

An experimental study on receiving Audio Descriptions in Iran

Javad Sagha

Department of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, Communication and Media Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran
saga_j@yahoo.com

How to cite:

Sagha, J. (2024). An experimental study on receiving Audio Descriptions in Iran. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies* 5(4).1-16. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v5i4.513>

ARTICLE

HISTORY

Received:
03/07/2024

Accepted:
30/09/2024

Keywords:

Audio
Description,
Persian,
Reception
Quality,
Objective,
Subjective

Abstract

Despite the growing body of research on audience satisfaction, Audio Description (AD) in Iran is still in its early stages of scientific development. Given the non-professional nature of AD production for Persian films in Iran, this research aimed to determine whether the current AD services meet users' needs and satisfaction. This study is based on a questionnaire survey of 30 blind and partially sighted individuals. The results indicate that AD services in Iran are limited to movies, revealing a significant gap between supply and demand. AD in Iran faces several challenges, including low quality, a lack of specialists, and insufficient theoretical research. From the audience's perspective, common issues include inappropriate timing, unsuitable vocabulary, subjective judgments, premature disclosure of story elements, neglect of actors' characteristics, and a disregard for standard guidelines in favour of self-made norms in descriptions. However, the existing Persian AD does help the audience understand the film's storyline. Our experimental research shows that participants prefer objective AD with detailed descriptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Audio Description (AD) enables blind and partially sighted individuals to enjoy movies by verbalizing visual elements, such as symbolic signs, and combining them with the movie's soundtrack to shape their perception, thereby compensating for their impaired vision (Di Giovanni, 2014, 2018). Today, the focus in media accessibility is on providing inclusive services and cultural products for diverse users, especially those with special needs (Bogucki & Deckert, 2020). Ensuring easy and equal access to visual and audio media for all users is essential (Snyder, 2007).

In Iran, while measures have been taken to provide access to information for blind and partially sighted groups, these individuals still lag behind their sighted counterparts in accessing various media, including movies and series. Although the Iranian government enacted a law in 2017 to provide AD on television for the blind and partially sighted, specific regulations and guidelines are lacking. Currently, two independent internet groups, a radio network, and, more recently, a television network suggested by the researcher, are active in producing AD for Persian films in Iran. However, the needs of visually impaired individuals remain largely unmet, and AD services on television are very limited.

Initial AD research primarily examined its role and position in different countries, its foundations, and its guidelines (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020). Recent studies have focused on the receptive and educational aspects of AD (Di Giovanni, 2018). Unlike the extensive research on AD worldwide, particularly in

Europe (Taylor & Perego, 2022), there is limited research on Persian AD in Iran. AD in Iran is in its early stages, both in terms of service provision and as an academic research topic.

This study aims to provide information on the availability and quality of AD in Iran and the acceptance of AD by the target audience. Given the lack of professionalism in AD production in Iran, we sought to determine how closely current efforts align with standards for producing AD for Persian fiction films. The article first presents a brief overview of the creation of Persian AD in Iran and analyzes the factors influencing its development. It then conducts a questionnaire-based study on AD acceptance. The research also investigates audience preferences between subjective AD and detailed objective AD and assesses the extent to which produced Persian AD adheres to established guidelines. Recommendations for applying AD are used as a framework for data analysis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Audio Descriptions (AD) and Standards

The first academic record of the concept of Audio Description (AD) was documented in Gary Gorey Fraser's master's thesis, titled "Television for the Blind," in 1975 (Snyder, 2007, pp. 99-104). Fraser's research in America laid the groundwork for the development of AD and its introduction to television. In the United States, the broadcast station WGBH in Boston began its descriptive video service in 1987 (Fryer, 2016). According to DiGiovanni (2018), audio-descriptive television programming flourished worldwide in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In AD studies, three main areas of interest are: when to describe, what to describe, and how to describe (Holsanova, 2016; 2022; Holsanova et al., 2016; Vercauteren, 2021). According to the guidelines (Ofcom, 2021, p. 6), descriptions should be interspersed with conversations and should never overlap with dialogue.

Regarding what should be described, ITC (2000) and Ofcom (2021) emphasize that descriptions should focus on what appears and exists on the screen. Holsanova (2023, pp. 64–92) notes that the sequence of events in a film is closely related to the verbal narrative conveyed through AD. Identifying and describing characters is an integral and essential part of effective AD (Mazur, 2015; Vercauteren, 2016). Naming characters and describing their appearance is crucial to how they are perceived and remembered (Benecke, 2014) and can affect narrative comprehension (Vercauteren, 2016).

Jankowska and colleagues argue that in AD production, factors such as the relationship between tone, sound type, and film genre should be considered. The type of sound and the emotional capacity of a scene can significantly affect AD. An inappropriate tone (e.g., a happy or comedic voice for a scary scene) can distract the audience (Jankowska et al., 2023, p. 716).

Existing guidelines (Independent Television Commission, 2000; Remael et al., 2015; Snyder, 2014; Szymańska & Strzymiński, 2010) emphasize that the voice used for AD should be neutral and clear, yet not monotonous, and should match the main tone of the film. However, recent research suggests aiming for a balanced tone in AD that suits any movie, as both overly dramatic and overly flat readings can detract from the film. The sound should complement the film, and the tone should match the character of the scene (Jankowska et al., 2023, p. 716).

Over-description can sometimes undermine a scene, while under-description can provide insufficient information. The goal of AD is to minimize audience confusion (ITC, 2000, pp. 15-16). According to the ITC (2000), blind viewers with visual memory often appreciate detailed audio descriptions, whereas those who have been blind from birth or early childhood may find such details meaningless.

In AD production, the choice of vocabulary, style, and form of expression are crucial. Descriptions should be simple and concise. The descriptor should keep pace with the film and not provide

information prematurely, as no information should be presented to blind audiences before it is available to sighted viewers (Ofcom, 2021). These guidelines are among the most well-known principles discussed in the ADLAB project. The ADLAB project concluded that successful descriptors are trained professionals with extensive knowledge of audio description guidelines and standards, as well as expertise in language, linguistics, media accessibility, scriptwriting, and audiovisual and multimedia texts.

Moreno and Vermeulen (2017, pp. 52-68) argue that films can reproduce physical realities and the physical world very accurately and that the importance of certain elements increases when more description is needed. The need for further description has been noted in recent research. These studies suggest that subject-oriented approaches are useful for better understanding the audience (Geerinck & Vercauteren, 2020). According to some researchers, subjective AD can provide blind viewers with a closer experience to that of sighted viewers (Bardini, 2021, p. 94).

Fix (2005), as cited by Jacket and Carrer (2018, pp. 54-56) and Fryer (2016), supports subjective and interpretive audio descriptions. However, Szymańska and Zabrocka (2015) state that "audio descriptors should strive to objectively describe the image rather than offering their own subjective interpretation." In American AD practice, descriptors only describe what is apparent on the screen. Instead of stating that a character is angry, they describe the character's actions, allowing the blind and partially sighted viewer to interpret the action (Bardini, 2020, p. 276). British research suggests that additional commentary is acceptable as long as it does not involve interpretation (Ofcom, 2021; ITC, 2000).

ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015) recommends balancing subjectivity and objectivity in AD, enabling viewers to make their own interpretations. Maseru and Chamil (2012, pp. 173-188) advocate for a unified approach that maintains moderation.

Aside from the objective and subjective approaches to describing the visual features of a film, descriptors need to be familiar with AD standards. These standards help determine what to describe and how to describe it.

Lukasz (2016) identifies common mistakes in audio descriptions, including over-interpretation, revealing plot points too early, and using long sentences. These issues are present in many AD services available in Iran. Common problems include inappropriate timing, lack of balance, unsuitable vocabulary, judgmental language, the early plot reveals, neglect of actors' characteristics, and disregard for standard guidelines in favour of self-made norms. To understand the target audience's acceptance of AD services in Iran, an acceptance study was designed and conducted. Research on AD acceptance in Iran is still in its early stages, and the literature is limited. Studies by Sagha et al. (2021) and Sagha et al. (2022) in the Persian language show that Persian AD users prefer detailed descriptions that adhere to common standards in Persian AD for movies. The present study calls for more research and investigation into various aspects of AD in the Persian language.

2.2. Audience Reception and Acceptance in Audio Description Studies

Audience acceptance, a significant focus of AD research today, has driven a thematic and methodological shift in the field (Jankowska, 2019). Early research on audience acceptance primarily focused on preferences and perceptions, often measured through mental models. Today, there is a growing interest in exploring the concepts of presence and emotional response.

Most multimedia AD research emphasizes reception studies (Bardini, 2020b; Chaume, 2018). Within the field of voice description, several studies have examined user expectations and satisfaction with different narration styles (Fernández-Torné & Matamala, 2015), as well as the effects of speech speed, tone, and articulation on audience comprehension. Research has also investigated how changes in the

presentation and intersection of information affect the information recall process among users (Fresno, 2014, cited by Matamala, 2018).

In many of these studies, users watched videos or live performances, followed by data collection through individual or group interviews or questionnaires. For instance, Bardini (2020) took a different approach to studying AD reception, examining various AD styles. In his article "Interpretation in Audio Description and Film Experience of Blind and Partially Sighted Audiences: Design of a Reception Study," Bardini reports on the methodological aspects of a study that tested three different AD styles: descriptive, cinematic, and narrative. This article details the materials used for the experiment and the creation of these three versions within a functionalist framework.

Bardini's (2020) findings align with Kleege's (2018, 98) observations, concluding that while AD is generally understandable, a certain level of adaptability and professionalism is necessary. Established rules and guidelines may contain problematic assumptions about what blind people can and should know about visual phenomena. ADs can help dismantle these stereotypes by identifying potential issues, thereby paving the way for testing solutions with blind and visually impaired audiences.

Walczak (2017) conducted a study that tested the reception of a "creative AD style," incorporating cognitive and creative descriptions to translate cinematic language into words. Bardini (2020) further explored this by testing the experience of blind and visually impaired users with a "cinematic AD style," which mainly used cognitive descriptions, a "narrative AD style," featuring more creative descriptions, and a "conventional AD style," with predominantly symbolic descriptions.

Walczak's paper reports on two empirical studies with end-users in Poland. The first experiment analyzed the reception of two AD styles: standard and creative. The second study examined the reception of two types of AD voices, human and artificial, across two genres, fiction and documentary. Focusing on the concept of presence, Walczak used the ITC-SOPI questionnaire to gather information from participants. The results of these projects showed that despite existing guidelines, the use of interpretive AD techniques is well-received by end-users and enhances their experience.

In another study, Monika Zabrocka (2018) conducted research titled "Rhyme and Traditional Audio Description as Seen by Blind and Visually Impaired Audiences: Results of a Pilot Study on Audio Description." In this study, two types of ADs—rhymed and traditional—were prepared for the animated film *Boundin'* (Pixar, 2003) and presented to blind audiences, including both children and adults. The audience was then questioned about the plot, characters, and various technical aspects of the AD, such as its overall character, vocabulary, and the narrator's voice. The study aimed to determine whether artistic AD could provide blind people with the necessary information to understand a film at the same level as sighted viewers. The study concluded that the form and level of difficulty should be adjusted according to the age, skills, and expectations of the target group. The results also showed that AD "must not impose itself on its target audience." The majority of regular AD users emphasized the importance of objectivity in the narrative.

These studies have explored the audio description of films from various perspectives. The present research aims to assess the quality of Persian experimental AD through a case study, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data.

2.3. Audio Description Services in Iran

Audio Description (AD) services are relatively new in Iran. Based on field research conducted by the author and discussions with key activists in this field, the history of Persian AD for films in Iran dates back to 2005, when Persian AD broadcasted some foreign films on a radio program called "Radio Cinema." This program, which was active for only one year, aimed to provide Persian AD services

through radio to a general audience, not specifically for the blind (Personal communication, January 16, 2024, Mshishegaran).

Currently, four main groups are providing Persian AD services to the blind and visually impaired:

1. Radio Film (<http://radionamayesh.ir>): This radio program began its operations in 2011 on Radio Namayesh. "Radio Film" is the first targeted program to provide Persian film AD for the blind in Iran (Personal communication, January 14, 2024).
2. Sevina Group (<https://sevinagroup.com>): This independent group began its activities in 2019 by showing films for the blind in cinemas, using a live description method, which Snyder (2007, 99-104) considers unauthorized. After the COVID-19 pandemic, Sevina Group shifted to producing Persian ADs recorded on movies available on the internet, starting in 2020.
3. Goshkon Group (<https://gooshkon.ir>): Another independent group that started providing AD services on the website "Blind Neighborhood" in 2020.
4. Namayesh TV Channel (<https://namayeshtv.ir>): Following a suggestion by an Iranian TV researcher, this channel began broadcasting audio-described movies in a very limited capacity, with only one movie per week, at the time of writing this article.

These groups are currently engaged in creating Persian ADs for fiction films in the form of audio files, alongside their other activities. In all these groups, blind and partially sighted volunteers provide consultation, which aligns with the collaborative access model described by Di Giovanni (2018: 158). However, several factors influence the development of Persian AD.

Firstly, AD resources are limited. The author's field research on these groups indicates that by the end of 2023, a total of 400 films and series had been produced with Persian AD. "Radio Film" broadcasts AD for films only once a week, which may not fit the schedules of all audiences. The Sevina and Goshkon groups provide AD services on internet platforms, but due to media filtering and poor internet services in Iran, these may not be fully accessible. Furthermore, blind and partially sighted people in Iran can only access AD films as audio recordings and television broadcasting for the blind remains extremely limited.

Secondly, the majority of individuals involved in AD services in Iran are amateurs or part-time volunteers, with only a few professionals participating in AD production. KhoshSaligheh and Shafiei (2021), as well as Sagha, Shahmohammahi, and Ronaghy (2022), highlight the issues of unprofessionalism among AD teams, including writers and narrators, and the lack of a standardized training system for voice describers. Their research suggests that government organizations and researchers should conduct studies to establish necessary standards and guidelines for AD production to ensure that blind audiences can fully benefit from this cultural resource.

Over the years, some countries have developed their own AD standards or guidelines, either individually or through regional cooperation (e.g., ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2021; ADLAB, 2017; ACB, 2009). According to Massida (2015), Persian AD production groups in Iran rely on self-made standards to describe films. In practice, AD in Iran often involves narrating the entire story, with common issues such as inappropriate timing, disproportionate descriptions, subjective judgments, and a lack of attention to the characteristics of the actors.

Thirdly, there has been little academic research on AD in Iran. One notable example is the PhD thesis by Sagha (2021) from Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, titled "Image Reading: The Lived Experience of Cinema for the Blind in Iran." This study, using a phenomenological approach, explores the experiences of blind Iranians with AD in film and cinema. Early academic studies in Persian have aimed to introduce the phenomenon of AD, such as those by Khosh-Saligheh and Shafiei (2021) and Sagha et al. (2022).

In addition, some research has been published in English, including studies by Khoshsaligheh et al. (2022) and Salehi & Mousavi Razavi (2023). These studies have used qualitative methods to evaluate ADs produced by groups like Sevina, comparing them against guidelines from ADLAB and ITC. The present research, based on audience reception, aims to investigate the objective and subjective nature of current Persian AD content, as well as the expectations and needs of users, through questionnaires and interviews. By addressing these aspects, this study seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of AD services for the blind and visually impaired in Iran.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Questionnaire-Based Research on AD Acceptance in Iran

This study utilized a questionnaire-based approach to examine the acceptance of Audio Description (AD) among visually impaired individuals in Iran. A total of 30 participants were selected from six cities: Tehran, Shiraz, Yazd, Karaj, Rasht, and Mashhad. Following Orero et al. (2018), who suggest that a minimum of 25 participants with visual impairments is desirable for obtaining more representative results (p. 110), the sample size was considered adequate for this research.

The participants, aged between 18 and 50 years, included 16 women and 14 men, with educational backgrounds ranging from a diploma to a doctorate. Among them, 16 individuals were blind from birth or before the age of two, 6 lost their sight during adolescence or early adulthood, and 8 were visually impaired rather than fully blind. All participants had prior experience with watching films accompanied by audio descriptions.

To facilitate data collection, some participants were contacted via Telegram and WhatsApp, and they completed the questionnaire online. Following the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information.

The research aimed to assess the following aspects:

Participants' Media Preferences: What types of media products do participants prefer?

Familiarity with AD: How familiar are participants with AD, and what are their opinions on the information provided at the beginning of movies?

Satisfaction with AD Quality: What is the level of satisfaction with existing AD quality, and what are the participants' specific AD needs?

Subjective vs. Objective AD: What are participants' opinions on the use of subjective versus objective approaches in AD?

3.2. Questionnaire Structure

The questionnaire was structured into four distinct parts to comprehensively assess participants' experiences and preferences regarding Audio Description (AD):

Part One: This section focused on participants' demographic characteristics and vision priorities. It gathered basic information about the participants' backgrounds, including their age, gender, educational level, and the nature of their visual impairment.

Part Two: This part assessed participants' familiarity with AD and their opinions on common Persian AD practices, particularly the introductory information provided at the beginning of movies. Participants who had experience with AD films commented on the information about actors, directors, filmmakers, and the AD production team. They rated the necessity of this introductory information

using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Somewhat Satisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied).

Part Three: In this section, participants watched the Iranian film "The Salesman," directed by Asghar Farhadi, which included Persian AD produced by "Radio Film." After viewing the film, participants completed a 5-point Likert scale survey and answered 10 multiple-choice questions concerning the movie's vocabulary, simplicity, and overall description quality. Additionally, open-ended questions were included to collect detailed feedback on their AD needs and preferences.

Part Four: This section explored participants' opinions on subjective versus objective AD. Participants viewed two different opening sequences of the film "Rebecca": one with a relatively subjective AD produced by the "Sevina" group and the other with a relatively objective AD prepared by the researcher. Participants rated and provided explanations for their preferences regarding each AD version.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Media Preferences

Most Used Media: Of the participants, 10 preferred television, 10 preferred smartphones, 7 preferred cinema, and 3 preferred computers. None chose DVDs. Television's widespread availability and its role in family gatherings made it a popular choice. Smartphones were favoured for their versatility and personal viewing options. Despite technological advancements, some visually impaired individuals preferred connecting their smartphones to large TV screens. Although Iranian cinemas lack AD, participants expressed an interest in watching films in cinemas and sought assistance in understanding visual content.

Movie Preferences: Participants showed a preference for romantic movies (9), comedy (7), science fiction (6), action movies (5), and documentaries (3). Additionally, 18 respondents preferred Iranian movies, while 25 preferred international films. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' viewing habits

| The most used media | television | smartphone | Computer | Cinema | DVD |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------|--------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| | 33% | 33% | 10% | 24% | - |
| Popular movies | romantic | Comedy | sci-fi | Action | documentary |
| | 30% | 24% | 20% | 16% | 10% |
| Preference of the movies | Iranian movies | | movies of the day of the world | | |
| | 60% | | 83% | | |

The survey results indicated a disparity between existing AD services and the general habits and preferences of the participants. While participants often watch TV, the newly established AD service on TV is limited. Out of 24 TV channels, only one broadcasts AD movies weekly.

The current AD services do not align with participants' viewing habits and preferences, particularly regarding the release year of films, especially foreign movies. Additionally, current movies are not available through these services, and none of the cinemas in Iran are equipped with AD broadcast capabilities.

Participants expressed a particular interest in comedy, science fiction, and action films, noting that these genres receive less attention from the three Persian AD production groups. These findings align with

results from Yang et al. (2023) in their pilot study on the quality of AD in China. This study showed that while participants often prefer to watch TV, existing AD services do not meet their viewing habits. The preference for movie genres among participants in this study was 21% for romantic movies, 16% for action films, and 15% for comedy movies.

4.2.familiarity with AD and participants' opinions about AD at the beginning of the movie

Regarding the participants' experience with AD, when asked how they became acquainted with this service, 30% reported learning about it through English-language AD films on the Internet or programs such as Netflix. Another 30% became familiar with AD through the "Radio Film" program, 26% through the "Suvina" group, 7% through the "Radio Cinema" program, and 7% through "Friends" groups.

When asked whether it is necessary to provide information about the actors and producers of a film, 28 participants, accounting for more than 93% of the group, considered it essential. Captions, a type of text on the screen (Matamala & Orero, 2015), are sometimes used to provide explanations before the AD text is read (Remael et al., ADLAB 2015). The participants stated: (1) It is important to know about the actors and production team. (2) Knowledge about the actors allows us to participate in discussions about the film. (3) Knowing famous directors or actors encourages us to watch. However, 2 participants who did not find this information necessary mentioned that the story of the film is more important to them than details about the actors.

Regarding the inclusion of information about the AD production group, including the name of the group, the AD author, the AD announcer, and the technical and sound technicians, 80% (24 participants) deemed it necessary. Their reasons were: (1) It allows us to assess their abilities. (2) The quality of their descriptions matters. (3) Knowing about the production group encourages us to watch the film. On the other hand, 20% (6 participants) who did not find this information necessary stated: (1) It does not aid in understanding the movie. (2) The information is redundant and unnecessary.

Interviews revealed that most participants, more than 56% (17 people), prefer to receive an evaluation of the film's place and significance, including its reception among viewers and experts and its achieved success, for both Iranian and foreign films.

4.3.Satisfaction with the content quality of AD and the needs of participants

After watching the movie "The Salesman," participants answered 10 multiple-choice questions evaluating aspects such as timing, word choice, judgment, sentence simplicity and clarity, character descriptions, appearance, attention to detail, and relevance. The results indicated a relatively low level of satisfaction with the AD (Total score = 10 points, mean = 4.85, SD = 1.28). Participants' feedback primarily focused on improving quality, with many expressing a need for higher-quality Persian AD. Their suggestions, categorized according to common guidelines, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Opinions of the participants regarding the content quality of Persian AD

| referential element | Opinion of participants | Compliance with AD guidelines |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Scheduling | Sometimes the actor's voice cannot be heard because the AD sound is placed over them. | Descriptions should be clear, (Ofcom, 2021, p6) not rushed – every word should be clear, audible and carefully timed so as not to overpower subsequent conversations. Coherence of film sound and AD is essential; AD should not overlap with the film soundtrack. (Chmiel, 2015, p. 36) |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Characteristics of actors | We like to know what the movie characters look like. What are they wearing? Are they tall or short, etc. | Character description is vital for effective Audio Description. Aspects such as clothing, physical features, and facial expressions. (Ofcom, 2021, p 8) (Snyder, 2000, p 6) (ITC, 2007) |
| Long sentences | Long sentences are distracting and confusing. | According to Perigo (2015), a very long description with details may tire the audience. (ADLAB, 2017), (Snyder, 2007), (Franca, 2016) |
| Repeated vocabulary | The use of lexical diversity is low. | (Ramael et al. 2015) In Audio Description, one should use the variety of vocabulary and avoid boring repetition of common and general vocabulary. |
| Vocabulary suitable for the blind | I think they should use sentences that match the perception of the blind, not the sighted. | Words and vocabulary should be used according to the needs and understanding of the blind. (Orero, 2008, 176-193) Vocabulary should match the genre of the program and should be precise, easy to understand and concise. (Ofcom, 2021) |
| Judgment | Sometimes a narrator tells the story in advance and gives a personal opinion. | Don't get ahead of the story, it's a kind of judgment. (ADLAB, 2017), (Snyder, 2014) Ofcom, 2021) |
| Early introduction | If the name of a person or a place is to be introduced by the program itself, there is no need to include it in the description. | It advises not to reveal the character's name if the story reveals it in the future. (Ofcom, 2021) |
| establishing balance | Sometimes too much details are given and sometimes relevant details are not mentioned. | According to Perigo (2015), paying too much attention to details is boring, on the other hand, short and concise description endangers one's understanding of the film. (France, 2016) establishing balance: Too much description, even where there is plenty of room for description, makes it difficult for viewers to absorb the information. (Ofcom, 2021) |
| being related | We should be told things related to the film and the story. | As far as the storyline is concerned, the characters, places and... should be described. (Ofcom, 2021, p 6) |
| Descriptor choosing | Sometimes some descriptors are not suitable for the movie being shown. | Descriptors should be chosen according to the genre, the nature of the program and the intended audience. (Ofcom, 2021, p 6) |

The test results revealed that the content quality of current Persian AD is not satisfactory. As shown in Table 2, the Persian AD presentation in Iran falls short of industry standards. Previous research conducted in Persian (Sagha et al., 2021; Sagha et al., 2022) also highlighted similar issues. These studies found that the lack of training and professionalism among active AD groups has contributed to a decline in AD quality. This aligns with the findings of Tor-Carroggio and Casas-Tost (2020), which showed that most audio describers in China are volunteers with unrelated university education.

Participants frequently noted issues with Persian AD similar to those listed in Table 2. Feedback on their AD needs included:

1. Increased Quantity: There is a demand for more AD videos to be made available.
2. Access to Recent and Popular Movies: Participants expressed a desire to access the latest and most popular films.
3. Frequent Screenings and Better Advertising: Respondents wanted AD movies to be screened more frequently and advertised more effectively to increase user awareness and access.
4. AD Services on TV: There is a preference for AD services to be available on television.

4.4. Participants' comments on relatively subjective and objective descriptions in more details

Considering that starting a program or movie is often the most difficult for blind and partially sighted people who are unable to receive visual cues (ITC, 2000, p6), (Ofcom, 2021, p8) we have two different Persian AD versions of the sequence we showed the cliff and inside the hotel sequences of the movie "Rebecca" directed by Alfred Hitchcock to the participants (Table 3) to collect their preferences and test the effect of different versions on reading comprehension.

Table 3: Relatively subjective versus objective description with more details of "Rebecca"

| Subject: Cliff sequence When Maxim is standing on top of the rocks facing the sea the girl imagines that he is trying to commit suicide. In this sequence, the sound of sea waves crashing against the rocks is heard along with frightening music, which aims to induce an exciting feeling in the audience. | |
|--|--|
| Objective version | subjective version |
| Unsettled sea and waves hitting the rocks, a man standing on top of a cliff facing the sea. He is staring at the rough sea. One of the man's legs is slightly raised while walking. He is staring at the sea. Girl: No, wait. Descriptor: The voice of a young girl standing at the bottom of the cliff. | Descriptor: A raging sea and waves hitting the rocks. Maxime de Winter is standing on top of the rocks as if he is about to commit suicide. Girl: No, wait. Narrator: The narrator's voice, is a young girl standing further away. |
| Subject: The scene inside the hotel When Mrs. Fan Hopper is sitting with the girl in the hotel, she recognizes Maxim and Maxim and the girl meet again. | |
| Objective version | subjective version |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Descriptor: The girl and her companion, Mrs. Edith Fan Hopper, are sitting in the lobby of the hotel.</p> <p>Fan Hopper: I will never come to Monte Calero in the off-season again, you won't see a single prominent person in the hotel at this time. This is their coffee! Waitre. Call the waiter, tell him something for me... (the woman doesn't finish).</p> <p>Narrator: Mrs. Fan Hopper notices something.</p> <p>Fan Hopper: My God, this is Max DeWinter. I am very happy, sir.</p> <p>Maxim: Me too.</p> <p>Narrator: The girl and Maxim stare at each other for a moment. They had seen each other before in the cliff.</p> <p>Fan Hopper: I am Edith Fan Hopper. I am very happy to see you here. I was going to despair of finding old friends here in Monte Carlo.</p> | <p>Descriptor: The girl is sitting with an old woman, Mrs. Edith Fan Hopper, in the lobby of an aristocratic hotel.</p> <p>Fan Hopper: I will never come to Monte Calero in the off-season again, you won't see a single prominent person in the hotel at this time. This is their coffee!</p> <p>Waitre. Call the waiter, tell him something for me... (the woman leaves her speech unfinished)</p> <p>They notice Maxim entering the hotel.</p> <p>Mrs. Fan Hopper: My God, this is Max DeWinter. I am very happy sir.</p> <p>Maxim: Me too.</p> <p>Mrs. Fan Hopper: I'm Edith Fan Hopper. I am very happy to see you here. I was going to despair of finding old friends here in Monte Carlo.</p> |
|--|--|

In the first stage, the first group watched the subjective version and the second group watched the objective version. After viewing, participants were asked to answer 5 multiple-choice comprehension questions about each AD. Comprehension questions include: (1) Why was Maxim standing on the rock? (2) Did you get a sense of excitement and worry? (3) Why did the girl tell him to stop? (4) Do the girl and Maxim meet at the hotel? (5) Do you notice that they have met before? subjective version: mean = 3.21, standard deviation = 1.19, objective version: mean = 3.17, standard deviation = 1.03). The results of this stage showed that subjective or objective descriptions do not make much difference in improving the participants' understanding of the film.

Proponents of objective description said: (1) Objective description describes scenes well. (2) We are interested in receiving details similar to what ordinary viewers see, and this is present in the objective description. Proponents of subjective description said (1) it made it easier to follow the movie. (2) It provided more information. (3) It made the film easier to understand.

In the second step, each group listened to the other's unheard version. Then, participants were asked to choose whether they preferred the subjective or objective version and then state the reasons for their choice. Finally, they were asked to rate their satisfaction with each version of AD on a 5-point Likert scale.

Most of the participants (66% of the participants) found the objective explanations appropriate. In addition to 26% of the visually impaired participants and 20% of the participants who had lost their vision during adolescence, 20% of the blind from birth also liked the AD prepared by the researcher. This result is consistent with guidelines that prescribe an objective approach. symbolic description and stating that audio describers should refrain from interpreting images (Dosch, Benecke, 2004; Ofcom, 2000; AENOR, 2005; Morisset, Gonant, 2008).

(objective version: mean = 4.23, SD = 0.46, subjective version: mean = 4.12, SD = 0.54), the majority of participants (66.66%) stated that they preferred the objective version.

These results are consistent with the results of Zabrocka's research in Poland. The results of the research, which was conducted through a questionnaire regarding two different ADs of the same film, show that most participants prefer objective descriptions.

Zabrocka (2018) concluded that most people who regularly use AD consider the objectivity of the narrative very important. In general, traditional AD is much more appreciated than artistic AD because it is more neutral, predictable, and easier to receive, but this should not discredit artistic AD, according to respondents.

Participants said that in the AD prepared by the researcher, (1) they became aware of the intention of "Maxim" in the scene of standing on the rock in the movie "Rebecca". (2) They considered the early use of the word "suicide" unnecessary because the objective description of the frightening images and music conveyed the sense, as (ADLAB2017) and (Ofcom2021), judgment precedes fiction. Snyder (2014) says that audiences should be allowed to interpret what they hear and avoid imposing an additional burden on explanations. They said that the quick mention of Maxim's name at the beginning of the film would have lessened the appeal of his identification in the hotel (ITC, 2000, p6) since Maxim was identified in that scene by Mrs. Fan Hopper. According to Ofcom (2021), the narrator in the narration should keep pace with the film and not be ahead of the film, because no information should be presented to the blind before others. These are among the most well-known guidelines mentioned in the ADLAB project.

Also, for the participants, the description of the faces of "girl" and "Maxim" in the hotel, which showed (ITC, 2000, p6) and Ofcom (2021) that they had seen each other before, was attractive. The description of this scene was not included in the subjective version of the AD Farsi movie, try to cover as much as possible what is shown in the scene and additional explanation is appreciated as long as there is no commentary.

Regarding the reason for their choice, participants said: (1) objective description helped bring the film to life; (2) The pictures were explained in more detail and helped me understand better. (3) The subjective description had judgment and reduced the excitement. (4) The objective description did not precede the story. (5) The subjective description weakened the appeal of the film. The participants who liked the subjective version said: (1) subjective explanations place us better in the flow of the story, but this is not a reason to reject objective explanations. (2) We don't like being ahead of the story, but sometimes we may not understand the story without subjective explanations.

5. CONCLUSION

The implementation of AD in Iran has helped certain audiences to some extent, but at the same time, its development faces many problems. There is a big gap between supply and demand; only three groups produce Persian AD films in Iranian audio format, and television provides very few services in this field.

The films are not up-to-date and do not meet their expectations. The common practices in AD services and content in Iran are different from the norms that are widely accepted by developed countries. The weakness of AD services can be the reason. AD producers in Iran have applied the necessary patterns for Audio Description according to their tastes and willingness, which can be a challenge in the correct transfer of concepts based on Audio Description standards (Masida, 2016). As Nunes says, the decisions of non-professional interpreters of subtitles are based on feeling and "instinct" (Nurens, 2007, 182) and

do not strictly follow commercial norms (Di Giovanni, 2018b). Partly due to the lack of professional staff and integrated AD guidelines, the quality of Persian AD is not very satisfactory.

Although, due to the low level of expectation from AD, the demand of Iranian blind and visually impaired people for movies is often only "understanding the storyline", but most of the participants tend to objective explanations and deal with relevant details. This study can provide a short look but providing a clearer picture of receiving AD in Iran requires more research.

REFERENCES

American Council of the Blind (ACB). (2009). Audio description standards. Retrieved from http://www.acb.org/adp/docs/ADP_Standards.doc

Bardini, F. (2020a). Audio description and the translation of film language into words. *Revista Ilha do Desterro: Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, 73(1), 273–295

Bardini, F. (2020b). Film language, film emotions, and the experience of blind and partially sighted viewers: A reception study. *The Journal of Specialized Translation*, 33, 259–280

Bardini, F. (2021). Film language, film experience, and film interpretation in a reception study comparing conventional and interpretative audio description styles. In S. Braun & K. Starr (Eds.), *Innovation in audio description research* (pp. 76–96). Routledge

Benecke, B. (2014). *Character Fixation and Character Description. The Naming and Describing of Characters in Inglourious Basterds*. In A. Maszerowska, A. Matamala & P. Orero (Eds.), *Audio description: New perspectives illustrated* (pp. 141-158)

Bogucki, Łukasz & Deckert, Mikołaj. (2020). The Palgrave Handbook of Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility. 10.1007/978-3-030-42105-2

Bogucki, Łukasz & Deckert, Mikołaj. (2020). The Palgrave Handbook of Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility. 10.1007/978-3-030-42105-2

Bogucki, Łukasz. (2013). Areas and Methods of Audiovisual Translation Research. 10.3726/978-3-653-03263-5

Chaudhuri, Shohini. (2009). Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema. *Screen*. 50.251-254.10.1093/screen/hjp002

Chaume, F. (2018). An overview of audiovisual translation: Four methodological turns in a mature discipline. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 1(1), 40-63.

Chmiel, A. (2015). Sound effects and music. In A. Remael, N. Reviers, & G. Vercauterens (Eds.), *Pictures painted in*

Di Giovanni, E. (2018). Participatory accessibility: Creating Audio Description with blind and non-blind children. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 1(1), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v1i1.50>

Di Giovanni, E. (2018a). Audio Description and reception-centered research. In E. Di Giovanni & Y. Gambier (Eds.), *Reception studies and audiovisual translation* (pp. 225-250). John Benjamins Publishing Company

An experimental study on receiving Audio Descriptions in Iran

Disabled People's Society of Iran. (2017). Law on protection of disabled people's rights. Retrieved from <http://iransdp.com/?part=menu&inc=menu&id=1473>

Dosch, E. and Benecke, B. (2004). *Wenn Aus Bildern Worte Werden. Durch Audio Description Zum Hörfilm*, 3rd Edition. Munich: Bayrischer Rundfunk

EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste. (n.d.). ADLAB audio description guidelines (pp. 30-35)

Farhadi, A. (Director). (2016). *Salesman*. [Film]

Fernández-Torné, A., & Matamala, A. (2015). Text-to-speech vs. human voiced audio descriptions: A reception study in films dubbed into Catalan. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 24, 61-88.

FIX, Ulla, ed. (2005): *Hörfilm. Bildkompenstation durch Sprache*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt. Gernsbacher Morton and Givon, Talmy, eds. (1995): Coherence in Spontaneous Text. Amsterdam: Benjamins

Franca, L. S. (2016). *Watching films through words: A comparison of the Italian and English audio descriptions of the silence of the lambs* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Universitàdi Padova, Padua, Italy

Fryer, L. (2016). An Introduction to Audio Description. London/New York: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781315707228

Geerinck, Bonnie & Vercauteren, Gert. (2020). Audio describing the mental dimension of narrative characters. Insights from a Flemish case study.. Punctum. *International Journal of Semiotics*. 06. 85-107.10.18680/hss.2020.0005

Giovanni, Elena. (2013). Visual and narrative priorities of the blind and non-blind: eye tracking and audio description. *Perspectives*. 22. 136-153. 10.1080/0907676X.2013.769610

Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1940). *Rebecca*. [Film]

Holsanova, J. (2022). *The cognitive perspective on audio description: Production and reception processes*. In C. Taylor & E. Perego (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of audio description* (pp. 57–77). Taylor & Francis

Holšánová, Jana & Blomberg, Johan & Blomberg, Frida & Gärdenfors, Peter & Johansson, Roger. (2023). Event Segmentation in the Audio Description of Films: A Case Study. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*. 6. 10.47476/jat.v6i1.2023.245

Holšánová, Jana. (2016). Syntolkning - forskning och praktik. 10.13140/RG.2.2.32723.78888

Holšánová, Jana. (2021). Cognitive approach to Audio Description: production and reception processes

Jankowska, A..(2019): Why describers describe what they describe? Paper presented at the 5th *International Conference on Audiovisual Translation INTERMEDIA*, September 19–20, Warsaw, Poland

Jankowska, Anna & Pilarczyk, Joanna & Wołoszyn, Kinga & Kuniecki, Michal. (2022). Enough is enough: how much intonation is needed in the vocal delivery of Audio Description?. *Perspectives*. 31. 1-19.10.1080/0907676X.2022.2026423

Jankowska, Anna. (2017). Fryer, Louise. An Introduction to Audio Description. A Practical Guide (2016). *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 28

Jekat, S. J., & Carrer, L. (2018). A reception study of descriptive vs. interpretative Audio Description [Conference paper]. Proceedings of the Second Barrier-Free Communication Conference – *Accessibility in Educational Settings* (BFC 2018), 54–57. <https://doi.org/10.21256/zhaw-4994>

Khoshsaligheh, M., & Shafiei, S. (2021). Daramadi bar jaygah va vaziateh tosif shafahi dar Iran [Audio description in Iran: The status quo]. *Language and Translation Studies (LTS)*, 54(2), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.22067/lts.v54i2.2101-1006>

Khoshsaligheh, Masood & Shokohmand, Farzaneh & Delnavaz, Fatemeh. (2022). Persian Audio Description Quality of Feature Films in Iran: The Case of Sevina. *Internet Journal of Language, Culture and Society*. 10.22034/ijsc.2022.552176.2618

Kleege, G. (2018). More than meets the eye. New York: Oxford University Press.

Łukasz, B. (2016). *Areas and Methods of Audiovisual Translation Research*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Massidda, Serenella. (2015). Audiovisual translation in the digital age: *The Italian fansubbing phenomenon*. 10.1057/9781137470379

Matamala, A., & Orero, P. (2015). Text on screen. In A. Remael, N. Reviers, & G. Vercauteren (Eds.), Pictures painted in words: ADLAB audio description guidelines (pp. 39–41). *EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste*

Mazur, I. (2015). Characters and actions. In Remael, A., Reviers, N., & Vercauteren, G. (Eds.), Pictures painted in words: ADLAB Audio Description Guidelines, EUT Edizioni UniversitàDiTrieste, Trieste, Section 2.1.1, 19–23

Mazur, Iwona & Chmiel, Agnieszka. (2012). Audio Description Made to Measure: Reflections on Interpretation in AD Based on the Pear Tree Project Data. 10.1163/9789401207812_011

Morisset, L. and Gonant, F. (2008). La Charte de l'audiodescription. <https://www.sdicine.fr/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Charte-de-laudio-description-1008.pdf> [accessed 11/12/2019].

Ofcom. (2021). Ofcom's guidelines on the provision of television access services. Retrieved from https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/212776/provision-of-tvacat

Orero, Pilar & Doherty, Stephen & Kruger, Jan-Louis & Matamala, Anna & Pedersen, Jan & Perego, Elisa & Romero-Fresco, Pablo & Rovira-Esteve, Sara & Soler, Olga & Szarkowska, Agnieszka. (2018). Conducting experimental research in audiovisual translation (AVT): A position paper. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 105–126

Perego, Elisa. (2014). Film language and tools. 10.1075/btl.112

Remael, A., & Vercauteren, G. (2015). Spatiotemporal settings and their continuity. In A. Remael, N. Reviers, & G. Vercauteren (Eds.), Pictures painted in words: ADLAB Audio Description guidelines (pp.24-27). EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste

Sagha, J. (2022). *Image reading: The lived experience of cinema for the blind* (Doctoral dissertation). Islamic Azad University, Central Tehran Branch

An experimental study on receiving Audio Descriptions in Iran

Sagha, J., Salmani ShahMohammadi, A., & Ronaghi, M. (2022). The lived experience of the blind: Conveying the concept of films with audio descriptions. *Quarterly Scientific Journal of Audio-Visual Media*, 16(42), 29–58. <https://doi.org/10.22085/javm.2022.313611.1859>

Sagha, J., ShahMohammadi, A., & Ronaghi, M. (2021). Blind people's lived experience of special screenings in cinema and image reading. *Journal of Social and Cultural Development Studies*, 10(2), 54–80

Salehi, S., & Mousavi Razavi, M. S. (2023). Indicators of scene changes in Persian and English audio descriptions: A comparative study. *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 4(4), 143–158. <https://ijls.org/index.php/ijls/article/view/379>

Snyder, Joel. (2005). Audio Description: The visual made verbal. *International Congress Series*. 1282. 935-939. 10.1016/j.ics.2005.05.215

Szymańska, B., & Strzemiński, T. (2010). Standardy tworzenia audiodeskrypcji do produkcji audiowizualnych. Retrieved from http://avt.ils.uw.edu.pl/files/2010/12/AD_stdardy_tworzenia.pdf

Szymańska, B., & Zabrocka, M. (2015). Audio description as a verbal and audio technique of recapturing films. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *Accessing audiovisual translation* (pp. 117–136). Peter Lang

Taylor, C., & Perego, E. (Eds.). (2022). *The Routledge handbook of Audio Description* (No. 191371). New York: Routledge

The Visual Made Verbal: A Comprehensive Training Manual and Guide to the History and Applications of Audio Description. (2020). (n.p.): AE Academic Publishing

Vercauteren, Gert. (2014). A Translational and Narratological Approach to Audio Describing Narrative Characters. *TTR : traduction, terminologie, rédaction*. 27.71.10.7202/1037746ar

Vercauteren, Gert. (2021). Insights From Mental Model Theory and Cognitive Narratology as a Tool for Content Selection in Audio Description. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*. 4.10.47476/jat.v4i3.2021.191

Vermeulen, A & Ibáñez Moreno, A (2017). Audio Description for All: a Literature Review of its Pedagogical Values in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. *Revista Encuentro*. 26.10.37536/ej.2017.26

Yang, H., Shen, W., Liu, B., & Wang, Y. (2023). A pilot study on the availability and reception of audio description in the Chinese mainland. *Frontiers in Communication*, 8, Article 1114853, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1114853>

Zabrocka, M. (2018). Rhymed and traditional audio description according to the blind and partially sighted audience: Results of a pilot study on creative audio description, *The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 211-235