



Exploring the accessibility creative continuum on streaming platforms: A contrastive multimodal analysis of subjectivity and objectivity in audio description

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Abstract: The suitability of objective or subjective audio description (AD) is still an ongoing topic with opposite views. While AD guidelines used by some countries and streaming platforms support the traditional perspective of providing an objective or denotational description, growing interest has developed among researchers towards a more narrative, subjective, or interpretative description. In this paper, we explore whether the AD provided by different streaming platforms can be located at the same point along an accessibility creative continuum in terms of objectivity and subjectivity. To fulfil our aim, a multimodal analysis based on audiovisual texts' meaning codes was used to operationalize how objectivity and subjectivity interact in a corpus of AD in English from Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+. Our results show, firstly, that both objectivity and subjectivity appear in the AD excerpts from every platform. Secondly, our findings point to dissimilarities when comparing the frequency of objective and subjective elements that interact in each platform's AD. More specifically, whereas Apple TV+ seems to be closer to the objectivity end of the creative continuum, Disney+ can be located near the subjectivity end, with both Amazon Prime Video and Netflix being roughly in the middle. In conclusion, if we consider pure objectivity and subjectivity in AD as two opposite poles of a continuum, the AD provided by these streaming platforms displays different degrees of creativity.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, accessibility, audio description, accessibility creative continuum, multimodality

1. Introduction

Audio description (AD) is an accessible audiovisual translation (AVT) or media accessibility (MA) mode usually regulated by guidelines, quality standards or norms that, to different extents, prescribe what to include in the AD scripts. These instructions can have a national (e.g., Spain's *UNE 153020* norm, AENOR, 2005) or international (e.g., *ISO/IEC 200071-21*, 2015) scope, they can have a scholarly nature (the ADLAB project, Remael et al., 2014), they can be based on a professional background (*The Visual Made Verbal*, Snyder, 2014) or they can be applied within the boundaries of a streaming platform (Netflix's guidelines, 2023). Irrespective of their origin, most of these regulations share a common notion: they encourage an objective description. Despite this

recommendation, some scholars are of the opinion that creative alternatives in AD could provide end-users with a better experience.

This paper draws on the debate surrounding objectivity in AD to explore whether the AD that can be found on different streaming platforms is equally objective or if it belongs at different points of an accessibility creative continuum. To determine the position of different AD's on this continuum, we used multimodal meaning codes to ascertain how objectivity and subjectivity manifest in a corpus of AD in English from Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+.

To properly portray our accessibility creative continuum, we will first delve into the multimodal nature of AD, including the basic theoretical aspects of multimodality and how they relate to AVT, particularly to AD. Subsequently, we will address the proposals supporting both objectivity and subjectivity in AD. Then the methodology will be explained in depth, specifically focusing on the corpus compilation stages, endorsing the descriptive essence of the study, as well as the multimodal application of meaning codes in terms of objectivity or subjectivity. Finally, the results obtained from the analysis will be displayed, followed by discussion and a series of final reflections.

2. The multimodal nature of audio description

Multimodality could be roughly defined as a discipline interested in different semiotic systems and the way they interrelate to create complex meanings. Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001) define multimodality as the use of semiotic modes and the way these modes combine in a product or event. These semiotic modes are “semiotic resources”, whose meaning is “culturally made, socially agreed and socially and culturally specific” (Kress, 2014, p. 60). It is through the interaction of modes that meaning is created (O'Halloran et al., 2015), which results in the multimodal text (Taylor, 2020). In these texts meaning is generated by resorting to the resource integration principle, the multiplying of meaning, modal density, and modal configuration.

The resource integration principle has to do with how modes relate to each other (Baldry & Thibault, 2006) or, as Kaindl (2013, p. 258) explains it, “a multimodal perspective implies the awareness that modes exist in combination”. Remael & Reviers (2019, p. 260) state that “combining different modes creates supplementary meaning, on top of the meanings conveyed by the individual modes”, that is, the meanings from one set of semiotic modes are affected by the meanings resulting from other semiotic modes, “thus multiplying the set of possible meanings that can be made” (Lemke, 1998, p. 92). Finally, Norris (2004) alludes to the concept of “modal density” as the intensity and complexity achieved by means of the interaction of different modes and, due to this density, some modes might become more relevant than others, a hierarchy called “modal configuration” (Norris, 2004). It is because of this modal configuration that Remael & Reviers (2019, p. 260) affirm that “all the modes have a role to play in the creation of meaning in a text, but their importance will vary”.

Kaindl (2013, p. 259) states that Translation Studies was a monomodal discipline that only focused on the linguistic dimension for quite some time, but it progressively acknowledged the notion of text as something that went beyond, so “multimodal texts were not dealt with in a more systematic way before equivalence postulates were given up in favor of culture-sensitive, target text-oriented approaches”. Having covered the basic theoretical aspects regarding

multimodality, we should state that the link between this discipline and AD (or more generally, AVT) depends on semiotics (Kourdis, 2022), the basis of multimodality, and multimodality is, in turn, one of the theoretical frameworks used by AVT scholars, such as Díaz-Cintas (2008), Chaume (2012), and Díaz-Cintas & Remael (2010), among many others. Remael & Reviers (2019, p. 260) are clear on this association: “multimodality is fast becoming the main conceptual framework for the study of audiovisual texts, i.e., texts that create meaning through the use of multiple semiotic modes, such as films”. When some of these scholars define essential AVT concepts, like the audiovisual text, they usually do so in semiotic and multimodal terms. For instance, Díaz-Cintas (2020) states that audiovisual texts are semiotic composites in which codes merge to create meaning.

A key figure who has explored the semiotic essence of the audiovisual text is Chaume (2004, 2012). He goes beyond the Hallidayan model based on the linguistic theory of social semiotics (O’Halloran, 2012), typically used in early 20th century multimodality, to propose an approach that draws on the Filmic Studies concept of “meaning codes”. These codes are transmitted either by the acoustic or by the visual channel and they specifically affect AVT. Codes are constituted by signs and their meaning is conventionalized by culture, which resonates with the notion of the “semiotic mode”. Among the acoustic codes, the linguistic code refers to any language information appearing in dialogues, monologues, a narrator’s voice, etc. The paralinguistic code has to do with aural nonverbal information. The musical code includes information related to the soundtrack and songs. The special effects code alludes to sound elements not uttered by characters. Finally, the sound position code deals with the origin of characters’ voices. Moving on to the visual codes, the iconographic code is composed of indexes, icons, and symbols. Conversely, the photographic code alludes to information related to perspective, light, and color. As for the mobility code, we can distinguish between proxemic signs (the characters’ distance from each other and their distance from the camera), kinesic signs (body movements and gestures), and mouth articulation signs. The shot code refers to the use of camera movements and angles, as well as the information they convey (e.g., a close-up shot to focus attention on a character’s face). The graphic code deals with written language appearing on screen, such as titles, subtitles, credits, etc. Finally, the editing code has to do with the film transition marks that organize the film into shots, sequences and so forth. Due to space restrictions, we refer to Chaume (2004, 2012) for a complete analysis of meaning codes interaction and the way they create complex meanings (in his case, in dubbing).

Having seen how multimodality constitutes the essence of AVT, we should now tackle the multimodal nature of AD. Broadly speaking, AD could be defined as an accessible AVT or MA mode primarily aimed at blind or partially sighted people. It consists of a verbal narration embedded in the available gaps left by dialogues or other relevant sounds. Vercauteren (2022, p. 78) states that AD translates “the visual and aural elements that [blind or partially sighted people] do not have access to into a verbal commentary”. Following the previously mentioned link among semiotics, multimodality, and AVT (which includes AD), AD has had a long tradition of being defined with reference to Jakobson’s (1959) notion of “intersemiotic translation”, i.e. the translation of verbal signs into a nonverbal sign system. Consequently, many scholars (e.g., Matamala, 2019; Fresno, 2022; and Taylor & Perego, 2022) have linked the concept of intersemiotic translation to AD in order to explain that AD is a translation from a nonverbal sign system (the image and, to a lesser extent, the

sound) into a verbal sign system (the AD script). Taylor (2020, p. 84) also establishes a clear connection between multimodality and AD: “multimodality can be described as a defining feature of AVT, but in the cases of SDH and AD this is all the clearer”. As a matter of fact, many scholars have already tackled AD from a multimodal perspective: Hirvonen & Tiittula (2010), Braun (2011), Álvarez de Morales (2011), the TRACCE corpus (Jiménez & Sibel, 2012), Jiménez Hurtado & Soler Gallego (2013), Chica Núñez (2015), Carlucci & Seibel (2016), Reviers (2018), Randaccio (2018), Matamala (2019), Taylor (2020), and Holsanova (2020).

Hirvonen & Tiittula (2010) consider texts to be a multimodal sign system, and they present a systematic method for analyzing multimodal texts from a translation perspective applied to AD. Braun (2011) explores how the coherence of a source multimodal text (a film) is recreated in a target multimodal text (AD). Álvarez de Morales (2011) explains the AMATRA project to present the AD script as a new type of discourse, a coherent oral text and a speech act that adjusts to Quintilian’s rhetoric. The TRACCE corpus (Jiménez & Sibel, 2012) is a multimodal corpus which contains audio described films tagged following three semiotic dimensions relevant to research in AVT and accessibility: narratology, cinematography, and grammar. Jiménez Hurtado & Soler Gallego (2013) explain how to analyze AD by using the multimodal annotation software Taggetti applied to the TRACCE corpus. Chica Núñez (2015) focuses on color and movement in AD to study multimodal perception, which the author identifies with the translation process that occurs in AD when moving from the perception of audiovisual elements by the audio describer to the production of a functionally equivalent text. Carlucci & Seibel (2016) draw on the DESAM project aiming, on one hand, to develop teaching strategies to create a multimodal educational space among Translation and Interpreting BA students, and, on the other hand, to promote the dissemination of accessible culture for people with sensory disabilities. Reviers (2018) employs a corpus-based multimodal study to describe linguistic features of AD scripts and the role they play in the communicative function. Randaccio (2018) connects the changes introduced in Museum Studies in the 1980s and 1990s with the development of AD for museums, seen here as a form of multimodal and multisensory translation. Matamala (2019) developed the VIW (Visual Into Words) project, a multimodal and multilingual AD corpus comprising the AD in English, Spanish, and Catalan of a single short film where the linguistic and film levels were studied by means of the corpus analysis tool ELAN. Taylor (2020) employs cognitive linguistics, systemic-functional linguistics, and discourse analysis for the study of museum AD, where the author goes beyond the image or word level to resort to other senses like sound, smell, and touch. Finally, Holsanova (2020) argues that scientific texts are multimodal and have many images that can be challenging for readers, so AD is proposed as a tool to help readers achieve greater multimodal literacy.

While these studies have contributed to the advancement of AD as a discipline, it is our view that further research can be developed in the line of multimodality, specifically through meaning codes, as a prominent approach to study AD. As we will argue in the following sections, the main advantage of using meaning codes is that they allow the operationalization of abstract notions, such as objectivity, which would shed some light on this long-debated topic.

3. The issue of objectivity in audio description

Research on AD emerged in the 1990s and 2000s (Greco & Jankowska, 2020; Fresno, 2022), when scholars focused on the function and status of AD in different countries (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020), the linguistic characteristics of AD (Mazur, 2020) or quality standards (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020). Since these early studies, Mazur (2020) notes, research on AD has covered many areas, such as textual approaches (discourse analysis, corpus studies, narratology, the translation of AD, etc.), reception approaches (the AUDETEL project, the ADLAB project, studies on immersion, presence, synthetic voices, etc.) and experimental approaches (such as eye-tracking, heart rate, or electrodermal activity studies).

One recurrent topic tackled from both a scholarly and a professional perspective is the issue of objectivity and the possible alternatives to it. Objectivity is a constant reference in many guidelines, and it has been the focus of many conferences (e.g., *Discussing the Limits of Objective Audio Description* held at the University of Hildesheim), special issues in international journals (e.g., *Beyond Objectivity in Audio Description* published by the *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*), and many scholarly papers (Kruger, 2010; Fryer & Freeman, 2012; Jankowska, 2015; Walczak, 2017; Bardini, 2020; and Soler Gallego & Luque Colmenero, 2023). The problematic area surrounding this debate is that two opposing views clash when it comes to regarding objectivity in AD as a desirable strategy. On the one hand, the professional AD guidelines used by many countries and streaming platforms have traditionally preferred objective descriptions (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022). On the other hand, some AVT and MA scholars have pointed out the advantages of more creative alternatives. We are aware that ‘creative’ might be a problematic label, but these alternatives are regarded here as a deviation from the objectivity suggestion that fits into creative media accessibility, that is those practices “that not only attempt to provide access for the users of a film or a play, but also seek to become an artistic contribution in their own right and to enhance user experience in a creative or imaginative way” (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022, p. 84). As we will observe, some authors have called their proposals “interpretative”, “creative”, or “subjective”, among others, but our view is that the term “creative” can encapsulate all of them.

As far as the traditional or professional approach is concerned, we find this perspective in national AD guidelines, such as the ones from Spain, France, the US, and the UK. The Spanish *UNE 153020* norm advises not to describe what is easily extracted from the work nor any subjective points of view (AENOR, 2005). The French *La Charte de l’audiodescription* suggests that description must be done in an objective way so as not to impose your own feelings, but to provoke them, and not to use subjective adjectives except when the characteristic is evident (Morisset & Gonant, 2008). In the UK, the ITC Guidance states that “a few well-chosen words can enhance a scene considerably, but they must not reflect the personal view of the describer” (ITC, 2000, p. 20), whereas Ofcom’s *Guidelines on the Provision of Television Access Services* include “what not to describe: the description should only provide information about what can be seen on the screen” and “adverbs are a useful shorthand to describing emotions and actions but should not be subjective” (Ofcom, 2024, pp. 7–8). In the US, the *Standards for Audio Description and Code of Professional Conduct for Describers* (Audio Description Coalition, 2009, p. 2) recommend the following: “describe objectively. Allow listeners to form their own opinions and draw their own conclusions. Don’t editorialize,

interpret, explain, analyze or ‘help’ listeners in any other way”. Similarly, the *American Audio Description Standards* (California Audio Describers Alliance, 2009, p. 9) are clear about this issue: “the best audio describers objectively recount the visual aspects of an image. Subjective or qualitative judgments or comment get in the way—they constitute an interpretation on the part of the describer and are unnecessary and unwanted”. We could also include Joel Snyder’s *The Visual Made Verbal*, where he asserts: “the best audio describer is sometimes referred to as a verbal camera lens, objectively recounting visual aspects of an event”; “it’s critical to maintain that sense of objectivity”; “the oft-referenced first rule of description is to describe what you see” (Snyder, 2014, pp. 163–164). Finally, another case of objectivity support is Netflix, whose guidelines state: “Description should be factual” and “description should not be opinionated” (Netflix, 2023, pp. 1–2).

For some scholars, objectivity in AD is controversial, so there have been some attempts to explore the benefits of more creative alternatives. For instance, Jankowska states that “a hundred per cent objectivity is impossible, and AD is always subjective, since it is a choice made by a particular audio describer” (2015, p. 22). ADLAB (Remael et al., 2014, p. 8) asserts that “AD too is always subjective to some extent since it is based on the interpretation of the audio describer”. In the same vein, Mazur (2020, p. 235) explains that “although AD guidelines generally advise against using subjective judgment in description, in some cases an objective description may be difficult”. In our view, this might be triggered by the intersemiotic transfer in AD, since it implies a certain textual subjectivity regarding what to include in the script, which in turn might be different from a personal subjectivity as to how to describe those elements. This is precisely the stance developed in ADLAB (Remael et al., 2014), where a difference is made between personal interpretation (subjectivity) and text-based interpretation (equated there to objectivity). Our perspective is that ADLAB’s text-based interpretation is not a sign of objectivity, but it rather proves that complete objectivity is never possible in AD because of its intersemiotic nature.

Kruger (2010) introduced the notion of the “descriptive-narrative continuum”, where he proposes three types of AD: an explicitly descriptive AD that focuses on the visual aspects to be described that would be objective, an AD with some narrative markers and subjective interpretation located somewhere in the middle of the continuum, and finally an audio narration that favors a coherent narration, to the detriment of what can be seen on the screen. Ramos Caro (2013) supports the idea that an objective AD would promote comprehension, whereas a subjective AD would improve the filmic experience as well. Another important contribution is Szarkowska’s (2013) proposal of auteur description, which includes the director’s creative vision in the AD by means of vivid and emotional language, additional information about the characters, their emotions, as well as actions and settings not necessarily visible on screen. Jankowska (2015) alludes to a creative audio description that includes “color” or vivid language, metaphors, emotions, and film language. Walczak (2017) also proposes a creative description, which uses mise-en-shot elements as well as intensified, vivid, and emotional vocabulary. ADLAB (Remael et al., 2014) affirms that AD does not only have a denotational function but also an expressive, symbolic, and aesthetic one, which conveys the idea that AD serves a bigger purpose than the mere transmission of objective information.

Furthermore, in the tradition of researching alternatives to objectivity, some scholars have resorted to the concept of “style”, like Fryer & Freeman (2012), who propose a “cinematic AD” style that includes filmic language.

Bardini (2020) distinguishes three AD styles: conventional, cinematographic, and narrative. Conventional AD is a denotational and objective description of what is on screen, cinematographic AD is interpretative and uses and interprets filmic terms, whereas narrative AD interprets information through vivid verbal elements that create a fluid and coherent narration. Holsanova (2016) mentions a descriptive AD style that focuses on spatial and visual details, and a narrative style that covers temporal and dynamic elements. Soler Gallego & Luque Colmenero (2023, p. 5) study AD for museums and compare a standard style to minority styles, such as the gist style, which is defined as “an enunciation of a limited number of the visual components that make up the work, with little or no conceptual connection between them, often adding voice to complement language in creative ways”. Finally, Rizzo & Spinzi (2023) study creativity as a multidimensional tool in AD to provide end-users with participatory and engaging forms of access, and to do so they investigated whether and how creativity is used to transmit culture-specific references in what they call “authorial (audio) description” (p. 420).

Therefore, there seem to be two different perspectives regarding objectivity in AD. Firstly, we can identify a professional or traditional perspective supported by most guidelines, where objectivity is encouraged. Conversely, an academic perspective rejects the idea of complete objectivity being possible in AD and encourages more creative alternatives. This opposition might seem simplistic, since many examples of creative media accessibility are produced by artists “who adopt radically subjective stances to explore the poetic and generative potential of MA and its ability to become a window into the lived experience of disability” (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022, p. 87). Moreover, some guidelines, such as ADLAB, embrace certain interpretative elements as well. However, objectivity is still an essential element in most AD guidelines used by broadcasters (Romero-Fresco & Chaume, 2022) and creative alternatives to objectivity have been a prolific topic among MA scholars, so despite some exceptions, these two opposing perspectives persist. Nevertheless, this situation might be changing, since Ofcom launched a consultation in July 2023 resulting in new guidelines published in 2024 that include a subjective style. Similarly, the Spanish *UNE* norm is currently being updated and modifications related to objectivity could be endorsed. Be that as it may, in this paper completely objective or subjective AD are considered theoretical abstractions, two poles of an accessibility creative continuum, and any given AD would fall somewhere along the continuum depending on its level of creativity.

4. Methodology

This paper focuses on whether the AD from different streaming platforms is equally objective or if it can be located at different points on an accessibility creative continuum with pure objectivity at one end and pure subjectivity at the other end. To determine the position of every AD along the continuum, we applied a multimodal analysis based on meaning codes to ascertain how objectivity and subjectivity interact in eight AD scripts in English from Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+. We used a descriptive methodology based on an AD corpus compiled as a result of three levels of selection criteria following Gutiérrez Lanza (2007) and De Higes Andino (2014). The first level led to Corpus 0 (catalogue), which is a material selection according to some textual, linguistic, and temporal limits. In our case, it

consisted of a classification of the most appropriate audiovisual material. The second level drew on Corpus 0 to create Corpus 1 (primary corpus), which is a database composed of the most convenient series from Corpus 0. After that, we used Corpus 1 to create Corpus 2 (analysis corpus), which derives from a series of filters to help us decide which fragments to analyze. Finally, we applied a multimodal analysis based on meaning codes so that the interrelation between objectivity and subjectivity could be evaluated on the platforms.

4.1. Corpus 0

This paper has a descriptive nature that follows some of the typical traits of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), which, unlike prescriptive stances, “broke with normative approaches of *ought* and *ought not* and proposed an approach focused on *is* and *is not*” (Vandaele, 2021, p. 180). One of those traits is the use of a corpus to obtain an empirical basis when searching for regularities in translations or languages (Zanettin, 2012), since it allows more faithful generalizations (Pavesi, 2019). To properly identify the regularities of translations (objectivity or subjectivity in the AD from streaming platforms) and languages (English), a descriptive analysis was performed on a corpus resulting from three levels of selection criteria. Starting from the amount of available audiovisual material with AD, the most appropriate products were chosen according to a first level composed of availability, production, linguistic, and temporal filters.

As far as the availability filter is concerned, any researcher compiling an AD corpus requires access to a considerable amount of audio described material for as long as possible to analyze it. Consequently, streaming platforms were considered the best option, particularly four of the best-known sites: Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+. With these platforms as our audiovisual sources, we chose series as the type of audiovisual production that would provide us with the largest amount of AD material considering the number of episodes that an average series might have per season as well as their average duration. As previously stated, our aim is to study AD in English; therefore, we included only those series that offered at least AD in that language. Finally, given the dynamism of streaming platforms’ catalogues, a temporal criterion was established to restrict the selection to series with at least one season released between 2021 and 2023, the most up-to-date possibility when this study was conducted. Having applied these four filters, we created Corpus 0 comprising Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+ series from 2021-2023 with English AD.

4.2. Corpus 1

Even though we had narrowed down the possible choices, there was still too much material to analyze, so we used Corpus 0 to create a database called “Corpus 1” to deal with a feasible number of series, which resulted from three selection criteria: date, number of series, and genre. With the temporal filter, there were series from 2021-2023 that also had previous seasons, so Corpus 1 was restricted to those seasons released between 2021 and 2023. Moreover, it seemed more appropriate to concentrate on a single genre, but sites like IMDb group audiovisual products under more than one label, therefore the two most common genres from Corpus 0 were preferred: drama and thriller. Finally, since four platforms had been chosen, it was considered sufficient to choose two series from every platform. By applying these three criteria to Corpus 0, we obtained Corpus 1, which contained eight drama and thriller series with seasons released between 2021 and 2023: *Sky Rojo* (Pina & Martínez Lobato, 2021–

2023) and *Elite* (Montero & Madrona, 2018–2023) from Netflix, *The Wheel of Time* (Judkins, 2021) and *The Rings of Power* (McKay & Payne, 2022) from Amazon Prime Video, *The Clearing* (Cameron & McCredie, 2023) and *Great Expectations* (Knight, 2023) from Disney+, and *Truth be Told* (Tramble, 2019–2023) and *Lisey's Story* (Larrain, 2021) from Apple TV+.

4.3. Corpus 2

Even after having chosen the most suitable series, it was fundamental to establish which episodes and scenes to consider for analysis, i.e. Corpus 2. The first episode from each most recent season was regarded as the best option. If there are previous seasons, the first episodes usually cover important past events that need to be audio described. Conversely, if a series starts from scratch, the first episode introduces key aspects, such as the main characters, settings, plot elements, etc. After that, we followed Remael & Vercauteren's (2007) view that the first ten minutes of a film determine the audience's expectations of what the remainder of the film will be. In this case, the span of time was reduced to five minutes due to the shorter length of episodes compared to films.

5. Multimodal analysis

Once the eight fragments were selected, we transcribed them using Transkriptor and then a thorough revision was carried out to ensure proper quality standards. This AD transcription was then analyzed multimodally following a qualitative content analysis (QCA) applied to Chaume's (2004) proposed meaning codes. According to Schreier (2012), QCA describes the meaning of qualitative material by classifying instances of certain categories in that material. These categories are labelled by means of codes, which in the QCA tradition means words or short phrases that we associate as attributes of the phenomenon that we are studying. In QCA, codes depend on a codebook, which is "a set of codes, definitions, and examples used as a guide to help analyze interview data [...] they provide a formalized operationalization of the codes" (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138). Therefore, meaning codes were adapted to the characteristics of AD and the resulting combination constituted the codebook for the analysis, i.e. a table with an explanation of how each code manifests in AD and some examples. Subsequently, each code was represented in the script by means of a symbol consisting of its first letter(s), e.g. (MB) would stand for a sign from the mobility code. The eight transcriptions were analyzed by cataloguing every sign (usually at the clause level) as an instance belonging to one of the eleven meaning codes. The next step was deciding whether the instances were objective or subjective, so we created a series of objectivity and subjectivity parameters drawing on the guidelines and researchers' proposals from Section 3. It is by this final stage that objectivity and subjectivity are operationalized in AD. As Saldanha and O'Brien (2013) summarize, operationalizing means turning an abstract theory (objectivity and subjectivity in this case) into a measurable entity (how often they appear in the scripts).

Thus, a sign was considered to be objectively rendered when there was no subjective interpretation or point of view (AENOR, 2005; Morisset & Gonant, 2008; Netflix, 2023; *ITC Guidance*, 2000; California Audio Describers Alliance, 2009; Audio Description Coalition, 2009), no references to the describer's feelings (Morisset & Gonant, 2008), when it just included what could be seen on screen (*Ofcom*, 2024; Snyder, 2014; Bardini, 2020), and when it used no subjective adjectives (*Ofcom*, 2024), just factual descriptions (Netflix,

2023). Conversely, a sign was determined to be subjectively rendered when there was any sort of interpretation (Kruger, 2010; Bardini, 2020), if it contained emotional language, additional information about actions or settings (Szarkowska, 2013), or vivid language (Jankowska, 2015; Walczak, 2017; Bardini, 2020), as well as when it resorted to metaphors (Jankowska, 2015), contained references to emotions (Jankowska, 2015; Walczak, 2017), or to personal or text-based interpretation (Remael et al., 2014), or included film terminology (Fryer & Freeman, 2012; Jankowska, 2015; Walczak, 2017; Bardini, 2020). We are aware that some of these subjective parameters might be said to belong to a text-based interpretation that is inherent to the AD’s intersemiotic transfer rather than an example of pure personal interpretation. In our view, both are stances of different degrees of a creative diversion from the need to be objective, as promoted by guidelines, that is why both types of interpretation are subjectivity parameters. Finally, to make the objective-subjective difference more visual in the scripts, every code symbol was followed by an “O” or “S”, which stand for “objective” or “subjective”, respectively. This process eventually gave rise to the fully fledged analysis, an example of which is presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1: Excerpt of the AD analysis from *The Rings of Power*

<i>The Rings of Power</i> (E1S1 – “A Shadow of the Past”)
<p>Now (ED_O), in a sunlit pastoral woodland (ED_S).</p> <p>GALADRIEL: Nothing is evil in the beginning.</p> <p>Pointed-ear children (I_O) play a game (MB_O), one boy wearing a blindfold (I_O).</p> <p>GALADRIEL: And there was a time when the world was so young, there had not yet been a sunrise. But even then, there was light.</p> <p>Sitting apart from the others (MB_O), a girl murmurs to herself (MB_O) as she carefully folds a paper (MB_S).</p> <p>Dressed in flowing white garments (I_S), the other children race (MB_O) barefoot (I_O) along a stream (ED_O). They spy on the girl folding the paper (MB_O).</p> <p>Sporting silvery blonde hair (I_S), she sits on a rock with her back turned (MB_O).</p> <p>A curly-haired boy addresses her (L_O).</p>

Table 1 shows a small fragment from the AD analysis corresponding to the Amazon Prime Video series *The Rings of Power*. This excerpt conveys the idea of a fantastic and idyllic past where, as Galadriel says, the world was young and there was no evil. This idealization is supported by the interaction of signs belonging to different codes: the editing code (“in a sunlit pastoral woodland”), the iconographic code (“pointed-ear children”, “a blindfold”, “flowing white garment”, or “barefoot”), and the mobility code (“play a game”), which accounts for the modal density achieved to depict a reality based on purity and innocence. Moving on to objectivity and subjectivity, we note that “now” is tagged as an objective editing sign, since it conveys a temporal shift from a past scene to a present one, and it is done with no interpretation whatsoever nor any subjective usage of information. Conversely, “in a sunlit pastoral woodland” is treated as a subjective sign from the editing code, since it informs about a change of place, but it is done using very precise vocabulary and by interpreting what this place evokes, a pastoral atmosphere, rather than a description of what is on screen (the trees, for example). We might argue that “pastoral” could be an example of text-based interpretation inherent to the intersemiotic transfer or an example of personal interpretation based on pure subjectivity, but both options are considered parameters of subjectivity that entail a creative diversion from the objectivity required in most guidelines. “Pointed-ear children” is an

objective iconographic sign that informs the audience about a very symbolic physical trait, as elves have pointed ears in most fantasy universes. This reference is objective because the describer draws attention to what can be seen with no interpretation behind it, unlike “elf-like ears”, which would have been the subjective counterpart. Moving on further in the script, “a girl murmurs to herself” might seem confusing, but considering the original text (the image and audio), we see a girl moving her lips, but no sound comes out, so this sign was analyzed as an objective instance from the mobility code. One last example from this fragment is “as she carefully folds a paper”, which interprets (whether from a personal or text-based point of view) the way (“carefully”) this character performs a movement, so it is a subjective sign from the mobility code.

Table 2. Excerpt of the AD analysis from *The Clearing*

<i>The Clearing</i> (E1S1 – “The Season of Unfoldment”)
<p>A disclaimer: “While inspired by actual events, this series is a work of fiction.” (G_S)</p> <p>A young woman stands shoulder deep (MB_O) in a misty lake (ED_O), staring at a secluded diving platform (MB_S) in the center of the water (ED_O). She dives (MB_O), causing ripples on the smooth surface (MB_S).</p> <p>Heavy black school shoes (I_S) plod down (MB_O) a road of compacted dirt and rock (ED_S).</p> <p>A young girl with brown curly pigtails (I_S) treks down the hilly rural road (MB_S) in a maroon school dress, tightly clutching the straps of her backpack (I_S) as she passes fields and gum trees (MB_S).</p> <p>She stops to observe (MB_O) an older girl with bleached blonde hair (I_S) crouched by the base of a gnarled tree (ED_O) in a pristine white shirt and navy tie and skirt (I_S).</p> <p>GIRL 1: What are you doing?</p> <p>GIRL 2: Carving my name.</p>

Table 2 displays another fragment of an AD analysis, this time from the Disney+ series *The Clearing*. If we start at the very beginning, “a disclaimer: ‘while inspired by [...]’” is tagged as a subjective sign belonging to the graphic code because although the exact contents of the text are audio subtitled, “a disclaimer” is an unnecessary interpretation of the function that this text has. “A young woman stands shoulder deep” is an objective sign from the mobility code because it refers to the movement (or lack of movement in this case) of a character and no interpretation, use of metaphors, filmic language or vivid description are found. “In a misty lake” alludes to a place change in the scene and it is done by describing what the screen depicts (a lake and some mist), so it is an objective sign from the editing code. One last example that is particularly interesting to analyze is “staring at a secluded diving platform”, since most references to sight have been considered movement because they somehow refer to characters’ actual facial expression, which is included within the mobility category, and the fact that the describer characterized the diving platform as “secluded” is a sign of interpretation.

6. Results

Although our multimodal analysis was qualitative, a quantitative reading of the results was also possible to measure the frequency of objectivity and subjectivity on the selected streaming platforms. Thus, as Figure 1 shows, our results indicate that out of all the signs (688) analyzed on the streaming platform

AD corpus, 519 signs were described objectively (75.44%), whereas 169 signs had a subjective description (24.56%).

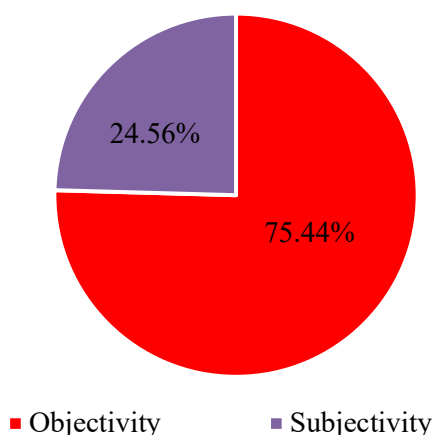


Figure 1. Objectivity and Subjectivity Proportion on the Streaming Platforms' AD

Moving away from the general data obtained from the corpus, we can highlight the interrelation of objectivity and subjectivity on each streaming platform. Thus, according to our data, the series from Netflix (Figure 2) had 209 signs analyzed, 151 of which were described objectively (72.25%), whereas 58 signs were subjective (27.75%). As far as Amazon Prime Video (Figure 3) is concerned, out of 138 signs analyzed, 101 signs (73.19%) had an objective description, while 37 signs (26.81%) were described subjectively. In the case of Disney+ (Figure 4), we detected 142 signs, 97 of which were objective (68.31%) and 45 were subjective (31.69%). Finally, regarding Apple TV+ (Figure 5), out of 199 signs, 170 were described objectively (85.43%), whereas the remaining 29 signs had a subjective rendition (14.57%).

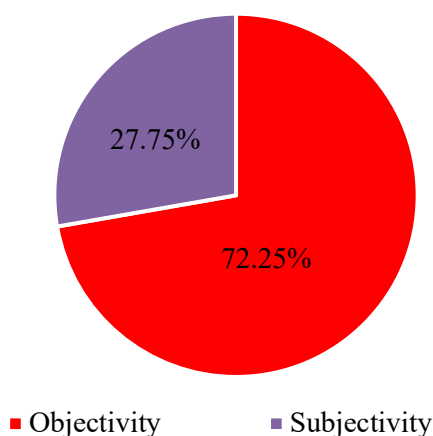


Figure 2. Objectivity and Subjectivity Proportion on Netflix

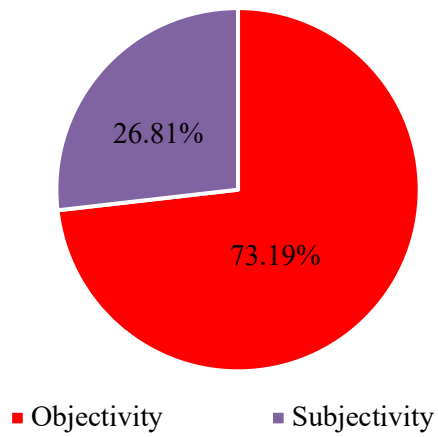


Figure 3. Objectivity and Subjectivity Proportion on Amazon Prime Video

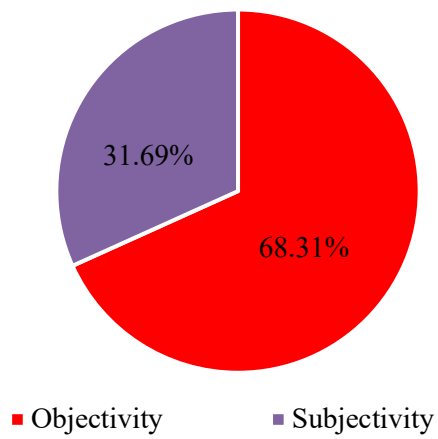


Figure 4. Objectivity and Subjectivity Proportion on Disney+

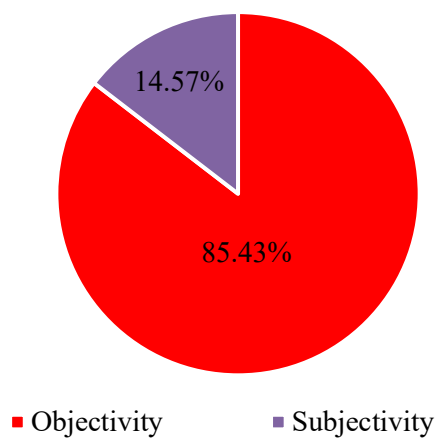


Figure 5. Objectivity and Subjectivity Proportion on Apple TV+

Finally, the results from the four platforms together allow us to draw the accessibility creative continuum depicted in Figure 6. On this continuum, a completely red bar would indicate that the AD from this platform is located at the purely objective pole, whereas a completely blue bar would point to AD from this platform belonging at the completely subjective end of the continuum.

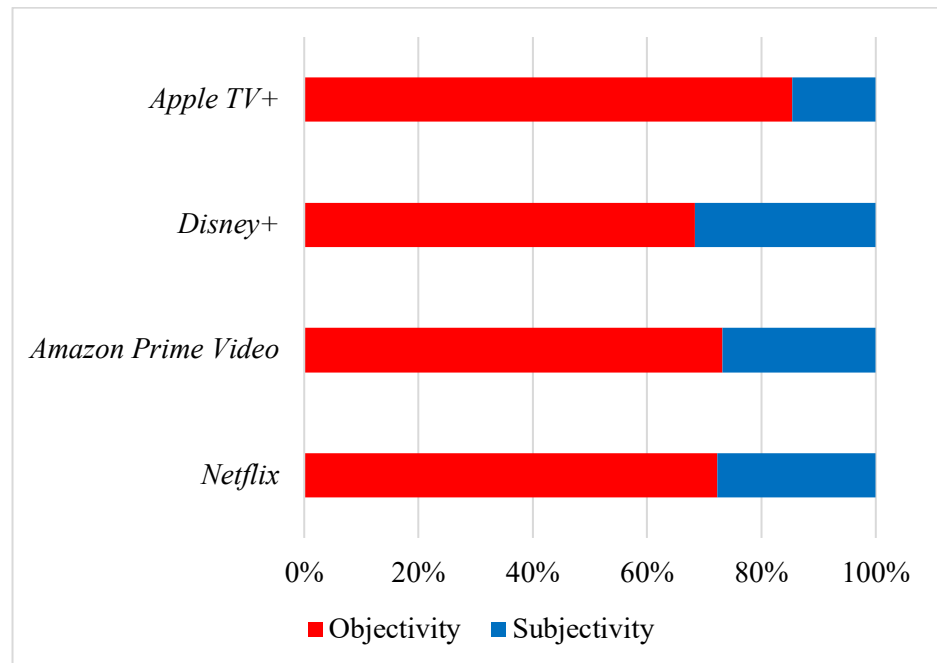


Figure 6. Accessibility Creative Continuum on Streaming Platforms

7. Discussion and conclusions

The findings of the multimodal analysis of our corpus suggest that objectivity and subjectivity manifest in every AD script from these four streaming platforms, although the platforms vary in terms of degree of creativity.

Considering the constant recommendation that can be found in most guidelines to describe objectively, it seems surprising that almost 25% of the information tends to disregard that instruction and adopt a more creative approach. However, this very reason might be behind the fact that approximately 75% of the AD is still objective, which is a considerable amount of information within the script. In other words, the influence that guidelines exert on the way describers envisage the need to be objective is still paramount.

Moreover, this tendency towards objectivity with a significant presence of subjectivity seems to persist on the four platforms. Objectivity prevails in all cases: 72.25% on Netflix, 73.19% on Amazon Prime Video, 68.31% on Disney+, and 85.43% on Apple TV+. More creative, subjective, narrative, or interpretative options comprise a smaller yet consistent proportion of the script: 27.75% on Netflix, 26.81% on Amazon Prime Video, 31.69% on Disney+, and 14.57% on Apple TV+.

In light of these results, we can argue that, although objectivity and subjectivity interact on every platform, they do so in dissimilar proportions, so an accessibility creative continuum can be drawn, where some examples tend to be more creative, but others tend to display a more traditional way of describing. Hence, AD from Apple TV+ seems to be closer to the purely

objective pole of the continuum, whereas Disney+ is closer to the subjective end of the continuum. On the other hand, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video might be in a slightly more central position in terms of creativity. In other words, the AD from Apple TV+ is the most conservative in our corpus and the AD from Disney+ is the most creative.

In conclusion, while guidelines constantly recommend objective descriptions, we observe a substantial amount of subjective information that is already present on every platform analyzed. Moreover, the AD from these platforms can be located at different points along an accessibility creative continuum, as these scripts display different degrees of creativity. Be that as it may, these results should be considered a first step towards a full overview of creativity on platforms, where studies with larger corpora, more series and other languages should be implemented.

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