

Audio description and textuality

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Abstract

Studies of audio description have been flourishing in Europe over the past few years, with a host of analytical approaches set forth by scholars worldwide. However, most studies so far seem to have taken for granted the textual nature of audio description, which is born in the interstices of a filmic text and works as a complement to it for the benefit of the blind and visually impaired. It is precisely its ancillary nature, its verbalization of the non-verbal which comes to life in the absence of dialogues that makes the analysis of the textual nature of audio description all the more challenging. Making reference to some of the most prominent studies in text linguistics, this paper explores textuality in audio description, especially focusing on the presence or absence of coherence and cohesion. It also presents a comparative analysis of the English and Italian audio descriptions of the same film (*Gran Torino*), to see how textuality can be differently actualized across languages.

Keywords

Audio description, textuality, text linguistics, audiovisual translation, accessibility

1. Introduction

By virtue of being an intersemiotic activity, which involves making verbal what is non-verbal, audio description (AD) has received a variety of definitions by practitioners, regulating bodies and scholars.

With reference to its linguistic structure, it has been said to “transform images into vivid narration” (Matamala & Orero 2007, p. 329), to be a “verbalization of the visual codes” (Kruger, 2012, p. 70), an “additional narration” (Wikipedia, n.d.), a “descriptive narration” (University of Washington, n.d.) or even “an additional commentary” (RNIB, 2011). Although different, all these definitions refer to the textual dimension of AD and somehow take it for granted, as Remael and Vercauteren clearly state in a 2010 article (p. 155). Whether it is called a commentary, a narration or an additional text, AD is nonetheless likened to a structured piece of writing.

But what is a text in the first place? And what are the essential features it needs to possess in order to be called a text? In other words, what elements ensure textuality, and to what extent? Before looking at audio description with reference to the notion of textuality and a specific case study, let us explore this very notion, through seminal works in text linguistics but also further developments, within linguistics as well as linguistic-oriented translation studies.

2. What is a text?

Text linguistics emerged as a discipline in the Sixties, with the most important contributions having come from German scholars over the following two decades (see, for instance, Harweg, 1968; Dressler, 1972; Schmidt, 1973). The discipline branched out of applied linguistics, as a consequence of the shortcomings of sentence-based grammars in explaining such phenomena as pronominalization, co-reference, word order, etc. It was soon picked up and further developed within more specific areas of investigation, such as discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1985) and genre analysis (Swales, 1990). In translation studies, linguistic-oriented approaches have often referred to, and elaborated on, text linguistics: from Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), to Baker (1992) and, perhaps more systematically, Hatim and Mason (1990, 1997) and Hatim (2009), the notion of textuality has been referred to the study of translation practices and products. And since audio description is largely studied in Europe within the realm of AVTS (AudioVisual Translation Studies, one of the most lively sub-disciplines within translation studies), we shall refer here to textuality also as assumed and defined by translation scholars.

Going back to the basic notion at stake here, what can be defined as a “text”? A seminal definition was provided by M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan (1976) in their study on *Cohesion in English*. For the two scholars, a text is a unit of language *in use*. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or sentence, although the grammatical relations it displays are essential to its very textuality. A text is a sequence of clauses and sentences which are bound by extra-grammatical ties and involve personal knowledge, experience of the world, etc. Thus, a text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning (1976, p. 2) or, as the two scholars stated later on, a unit of communication (1989). In more contemporary linguistic studies, the definition of “text” has been challenged, among other things, by the advent of corpus-based analyses. As Longrée and Mellet put it, “the development of computerized corpora has reminded researchers of the text as a complex object, both linear and network-like, and largely shaped by its context” (2009, p. 1). And while being aware of the context-bound nature of each text, corpus linguists have had to face the challenge of

recovering and redefining sub-units to tag texts for analysis, thus casting new light also on grammatical ties and manifestations.

In linguistic-oriented translation studies, Basil Hatim has discussed the notion of “text” in relation to its use, by referring first and foremost to Halliday’s tripartite classification for register analysis (mode, tenor, field of discourse). One particularly interesting element which emerges from Hatim’s reflections is that he sees the necessity to integrate Halliday’s classification with one more dimension, that of intentionality:

In order for a sequence of sentences to be properly considered a ‘text’, the sequence would have to function in ways that go beyond register profiles defined exclusively in terms of field’s technicality, tenor’s formality and mode’s spoken versus written orientations. We need to see mode in terms of higher-level textual criteria which, although still driven by such register variables as formality and technicality, additionally involve a level of intentionality that regulates the overall communicative thrust (2009, p. 43)

Even though intentionality in text definition and analysis was nothing new, being, among other things, one of the seven basic criteria for textuality defined by De Beaugrande and Dressler in *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (1981), Hatim sees it as determining one of the two options available for any text author. In a text, he states, “a situation may either be monitored in a fairly detached and unmediated fashion, or managed by attempting to steer the text receiver in a direction favourable to the text producer” (2009, p. 43). Although, by this statement, Hatim recalls well-known categorizations such as those by Katarina Reiss¹, they very well frame the specificity of AD, which is most of the times required to be informative rather than vocative. This additional criterion in text definition, therefore, may be used in the search for textuality in AD, as explored in the next sections.

Before focusing on AD, let us define the two, main criteria we shall be applying to our search for textuality, i.e. cohesion and coherence. Although studies on both have flourished over at least four decades (see, among many others, Bublitz, Lenk & Ventola, 1999 and Tanskanen, 2006), we shall refer mainly to the categories provided by some of the founding scholars in text linguistics, as they seem to provide a perfect theoretical framework for initial but systematic investigations of AD textuality as the one presented in the following pages.

3. Defining cohesion and coherence

For Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 8), cohesion can be traced in the interdependence of different elements in the discourse (language in use). In other words, when cohesion exists, it manifests itself in the relations established between elements, each of which acquires meaning by virtue of its connections with one or more others, and of the activation processes provided by users. On the whole, cohesion is expressed through the stratal organization of language and is reflected in grammatical or lexical ties. It can be analysed as grammatical or lexical cohesion and identified through bonds within a sentence or clause, but also through leaps over a number of sentences and elements.

Similarly, for De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) cohesion concerns the way in which linguistic items in a text are meaningfully connected to each other on the basis of the grammatical rules of the language. The idea that cohesion, as a guarantee of textuality, is established as a semantic and not merely formal set of ties is thus preserved in De Beaugrande and Dressler,

¹ In several works published between 1971 and 1977, Katharina Reiss gave a linguistic-based classification of text types including informative, expressive, operative and multi-medial texts.

although these ties are all identified through surface relations. The two Austrian scholars have codified the main patterns of cohesion which can be found in texts, partly in line with the classification offered by Halliday and Hasan. Among these are reference, deixis, conjunction, ellipsis and lexical cohesion, some instances of which will be analysed in the following sections. Moreover, like Halliday and Hasan, De Beaugrande and Dressler lay great emphasis on the role played by recipients in decoding linguistic cues for cohesion. However, in search of a definition of textual features with reference to audio description, strategies of text activation and reception by users fall out of the scope of this article, and therefore will only be hinted at.

As for coherence, Halliday and Hasan (1976) state that it encompasses all the semantic relations which can be traced within a clause and a set of clauses. Using the term *logogenesis* to define the creation of meaning in the unfolding of a text, in a book published several years later, M.A.K. Halliday (1994) specifies that this term pertains to the entire meaning potential, encompassing both cohesive and coherent relations. And if cohesion is concerned solely with the lexicogrammatical subsystem, coherence encompasses all semantic relations and is best identified, in a text, through theme-rheme patterns and, in general, through the structuring of information and the notion of focus.²

For De Beaugrande and Dressler, coherence refers to the informational units provided by a text (the so-called *textual world*), which have to be mutually accessible as well as relevant to ensure textuality. The textual world consists of *concepts* and *relations*. A concept is “a configuration of knowledge (cognitive content) which can be recovered or activated with more or less unity and consistency in the mind”, and relations are the *links* between the concepts “which appear together in a textual world” (De Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, p. 4). Amongst the most significant relations which reflect the coherence of a text are causality relations, time relations and logical sequence relations.

Several years earlier than De Beaugrande and Dressler, between 1976 and 1980, Italian linguist Maria Elizabeth Conte edited and published several books in which she discussed the conceptual pair cohesion/coherence in detail, with reference to textuality. Although her studies are not as widely acknowledged as De Beaugrande and Dressler or Halliday and Hasan’s within the international (mainly English-speaking and -reading) community, she was amongst the founders of text linguistics and her works have had a pervasive influence on subsequent European studies in this area. For the purpose of this paper, her definitions of the two concepts of coherence and cohesion complement Halliday and Hasan’s and De Beaugrande and Dressler’s, as they well support the identification of elements and patterns of cohesion and coherence in (possible) AD texts.

As a matter of fact, Conte’s principal concern was with the notion of coherence, which she dealt with from her early works (1976-1977). Interestingly, Conte sees coherence first and foremost as a positive concept. According to her theory, it is concerned with the presence in a text of an overall unit of meaning, as opposed to the mere lack of contradiction between the loose parts of a non-text. Seen in Conte’s terms, coherence is what really makes the difference between a text and a string of sentences, and although it can take numerous forms at the local level, it ensures textuality by constituting an overall, meaningful unit.

² “Information focus is one type of emphasis, whereby the speaker marks out a part of a message block as that which he wishes to be interpreted as informative. What is focal is new information.” (M.A.K. Halliday, 1967, cited in Lambrecht, K., 1996, p. 207).

Equally important for Conte, although somewhat subordinate, is the concept of cohesion. First discussed in an article published in 1980, whose main focus was on coherence it was further elaborated in the following year and later still, in the wake of Hatakeyama, Petöfi and Sözer (1988). Conte then made a distinction between cohesion and connexity, whereby cohesion mainly referred to the presence of semantic and thematic bonds between parts of a text, whereas connexity was concerned with the formal relations of reference and connection between linguistic units (1989). It is, therefore, as if the importance –and presence in a text– of coherence had pervaded the general notion of cohesion, its semantic nature prevailing over its surface manifestations. Connexity, however, incarnates the more tangible essence of cohesion and it is these connexive ties that we will be looking for in the analysis which follows. Moreover, since the most important elements providing connexity are, for Conte, pronouns, conjunctions and connective adverbs, it is precisely these elements which we shall be observing with reference to selected AD excerpts, since they are also at the core of cohesive relations such as reference, junction and deixis, defined by Halliday and Hasan and described above. But before we embark on our practical search for coherence, and cohesion, let us discuss the notion of textuality with reference to AD theory and practice, and identify the guises textuality can take precisely in audio description.

4. Audio description and the search for textuality

Despite the numerous definitions which seem to take the textual nature of AD for granted (see above), its accessorial, ancillary nature nonetheless makes it difficult to think of audio description as a *text*. Born in the interstices of a filmic text, without which they have no reason to exist and cannot be enjoyed, audio descriptions seem to stand no chance of satisfying the basic criteria for textuality.

And yet, as the study of AD moves steadily along and achieves international recognition, there is a proliferation of approaches that explore the textual dimension of this activity from specific angles. Instances of this are provided by studies of audio description within the framework of narratology (Kruger, 2012; Vercauteren, 2012) or, for instance, in its functional and narrative interaction with another technique employed to make films accessible, i.e. audio subtitling (Braun & Orero, 2010; Remael, 2012).

The very first to reflect on the textual essence of AD were Bourne and Jiménez Hurtado in their 2007 article which, like this one, adopts a comparative perspective. A few years later, Sabine Braun (2011) published a sound and well-informed study of coherence with reference to AD. In her study, Braun refers to ADs as “texts not intended to be stand-alone” (2011, p. 646), but since they are added to the film in the post-production phase, ADs, in Braun’s words, “refer to the film” (Ibid.). The author goes on to observe that the audio described version of a film is a multimodal text in itself, like the audiovisual text it relates to. By so doing, Braun somewhat takes for granted the textual nature of AD, although she questions it several times during her analysis. Also, Braun’s study is grounded in discourse analysis and multimodality and, differently from the study here presented, it is also concerned with the way in which receivers activate coherence in texts and in AD (p. 646).

In this paper we wish to take a step backwards and aim to see if, and how, audio descriptions can be defined as texts. Although, as explained above, textuality can be evaluated from a host of perspectives, taking into account numerous surface and semantic relations, extratextual and intertextual features, we will here make reference to the concepts of cohesion and coherence as they have been defined by Halliday and Hasan, De Beaugrande and Dressler and,

last but not least, Conte, so as to try and focus first and foremost on elements and strategies which have been traditionally seen to be at the very core of textuality.

Concentrating on film audio description, we will see that the ancillary nature of AD does not prevent it from displaying clear textual features. On the contrary, we will observe that textuality in audio description is much more multi-faceted than it normally appears to be in many well-established types of texts.

Coming to life at points in which the filmic text communicates mainly, or solely, through images, audio description bridges gaps in blind individuals' perception by translating those images into words, connecting them with the film dialogue and its overall narrative development. Thus, audio description seems to fulfil three functions:

- 1) Translating the visual into verbal.
- 2) Providing connections with dialogues and sound effects.
- 3) Ensuring smooth perception by establishing long or short-distance connections with its own sub-parts.

Therefore, when searching for proofs of textuality, we will have to take into account the threefold function AD performs. Cohesion and coherence will be identified within each short description from our case study, from it to the filmic text, across the filmic text and over to other AD fragments. In the following pages, therefore, we will endeavour to identify, and comment on, manifestations of cohesion and coherence at three levels:

- 1) Within each short description (internal coherence and cohesion).
- 2) Between the description and the filmic text (AD-to-film, or film-to-AD, coherence and cohesion).
- 3) Across the film, between the short descriptions (AD-to-AD coherence and cohesion).

Our analysis will proceed along these lines, further supported by a contrastive analysis taking into account the English and Italian ADs of the same film.

5. *Gran Torino* and its audio descriptions

The film under analysis was released in the USA in 2008 and a few months later in the UK and in Italy. *Gran Torino*, directed by Clint Eastwood, was produced and distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures.

Although several versions of the audio descriptions were produced, in English and Italian, for the purpose of this paper we will refer to the English version produced for DVD distribution across the UK and the Italian version drafted for screenings at three cinemas in major Italian cities (Milan, Rome, Bari). The English AD for DVD release was produced by ITFC-Deluxe, whereas the Italian version here analysed was produced by Cinema Senza Barriere Onlus, a non-profit organization which provides the AD of selected films for screenings on a monthly basis.

The table below displays the very first section of both descriptions, for the film opening sequence. A literal back translation has been provided for the Italian AD.

<p>A hearse and several cars are parked outside a large Catholic church. A balding man plays the organ. A small congregation sits in pews towards the front of the grand church.</p> <p>An elderly man, Al, gets up from his pew and walks past a coffin draped in a white sheet. On a table in front of the coffin is a photograph of an attractive, middle-aged woman.</p> <p>Standing beside the coffin is a tall, hard-faced elderly man: Walt Kowasky. Al walks up to him.</p> <p><i>(Al and Walt talk)</i></p>	<p>È una giornata di sole. Nella grande chiesa cattolica di un sobborgo cittadino non molto agiato si sta svolgendo la messa per un funerale. Fra i banchi, una quarantina di persone.</p> <p>Un uomo si alza, passa accanto alla bara, appoggiata davanti all'altare e ad un ritratto della defunta, Dorothy Kowalski, appoggiato su un tavolino.</p> <p>L'uomo si avvicina a Walt, marito di Dorothy, in piedi accanto alla bara. Walt ha più di 70 anni, è alto, smilzo, veste in giacca e cravatta e ha un volto più duro che affranto e uno sguardo più sprezzante che triste.</p> <p><i>(Al and Walt parlano)</i></p>
	<p><i>It's a sunny day. In the large church of a not too rich city suburb a mass funeral is being celebrated.</i></p> <p><i>Some forty people are among the pews. A man stands up, walks by the coffin placed before the altar and by a photograph of the dead woman, Dorothy Kowalsky, placed on a small table.</i></p> <p><i>The man reaches Walt, Dorothy's husband, who stands next to the coffin. Walt is over 70 years old, he is tall, lean and is wearing a suit and a tie. His face looks stern rather than grief-stricken, his eyes scornful rather than sad.</i></p>

Table 1. Initial descriptions in English and Italian

In the English description, coherence can hardly be identified in what appears as a sequence of short, clear-cut sentences. Seeing it in Beaugrande and Dressler's terms, a series of *concepts* is provided here, but *relations* are not easy to identify. In other words, this description provides informational units, but their mutual relevance is not always marked.

With reference to Conte's definition, coherence in its positive sense cannot be found in this excerpt: an overall unit of meaning is lacking and a lack of such unity, therefore, may seem to point to a non-text.

The absence of strong *internal coherence* is, however, compensated by instances of *AD-to-film* and *film-to-AD coherence*. The short exchange between Al and Walt which occurs between the two descriptions is introduced at the end of the first and rounded up at the beginning of the second (see Table 2 below).

<p>Al shakes Walt's hand and goes back to his pew. Four casually dressed teenage kids, Daniel, David, Ashley and Josh, walk up the aisle. They each kneel and make the sign of the cross. Ashley, a pretty girl with red hair, wears a short top exposing her pierced belly button. Seeing this, Walt grimaces.</p>	<p>Walt osserva i giovanissimi nipoti Daniel, David, Ashley e Josh farsi il segno della croce uno dopo l'altro davanti all'altare.</p> <p>Ashley, unica ragazza, ha l'ombelico scoperto e decorato con un piercing. Walt le lancia un durissimo sguardo di disapprovazione. Ashley lo ignora e si siede fra i banchi.</p>
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<p>Josh, a thin boy with fair hair, is last to kneel, bow and make the sign of the cross.</p> <p><i>(Josh talks)</i></p>	<p>Sotto gli occhi di Walt, Josh pronuncia un'irriverente filastrocca che è parodia dei movimenti del segno della croce.</p> <p><i>(Josh parla)</i></p>
	<p><i>Walt observes his young grandchildren, Daniel, David, Ashley and Josh, as they make the sign of the cross one after the other before the altar. Ashley, the only girl, displays her belly button decorated with a ring. Walt throws a harsh, disapproving look at her. Ashley ignores him and sits among the pews.</i></p> <p><i>Under Walt's eyes, Josh utters an irreverent jingle which parodies the sign of the cross.</i></p>

Table 2. Second descriptions in English and Italian

In the second English description, the first sentence provides *film-to-AD coherence* but has no links with what follows within itself, although the filmic text does not feature a clear cut at this very moment. Camera moves slowly from Walt to the youngsters, which he is looking at (somewhat reflected in the opening sentence of the second Italian description). The remaining sentences of the English description display a certain unity of meaning and also a time and logical sequence relation, although neither of them appears to be particularly strong and explicit.

The first sequence in the Italian audio description shows internal coherence: the passage reads almost like a narrative, it proceeds in an orderly fashion from a contextualization in terms of time and space (daytime-suburbs-church), to move onto a description of the church interior, finally focussing on Walt's action and physical traits. Unity of meaning is found in this description, as well as explicit time and causality relations.

On the contrary, no *AD-to-film coherence* is to be found in the passage from the first description to the short dialogue and over to the second description, so that the interpretation of the exchange between Al and Walt and the link between it and the two descriptions depend solely on the ears of the blind audience.

The second excerpt from the Italian AD also reveals *internal coherence*: it opens with a description of the four youngsters—here directly referred to as Walt's grandchildren—as they file in before the altar. Coherence is also found in the passage to a more detailed description of the only girl, Ashley, involving Walt's reaction to her pierced belly button, of Ashley's reaction to his disapproval and of Walt's attention moving from Ashley to Josh.

The quest for cohesion in the first English description yields fair results. *Internal cohesion* can be found in the deictic reference to the first, central element which is evoked: "a large Catholic church" is, two sentences later, referred to as "the grand church". Besides this, we can note the not particularly meaningful anaphoric references to "pews" and "coffin", first generically introduced and then repeated with a specific reference ("his pew" – "the coffin"). Interestingly, the coffin is mentioned three times in this short description, thus standing out as a central element unlike in the Italian corresponding description. The use of pronouns (highlighted by Halliday & Hasan and Conte as constituting the main proof of cohesion) is

made twice in this passage, although it is unmarked and simply in line with the basic rules of grammar.

Traces of cohesion do not abound in the second English description. The first sentence refers anaphorically to the previously-mentioned pew, thus making it clear that the AD text continues across the film dialogue and providing *AD-to-AD cohesion*. The same goes for the reference to “the aisle”, which refers back to “the grand church” mentioned in the previous description and whose characterization is supported by the film soundtrack (a church piano is heard in the background). In terms of internal cohesive ties, this short description contains a few examples of more complex anaphoric references (“*They each kneel*” – “*Seeing this*”) and reveals lexical cohesion in the use of repetitions, at the level of words and phrases (“kneel”, “make the sign of the cross”). All in all, although not abundant, cohesion is here clearly established.

In the Italian version, cohesion in the short descriptions appears under a number of guises. As for internal cohesion, a complex pattern of anaphoric references, involving both the inanimate objects and the main subjects of the description can be identified (see, for instance, the reference to “un uomo-l’uomo-Walt”, i.e. “a man-the man-Walt”). Lexical cohesion is also ensured through the use of a number of semantically-related words: mass, funeral, coffin, deceased. As for AD-to-film cohesion, there seems to be no trace in these excerpts, whereas AD-to-AD cohesion is established solely through the use of “l’altare”, i.e. “the altar”, at the beginning of the second description.

Internal cohesion appears again in the second Italian description, where Walt’s four nephews and niece are described. Among others, an interesting, not-so-straightforward anaphoric tie is established between the first and second sentence by means of “unica ragazza” [only girl], which refers back to “i giovanissimi nipoti” [very young grandchildren]. The last sentence in this short description features an example of conjunctive relation established with the use of “che”, in “che è parodia di...” [which parodies...].

The second batch of descriptions, starting from minute 22 of the film, refers to the moments preceding the outbreak of a fight in front of Walt’s house. The choice of this film sequence and the corresponding English and Italian ADs has been made due to a balanced interplay of dialogue and silence (i.e. space available for description), but also to the fact that time has passed between the two descriptions analysed here and the preceding and following dialogues. The first images which are the object of description in both English and Italian come into the film after a scene change: in the previous scene, taking place in the morning, Walt was arguing with one of his sons over the phone, in his kitchen. A few hours later, Walt is outside the house. He has just finished polishing his car in the driveway and sits on his porch to rest.

<p>In his driveway, Walt lavishly polishes his Gran Torino. It’s dark green with gold trims. He buffs the wing of the car and works his way around the bonnet, carefully removing any marks.</p> <p>Evening. Walt sits on his porch with his dog Daisy and lights a cigarette. He looks out at the Gran Torino parked on the drive.</p> <p>(Walt: <i>Ain’t she sweet</i>)</p>	<p>È una bella giornata di sole: Walt sta lucidando con amore la sua Gran Torino, parcheggiata in giardino.</p> <p>Alla fine della giornata, Walt si gode il tramonto seduto sotto il portico, fumando una sigaretta e bevendo una birra.</p> <p>Daisy riposa accucciata accanto a lui.</p> <p>L’attenzione di Walt è tutta per la Gran Torino in</p>
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	<p>giardino, tirata perfettamente a lucido.</p> <p>L'uomo è soddisfatto e orgoglioso della sua automobile.</p> <p><i>(Walt: Che meraviglia!)</i></p>
<p>A couple of people walk by on the street. Walt swigs from a can of beer. As the lights begin to fade, and several beers later, he gets to his feet. He calls to his dog as he heads inside.</p> <p><i>(Walt calls Daisy in)</i></p>	<p>Birra dopo birra, il sole tramonta. Stanco e un po' brillo, Walt rientra in casa con Daisy.</p> <p><i>(Walt chiama Daisy in casa)</i></p>
	<p><i>It's a beautiful sunny day: Walt is passionately polishing his Gran Torino, parked in the garden.</i></p> <p><i>Towards the end of the day, Walt is sitting on his porch, he enjoys the sunset smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer. Daisy rests next to him. Walt's attention is all on his Gran Torino, in the garden, perfectly polished. The man is satisfied and proud of his car.</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>Beer after beer, the sun sets. Tired and dizzy, Walt goes back into the house with Daisy.</i></p>

Table 3. English and Italian descriptions from minute 22 (Walt polishing his Gran Torino).

The English AD first of all establishes film-to-AD coherence, by supporting and highlighting the passage from the last shot of the previous scene to the new setting: Walt is no longer inside the house but “in his driveway”, which cannot immediately be seen in the film, as it is visualized roughly a minute later, with a zoom out on the house and its frontal space. *Internal coherence* is to be found in the description of Walt’s car and the actions he performs on it: from an overview of the elegant vehicle to a zoom-in on some of its details. Coherence is then interrupted with the passage to the second part of this first description, marked by the use of the word “evening” in thematic position. The unit of meaning created in the first lines is thus interrupted to provide a clear and simple time reference, which underlines the passage from dusk to evening, conveyed in the film by a slow and smooth sequence with daylight fading off. And if a loose, AD-to-AD coherence relation is to be sought in the use of “evening”, it is across several descriptive passages, to create a sort of timeline running through a sequence of actions and places coming up in the film. This strategy is commonly encouraged and appreciated in AD. Although it perhaps loosens coherence in a linguistic sense, it provides the blind with temporal pillars which are extremely useful for decoding and following the narrative development.

At the end of this first description, AD-to-film coherence is marked by the reference to the Gran Torino, evoked at the end of the description and referred to by Walt in his short line (“Ain’t she sweet”).

The passage to the second English description is marked by a new action and set of characters, with no hint at film-to-AD coherence in the opening sentence. The following two sentences (“[...] several beers later, he gets to his feet. He calls to his dog as he heads inside.”) refer back

to Walt's actions in the previous description, thus providing AD-to-AD coherence. This type of coherence appears particularly strong in this sequence, especially through the establishment of a rather complex network of time relations. A certain redundancy can also be identified in the last sentence of the second description, which anticipates what Walt is going to say and contravenes one of the most widely accepted rules of AD, i.e. that what can be heard does not need to be anticipated or repeated in the description.

The Italian AD is clearly longer, richer in detail and, above all, in explicit connections. The concepts and actions described here can be perceived as a unit, with different types of relations established between various elements. AD-to-film coherence is also provided, with the very last sentence of the first description introducing Walt's line which follows. All in all, although the density of information is more or less equal to that of the English AD, this description can be perceived as more coherent as it provides a wealth of accessory details. Adjectives and adverbs support the overall perception of the scene through the AD, although, in a different paper, it might be worth discussing the appropriateness and acceptability of the nuances provided by the "enriching" elements.

Cohesion in the first English description is first of all established with the film (*film-to-AD cohesion*), as the phrase "in his driveway" marks deictically the passage from the interior of Walt's house to the exterior. Internal cohesion is established in the description of the car ("his Gran Torino" – "it's dark green" – "the wing of the car") and also, although abruptly, in the deictic use of "evening". The use of "his porch" revives the not-always-explicit cohesive tie which concerns Walt's movements inside and outside his house, whereas the use of "parked on the drive" seems to go against cohesion, as it is an unnecessary repetition of the opening phrase "in his driveway". The passage to the second, short description is unmarked by cohesion. Rather, it seems as if the description were following a camera movement from Walt and his actions to a pan shot of the street with its passers-by. The description goes back to Al and focuses on his action of drinking a beer, which is repeated metaphorically soon after. "His dog" refers anaphorically to Daisy, mentioned in the previous description.

In the Italian AD, no cohesion is established with the previous scene in which we saw Walt on the phone inside his house: a new context is introduced, starting with the description of the daylight and continuing with information about Walt's position (in the garden) and action (polishing his car). Lexical cohesion is traced in the use of words referring to the passing of time during the day: giornata, sole, giornata, fine, tramonto, i.e. day, sunshine, day, end, sunset. No details are given about Walt's work on his car, but his actions are described in a logically chained sequence, underscored by the passing of time. Walt is deictically referred to with the pronoun "lui" [him] and subsequently as "l'uomo" [the man], which is used as a synonym for his name. Deixis also appears in the direct reference to Walt's dog through her first name Daisy, the only element supporting the identification of Daisy as a dog being the past participle "accucciata" [crouched]. In the second part of the description, the car is again called into play (*la Gran Torino*, i.e. *the Gran Torino*) and cohesion is mainly established in the passage from "sta lucidando" to "tirata a lucido" [he is polishing-perfectly polished]. *AD-to-film cohesion* is clearly marked in the final sentence, "l'uomo è soddisfatto e orgoglioso della sua automobile" [the man is satisfied and proud of his car], which introduces Walt's short line. An interesting example of *AD-to-AD cohesion* emerges in the link between this and the following description, which begins with "birra dopo birra, il sole tramonta" ["beer after beer, the sun goes down"].

6. Discussion

The analysis outlined in the previous pages has clearly shown that both coherence and cohesion, long established and widely accepted as basic tenets of textuality, can be found not only in audio description but also, at varying degrees, in its relationship with the filmic text. By virtue of its special, ancillary nature, audio description unfolds by establishing textual ties which are specific to it (internal texture) and are also a guarantee of smooth reception, like the frequent time cues in the examples discussed above. In connecting with the film at various degrees, AD establishes ties with both its verbal and visual components, not necessarily at the same time on all occasions. Although through a very short sequence of examples, coherence and cohesion as essential purveyors of textuality have been shown to take three main forms in AD: 1) within each short description, 2) from description to film and from film to description, 3) from description to description across the film. These three forms are all equally meaningful for the reception of a film with AD, and as such they certainly deserve further investigation, within one language/culture and also, as has been seen above, in a comparative perspective.

The analysis outlined above has also shown that these three forms of textuality are far from being always actualized simultaneously, and/or to the same extent. Their relative prominence, as well as their absence, is not to be taken as absence of overall textuality: it is simply proof of different priorities defined by audio describers on the grounds of their professional experience, in accordance with national or local guidelines and in consideration of their audience needs. Thus, we may say that AD is not just about creating coherence and cohesion, but also about translating the coherence and cohesion which is expressed in the filmic text itself. To quote Sabine Braun (2011), they have to be traced in their intermodal as well as intramodal relations with the film.

To sum up our discussion, it seems evident that AD textuality is much more complex than it may perhaps seem, and impossible to define if not as a sum of its layers and manifestations. To this end, a comparative perspective proves indeed useful, although it also, inevitably, conjures up additional variables to be taken into account.

On the whole, it seems plausible to state that a more systematic analysis, starting with the basic model outlined in this paper, and taking into account a larger number of audio descriptions, produced nationally and/or across languages and cultures, would be useful to come to a more thorough understanding of AD textuality. It would lead to highlighting the varying strength provided by different textual ties and the relative effort required by the audience to fill textual gaps with their own knowledge and experience. In particular, if matched by audience research and reception studies, it could also shed important light on the more or less active participation of the users in the building and interpreting of cohesion and coherence between a film and its AD and the bearing it has on national practice.

To proceed with further analysis along the lines sketched above, the following factors should also be taken in due consideration:

- 1) The genre and complexity of the filmic text/s.
- 2) The space available for descriptions vs the time covered by dialogues and other essential auditory input.
- 3) The frequency and density of descriptions, as well as their positions in the film (within or at the end of a dialogue exchange, etc.).

4) The type of information they provide (selection of information) and the possibly recurring patterns in the provision thereof.

If the first two factors are more generic, the last two are generally influenced by national practices and standards in AD writing and, as has been widely discussed by scholars (see, for instance, Chmiel and Mazur, 2012; Orero, 2008), they tend to be different across languages and cultures. Research, as well as the contrastive analysis of national AD practices, have generally confirmed that AD is hardly ever translated but more commonly rewritten, as the expectations of different cultural-linguistic communities of receivers are different, as is their exposure to AD.

Indeed, the culture behind AD, manifested through the use of language in the film and the AD itself, is a determining factor in the weaving of textuality. The analysis presented above seems to confirm these observations: the sketchy, strictly informative first description provided in the English AD is in line with the linguistic and structural preferences of the source language, which privileges short, clear cut sentences and tends to discourage the use of evaluative adjectives and adverbs. This tendency is also reflected in the UK guidelines for the production of audio description, which in Britain, as well as other English-speaking countries, are much more codified than elsewhere in Europe and the rest of the world. Conversely, the Italian descriptions reveal a rich narrative texture, an ample – occasionally redundant – use of adjectives and adverbs, and longer sentences. All of these features are widely accepted and common in the use of Italian, especially for narrative purposes. They cannot be gauged against national standards for AD writing as Italy has none and all the audio description that is produced tends to follow company or individual practices.

7. Conclusion

If we look back at the analyses offered above in our quest for coherence and cohesion as main proofs of textuality, we can readily observe that the English descriptions tend to display less internal coherence and cohesion but more AD-to-film ties. This is perhaps indicative of a textuality sought more with the film than within the AD per se. This preference for internal cohesion and coherence rather than a more diffused kind of textuality, which weaves through the film and the descriptions, is equally deserving of closer investigation, so as to see if this is a generalized, culture and language-based tendency, if it happens with specific film genres, with certain providers of AD or with specific audio describers, etc.. Italian descriptions, on the other hand, have been seen to be more coherent and cohesive within themselves, forming micro-textual units which link with each other across the film, but can also stand alone in their own right. This may be ascribed, for instance, to the more limited exposure to AD on the part of the Italian visually impaired population: AD is much less frequently and systematically offered in Italy than in the UK, in cinemas and television and home video. The visually impaired audience being less accustomed to receiving AD leads to writing more thorough, self-contained descriptions, which are more easily received and decoded.

All the hypotheses and observations contained in this paper need to be explored further and supported by more extensive analysis. They also need to be aligned with other studies being conducted on audio description, from the point of view of narrativity and discourse analysis, for instance. To conclude, as Francesca Rigotti states in *Il Filo del Pensiero [The Thread of Thought]*:

The creation of a text is a job which involves the weaving of signs. A text shares with a piece of fabric the property of being a plot, a web, whose texture results from the crafted juxtaposition of elements and the creation of a network of relations. (2002, p. 75; my translation)

This is indeed what happens in audio description: the text exists *within* itself, *with* a film and *across* the film, thus forming a multi-layered, rich and always original texture, which is there for the researcher to be explored and explained.

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