the whole season. It is worth noting that the amount of described text does not seem to be strictly determined by the available time. This does not mean that the Spanish and English describers disregard time constraints, but on several occasions, we found the length of the Spanish AD is longer than the English one or vice versa, irrespective of such limitations (cf. Table 1 below). The examples are reported in numbered tables, with the Spanish AD (including interjecting dialogues) in the left-hand column and the English AD in the right-hand column. The start and end of the AD track are reported in the caption of each Table. The sections deemed more relevant for comparative analysis are italicised in the tables and discussed later. The back translation of the Spanish segments worth discussing is provided in the body of the text.

Example 1 (Table 1 below), taken from Episode 6, depicts Sara returning to live with Raúl despite his previous violent and possessive behaviour. Raúl and Sara earn money by advertising products on social media; he convinces her to film a promotional video for a bubble bath, leading them into their bathroom.

The initial Spanish AD provides a more detailed depiction of the scene and its sexual intensity (*'Sara está desnuda'*, Sara is naked, *'[Raúl] se baja los calzoncillos'*, [Raúl takes off his underwear]), but it also highlights Sara's discomfort upon seeing him naked (*'Sara le aparta la mirada'*, [Sara looks away]; *'Incómoda, Sara se coloca de espaldas a Raúl'*, [looking uncomfortable, Sara turns her back to him]). In the concluding part, both ADs indicate that Sara willingly initiates sexual intercourse (*'Sara se sienta en su regazo'*, [Sara sits on his lap]; 'Climbing on top of him'). Yet, the Spanish AD becomes more explicit and direct (*'Tienen sexo'*, [they have sex]) while the English AD focuses more on details, enhancing the sexual tension by emphasising Sara's movements (Sara begins to move up and down at a quickening pace).

Another instance of heterosexual intercourse can be found in Episode 5. Iván and Ari meet in the toilets of Isadora's nightclub. Both are visibly distressed for different reasons. They engage in a conversation about how their respective pains are impacting their lives and express frustration over their inability to cope. As depicted in Table 2, their intimate conversation swiftly escalates into sexual intercourse.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the AI software has probably been instructed to censor swearing or graphic language when detected. Therefore, the authors had to reinsert the omitted taboo words into both the Spanish and English ADs and dialogues.

Table 1: Example 1. E06. Min. 14.46 – 16.59

| | |
|--|--|
| Sara: Si tú me dices que nos viene bien, lo hacemos. | If it'll be good for our brand, let's do it. |
| Raúl: Vale. | OK. |
| Más tarde Raúl se retoca el peinado con las manos delante de un espejo. <i>Sara está desnuda</i> en la bañera. Raúl se quita el albornoz, mete una mano en la bañera. El agua está repleta de espuma. <i>Se baja los calzoncillos. Sara le aparta la mirada.</i> Raúl entra en la bañera, se sienta frente a Sara. | Later, Sara is in the bath surrounded by bubbles. Raúl glances in the foggy mirror then removes his robe. Sara watches him test the water. Raúl lowers himself into the other end of the bath. |
| Raúl: Vale. | OK. |
| Mira hacia la pantalla del móvil. | |
| Raúl: Vale, ahí estás un poco lejos. Em... ¿Por qué no te acercas un poco? | You are out of frame right there. Why don't you come a little closer? |
| Sara se acerca a él. | She shifts toward him, keeping her distance. |
| Sara: ¿Así bien? | Good enough? |
| Raúl: Mejor. | Better. |
| Sara: ¿Qué pasa? | What's wrong? |
| Raúl: No sé, no me convence. No sé si es por el fondo, por la postura... Em... ¿Por qué no pruebas a... darme la espalda un momento? | I'm not quite convinced. Don't know if it's the background or the posture or what. Why don't you try turning around? |
| <i>Incómoda, Sara se coloca de espaldas a Raúl. Acerca su espalda al pecho de su novio.</i> | Slowly, Sara turns and slides toward him. |
| Raúl: Vale. Mejor. ¿Te gusta? | OK, that's better? Do you like it? |
| Sara asiente. Raúl pega su cabeza en la de ella. | She nods curtly. He draws closer. |
| Raúl: Mierda, mierda, mierda, mierda... | Damn it, damn it, damn it. |
| Se lleva las manos a la entrepierna. | Sarah smirks as Raul pulls away. |
| Raúl: Joder, lo siento. | Sorry. Well... |
| Sara: ¿Te has...? | Did you...? |
| Raúl: Sí. Es que hace mucho tiempo que tú y yo no... ¿Sabes? Perdón. ¿Paramos hasta que se me baje? | Yeah. Well, it's been a while since you and I, you know. Sorry. Should we wait till it's gone? |
| Sara mira los labios de Raúl. Acerca su rostro al de él y le da un beso. Raúl la besa en los labios. Se besan apasionadamente. <i>Sara se sienta en su regazo. Tienen sexo iluminados por las luces de las velas que rodean la bañera.</i> | Sara peers into his eyes, then kisses him deeply. As their passions flare, Sara bites Raúl's lip. He responds by running a soapy hand along the back of her neck. <i>Climbing on top of him, Sara begins to move up and down at a quickening pace.</i> The soapy water lapsed the edges of the bathtub. On the floor, surrounding the tub, pale candles flicker. |

Table 2: Example 2. E05. Min. 48.16-49.19

| | |
|--|---|
| Iván: Si no podemos quitarlo, al menos podemos compartirlo, ¿no? | If we can get rid of it, then at the very least we can share it. |
| Ari acaricia el rostro de Iván. Él cierra los ojos. Los abre y mira a Ari. Juntan las frentes. Iván la besa. <i>Ella lo mira sorprendida.</i> Iván le acerca las manos a la cara y la besa con pasión. Entran en un cubículo del baño mientras siguen besándose. Iván la coloca de espaldas a la pared. Ari se baja las braguitas. Iván se baja los pantalones. <i>La embiste con las caderas.</i> La besa en el cuello. Ella cierra los ojos con gesto de placer. | She tenderly wipes his tears. As their eyes lock, Ari pulls him closer. They kiss deeply. Their passions intensify quickly, and they stumble together into a stall where he presses her against the wall. As he undoes his pants, she slips her underwear off under her skirt. <i>He lifts her leg and thrusts his hips into her</i> with feverish abandon. |

As can be noted, in this case the Spanish AD provides additional details, particularly in conveying the tender emotions they harbour for each other (*'Ari acaricia el rostro de Iván. Él cierra los ojos'*, [Ari caresses Iván's face. He closes his eyes], etc.). Moreover, the Spanish AD also captures Ari's sudden realisation of her revived attraction to him, considering that Iván is her brother's boyfriend (*'Ella lo mira sorprendida'*, [she looks at him in surprise]). Both descriptions of sexual intercourse appear sufficiently detailed as the Spanish *'la embiste con las caderas'* [he charges her with his hips] appears as evocative as 'thrusts his hips into her'.

The last example in the category of heterosexual scenes is interesting because it features Hugo, one of the boys who raped Isadora. In Episode 6, Nico overhears Hugo complaining to Alex about his inability to build muscle mass, despite consistent workout. Nico, aspiring to undergo phalloplasty and requiring funds, offers to steal steroids for Hugo from his father's practice. Upon learning of this trade, Isadora requests Nico to steal a drug that induces chemical castration. She enters the boy's changing rooms at school and exchanges Hugo's steroids with the castrating drug. In Episode 8, the effects on Hugo begin to become evident.

Table 3: Example 3. E08. Min. 19.40-20.20

| | |
|--|---|
| Hugo y una chica con coleta entran besándose en un baño del instituto. <i>Ella le toca la entrepierna.</i> | Hugo and a girl barge into a school bathroom. <i>They make out feverishly. As he presses her against the counter, she reaches into his pants.</i> |
| Chica: Oye, esto está un poco muerto, ¿no? | Hey. Things are kind of dead down there. |
| Hugo: Déjame a mí. | Let me do it. |
| <i>Hugo se desabrocha el cinturón. Se mete la mano en el pantalón.</i> | <i>He unbuckles his belt and masturbates. She bites her lips and smiles with anticipation.</i> |
| Chica: ¿Nada? | Nothing? |
| Hugo: Dame un segundo. | Wait a second. |
| Chica: Bueno, que si no, da igual, | Leave it. It doesn't matter. |
| Hugo: ¡Que no! | I say no. |
| Chica: Me imagino que esto nunca te ha pasado. Que es la primera vez... | I'm guessing this has never happened to you before. It's the first time. |
| Hugo: ¿Te puedes callar? | Shut up, alright? |
| <i>La chica se pone seria.</i> | <i>Her smile vanishes.</i> |
| Chica: Que da igual, tío. Vamos a dejar. | It's all good. Let's leave it. |
| Hugo: Que no... | I said no. |
| Chica: Que me sueltes. Que ya no me apetece, joder. | Get off me. I'm not into it now. |
| <i>Sale del cuarto de baño. Hugo se mira frustrado en el espejo.</i> | <i>Pulling away, she goes. Turning to his reflection, he rubs his forehead then pounds the counter in frustration.</i> |

Once again, the Spanish AD appears more condensed (*'Ella le toca la entrepierna'*, [she touches his groins]), which encourages the audience to infer more from what they hear. Conversely, the English offers more specific vocabulary relating to sexual intercourse (*'They make out feverishly. As he presses her against the counter, she reaches into his pants'*), although this leads to a more explicit description (*'He unbuckles his belt and masturbates'*).

It is worth noting that in both cases, and generally across both datasets, the Spanish AD predominantly uses the characters' proper names, while the English AD leans towards pronouns. According to Netflix guidelines, pronouns "should

only be used when it is clear to whom they refer” (Audio Description Style Guide v2.5a, cf. the “How” section) and one could argue that the English AD adheres to this advice, as the characters are clearly defined when they are alone in their respective settings, such as the room and the toilets. Conversely, the Spanish describer(s) may have opted for proper nouns as a precautionary.

4.2. Homosexual sex scenes

The three homosexual scenes in Season 6 feature Iván and Patrick. The scene not reported below shows the two young boys kissing and touching their groins inside Iván’s father’s swimming pool. We decided to discuss the other two scenes as they are much more explicit in content. Both scenes portray the same homosexual orgy. After Iván’s father Cruz died from being beaten up by a gang of men, Iván begins to hold Patrick accountable for the tragic incident. In the hopes of easing his pain, Iván throws a party involving heavy drug consumption and homosexual men. Patrick learns about the party and heads to Iván’s house.

Table 4: Example 4. E06. Min. 24.51-26.03

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Patrick camina hacia casa de Iván. Entra por la puerta, mira serio a los lados. Se quita la chaqueta. Lleva una camiseta sin mangas. En una columna, <i>un chico se agacha delante de la entrepierna de otro chico</i>. Patrick pasa por delante de un chico con el torso desnudo y entra en el salón. <i>Un chico esnifa cocaína sobre la mesa mientras otro chico con un arnés lo penetra</i>. Al otro lado de la mesa, tres chicos en ropa interior se besan. Patrick sigue caminando por el salón. <i>En el sofá un chico le hace una felación a otro chico</i>. Patrick camina hacia un cuarto con luz roja. <i>Un chico desnudo</i> sale del cuarto, se cruza con Patrick. Patrick mira hacia el cuarto rojo. Detrás de una barra, <i>un chico se arrodilla delante de Iván</i>. Patrick los observa sin mutarse. <i>Iván coge droga de la barra con una cucharilla y se la acerca a la nariz. El otro chico se pone en pie, mira a Iván con una sonrisa y da media vuelta. Iván lo sigue.</i></p> | <p>Patrick arrives at Ivan’s house. He cautiously approaches the front entrance he slowly removes his coat. <i>One man dances against another, then lowers his head to the man’s crotch</i>. Patrick passes a shirtless man on his way into Ivan’s dimly lit living room. <i>A naked man leans against the bar. Behind him another man grips him by the hips and thrusts deeply</i>. Three more men danced closely by the windows. <i>On the sofa a slender man receives oral sex from a partner</i>. Patrick makes his way to another room. <i>A naked man passes and looks him up and down</i>. Patrick wears a sweater vest with a large collar. At the doorway to a red-light room, <i>he spots Iván behind the counter. He pushes a man’s head down. Out of sight, craning his neck, he leans over the counter and snorts a bump of cocaine. His partner stands. With a coy grin, he goes.</i> Patrick gazes blankly.</p> |
|---|--|

Both ADs report instances of homosexual intercourse and nudity (“*un chico se agacha delante de la entrepierna de otro chico*” [a guy bends in front of another man’s groins], and “one man... lowers his head to the man’s crotch”, “*Un chico desnudo*”, [A naked man]). However, some appreciable differences can be noted. For instance, the Spanish version employs the euphemism ‘arnés’ to refer to the man’s penis, as can be gathered from the images accompanying the AD. In addition, the Latinate word *felación* (fellatio) is used instead of the plain English expression ‘oral sex’ found in the English AD. Both terms are likely to be understood by the blind or visually impaired audience, yet the English version appears more direct and, to some extent, coherent with the uninhibited context and characters. However, the Spanish describer’s choice to use proper nouns, particularly towards the end of the scene, potentially makes it clearer than the English AD. For example, the Spanish AD explicitly states that it is Iván who is snorting cocaine while receiving oral sex from the other man who is kneeling in front of him. In contrast, the continuous use of male

pronouns might make it slightly more challenging to understand who is doing what to whom in the English AD. It is worth noting that while the Spanish AD focuses on Iván and his partner's sexual intercourse, the English AD adds a final comment on Patrick's pensive expression.

Later during the same episode, the event occurring in Iván's house resumes. The scene is equally very explicit in its content.

Table 5: Example 5. E06. Min. 30.37-32.43

| | |
|---|---|
| Patrick camina por un pasillo de casa de Iván. Entra en una habitación con la luz roja. Se para cerca de un chico con un <i>arnés</i> . | At Ivan's drug fueled party, Patrick wanders through a blue lit room where <i>two men are pressed against the wall together</i> . He enters a bedroom with red lighting where a man grins. |
| Chico: Qué guapo. | Hey, handsome. |
| Mira hacia el centro de la habitación. | |
| Chico: ¿Una puntita de mefe? | Hey, you want some magic? |
| Patrick: No. No, gracias. | No, no, thanks. |
| Chico: Venga. | Come on. |
| Patrick: No, no, no, gracias. | No, really thank you. |
| <i>Iván penetra a otro chico por detrás. Patrick se les acerca. Iván embiste al chico con las caderas. Tiene los ojos cerrados. Patrick se para detrás de Iván. Le pasa una mano por un hombro. Lo abraza por la espalda y le besa el cuello con afecto. Iván busca los labios de Patrick con los suyos. Le besa los labios con los ojos todavía cerrados. Siguen besándose con pasión. Iván abre los ojos. Da un paso atrás.</i> | Near the bed, <i>Iván thrusts himself into another man from behind</i> with his eyes closed. Patrick <i>floats over</i> to them. He steps behind Iván and begins to <i>caress</i> his bare shoulders. Slowly, he runs his cheek along Iván's face and kisses his neck. With his eyes still closed, Iván responds by turning toward him. <i>They make out with passionate abandon</i> . Iván's eyes crack open. His grin vanishes. |
| Iván: ¿Patrick? | Patrick? |
| Iván se aparta de Patrick. | Patrick tries to kiss him, but he recoils. |
| Iván: ¿Qué haces aquí? ¿Qué haces aquí? | What are you doing here? Why are you here? I say leave me alone. Why didn't you just fucking die already? |
| <i>Iván lo empuja.</i> | Backing away, <i>Patrick stares in stunned horror</i> . |
| Iván: ¡Que me dejes en paz! ¿Por qué no te mueres de una puta vez? | You never should have been here. You should have been dead. You. |
| Patrick se queda pasmado. | |
| Iván: Tú sí que tenías que estar muerto, no mi padre. Tú. | |
| <i>Iván se tambalea. Desconcertado, Patrick da media vuelta y sale de la habitación. Iván se lleva las manos a la cabeza. Patrick camina serio por los pasillos de la casa de Iván.</i> | Iván staggers. <i>Crushed by the toxic words</i> , Patrick flees. Unsteady on his feet, Iván holds his head. Patrick stalks out of the party. |

Unlike the other scenes described above, this scene exhibits more differences in the way the ADs are inserted between the characters' dialogues. This variation may be attributed to the escalating frantic nature of the action and Iván's words, which have a devastating impact on Patrick, who still believes he can win Iván's love back. Interestingly, the Spanish version seems misleading when the voice talent utters the sentence '*Se para cerca de un chico con un arnés*' ([he [Patrick] stands near a man with a tool]), since the man simply waves a small bag of cocaine in front of Patrick's eyes, offering some. In contrast, the English AD includes the detail of two other men having sex against a wall and only mentions a man who grins, shortly after being heard offering drugs.

That said, it could be argued that both ADs not only describe the erotic homosexual scene, but also attempt to convey Patrick's tender attempt to make love to Iván, using words such as '*lo abraza*' [he hugs him], '*con afecto*' [with tenderness], '*Siguen besándose con pasión*' [they keep on kissing passionately] in the Spanish AD. Similarly evocative words in the English AD are 'floats over', 'caress', 'They make out with passionate abandon'. Both ADs also try to convey Iván's and Patrick's feelings ('*Desconcertado*', [bewildered]; 'Patrick stares in stunned horror', 'Crushed by the toxic words'). Again, it could be argued that the English AD sounds slightly more informal than the Spanish one and might better fit the context of the series.

4.3. Transsexual sex scenes

As mentioned earlier, the scenes featuring transgender sex in Season 6 are not numerous. However, they are intriguing from many points of view. We have chosen to report a scene in which Nico has sex with Sonia and one with Ari. Example 6 is taken from Episode 5 and depicts Nico and Sonia in a suite at Isadora's club.

Table 6: Example 6. E05. Min 18.33-20.51

| | |
|--|---|
| En una suite Nico y Sonia se besan en la cama. Nico se quita la camisa. | In a suite, Nico and Sonia make out on the bed. <i>She wears a short leather skirt and a bra.</i> Nico pulls his shirt off. |
| Sonia: Estoy flipando con que hayas alquilado esta suite | I'm so blown away that you rented this suite. |
| Nico: Siempre he querido invitar a alguien especial aquí. | I've always wanted to invite someone special here. |
| Sonia: Ah, entonces, ¿tengo que sentirme especial? | Oh, so does that mean I should feel special? |
| Nico sella los labios de Sonia con un beso. Baja una mano hasta la entrepierna de la chica. Ella acerca su mano a la entrepierna de Nico, pero él se la aparta. | As they resume their lovemaking, Nico's hand slowly slips down between her legs. Sonia reciprocates but he pulls her hand away. |
| Sonia: ¿Tanta suite solo para que me hagas un dedo? | You got this suite just to finger me? |
| Nico: No. Pero lo hacemos a mi manera. | No, but we're doing it my way. |
| Nico se asienta en la cama. Se desabrocha los pantalones, se levanta y se los quita. Coge un preservativo. <i>Sonia lo mira confundida.</i> Nico abre el preservativo. | Sitting on the edge of the bed, <i>Nico pulls his pants down. Behind him, Sonia takes her skirt off.</i> Nico takes a condom. <i>An erect penile prosthetic protrudes from a pair of black briefs. Sonia watches with desirous anticipation as he puts on the condom.</i> |
| Sonia: ¿Y eso para qué? | Why the condom? |
| Nico: Se supone que por higiene. Y, bueno, por la experiencia, no te voy a engañar. ¿Te apetece? | For hygiene and well for experience to be honest with you. |
| | Nico: Do you wanna do it? |
| <i>Sonia sonríe con picardía.</i> Nico se tumba encima de ella y la besa. | <i>She eyes him provocatively and spreads her legs.</i> Nico climbs on top of her. |
| Sonia: Ah, espera, espera. | Hold on, hold on. |
| Nico la embiste suavemente con las caderas. | <i>She helps him readjust.</i> Nico begins to thrust his hips. He stops. |
| Nico: Joder, perdona. | Fuck! I'm sorry. |
| Sonia: No pasa nada. Espera. Prueba así. | It's no big deal. Hold on. Try like this. |
| Sonia se pone en cuadrupedia. <u>Nico la penetra por detrás.</u> | She turns over onto her hands and knees. <i>Behind her, Nico grips her hips.</i> |
| Nico: ¡Joder! | Fuck! |

| | |
|--|--|
| Se coloca la prótesis. | Pulling away, he sits on the edge of the bed and removes the condom. |
| Sonia: Quitate eso y hacemos otras cosas. No lo necesito. Nico, ¿qué te pasa? Antes te gustaba. | Why don't you just take that off. We can just do other things. I don't need it Nico what's the matter? You used to be into it. |
| Nico: Pues ya no. | Not anymore. |
| Nico se levanta de la cama. Sonia y él se visten cariacontecidos. | He gets up and they dress. Nico's brow is furrowed as he gazes distantly. |

From the very beginning, the Spanish AD contains few details of the action taking place, despite having sufficient time to provide more description. We only hear that Nico and Sonia are kissing, and he takes his shirt off. In contrast, the English AD provides details of Sonia's outfit. Additionally, when Nico takes a condom, the Spanish AD emphasises Sonia's reaction (*'lo mira confundida'*, [she looks at him confused]). Conversely, the English AD highlights Nico's prosthetic penis and Sonia's desire, thereby emphasising the transgender nature of these characters' lovemaking. Interestingly, this AD shows a distinct contrast in register with the dialogue among characters. When Sonia asks Nico, 'You got this *suite* just to finger me?', the dialogue features the colloquial verb 'to finger'. However, moments later, the descriptive narration describes the following scene with '[a]n erect penile prosthetic protrude[ing] from a pair of black briefs', which notably adopts a less colloquial, and more politically correct, tone without necessarily opting for censorship. Such differences in style and register are worth considering when teaching and learning the AD practice, as we further comment in our conclusions.

When Nico feels uncomfortable, Sonia tries to ease the process by adjusting Nico's prosthetic penis and subsequently changing position to facilitate penetration. In this case, the Spanish AD becomes much more explicit (*'Nico la penetra por detrás'*, [Nico penetrates her from behind]) while the English AD leads to such inference (Behind her, Nico grips her hips). Similarly, the Spanish AD *'se coloca la prótesis'* [he readjusts his prosthesis] explains the reason for Nico's swearing, whereas the English AD emphasises Nico's action as a result of his prosthetic penis displacing. On a final note, we have reported a line that was added in the English dubbed version when Nico says: 'Do you wanna do it?'. Although this aspect of dubbing falls beyond the matter at hand here, it should be noted that this could be done because Nico is shot from behind, while the camera focuses on Sonia's face.

The last example (See Table 7 below) depicts Nico and Ari. After having dinner with Nico's parents, the couple goes to Nico's room and begins chatting about Nico's difficult childhood. Eventually, they start kissing.

Unlike the scene reported in Table 6, this scene only touches upon transsexuality, mainly when Nico himself asks Ari if she is sure about having sex with him. In general, it comes across as tender lovemaking in both ADs, with sentences such as *'se besan con ternura'* [they kiss tenderly], *'Ari mueve las caderas con gesto placentero'* [Ari moves her hips with pleasure], 'slowly kisses her neck', 'They exchange eye contact, then continue their tender kissing', 'Their desires intensify', etc. It is therefore not surprising that even when Nico performs oral sex on Ari, both datasets offer accurate descriptions of the actions. Yet, the descriptions of the details differ, thus confirming the subjectivity of audio description. For instance, the Spanish AD explains that Nico kneels in front of Ari (*'Nico está de rodillas frente a ella'*), while the English AD emphasises Nico's desire (Nico's excitement builds, he moves more aggressively toward Ari's face). Also, in the Spanish AD, Nico removes Ari's trousers (*'pantalón'*) while the English AD mentions Ari's underwear.

This is obviously a minor detail, but the latter word may evoke a more sensual image.

Table 7: Example 7. E06. Min. 33.27-35.51

| | |
|--|---|
| Se abrazan. Nico le acaricia la espalda. Se separan lentamente. Acercan sus rostros. Nico besa a Ari en los labios. Ella le mira a los ojos. Nico vuelve a besarla. Ari le pone las manos en la nuca. Se besan con ternura. | Ari shakes her head then slowly steps into Nico's arms. He runs a hand through the hair at the back of her head, then slowly kisses her neck. Gradually, their lips find one another. They exchange eye contact, then continue their tender kissing. Ari wraps her hands around Nico's neck and kisses him deeply. Their desires intensify. |
| Nico: ¿Estás segura? | Are you sure? |
| Ari lo mira fijamente. Asiente. Él le mira los labios y vuelve a besarla. Ella baja la mano hasta su entrepierna. Introduce una mano bajo el pantalón de Nico. Nico pone una mano sobre la de Ari y la mueve de abajo arriba. Acerca lentamente sus labios a los de Ari. La besa. Ella sonríe. Sentada en la cama, Ari se quita la camiseta. <i>Nico está de rodillas frente a ella.</i> Se queda en ropa interior. Ari le besa los pectorales, sigue subiendo con los labios hasta encontrar la boca de Nico. Se tumba en la cama. <i>Nico le baja el pantalón.</i> La besa en el cuello bajando por los pechos hasta llegar a la entrepierna con la boca. <i>Ari mueve las caderas con gesto placentero.</i> | Peering directly into his eyes, she nods. As they resume their kissing. Ari's hand makes its way down into Nico's pants. She moves it up and down. <i>As Nico's excitement builds, he moves more aggressively toward Ari's face.</i> On the bed, they remove each other's tops. Ari kisses Nico's chest. Next, Ari lies on her back and Nico kisses his way down her body. <i>He pulls off her underwear.</i> He licks the skin around her bra and kisses her stomach. His head dips between her bent legs and he fondles her breasts over her bra. <i>Ari cranes are back and quivers with pleasure.</i> |

All in all, it can be said that while the English AD may seem more direct and informal in certain instances (e.g. examples 3 and 5), albeit also strives for political correctness (example 6). However, overall, it can be argued that the Spanish AD is more explicit (e.g. examples 1, 6 and 7). More importantly, the Spanish describer's choice to use proper nouns rather than pronouns, as in the case of the English AD, makes it probably clearer to understand what is happening onscreen (cf. particularly example 4). We believe this to be noteworthy, especially when training describers who may have to deal with scenes featuring same-sex intercourse.

5. Conclusions

Drawing on previous comparative analysis of ADs (Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado, 2007; Perotti & Valero Gisbert, 2017; Sanz-Moreno, 2018; Dore, 2019; Marra, 2023), this work has focused on the Spanish and English ADs of sex scenes in the series *Élite*, Season 6. By doing so, it has been possible to identify distinct techniques to convey both the essence and explicitness of these scenes across different languages. Moreover, the examination has revealed that while there are subtle variations in the portrayal of heterosexual, homosexual, or transsexual encounters, a slightly more notable distinction emerges in the directness of Nico's scenes, which are described more explicitly in Spanish than in English (cf. Example 6). Moreover, the Spanish AD appears to align more closely with Netflix's basic guidelines for AD, which prioritise using proper names over pronouns for characters (cf. Subsections 4.1 and 4.2). As the

analysis has shown, this descriptive approach is particularly effective when depicting homosexual scenes, where the repetition of the pronouns ‘he’ (or ‘she’) for all the characters depicted in the sex scene can potentially confuse the blind or visually impaired audience (cf. example 4).

The juxtaposition of Spanish and English AD sex scenes underscores the importance of linguistic and cultural nuances in audiovisual translation. Translators face the challenge of conveying the intended meaning while preserving the emotional and cultural context of the original content. In the case of *Élite*, the variations in the portrayal of sex scenes highlight the divergent approaches adopted by translators to navigate sensitive subject matter within the constraints of language and cultural norms.

Stylistically, the Spanish and English ADs exhibit notable differences. The English AD demonstrates a mix of colloquial and more formal registers, particularly in its portrayal of transgender sex scenes (e.g., Example 6), where the dialogue remains informal, while the Spanish AD narration adopts a more neutral and politically correct tone. These stylistic discrepancies highlight the role of subjective choices in AD and underscore the need for a more standardized yet adaptable approach to audio description practices in different linguistic contexts.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. This study consists of a case study focused exclusively on Season 6 of *Élite*, comparing its Spanish and English ADs. While the findings offer valuable insights into AD strategies for sensitive and taboo content, they are not necessarily generalisable to all ADs of sexually explicit scenes in other audiovisual productions. Further research could expand the dataset to include other Netflix series, different streaming platforms, or even national broadcasters to determine whether the observed stylistic trends hold across a broader range of content. Additionally, reception studies involving blind and visually impaired audiences would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these stylistic choices impact audience engagement and comprehension.

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