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MUSEUM AD: INTERPRETATIVE OR UN-INTERPRETATIVE AUDIO DESCRIPTION?

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Abstract

Museum audio description (AD) has emerged as a research topic in Translation Studies only in recent years, especially since AD started to move from being a service for the visually impaired to become a paradigm in Translation Studies. Many AD guidelines have been produced over the years to promote accessibility and support best practices for the visually impaired. From a comparison of AD guidelines available in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, France, Greece and the United States in 2010, it is clear that film and television AD still have priority over museum AD and that only some general features of museum AD are outlined. In this paper I will first introduce museum AD as described in these guidelines and try to show the main features of museum AD in relation to the question of objectivity and interpretation in the major studies available. I will also illustrate the theoretical background that explains how interpretation has become a major issue of museum AD and how this issue of interpretation, which has also engaged theorists in Translation Studies, must be gauged against the wider backdrop of museums as multimodal and multi-sensory spaces. Finally, I will show how cohesion, coherence and the discourse-based notions of microstructures and macrostructures are relevant for a comparison between an early un-interpretative example of museum AD and its later interpretative version.

1. Introduction

Museum audio description (AD) has emerged as a research topic in Translation Studies only in recent years. Over the last thirty years AD "[has begun] to come of age" (Reviers 2016: 232), especially since AD started to move from being a service for the needs of the visually impaired and has become "a modality in the field of Translation Studies" (Matamala and Orero 2017: 7). Increasingly recognized as part of audiovisual translation (AVT), AD has been defined by Braun (2007: 2) as "intersemiotic, intermodal or crossmodal translation or mediation" and by Gambier (2004: 3) as "intersemiotic

translation with an inverse definition – an interpretation of non-verbal signs system by means of verbal signs".

Museum AD, a verbal description that makes the visual elements of museum content accessible to the visually impaired, is a form of AD that has benefited from the social and cultural changes that museums started to experience from the late 1970s onwards (Vergo 1989; Hooper-Greenhill 1989; Andersen 1997; Dodd and Sandell 1998). These changes made accessibility a key notion, and they have been facilitated by the development of legislation in various countries over the last thirty years, from, for example, the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA 1995) in the United Kingdom and the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA 1990), to *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), which came into force in 2008. Pioneering studies saw AD as a powerful means against exclusion and marginalization in the information society. These studies started from the premise that, in our contemporary technological society, access is crucial for participation in the benefits of globalization, for example, in relation to economic and cultural growth. Exclusion from information is "the result of age (the fast-growing elderly population in Europe), (remote) geographic location, and/or lack of funds and financial means" (Díaz-Cintas, Orero and Remael 2007: 12). Access and accessibility formerly meant overcoming physical and sensorial barriers for the disabled, but it has now become a discipline *per se* – encompassing assistive technology, Universal Design, tourism management and services, and new media technology – with the paramount purpose of fighting the economic inequalities and illiteracy that undermine the realization of democracy in many countries. Accessibility has become a 'proactive principle' promoting "human rights as a whole for all", whose benefits extend "to all citizens, not only to those with disabilities" (Greco 2016: 27).

Many AD guidelines have been produced over the years to promote accessibility and support best practices for the visually impaired. From a comparison of some AD guidelines available in the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, France, Greece and the United States in 2010 (Rai, Greening and Petré 2010), it emerges that film and television AD still have priority over museum AD and that only the general features of this type of AD are outlined. In this paper I will first introduce museum AD as generally described in the above-mentioned AD guidelines and try to show the main features of museum AD in relation to objectivity and interpretation in the major studies available. I will also illustrate the theoretical background that has contributed to the development of interpretation as a major feature of museum AD and how this issue of interpretation, which has also engaged theorists in Translation Studies, must be gauged against the wider backdrop of museum as multimodal and multi-sensory space. Finally, I will show how cohesion, coherence and the discourse-based notions of microstructures and macrostructures enhanced an interpretative museum AD, entitled 'Ramparts' by the British painter Ben Nicholson, with respect to its previous un-interpretative version. These two versions feature in *Talking Images: Museums, galleries and heritage sites: improving access for blind and partially sighted people*, a project developed in collaboration with Vocaleyes and the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) between 2001 and 2003.

2. Museum AD in some recent AD guidelines

A comparison conducted by the RNIB of existing guidelines in Spain, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Greece and the United States in 2010 in *A Comparative Study of Audio Description Guidelines Prevalent in Different Countries*, illustrates in some detail what constitutes the main features of museum AD (Rai *et al*. 2010: 1-112). For example, the Spanish guidelines, published by AENOR and entitled "Norma UNE: 153020. Audiodescripción para personas con discapacidad visual. Requisitos para la audiodescripción y elaboración de audioguías", discusses museum AD in relation to adapted audio guides, and shows not only how museum objects can be made accessible but also outlines how the museum space must be described ("Location of the entrance, location of the exit, route for movement throughout the entire space which can be visited, location of useful services, such as bathrooms, cafés, shops, location of accessible materials, location of layout maps and other information published in relief or touch-significant, location of culture, location of each room"). A "proper terminology" (*ibid*.: 19) must be used for the description of the objects: a) if objects can be touched, their description must be "simple and organised" (*ibid*.) so that the visually impaired visitors can understand the most significant aspects of the objects; b) if objects cannot be touched, as in paintings, their description must give all significant information "avoiding any personal interpretations" (*ibid*.: 20). The American and British guidelines adapt indications from various sources and recommend "to describe what you see", to be specific, that "less is more" (Snyder 2007: 100), "to be clear" (ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description, UK) and "describe when necessary, but do not necessarily describe" (Clark 2001). Other well-known American guidelines are *The Art Beyond Sight's Guidelines for Verbal Description* (Salzhauer *et al*. 1980). They recommend giving standard information on a label (the name of the artist, nationality, title of the artwork, date, dimensions or scale of the work, media and technique), to promote museum tours and create audio guides with "extensive verbal description of artworks". They also suggest that descriptions give information on the subject, form and colour of the artwork; orient the visually impaired person with directions; move from the general to the specific; explain art conventions; indicate where the curators have installed a work; refer to other senses as analogues for vision; explain concepts with analogies; encourage understanding through re-enactment; incorporate sounds in a creative way and allow people to touch the works of art (*ibid*.). Like the Spanish guidelines, the American Audio Description International Guidelines also state that this type of AD must be "a coherent description [that] should provide visual information in a sequence" (Rai *et al*. 2010: 68), so that the visually impaired "may assemble, piece by piece, an image of a highly complex work" (*ibid*.) and that "clear and precise language is crucial to any good description" (*ibid*.: 100).

From the above-mentioned guidelines, a general advocacy of objective description of the artwork seems to prevail in museum AD. However, as will be discussed in the following section, the notion of un-interpretative description in museum AD has been questioned in several studies on museum AD. Hycks (2006), Udo and Fels (2009), Mazur and Chmiel (2012) were among the first to suggest that, in theatre and film AD, more creative and subjective ADs should be beneficial for the visually impaired. Nevertheless, it has been noted that subjectivity is a controversial aspect of AD because of the

contradiction between some guidelines that favour a neutral or an objective approach (ADC 2008; AENOR 2005; ITC 2000; Salzhauer *et al.*1980; Snyder 2010) and the advantages that more subjective descriptions seem to have for the visually impaired, as in RNIB and Vocaleyes (2003) (Gallego and Colmenero 2018: 141; Gallego 2019: 709) and in the ADLAB guidelines (Ramael, Reviers and Vercauteren 2015). It has also been suggested that museum AD must be analysed against the wider museum experience (Eardley *et al.* 2017; Hutchinson and Eardley 2019; Hutchinson and Eardley 2020). Museum AD, therefore, has received growing attention from diverse methodological perspectives in very recent times (Neves 2016; Gallego 2018; Randaccio 2017; Randaccio 2018; Spinzi 2019; Perego 2019; Taylor and Perego 2020; Colmenero and Gallego 2020).

3. Features of museum AD as interpretation

De Coster and Mülheis (2007) and Neves (2012, 2015) are among those who favour interpretation in museum AD. De Coster and Mülheis (*ibid.*) see the language of museum AD as interpretative and describe the extent to which the verbal can render the visual and when ambiguity in the visual has to be represented through other senses. They start from the assumption that every work of art deals with signs, which can be either clear or ambivalent. Clear signs are those that are perfectly translatable into words. Ambivalent signs, instead, have more layers of meaning and, although they can still be put into words, they are difficult to translate, especially if the visual effects are difficult to represent through other senses. De Coster and Mülheis (*ibid.*) give Gombrich's head as a well-known example of an ambiguous sign, which might represent the head of a duck or a rabbit, thus containing two different images within one structure. This image is a visual phenomenon with strong intensity but, if it cannot be translated into another sensual phenomenon (touch or hearing), its ambiguity remains purely visual. De Coster and Mülheis (*ibid.*) make a distinction between translatable and untranslatable visual impressions and give the following guideline: "every sign or meaning of an object or a work of art that can be clearly identified can be translated into words, but one can give an idea of visual ambiguity only if a comparable ambiguity exists in another sensorial field (touch, hearing)" (*ibid.*: 193). As already stated, they believe that this ambiguity can still be expressed in words: museum AD thus becomes interpretative as it "encourages reflection between visual and verbal signs, and the ratio between sensory and semiotic modes" (*ibid.*). Neves (2015) also reflects on the ambiguity of museum AD. In analysing descriptive guides (DGs), Neves (*ibid.*: 69) states that

> there is no 'original text' to go by because the descriptive guide is the original text. There is however an original non-verbal text that will live as a co-text […] and that will determine the nature and structure of the descriptive guide. Thus, with descriptive guide relevance is seen in terms of a variety of open co-texts that require contextualization and interpretation and, above all, selection.

Therefore, there is less concern with 'when to say it' and a greater emphasis on 'how' and 'what' to say 'about what' (*ibid.*). For Neves, unlike AD for film and theatre where visually impaired people can still integrate information coming from film and stage aurally, the language of museum AD has to resort to a higher level of interpretation:

Neves goes further to promote a 'multi-sensory approach' to AD. She names some museums that successfully incorporate this multi-sensory communication, like the Museo Anteros in Bologna and the Museo Tiflologico in Madrid, but asserts that the greatest problem to achieve successful artistic communication is to overcome visual ambiguity in paintings, and that this can be reached through what she calls 'soundpainting' which she describes as follows (Neves 2012: 290):

> Carefully chosen words and a careful direction of the voice talent to guarantee adequate tone of voice, rhythm and speech modulation can all work together with specific sound effects and music to provide the 'story(ies)' and emotions that a particular piece of art may offer.

It is interesting that the sensorial ambiguity of museum AD has been compared to soundpainting in a similar way to which the word/image relationship in AD was to ekphrasis (Pujol and Orero 2007: 49). Soundpainting and ekphrasis, used in other disciplines, such as music, literature, and the plastic arts, bear witness to the complexity of sensorial interpretation in museum AD.

4. The theoretical background of museum AD: soundpainting and ekphrasis

Neves (2012) and Pujol and Orero (2007) tackle the issue of sensorial and visual ambiguity in museum AD. Neves is aware that ambiguity and subjectivity in film ADs must be avoided and that description should be precise and concise. However, "when addressing a work of art, in which creativity and subjectivity are central, audio description necessarily needs to be addressed in a different manner" (Neves 2012: 289). Although there are clear differences between the two, Neves sees museum AD as similar to soundpainting in terms of its capacity to make audio and visual elements part of the creative process.

The process of soundpainting has been described by its creator, the composer Walter Thompson (cited in Minors 2012: 87), as:

> a multidisciplinary live composing sign language. It comprises more than 1200 gestures that are signed by the live composer – known as the Soundpainter. It indicates specific material and chance material to be performed. The Soundpainter, standing in front of the group (usually), signs a phrase to the group [and] then composes with the responses.

In this manner, a performance is constructed by the continuous succession of gestures and responses between the soundpainter and performing group. The soundpainter acts as a catalyst for creation in a process that is not restricted to representation, prior structural model or formal requirement. The musicians and dancers involved are directed through various gesture types in an interactive and collaborative manner and, in some performances, the audience is part of the performance. Minors (*ibid*.) notes that "the active combination of different media is central to this process. At the heart of Soundpainting lies a hypothesis that performers across disciplines are able to, and should, create a dialogue". She adds that the term soundpainting includes the metaphorical basis of the gestures as well as the mapping between the audio and visual ele-

ments as integral to this creative process: "a gesture is a silent movement, which bears meaning, but it is only realized when someone responds by interpreting it in sound and/or movement" (*ibid.*: 89).

Pujol and Orero (2007: 49), instead, see an analogy between AD and ekphrasis, "a literary figure that provides the graphic and often dramatic description of a painting, a relief or other work of art". Ekphrasis was originally used as a rhetorical device in epic poems in Ancient Greece to bring the experience of an object to listeners through detailed descriptive writing. If we consider that epic poems were initially handed down orally before they were written down, "the analysis between ekphrasis and audio description is even stronger" (*ibid.*). Pujol and Orero cite many well-known examples of ekphrasis in literary and artistic studies, such as the description of Achille's shield in the *Iliad* and the depiction of the urn in Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819). The two scholars then highlight what ekphrasis has in common with AD. In their opinion (Pujol and Orero 2007: 54), there is the "narrative potential of images" that can also be found in "still images that sometimes tell complex narration" (*ibid.*). They also note that ekphrasis is composed of elements that can be considered objective and elements that can be considered subjective and they conclude (*ibid.*): "Even if the audio describer chooses to be as objective as possible when describing the audio description, it is undeniable that the work will depend on the individual interpretation of reality".

In the contemporary debate, ekphrasis [1], however, continues to be defined as "the verbal representation of graphic representation" (Heffernan 1991: 299), and Western civilization sees it as the endless struggle to reconcile the 'natural signs' of visual arts with the 'arbitrary signs' of verbal languages (Krieger 1991: 300). A more reconciling position on ekphrasis is that adopted by Mitchell: for him, ekphrasis does not entail a conflict between the verbal and the visual as all arts and media share text and image (Mitchell 1994: 94-95). Mitchell, who together with Jenks (1995), Rogoff (1998) and Mirzoeff (1999) is one of the proponents of visual culture, also believes that "the disembodied image and the embodied artefact are permanent elements in the dialectics of visual culture" (Mitchell 2002: 170):

> The image/text problem is not just something constructed 'between' the arts, the media, or different forms of representation, but an avoidable issue within the individual arts and media. In short, all arts are 'composite' arts (both text and image); all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes.

Not only does Mitchell see ekphrasis as an unavoidable issue in the arts because all arts are composite arts, but he also makes a broader reflection on the intersemiotic nature of "mixed media". According to Mitchell (*ibid.*: 179), visual culture that investigates mixed media "entails a meditation on blindness, the invisible, the unseen, the unseeable, and the overlooked […] it also compels attention to the tactile, the auditory, the haptic, and the phenomenon of synesthesia".

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[1] On ekphrasis there are some interesting publications in Italian such as Eco (2003), Mazzara (2007) and Cometa (2009).

This shows how soundpainting and ekphrasis influence many contemporary cultural and artistic suggestions that inscribe AD in the wider context of multisensoriality and multimodal translation.

5. Museum AD and Translation Studies

A recent article on museum AD makes a detailed and extensive analysis of the problem of textual fidelity in museum AD and illustrates some of the translation strategies that can be relevant both for screen AD and for museum AD (Hutchinson and Eardley 2019). They are broadly grouped into three categories (*ibid*.: 43): "those that relate to the objectivity/visibility of the describers; those that are specific to and contingent on the source texts; and translation decisions that specifically influence the experience of the receiver". Hutchinson and Eardley (*ibid*.) pose, through the words of the major theorists in Translation Studies, the question on text fidelity and show that objectivity and interpretation represent a thorny issue in museum AD. They concede (*ibid*.) that "the translation of the visual aspects of a museum's artworks and artefacts brings with it new considerations that are as yet largely unexplored, and that are central to development of museum AD". In fact, the practice of museum AD, which is not fully professionalized, leaves space for the "art of AD to change and develop" (*ibid*.: 42). Museum AD can thus be reconfigured to change and develop and must be considered the result of the changes, in terms of accessibility, that museums have experienced since the late 1970s and early 1980s.

6. Museum AD as accessibility to the multimodal and multisensory museum

Museum AD was born as part of the evolution that museums have experienced since the 1970s. This evolution had been analysed within the field of Museum Studies, first within the paradigm of the New Museology, and, more recently, within Critical Museology. These two fields of study break with the traditional view of museums and seek to revise old notions of museums as places where national identity is celebrated and education, object display, and art perception are still shaped according to outdated narratives. They "re-examine and reformulate traditional theories of text analysis so that they can be used to obtain new insights into these [museum] text types" (Jiménez Hurtado and Gallego 2013: 577). These new text types establish a dialogue with its visitors and "avoid using narrative perspectives that impose one type of interest or another" (Jiménez Hurtado and Gallego 2015: 278).

Museum AD is, in fact, the result of a process of democratization that started to consider museums as new, interactive places for social and cultural encounters. New Museology has had the merit of breaking with the 'how' – "how to administrate, how to educate, how to conserve" (Vergo 1989: 3) – to promote museums as places of social and educational inclusion. It has also offered the opportunity to overcome social inequality and remove the barriers that excluded different audiences, especially in terms of physical, emotional and psychological barriers. Above all, it denounced the contradictions of the public museum. On the one hand, the museum was considered until then both as the "elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education" (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63); on the other, it was also viewed as the perfect instru-

ment to maintain discipline, national identity, linearity in the object display, a univocal form of art perception, an institution designed to make citizens accept and internalize the established order (Bennett 1995). Thus, in the 1990s the discourse of accessibility, favoured especially by British and American legislation, as outlined above, promoted the museum "as a space of public address" (Barrett 2011: 9) and new forms in interactivity in museums. For example, Ravelli (2007: 1), in *Museum Text. Communication Frameworks*, proposes to analyse "texts in museums" that visitors and professionals are familiar with: labels, extended texts, catalogue entries, brochure description. Her framework seeks to be the means of a "broader sense of communication that in museums encompasses all other institution practices which make meaning" (*ibid*.). This is reflected in the contextual pragmatic effects of whether or not "there is an admission charge, the impact of visitors on the building, the layout of the galleries or whether exhibitions are promoted as written texts on walls or written on a brochure" (*ibid*.: 2). She does not limit her scope to written texts, but she also looks at "museums as text", i.e., the way a whole institution or exhibition within it makes meaning, communicating to and with its public. Such new forms of interactivity widened the horizons of communication in museums: Witcomb (2003: 7) divides them into "technological, spatial and dialogical". They include, for example, an increase in information and didactic materials, differentiation of exhibition organization according to audience (adult, children, post-colonial subjects) and changing the role of the curator, who becomes more a promoter rather than an expert. Another form of interactivity is how corporate museums develop into "blockbuster", "superstar" museums. These museums promote tourism, the distinctiveness of (usually) big cities for prestige and a place in the global market, and they reflect corporation image marketing. McDonald (2006: 2) calls it "promotional culture" and gives the example of how a seventeen-century doorway became the logo of V&A Enterprises, the Victoria and Albert Museum's commercial company. A further form of interactivity is the integration of performance, dance, music, theatre and video into museum spaces. Started by the avant-garde movements, the introduction of increasingly intertwined modes of aesthetic creation has become an essential part of the museum mission to collect, conserve, and promote understanding of present and past art. The most disruptive and controversial form of interactivity, however, is that related to technology. Although technology had already been used in some museum types for decades such as in science museums, technology started to become ubiquitous in all museums. This technology includes hand-held information devices, installation art, display supports, archiving systems, and systems to keep track of visitors. Moreover, this technology, some of which requires a high degree of involvement on the part of visitors, has been hailed as a means to democratize knowledge, to modernize, popularize and increase the efficiency of museums.

Museum AD as a resource available to the visually impaired is related to these forms of interactivity in museums, which have become multimodal communicative events. Jiménez Hurtado, Seibel, Gallego and Díaz (2012: 7) describe the structure of the multimodal discourse in the museum as follows:

> a macro-level of the text (the exhibition as a genre) and b) a micro-level of the text (the exhibits and the relationships between them as texts that are the realization of text types), both levels being linked to a specific situational macro-context (the museum).

Jiménez Hurtado, Seibel, Gallego and Díaz (*ibid.*: 7-10) propose this multi-layered structure which sees the exhibition as a set of conceptual objects that act as a first translation of the exhibition discourse. From a genre perspective, for them the first step is to determine the functional and pragmatic elements to establish communication, i.e. the communicative and social-semiotic context. Then, museum types – science museums, archaeological museums, contemporary art museums – will be seen as the socio-cultural context of the exhibition. The specific time and space in which the exhibition takes place will instead be viewed as the situational context of exhibits. Once contexts (museum types) and genre (exhibition type) have been studied, the next step is to analyse the exhibits as the source text (ST) *par excellence* in museums. These exhibits use a specific type of multimodal grammar determined by their visual, acoustic and linguistic nature. To give an example of a multimodal grammar applied to museum multimodal texts, Jiménez Hurtado and Gallego (*ibid.*) show how in videos, for example, the ST analysis includes a semantic analysis of the objects appearing in an image; a morphosyntactic analysis including the object morphology (colour, texture, size, etc.); a syntactic analysis describing the time-space relation between the objects as they appear in the video, and the setting in which they appear. Moreover, the study of images requires an analysis at the pragmatic and discourse levels that focuses on the perspective from which objects are shown in an image (*ibid.*):

> Obviously, this grammar analysis of videos can be applied to other types of exhibits requiring a study of non-verbal visual codes, such as paintings, sculptures, illustrations or objects.

This approach to museum AD comes from the idea that the combination of multimodality and multimediality gives rise to new methods of universal access to knowledge (Ventola and Kaltenbacher 2004: 1-6). As stated by Jiménez Hurtado and Gallego (2015: 577):

> the study of this phenomenon requires a detailed description of the new modes and their semiotic function as reflected in their discourse combination. This means that it is necessary to re-examine and re-formulate traditional theories of text analysis so that they can be used to obtain new insights into these text types.

Another approach to museum AD is that of a multisensory translation promoting accessibility, which is based on the idea that museums have lost their primary function as sites of seeing and privileged places where one can experience objectivity. In his introduction to *The Senses and Society*, Howes (2014) enthusiastically welcomed the rediscovery of the 'sensorium' across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. This rediscovery has brought key insights into the sociality of sensation and the cultural contingencies of perception, challenging the dominance of the psychological approach in this area. The most outstanding result of this return of senses is the emergence of "sensory museology" (*ibid.*: 259) that has rehabilitated, first of all, the sense of touch, and then, the senses of smell and taste, traditionally classified as 'base'. This approach to museum AD focuses more on aspects of artistic fruition and creative response and emphasizes the importance of using creative and interpretative language in AD, as championed by De Coster and Mülheis (2007) and Neves (2012).

7. Ben Nicholson's drawing 'Ramparts'

The AD of Ben Nicholson's abstract drawing titled 'Ramparts' is a well-known example of AD for the visual arts and one of the first examples of museum AD. This AD was written twice and, in comparing the two ADs, the audio describer Andrew Holland outlines the process that brought him from a more objective description to a more interpretative and subjective view and treatment of reality for the blind and visually impaired. As Holland (2009: 180) recalls:

> In 2003, VocalEyes worked with the RNIB and English Heritage on The Talking Image Project. We undertook three case studies to examine the use of three audio descriptions within the visual arts, working with galleries who were interested to opening up collections for the blind and visually impaired.

Before analysing Holland's two ADs, I will first describe the theoretical background referring to interpretation and narratology, coherence, cohesion and discourse structure that helped, in Holland's (*ibid.*) own words, "to give a narrative creat[ing] some emotional relationship with the piece". Holland (*ibid.*), as a long-term audio describer for the theatre in the UK, claims that audio describers cannot avoid interpretation but they can try not to be judgemental. As outlined in Section 3, the issue of interpretation is a delicate matter in AD and, as Mazur and Chmiel (2012: 173) remind us, has always been 'a bone of contention' among scholars, AD researchers and audio describers who have not found agreement on what interpretation should be. In their contribution, Mazur and Chmiel (*ibid.*) define interpretation "as the subjective treatment of reality perceived by audio describers in films and the equally subjective verbal expression of that reality in description for the blind and partially sighted". They therefore propose "that instead of applying the binary opposition of objective versus subjective, we should rather be using an objectivity–subjectivity scale, which can help determine which interpretive descriptions are less subjective and can consequently be used in AD" (*ibid.*). Objectivity, which was one of the key principles in early AD guidelines, was later questioned. Mazur and Chmiel cite a number of scholars that reject objectivity altogether and favour subjectivity and interpretation. For example, Udo and Fels (2009: 179) claim that the task of objective interpretation is impossible, and Hyks (2006) suggests that AD is highly subjective even if the describers try to be objective. As discussed above, De Coster and Mülheis (2007) and Neves (2012) see the language of AD museum as interpretative of sensorial ambiguity, and Pujol and Orero (2007) describe how the 'narrative potential of images' depends on the individual interpretation of reality. Vercauteren (2012) has also discussed the procedures of content selection and formulation of the descriptions in AD. Although he mainly refers to film AD, he describes the dual role of the audio describer in narratological terms. In fact, the audio describer "is not only the author of the audio described target product, but he is also a member of the audience of the source product" (*ibid.*: 211). Moreover, according to structuralist theories, he sees *fabula* (what can be told) and *story* (a way of telling the fabula) as components of narrative. One fabula may be realized in many stories. The fabula is the logical and chronological order of events of the real world, whereas the story is how the events are organized in 'a certain manner' and revealed to the readers. Holland, therefore, was aware that it was necessary to tackle the issue of sensorial and visual ambiguity with

a more subjective and creative interpretation (Neves 2012; Pujol and Orero 2007) using the most appropriate similes and analogues for vision to express tactile qualities. He also had to make decisions that influence the experience of the receiver (Hutchinson and Eardley 2019) and to revise the *story* of his first AD (Vercauteren 2012). My analysis of 'Ramparts' is also focused on issues of coherence and cohesion that played a crucial role for interpretation in the revised AD. Coherence and cohesion are not new topics in the field of AD, especially for film AD and multimodal discourse in general (Braun 2011; Taylor 2014, 2017). In particular, Braun (2011: 650) notes how coherence needs to be achieved across different modes of communication and makes a distinction between 'local coherence' created within individual scenes; and 'global coherence' that reaches out across scenes. She also shows how coherence in film emerges from links within and across different modes of expression (e.g. links between visual images, image-sound links and image-dialogue links). Consequently, she outlines a new model of coherence which embraces verbal and multimodal texts and which underlines the importance of source text author and target text recipients in creating coherence (Braun 2011: 647-652). Similarly, from a functional systemic perspective, Taylor (2014: 42) sees "the audiovisual text such as a film [...] still governed by cohesive ties of both a verbal and visual nature". Specifically, "in the case of audio descriptions (ADs), the text is written to be read and needs to be both linguistically cohesive within itself and cohesive with the visual content it describes" (*ibid*.).

Although Braun's and Taylor's contributions are particularly interesting for AD and multimodal discourse, my analysis of the two ADs of 'Ramparts', which is conducted exclusively on the written texts, will instead take into account Alonso's (2014) observations on coherence and discourse structure. Alonso (*ibid*.: 52) starts from the assumption that there is no stark opposition between coherence and cohesion and states that both "cohesion and coherence should be seen as interactive constituents of text and discourse structure". Thus, "meaning relations and properties existing in any text which are not cases of cohesion, are expressions of coherence" (*ibid*.). In line with some early studies on discourse coherence (van Dijk: 1977, 1980, 1985; van Dijk and Kintsch 1983), she sees how this relation can be made explicit or implicit, with or without explicit markers. She then goes on to analyse coherence at a local and global level. Local coherence refers to "the meaning expected to hold between individual propositions or portions of texts which are normally physically adjacent to one another" (Alonso 2014: 53). Van Dijk refers to this sequential connectivity of the adjacent portions of text as microstructure. At this microstructural level, relations may be of different types (chronological, general-particular, cause-effect, explanation) and may be marked by cohesive devices (explicit relations) or by different semantic operations (hierarchical ordering, choice of syntactic correlations, identity or difference relations, topic recurrence, etc.). The macrostructure of a text is, instead, characterized by the many semantic relations co-existing within large portions of a text or discourse. These sematic relations are essential to recover the general content of a discourse and their interdependence with microstructures are of fundamental importance for coherence. Drawing on van Dijk and Kintch (1983: 150-51), Alonso (2014: 54-55) asserts that the microstructural level of analysis gives a step-by-step treatment of discourse, whereas the macrostructure recovers meaning as a result of the arrangements chosen and the selection made. Importantly, the semantically interrelated propositions found in a text:

do not develop independent topics or pursue independent goals, but function together towards the construction of the general message or the achievement of a communicative plan as represented by the totality of the text.

I will mainly draw on Alonso's notions to analyse Holland's two ADs of 'Ramparts'. I will first consider how cohesive relations contribute to create coherence, thus enhancing the construction of meaning, through the implicitness and explicitness of the linguistic markers in the two ADs. I will then focus on how coherence works both at local and global level and on how the interdependence of microstructures and macrostructures are relevant for the more interpretative and subjective rewritten AD.

I have divided the two ADs of 'Ramparts' into two comparable sections: first, the un-interpretative version (from now on UN) is divided into seven sections (nine sentences); while the second, interpretative version (from now on IN) is divided into eight sections (23 sentences). My analysis, however, will only include some excerpts taken from the two versions and I will use the terms un-interpretative and interpretative to refer to objectivity and subjectivity, as described above.

The ADs describe a relief with three rectangles and two trapeziums (figure 1).

Figure 1. "Ramparts"

Although the first two sections are similarly phrased in the two versions, the IN version shows a higher level of explicitness between and within sentences. The first sentence states that the work of art is "this relief" and gives contextual information on the author, where he was living and the year of production ("this relief <u>was made in</u>

	Un- interpretative	Interpretative
1		Subtitled "Ramparts", <u>this *relief*</u> was made <u>in 1968,</u> whilst Ben Nicholson was living in Switzerland.
	A rectangular backboard, some 19 inches high and 21 inches wide, that is about 48 by 53 centimetres, is painted a smooth earthy brown.	A *rectangular backboard*, <u>just over eighteen inches high and nearly two feet wide – that's about 48 by 53 centimetres</u> – is painted a smooth earthy brown.

<u>1968, whilst Ben Nicholson was living in Switzerland</u>"). "This relief" is also in cataphoric position to the phrase "subtitled 'Ramparts'", which gives the title to the relief and draws attention to the artefact itself, its height and width ("just over <u>eighteen inches high and nearly two feet wide – that's about 48 by 53 centimetres</u>").

Section 1 is explicitly linked to section 2 in the IN version through substitution ("relief/backboard") and the cohesive marker "this":

2	Standing proud of it is a slightly smaller rectangle - this one divides up into a number of smaller, overlapping shapes.	*This* backboard frames, as it were, a collection of overlapping geometric shapes.

This is shown in "<u>this relief</u> […] <u>A rectangular backboard</u> […] <u>This</u> <u>backboard</u> frames, as it were, a collection of overlapping geometric shapes". Although the corresponding UN version reports 'standard information' which is traditionally considered as one of the requirements for successful museum AD [2] and makes an interpretative reference ('standing proud'), the UN version is less explicit and cohesive ("<u>A rectangular backboard</u> [...] standing proud of <u>it</u> a smaller rectangle – this one divides up into a number of smaller, overlapping shapes") (Sections 1 and 2).

This 'backboard frames a collection of overlapping geometric shapes' in the IN version refers anaphorically to the three rectangles and allows us to organize the following sentences in a hierarchical ordering: "three different sized rectangles […] the one to the left is the smallest […] the central […] the third rectangle […]" (Section 4):

4	The light created by these three rectangles starts off – to the left – as horizontal and almost central. But a little way across, the line shifts so that the two rectangles centre and right slope downwards. From a far right is a tall rectangle – painted the same brown as the background.	Separating the top frosted section from the bottom, three differently sized rectangles progress across from left to right. The one to the left is the smallest and is painted a similar earthy brown to the background, but with a scuffed quality. The central rectangle is a darker brown –with a blacker sheen – which makes it sink back away from us into the relief – although it actually stands proud of the one to the left. The third rectangle – in fact almost a square – is a lighter, orangey brown.

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[2] This is the first requirement for museum AD listed in *Art Beyond Sight Guidelines for Verbal Description* (1980).

| 3 | At top and bottom are areas of white. Between them a line of three differently sized rectangles. The one to the left is brown like the background. The central one is a darker brown, and the third, a lighter, orangey brown. | At top and bottom are areas of frosty, silvery white. These have been scratched and rubbed in places to create an irregular, uneven surface, like snow drifting across dirty ice. A patch at the top left has been roughly scraped so that a grubby brown shows through like a stain. Elsewhere, are smudges of thick, powdery white. |

For example, the noun phrase "areas of white" framing the three rectangles becomes "areas of frosty, silvery white", and underlines the tactile and visual qualities of the artefact. In the sentence "These have been scratched and rubbed to create an irregular, uneven surface", not only does 'these' anaphorically refer to "areas of frosty, silvery white" but also the use of the passive – "have been scratched and rubbed" – draws attention to the process these areas have undergone, which techniques have been used, and how they feel like to touch. The sentence concludes on a simile "like snow drifting across dirty ice", which gives a clear analogue for vision. A similar microstructure is repeated in the following sentence – "A patch at the top left has been roughly scraped so that a grubby brown shows through like a stain" – in which attention is drawn to the process-making and the technique used, and it closes with a simile, which is another analogue for vision. Furthermore, in the IN version important spatial indications relevant to the visually impaired visitors are provided, with indications of where the various components of the relief are located: "At top and bottom are areas", "A patch at the top left" (Section 3), "separating the top frosted section from the bottom", "three differently sized rectangles progress across from left to right", "stands proud of the one to the left' (Section 4), "down towards the right" (Section 5), "between the frosted white sections at top and bottom", "a tall rectangular form to the far right", "to the top right corner of the orangey brown square" (Section 6). This is particularly evident if compared with the fewer indications given in the UN version ("at top and bottom" (Section 3), "to the left" (Section 4)). Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the IN version portray the three rectangles, especially their colour ("earthy brown", "darker brown, lighter, orangey brown"). Finally, Sections 6, 7 and 8 introduce the trapeziums.

The trapeziums are also described in more detail than in the un-interpretative version. They are more clearly ordered from general to particular ("Two other forms...", "Both of a similar shape – trapezium", "One of these trapeziums...", "The other trapezium"). Their colour is expressed through similes showing tactile and visual qualities that can help the visually impaired visitors: "In colour both shapes reflect the two frosty-white sections [...] giving these a more insubstantial feel" (Section 6), and the circle carved within the first trapezium is "painted white, creating a moonlike glow" (Section 7).

As I have shown, the IN version is significantly different from the UN version in its use of coherence, by substitution, repetition and hierarchical ordering, at the microstructural level [3]. However, it is in the interdependence of microstructure and mac-

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[3] In a recent work Perego (2019) conducted a study on the scripted and recorded museum AD texts of 18 paintings from the British Museum. The result was that they only partially complied with the recommendations of existing guidelines. On the one hand, the author showed that her corpus still

6	The other form seems to float above the relief. Their colour is similar to the two white sections. Both are similar in shape – a trapezium – with parallel sides, horizontal tops, but with a bottom edge which slopes down towards the right.	Now sloping, these two rectangles seem in danger of slipping out of the composition – squeezed out from between the frosted white sections at top and bottom. The only thing which stops them going any further and holds them in some kind of equilibrium is a tall rectangular form to the far right – painted a similar brown as the background. But even this seems to have been affected by the strong movements within – and the top right corner of the orangey brown square dents into it. Two other forms animate the relief further. Both are a similar shape – a trapezium – with parallel sides, horizontal tops, but with a bottom edge which slopes down towards the right. In colour both shapes reflect the two frosty-white sections as though somehow related to them – though the texture of the board is allowed to show through, giving these a lighter, more insubstantial feel.
7	One is positioned within the top white section and to the right. Its slanting edge runs along the top edge of the slanting brown line. Carved within it is a circle – the inner edge painted white.	One of these trapeziums is positioned within the top frosted section to the right. Its slanting bottom edge seems to be holding the dark brown rectangle and orange square in their downward slope. Carved within it is a circle – the inner edge of which is painted white, creating a moon-like glow.
8	The other trapezium sits next to it – just left of centre – and a little lower. In this, another circle has been inscribed rather than cut.	The other trapezium sits next to it – just left of centre – and a little lower. Within this is another, larger, circle. Inscribed rather than cut, this circle has an ethereal quality – like an echo of the first. Hovering in front of the darker brown rectangle – the trapezium appears like a guillotine, which having severed the line of rectangles, pushing it downwards and backwards into the relief – now holds the pieces in their final balanced positions.

rostructure that the rewritten AD especially reveals its subjective and interpretative value. The macrostructure recovers meaning as a result of the arrangements chosen and the selection made to create 'an emotional response' both for the audio describer as a member of the audience and for the visually impaired visitor. Holland's story focuses on his subjective description of the relief. The four macrostructures of the AD (Sections 1-3, 4-6, 7, 8) show many semantic relations. For example, "the collection of overlapping geometric shapes" acquires a more complete meaning when the areas at the top and bottom of these shapes are described (Section 3); while "the three differently sized rectangles" become more meaningful when Holland describes their colour and qualities in detail (Section 4). Similarly, the other "two forms [that] animate the relief further"

guaranteed vivid and imaginative language, text informativity through the combination of high lexical diversity, extensive use of descriptive adjectives, and substantial lexical diversity. On the other hand, her museum ADs seemed more lexically and syntactically complex due to the use of opaque technical terms, heavy adjectival phrases, and long sentences.

show their full meaning when these two forms are described as trapeziums that have the same colour as the two frosty-white sections mentioned earlier (Section 6).

However, the most significant semantic relations are those deployed in macro-structures 4 to 8 that create, according to Holland himself, 'a sense of slow, powerful movement' eventually ending in a balanced equilibrium. Thus, from the previous, more objective description, the revised 'Ramparts' has become highly subjective and inter-pretative, as the reference to 'movement' is made in every macrostructure, as shown in the following examples: "three differently sized rectangles progress across from left to right" (Section 4); "the central rectangle is a darker brown – with a blacker sheen – which makes it sink back away from us into the relief" (Section 4); "the other two forms have shifted downwards" (Section 5); "Now sloping these two rectangles seem in danger of slipping out of the composition" (Section 6); "Its [referring to the trapezium] slanting bottom edge seems to be holding the dark brown rectangle and orange square in their downward slope" (Section 7) and "the trapezium appears as a guillotine, which having severed the line of rectangles, pushing it downwards and backwards into the relief – now holds the pieces in their final balanced position" (Section 8). This strong sense of movement in the revised AD of 'Ramparts' is the result of the use of coherence at the microstructural level, and of the interrelation of microstructures and macrostructures at the discourse level.

8. Conclusion

My analysis shows how the emerging topic of museum AD has started to become a paradigm in the field of Translation Studies. Museum AD has been the result of the changes that museums have been experiencing from the 1970s onwards and it has also been favoured by legislation which, in the 1990s, made accessibility a priority in many countries, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States. The legislation has promoted accessibility at every level of the museum experience. Access has to be 'physical', i.e. the museum building must be accessible; 'cultural', i.e. exhibitions and collections should reflect the interests of their audience; 'emotional', i.e. the museum environment has to be welcoming; 'financial', i.e. affordable in terms of museum admission, free transport, etc; there must be 'intellectual access', which aims at including people with learning difficulties or with limited knowledge having access to the museum; and, finally, 'sensory access', i.e. museum exhibitions must cater for to the needs and requirements of people with visual and hearing impairment.

The issue of accessibility has led to the creation of many AD guidelines, and I have tried to identify the characteristics of museum AD in relation to objectivity and inter-pretation. I have also illustrated the theoretical background that has made interpre-tation become a major factor of museum AD and outlined how interpretation can be gauged against the wider backdrop of multimodal and multi-sensory museums. Howev-er, I have also shown how the issue of interpretation vs. objectivity still remains a bone of contention among AD scholars and audio describers. Finally, I have compared the un-interpretative and a later interpretative museum AD of Ben Nicholson's artwork 'Ramparts' (1968). In conclusion, my analysis has illustrated how, in the interpretative version, there are more similes and analogies for vision; how, in narratological terms, the story is rewritten; how cohesive ties contribute to create coherence through explicit

and implicit linguistic markers; and, finally, how the interrelation of microstructures and macrostructures that emerges at discourse level plays a crucial role in making the later version of 'Ramparts' more interpretative.

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