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## “Feeling” audio description

### Exploring the impact of AD on emotional response

Marina Ramos Caro and Ana María Rojo López

There is evidence suggesting that watching movies usually provokes an emotional response in the audience that may differ according to the type of film viewed. For example, Grodal (2009) argues that the type of response provoked by mainstream cinema is different from that elicited by avant-garde films.<sup>1</sup> In visually impaired audiences, the emotional impact of films is inevitably mediated by the Audio Description (AD) provided. In most countries AD norms do not cater for variations between different types of films. There exists, therefore, the possibility that the emotional impact of the film could be affected or altered by the AD. This paper aims to explore possible differences in the response of sighted versus unsighted audiences when watching avant-garde and narrative films. A pilot study is designed to measure the emotional response through self-response questionnaires. Our results indicate that differences between both types of audience are more prominent for avant-garde films.

**Keywords:** audio-visual translation, emotions, accessibility, reception

## Introduction

Audio Description (henceforth, AD) is an optional digital service that provides visually impaired spectators with a commentary describing the visual elements of the TV programme, films, theatre plays, or other art forms that are being viewed. The commentary serves to guide the audience through the presentation by providing a concise and objective description of scenes, settings, costumes, body language and any other visual element that a sighted person takes for granted but that are not otherwise accessible to visually impaired people. The search for objectivity and neutrality in the description is not a mere desideratum; it has rather become one of

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1. The terms ‘art film’, ‘avant garde’, and ‘experimental film’ are used interchangeably, as opposed to mainstream films.

the ‘golden’ rules of current professional AD practice. ITC guidelines on standards for Audio Description (2000) specify that AD should be as objective as possible, provide only relevant information and avoid personal judgements and patronising attitudes. The general idea is that AD is not intended to explain or interpret the programme. As sighted audiences do, visually impaired people should also be allowed to make their own interpretations of the scene being shown. Similarly, AD is not created to teach or move the audience and, thus, the use of the language should avoid any pedagogical tenor. In Snyder’s (2005) words, AD should follow the principle “what you see is what you say,” a code that has become the most widespread practice in the different AD traditions, describing exclusively what can objectively be seen in the scene.

But apart from offering an accessibility service to blind and visually impaired people, AD has also recently become a prolific field of research for translation scholars. Since the majority of studies have been focused on improving the standards of the activity and disseminating information about the type of work carried out, they have for the most part adopted a fairly prescriptive or purely descriptive methodology. Among the main research interests of prescriptively-oriented studies have been, for instance, the attempt to justify AD as a type of intersemiotic translation (Braun 2008), descriptions of the best techniques to create an AD (AENOR 2005; ITC 2000) or the basic competences that describers should acquire (Díaz Cintas 2007). Within the descriptive branch, we mainly find studies that illustrate existing examples of AD (Fix 2005) or which compare the differences between AD in different languages. For instance, Seibel (2007) compares the Spanish and German versions of a corpus of films and Bourne and Jiménez (2006) compare the British and Spanish versions of the film *The Hours*.

In an attempt to shift away from the prescriptive tradition, some studies have also outlined the need to carry out more empirical research focused on the audience’s active interpretation or reception of AD (e.g. Pettitt et al. 1996; Peli et al. 1996; Schmeidler and Kirchner 2001; Luque 2009). From this point of view, the audience’s response — both cognitive and emotional — becomes, together with the professionals’ ethical choices, the keystones for establishing solid theoretical postulates and efficient working guidelines.

One question that remains unexplored — at least to our knowledge — is the impact that current AD practices may have on the response of unsighted audiences to different types of films. The study of an audience’s response to films has been a pivotal and fertile research topic in the approach known as Cognitive Film Studies. Under this umbrella term we find a series of studies that have approached film analysis from a cognitive perspective, focusing on the cognitive processes and emotional engagement involved in the perception of moving images. Scholars within this approach have explored the emotional component of film perception

from different viewpoints, including philosophical (Carroll 1984; 1992; 1993; 2003), psychological (Smith 2003; Plantinga 2009; Tan 1995; 1996) and psychoneurological (Grodal 2009) perspectives. Particularly relevant for the purposes of our study is Grodal’s approach to film perception, since it allows us to differentiate between the emotional response provoked by mainstream films and the one provoked by art films. Grodal’s (2009) theory of film experience is based on the PECMA flow model — PECMA being short for Perception-Emotion-Cognition-Motor-Action. According to him, the film experience can be conceived of as a flow that goes from perception to real — though suppressed — motor action. The degree of tension or emotional saturation felt by the audience will depend on the emotional labelling and cognitive processing of the perception experienced. In this model, an audiovisual representation can induce different experiences in the audience according to the type of content and form. Thus, art films — mainly due to the missing narrative ‘action’ — are more likely to create saturated emotions that block the PECMA flow.

From the point of view of AD studies, if we assume that different types of films induce different emotional reactions, then the question arises as to whether it is possible that in certain types of audio-described films, the AD may have an inhibiting effect that diminishes the emotional response of unsighted audiences as compared to sighted ones. Is it possible that the objectivity principle that rules current AD practice may have a suppressing effect on the emotions engendered by avant-garde films? Can this objectivity contribute in any way to ‘strengthen’ or ‘create’ a narrative in art films, suppressing lyrical-associated feelings and reducing the degree of emotional saturation? To explore these questions, the following section introduces a pilot study that aims to research potential differences in the emotional response of sighted versus unsighted audiences when watching different types of films.

### “Feeling” AD in art versus mainstream films: A pilot study

The study designed in the present paper was financed by a research grant from the *Fundación Carolina*, an association aimed at promoting educational and scientific cooperation between Spain and other countries from the Ibero-American Community of Nations. The grant involved cooperation between the University of Murcia (Spain) and the Universidade Federal de Bahia (UFBA) in Salvador de Bahia (Brazil). The study was carried out in Brazil within the framework of the research group TRAMAD, led by Professor Eliana P. Franco and her team.

### *Aim and hypothesis*

As noted earlier, the central aim of this study is to explore possible differences in the emotional response of sighted versus unsighted audiences when watching a mainstream film as opposed to an avant-garde one. The study measures the subjective emotional response of both audiences, using it as a standard to measure the effectiveness of current AD practices for both mainstream and art films.

Assuming that the objectivity and neutrality principle that rules current AD practice may have a suppressing effect on the emotions evoked by avant-garde films, our main hypothesis predicts that the differences between the audiences will be more prominent for avant-garde films than for mainstream ones.

### *Participants*

Thirty-one participants volunteered to take part in the study: fifteen sighted subjects and sixteen visually impaired ones. The sighted group was composed of eight females and seven males. Fourteen of them had higher education and one of them had only secondary education.

Visually impaired people were contacted via certain associations for the blind, such as *Associação Bahiana de Cegos (ABC)*, *Instituto de cegos da Bahia (ICB)*, and the *Braille Library* associated with the *Bahia State Library*. The group included seven females and nine males. Five of them had higher education, five had only secondary education, and two of them had only primary education. The mean age of the sighted participants was 24.3, whereas the mean age of the visually impaired participants was slightly higher, at 29.3.

### *Materials and stimuli*

Films have been proven to be a powerful technique for eliciting emotions in a laboratory environment (e.g., Westermann, Spies, Stahl and Hesse 1996). As emotion-eliciting instruments, they have several methodological advantages: they can be easily watched in a laboratory setting, they provide strong subjective, physiological, and behavioural changes (Rottenberg, Ray, and Gross 2007; Palomba, Sarlo, Grilli, et al. 2000) and they have a dynamic nature that is an optimal artificial model of reality.

The film stimuli used in this study were selected from the TRAMAD film library. Short films were preferred over long ones for practical reasons; short films narrate a full story and do not require selecting or editing scenes. Besides duration criteria, films were also selected on the basis of their potential to elicit emotions. Three short films were therefore selected because of their high emotional

elicitation power. Two of the films (*Aguas de Romanza* and *Pênalti*) have a clear mainstream narration, while the third film (*Ecos da terra*) lacks a clear narrative line and dialogue.

1. *Aguas de Romanza* is a 2002 film directed by G. Soares located in the Brazilian desert. It tells the story of Romanza, a six-year-old little girl who has never seen rain. Her grandmother, who is very ill, decides to take the girl on a special journey to experience what rain is. The AD was created by the LEAD research group at the University of Ceará, Brazil.
2. *Pênalti* is a 2000 film directed by Paz A. Kibe about a football player who, after failing an important penalty, finds his wife in bed with his best friend. These two events lead the protagonist to a tragic ending. The AD was created by the TRAMAD research group of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.
3. *Ecos da terra* is a 2008 environmental short film by P. Abel. It depicts a young woman standing in the street. Some people who pass by tear her clothes, write their names on her skin, urinate on her feet, etc. It represents the metaphor MAN IS A TREE. The film has no dialogue or music, which allows space for an extended audio-description of the film. The AD was created by the TRAMAD research group at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.

In the three films, the audio-description strategy is similar. All of them follow Snyder's (2005) principle “what you see is what you say”.

Emotions are a central topic in many fields related to psychology. Today there are many methods for measuring emotional response in terms of participants' subjective (using self-report questionnaires), physiological (measuring skin conductance, hormonal segregation, or heart rate and variability), and behavioural (analysing body movements and facial expressions) responses. For this study questionnaires were selected as instruments to measure the participants' subjective emotional response. Two types of questionnaires were used as elicitation instruments. First, an informative questionnaire asked for personal details, socio-economic factors (such as gender, age, education, and profession), type and origin of visual impairment (if any), and leisure and film preferences. Secondly, a self-report questionnaire was used to measure the emotional impact of the films. While we were aware of the existence of some validated questionnaires designed to measure emotional impact (e.g. the Geneva Emotion Wheel or GEW [Scherer 2005] and Watson and Clark's [1994] emotion questionnaire), these questionnaires were mainly designed to measure the type and valence of emotion, something that was beyond the scope of our study. For the purposes of our research, we selected a questionnaire designed by Lehr and Shuman (2013). Although this seven-point Likert scale questionnaire was originally designed to measure the emotional impact of original versus translated texts, the items were easily adaptable for

audiovisual stimuli. Moreover, the connections between AD and translation on the basis of the intersemiotic transfer that it involves pointed to the suitability of this questionnaire as an appropriate tool to measure the emotional impact of films and their AD versions. The original self-report questionnaire was then modified, adapted, and translated into Portuguese. The final, modified version of the questionnaire included the instructions and the 14 items displayed below. The first ten items were designed to elicit positive emotions whereas the final four items described negative emotions. The whole questionnaire has been translated back into English here to facilitate comprehension:

Please rate from 1 to 7 to what extent the following statements are true for you right now, with 7 being “I completely agree” and 1 “I completely disagree.”

1. The film moves me
  2. The film touches me
  3. The film has an impact on me
  4. The film influences me
  5. To me, the film is expressive
  6. To me, the film is powerful
  7. To me, the film is meaningful
  8. The film affects me
  9. The film is stirring
  10. The film elicits emotions
- 
1. I am indifferent about the film
  2. I find the film to be expressionless
  3. This is a weak film
  4. The film does not speak to me

### *Results and discussion*

In order to facilitate analysis of the data, the seven-point Likert scale of the questionnaire was recoded into two broad categories. To simplify the initial scale — which went from one to seven, with 1 “I completely disagree” and 7 “I completely agree” —, answers one to three were grouped into the more general category “I disagree” and answers five to seven were grouped into the category “I agree.” Answer four was considered as “indifferent.”

The questionnaire used comprised fourteen original items. For the sake of simplification, the fourteen items were also grouped into six broader categories according to the following criteria: positive statements on the impact of the film on the participants, statements on the changes that participants felt they experienced, positive statements on the expressive nature of the film, statements on the potential of the film to produce emotions, negative statements on the participants’

**Table 1.** Criteria and labels for the re-classification of items.

Criteria	Original items	New codification
Positive statements about the impact of the film on participants	The film moves me	HAS IMPACT
	The film touches me	
	The film has an impact on me	
Statements about the changes the participants felt they experienced	The film influences me	TRANSFORMS ME
	The film affects me	
	The film transforms me	
Positive statements about the expressive nature of the film	The film is expressive	IS EXPRESSIVE
	The film is powerful	
Statements about the potential of the film to produce emotions	The film is stirring	IS STIRRING
	The film elicits emotions	
Negative statements about the participants’ feelings	I am indifferent about the film	LEAVES INDIFFERENT
	The film does not do anything for me	
Negative statements about the film	The film is expressionless	IS WEAK
	The film is weak	

feelings, and negative statements on the film. The criteria adopted for creating these categories are displayed in the left hand column in Table 1 and the labels assigned to each category for the analysis are displayed in the right hand column.

Table 2 displays the results obtained for the three films for the sighted group (S) and the visually impaired group (VI). The table shows that the differences between both groups seem to be greater for the art film (*Ecos da Terra*) than for the mainstream films (*Pênalti* and *Aguas de Romanza*) in most of the items. For instance, when analyzing the item IMPACT, the results of the two groups regarding the film *Pênalti* are quite similar: around 50% of the participants disagreed with the statement “The film has an impact on me” (46.7% of the sighted participants and 56.3% of the visually impaired). The same can be said about the film *Aguas de Romanza* regarding the same item; around 70% of both groups agreed with the statement (73.3% of the sighted and 66.7% of the visually impaired participants). However, when analyzing this item in reference to the film *Ecos da Terra*, the results show a bigger difference between the two groups: 6.7% of the sighted and 43.8% of the visually impaired agreed with the statement, whereas 93.3% of the sighted and 50% of the visually impaired disagreed.

Another item that perfectly exemplifies this tendency is EXPRESSIVE (“The film is expressive”). On the one hand, for the films *Pênalti* and *Aguas de Romanza* no outstanding differences were found between the two groups (i.e., for the film

Table 2. Percentage of answers by group for each item.

Item	Group	<i>Penalti</i>			<i>Aguas</i>			<i>Ecos</i>		
		Disag.	Indiff.	Agree	Disag.	Indiff.	Agree	Disag.	Indiff.	Agree
HAS IM-PACT	S	53.30	13.30	33.30	0.00	20.00	80.00	6.70	0.00	93.30
	VI	43.80	6.30	50.00	13.30	13.30	73.30	43.80	6.30	50.00
TRANSFORMS	S	66.70	13.30	20.00	20.00	13.30	66.70	6.70	18.30	75.00
	VI	50.00	12.50	37.50	33.30	6.70	60.00	58.70	6.30	35.00
EXPRESSIVE	S	53.30	6.70	40.00	20.00	13.30	66.70	0.00	0.00	100.00
	VI	56.30	0.00	43.80	26.70	0.00	73.30	43.80	0.00	56.30
	S	20.00	13.30	66.70	13.30	0.00	86.70	13.30	0.00	86.70
STIRRING	VI	25.00	18.80	56.30	13.30	13.30	73.30	43.80	6.30	50.00
INDIFFERENT	S	46.70	0.00	53.30	86.70	0.00	6.70	100.00	0.00	0.00
	VI	56.30	0.00	43.80	93.30	0.00	6.70	56.30	6.30	37.50
	S	60.00	6.70	33.30	93.30	0.00	6.70	100.00	0.00	0.00
WEAK	VI	62.50	6.30	31.30	86.70	6.70	6.70	56.30	6.30	37.50

*Pênalti* 20% of the sighted and 37.5% of the visually impaired disagreed with the statement; 73.3% of the sighted and 62.5% of the visually impaired agreed). On the other hand, for the film *Ecos da Terra* great differences were detected in the results for both groups. Whereas not a single participant in the sighted group disagreed with the statement, almost 40% of the visually impaired participants did. All participants in the sighted group thought that the film was expressive, while only 62.5% of the visually impaired did.

A one-way ANOVA test was then performed for each category to corroborate our main hypothesis, which predicted that the differences between the sighted and visually impaired groups would be more prominent for avant-garde films than for mainstream ones. Table 3 summarises the results found for each

Table 3. Statistically significant differences between the groups for each category.

	Mainstream films		Art film
	<i>Aguas de Romanza</i>	<i>Pênalti</i>	<i>Ecos da Terra</i>
IMPACT	NO	NO	0.026
TRANSFORMS	NO	NO	0.024
EXPRESSIVE	NO	NO	0.003
STIRRING	NO	NO	0.060
INDIFFERENT	NO	NO	0.011
WEAK	NO	NO	0.011

category. Only significant differences between the two groups are expressed in numeric digits.

As can be inferred from the tables above, differences between sighted and unsighted people in terms of each category were only found to be significant — or almost significant — for the art film *Ecos da Terra*. The right hand column contains the *p* values obtained for each category. On the contrary, no statistically significant differences were found for either *Aguas de Romanza* or *Pênalt* — both with a mainstream narrative flow. In what follows, only statistically significant results are described in further detail for each category. As shown in Table 3, in the art film *Ecos da Terra*, statistically significant differences between the two types of audiences were found for five of the six items: IMPACT (*p*=0.026), TRANSFORMS (*p*=0.024), EXPRESSIVE (*p*=0.003), INDIFFERENT (*p*=0.011) and WEAK (*p*=0.007). For the item STIRRING, the difference did not reach the level of statistical significance, but did approach it (*p*=0.060).

### Results for the item HAS IMPACT

The answers of sighted participants for the item HAS IMPACT showed greater consistency than those of unsighted people. Nearly all of the participants in the sighted group agreed that the film had an impact on them, while the opinion of the visually impaired people was greatly divided: 50% of them agreed, 43.8% disagreed, and around 6% rated this item as indifferent. This distribution of answers suggests that the impact of the original film was greater than the impact of the AD version, a result that may be related to the fact that this film displays high impact

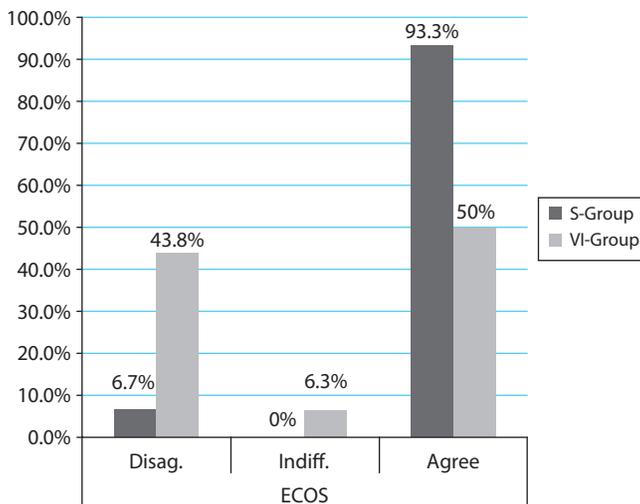


Figure 1. Answers by group for the item HAS IMPACT in the art film.

images that are not easily translated into words. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the answers by group for the item HAS IMPACT in the art film *Ecos da Terra*. The dark bars show the results of the sighted group (S-group), while the shaded bars represent the visually impaired group (VI-group).

### Results for the item TRANSFORMS ME

As for the previous item, consistency between the answers of the sighted group was greater than between those of the visually impaired group. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, one third of the sighted participants (75%) agreed that the film had transformed or affected them in some way, while 6.7% of them disagreed and 6.3% were indifferent. On the contrary, only 35% of the visually impaired participants thought that the film had transformed them, whereas half of them did not think it had. Overall, the tendency was similar to the one observed for the item HAS IMPACT, a result which was hardly surprising if we consider that both items could be related in terms of a cause-effect relationship. But despite the similarities, stating that a film ‘transforms’ you seems to be a much stronger assertion than admitting it has some impact on you; this may explain why some of the participants in the sighted group answered with “I disagree” or gave an indifferent answer to the item TRANSFORMS ME.

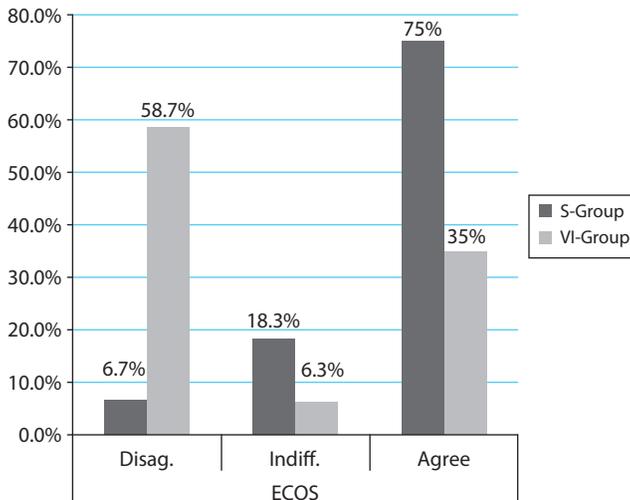


Figure 2. Answers by group for the item TRANSFORMS ME in the art film.

*Results for the item IS EXPRESSIVE*

Once more, participants in the sighted group showed a higher degree of agreement in their answers. Whereas all sighted participants found the film to be expressive, the opinion of the visually impaired group was clearly divided. Only slightly over half of the visually impaired participants agreed that the film was expressive (56.3%), while the rest disagreed (43.8%). Again, the fact that the film contained highly stirring and moving images whose expressive content was very difficult to convey by words could account for the difference between the answers of the sighted participants who watched the images and those of the unsighted participants who listened to the AD version.

But even if the tendency is similar to the one observed for previous items (HAS IMPACT and TRANSFORMS ME), the fact that this item (IS EXPRESSIVE) refers to a quality of the film itself, rather than to the effect it might have on the participants, may explain the fact that a slightly higher percentage of participants agreed with the item (i.e., the VI-group: 56.3% for IS EXPRESSIVE, 35% for TRANSFORMS ME, 50% for HAS IMPACT).

The distribution of the answers regarding the item IS EXPRESSIVE is illustrated in Figure 3 below:

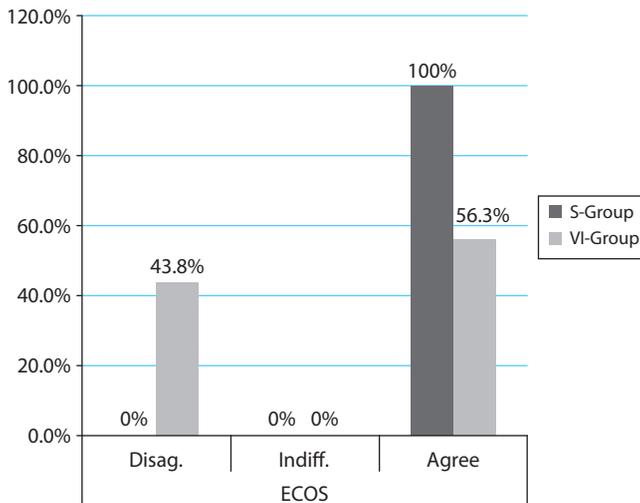


Figure 3. Answers by group for the item IS EXPRESSIVE in the art film.

*Results for the item LEAVES INDIFFERENT*

Results for this item were also very similar to those reported for the other items. All participants in the sighted group disagreed with the item “I am indifferent about

the film.” On the contrary, the answers of the visually impaired group showed a higher inconsistency, because 56.3% of the blind participants disagreed with the item while 37.5% of them agreed and 6.3% gave an indifferent answer.

Although the tendency is similar to the one observed in the items above, the graph shows the opposite picture because this item (LEAVES INDIFFERENT) states a negative assertion, whereas the other items previously reviewed (IS EXPRESSIVE, TRANSFORMS ME, HAS IMPACT) represent positive statements. The distribution of the answers for the item LEAVES INDIFFERENT is illustrated in Figure 4 below:

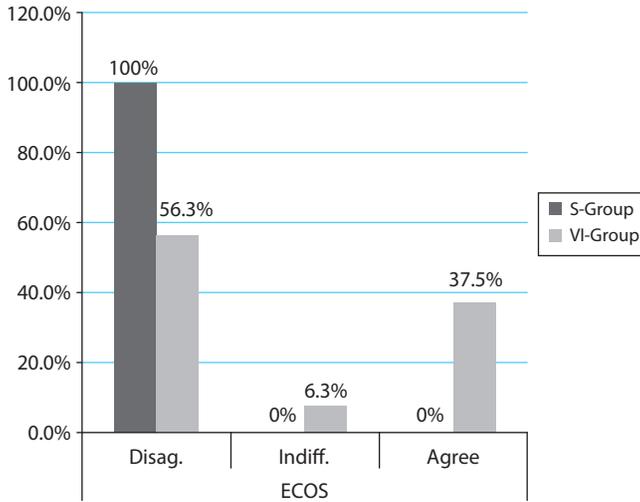


Figure 4. Answers by group for the item LEAVES INDIFFERENT in the art film.

*Results for the item WEAK*

Results for the item WEAK showed the same pattern as the data described in the previous item LEAVES INDIFFERENT (see Figure 5). While all sighted participants considered that they were not indifferent about the film, only slightly over half of the visually impaired people (56%) expressed a similar feeling. In contrast with the sighted participants, 37.5% of the unsighted ones considered that the film left them indifferent while 6.3 % of them rated this item as “indifferent.” Again, the answers of the sighted group showed greater consistency, pointing to the possibility that the film had a greater emotional impact on this group than on the visually impaired participants.

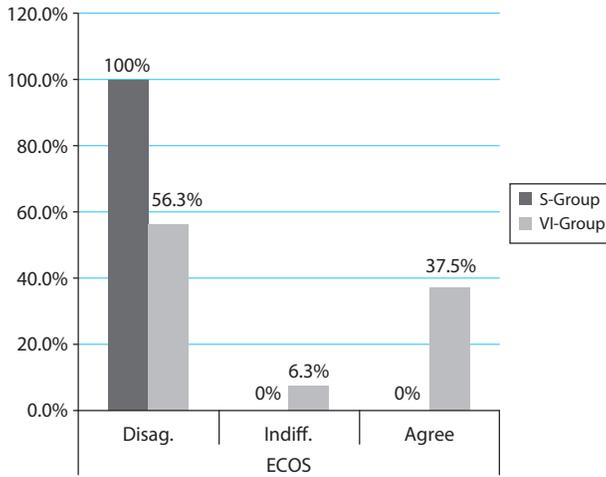


Figure 5. Answers by group for the item IS WEAK in the art film.

*Results for the item STIRRING*

Although the analyses performed did not show any significant differences between the groups for this item, a strong tendency towards significance was found ( $p = 0.6$ ). In fact, Figure 6 shows a similar tendency among the ones reported for previous items. While 86.7% of the sighted participants rated the film as stirring, only half of the visually impaired participants did. The other half of the visually impaired participants disagreed with the statement, whereas only 13.3% of the sighted did. Only 6.3% of the visually impaired participants provided an answer that could be rated as indifferent.

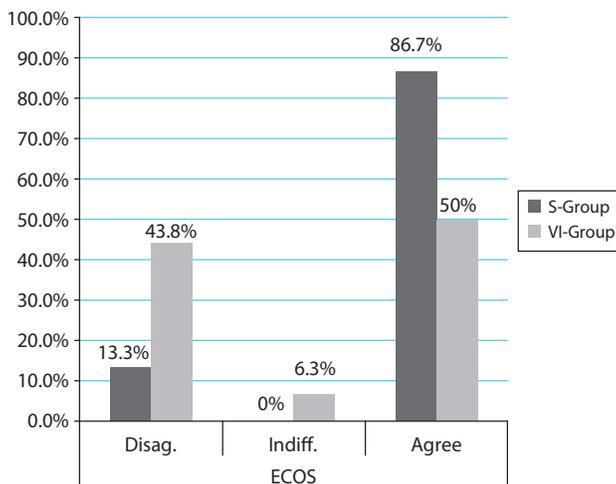


Figure 6. Answers by group for the item IS STIRRING in the art film.

### *General discussion*

The results described in this section show that the emotional response of sighted and visually impaired participants was very similar for the two mainstream films (*Pênalti* and *Aguas de Romanza*). These results suggest that Audio Description was able to fulfil its main objective in these two cases, offering the visually impaired audience a similar experience to the one the films offer to sighted audiences.

However, data for the art film *Ecos da Terra* show a different pattern. As previously explained, our results reveal statistically (or nearly) significant differences between the sighted and the visually impaired group for all items regarding this film. Furthermore, a similar tendency is found for all items, since results for the visually impaired group are in all cases divided; around half of the participants in the visually impaired group comment that the emotional impact of the film is not strong enough to elicit a response from them. This difference between the two groups is especially visible in items such as EXPRESSIVE, INDIFFERENT and WEAK, where 100% of sighted participants agree that the film is very powerful and emotional, while only around 50% of visually impaired participants think the same (43.8% for EXPRESSIVE; 56.3% for INDIFFERENT and WEAK). For the other three items, results for the sighted participants also show that their emotional response to this film is strong and consistent (93.3% for IMPACT, 75% for TRANSFORMS and 86.7% for STIRRING), whereas half of the visually impaired participants still answer the opposite (43.8% for IMPACT, 58.7% for TRANSFORMS and 43.8% for STIRRING). These results strongly suggest that the special nature of experimental films might require a different treatment when it comes to creating their Audio Description.

### **Conclusion**

Overall the results reported in the previous section seemed to corroborate our initial hypothesis. Statistically significant differences between the sighted and the visually impaired group were found in their response to the film *Ecos da terra*, a short film that shows non-mainstream characteristics in terms of its narrative structure. In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found between the groups in terms of their emotional response to the other two mainstream films, *Aguas de Romanza* and *Pênalti*. These data suggest that elaborating an audio-description that provokes an emotional response in unsighted audiences similar to the one provoked by film images in sighted audiences may indeed be more difficult to achieve for some types of films, such as avant-garde or art films.

*Ecos da terra* belongs to the category of films described by Grodal (2009) as art films without narrative action; they are thus more likely to create saturated

emotions that block the PECMA flow. The difference reported in our study between this art film and the other two mainstream ones with a clear narrative flow suggests that in avant-garde films the AD version could be more likely to have an inhibiting effect that diminishes the emotional response of unsighted audiences in comparison with sighted ones. In *Ecos da terra*, as in most avant-garde films, the lack of narrative action was compensated for by stirring and high impact images with a strong emotional load that was very difficult to convey by the words of an AD description. In this type of films the popular saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” certainly acquires strength in relation to the potential of images to elicit emotional responses. Precisely for this reason the design and elaboration of an AD version that aims to provoke a similar emotional response to that created by the original film images becomes a more intricate task in these films. And the whole process seems even more laborious under the objectivity and neutrality principle that rules current AD practice. After all, the principle of objectivity and neutrality confers a sense of detachment to the description, which can easily contribute to suppressing lyrical-associated feelings and reducing the degree of emotional saturation.

Whether or not the reported suppressing effect of emotions is related to the objectivity principle ruling current AD practice remains an unanswered question. However, there is now evidence that suggests that using more emotional language in audio-descriptions can contribute to eliciting an emotional response in unsighted audiences that is more similar to the one evoked by film images in sighted audiences (e.g., Ramos 2013). And although the existing evidence is not conclusive and further research is still needed, perhaps the time is now right for a revision of current AD practices. In light of the previous research on emotional response, it now seems sensible to revise current AD practices in order to accommodate for differences between various types of films. The possibility exists that the objectivity and neutrality principle that was initially adopted to avoid giving visually impaired people a biased and subjective perspective on the films they are hearing may in fact have had the opposite effect in films where lyrical-associated feelings give prominence to subjective and personal emotions.

The results reported in this study suggest that the hypothesis is valid in at least certain cases, but they should be interpreted cautiously. To start with, we worked with a convenience sample of participants in which distribution was controlled by the participants’ gender and age, but did not account for other potentially intervening variables, such as their socio-economic background, film literacy, or type of visual impairment. Moreover, the use of questionnaires as a data gathering method provides subjective data that give researchers a general impression of the phenomenon under study, but does not offer conclusive data on what actually goes on in the participants’ minds and bodies. Limitations relating to cultural

conventions should also be acknowledged; the same statement may be answered with different intensity depending on cultural conventions, since the expression of emotion may be more acceptable in some languages and cultures than in others.

These methodological limitations constrain research comparability and determination of cause and effect relationships, but do not invalidate the main result of the paper, showing that in certain types of art films there is a difference in the emotional response of sighted versus unsighted audiences. Furthermore, most of these limitations could be overcome by adopting different research methods and designs that include ways to triangulate our data. Future research should thus be carried out to unveil both the strengths and limitations of current AD practices. If AD seeks to expand the possibilities of visually impaired people to have access to visual scenes, then an AD that diminishes the impact that the film has on sighted people may somehow contribute to increasing the limitations of visually impaired people, preventing their potential emotional responses to certain kinds of films.

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