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DANCE AUDIO DESCRIPTION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS BASED ON INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONALS¹

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Abstract

Dance audio description is a relatively recent modality that is still being developed to make choreographic works accessible to people with visual impairments or low vision. This study situates dance audio description within the broader field of audio

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description research and draws on the experiences of ten dance audio describers from different countries. Its purpose is to explore and provide a detailed account of the dance audio description process, identify the main challenges, strategies, and supplementary resources employed, and examine how practices diverge or align across different international contexts, with the ultimate aim of advancing accessibility and fostering a deeper understanding of this art form.

Keywords: Audio description; Contemporary dance; Audio introduction; Visual disability; Touch tour.

Resumen

La audiodescripción de danza es una modalidad relativamente reciente que continúa en proceso de desarrollo para hacer accesibles las obras coreográficas a personas con discapacidad visual o baja visión. Este estudio sitúa la audiodescripción de danza en el contexto de la investigación en AD y recopila las experiencias de diez audiodescriptoras de distintos países. Su objetivo es conocer y describir en mayor detalle el proceso de audiodescripción de danza, identificar los principales retos, estrategias y recursos adicionales empleados y analizar cómo las prácticas varían o convergen en diferentes contextos internacionales, con el fin de fomentar el avance en la accesibilidad y comprensión de este arte.

Palabras clave: Audiodescripción; Danza contemporánea; Audiointroducción; Discapacidad visual; Visita táctil.

1. Introduction

Audio description (hereinafter AD), as defined by Benecke (2004), is a sensory translation process that converts visual elements into sound linguistic elements. It is regulated by the Spanish standard UNE 153020 (AENOR 2005), which defines it as a fundamental communication support service for people with visual disabilities. AD takes advantage of the silences present in any audiovisual product (film, opera, play, etc.) to add a descriptive narrative to the image (Benecke 2004).

In this article, the audiovisual product is contemporary dance. Dance in general is a completely visual product, since the message is transmitted through body movements. Therefore, AD is necessary so that the visually impaired audience can understand the message. Some authors such

as Kleege (2014), Snyder (2010), Fryer (2018b) and Ramos Caro (2024) have investigated how to audiodescribe dance so that it can be understood by people without access to the image. These studies, although focused on classical dance, serve as the basis for our study.

Dance is an artistic manifestation in which the essential mission is to use the movement of the body, accompanied by music, as a form of expression and social interaction for entertainment or artistic purposes (García Ruso 1998). This mode of expression can present a sensory barrier for the visually impaired audience, since dance is a visual and sound art in which the feelings and plot of the work are presented through body movements. Accessible translation, and specifically AD, plays an essential role in allowing visually impaired audiences to access dance performances (Verdú Macián 2022). This type of AD presents specific challenges for the audio describer derived, among other aspects, from the absence of dialogues, the continuous movement of the artists and the superposition of the spoken AD and music.

This work presents an exploratory study on AD for dance performances, with the aim of identifying the different steps in the development of the script, the main challenges of this type of AD, the type of language used and the basic characteristics of the additional services or resources (e.g. audio introduction, touch tours or previous workshops) that accompany the dance AD and that facilitate its understanding and accessibility. The study uses a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of data collected from ten interviews with professional dance audio describers.

2. AD of live shows

Live shows (opera, theatre, dance, etc.) are considered dynamic live material. For this reason, the AD narration is normally spoken live during the performance of the play or show. Furthermore, it is usually a planned AD, since a script is prepared prior to the performance (Fryer and Cavallo 2022). Sometimes, the AD can be spoken semi-directly, that is, the audio describer launches the pre-recorded AD during the representation (Castan 2014).

Most performing arts accessibility research focuses on theatre and opera (Di Giovanni 2014), with few studies including dance AD (Snyder and Geiger 2022; Kleege 2014; Margolies 2015). Although there are some guidelines and training resources in audio description, these are limited, especially in the Spanish-speaking context (Fryer and Cavallo 2022; Snyder 2010; Fryer 2018b).

In theatre, experimental techniques have been explored, such as AD for Shakespeare in iambic pentameter (Udo and Fels 2010). For opera, Cabeza-Cáceres and Matamala (2008) propose integrating the visual description with the interpretation of music and singing, while Iturregui Gallardo and Permy Hércules de Solás (2019) suggest using audio introductions (AI) to offer synopses and important details before the start of the play. Fryer (2018a) also discusses how to conduct AD for opera and dance, highlighting the need to decide how and when to paraphrase or read subtitles.

2.1. Dance audio description

Dance AD is an emerging field of research that focuses on improving the accessibility of this art for people with visual disabilities. Various studies have addressed different aspects of AD in dance, highlighting its importance, challenges and methodologies. Dance AD presents specific difficulties that do not adapt well to the objectivity required by the Spanish UNE standard, given that this context requires more creative and evocative descriptions to capture the artistic nature of the works. However, a more creative approach may involve greater cognitive and emotional effort, underscoring the need to balance regulations and accessibility. In this sense, it is essential to delve deeper into dance AD and develop more effective strategies that allow precision, accessibility and artistic appreciation to be harmonised.

Dance is primarily a visual art. Therefore, AD is essential so that the viewer without access to the images can understand it and enjoy the experience.

The inclusion of verbal descriptions and touch tours in dance performances can significantly improve access and enrich the experience for all audiences, promoting more inclusive and accessible works.

One of the main challenges in dance AD is determining what aspects should be described and how to do it effectively. The audio describer must consider what to say in the AD script and what to omit, so that the AD is not overloaded with unnecessary details (Kleege 2014), since a description that is too detailed can be overwhelming for the listener, who will get tired and stop paying attention. Therefore, it is recommended to focus on general patterns and the most significant movements (Fryer 2018b and Snyder 2010). The movements must be described clearly, but in harmony with the music and the stage layout to improve the audience's experience (Bukowski 2021).

When it comes to AD methods and techniques in Dance, it has been proven that the use of touch tours improves the experience (Fryer, 2018b), since attendees can experience the key movements of the show. On the other hand, there are studies in which techniques from cinematic AD have been incorporated into dance AD, offering an interpretive approach that includes the description of the spatialisation of bodies, the dynamics and symbolism of movement (Castan 2014) and the importance of similes (Ramos Caro 2024). Similarly, research has also been conducted into whether the use of the Labanotation, a detailed and precise system for recording and analysing dance movements, can give fluency to AD. However, it requires exhaustive preparatory work before the performance in order to analyse and explain the steps with the help of annotation (Verdú Macián 2022).

3. The research

3.1. Objectives

The central objective of this work is the characterisation of dance AD. This main objective is broken down into five secondary objectives aimed at gathering information on the following aspects of dance AD:

1. The process of script development.
2. The difficulties and solutions involved in dance AD.
3. The language used.
4. The development of the additional elements prior to the performance, such as touch tours, workshops and audio introductions.
5. Other relevant aspects.

3.2. *The sample*

3.2.1. *Sample selection criteria*

The sample of audio describers was selected by convenience, prioritising access to people who were easy to contact. Before selecting the sample, the following criteria were established to define the profile of the participants:

1. That the audio describers had previously carried out research into AD in the field of the performing arts.
2. That they had produced at least one audio description of a work in the performing arts.
3. That they were active as audio describers in the field of the performing arts.

The participants had to meet at least one of these three criteria to be included in the study. Initially, a total of twenty professionals who met these conditions were contacted, but only twelve responded to the invitation and, in the end, ten of them could be interviewed. The interviews were conducted by video call due to the impossibility of arranging face-to-face meetings with some of the people contacted.

We are aware that a sample selection based on demographic criteria would have been more rigorous and representative. However, as this is an exploratory study and is not on a large scale, the main objective is not to obtain generalisable results, but to make an initial approach to the subject of AD in the performing arts.

The study followed the protocol approved by the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), and its informed consent form was used to ensure compliance with ethical principles. The

participants signed the consent form before starting the interviews, after having read the corresponding document. All gave their consent to be interviewed and cited in this study.

3.2.2. Demographic description of the sample

As mentioned above, the final sample consisted of 10 women, with an average age of 40, from different countries and with different mother tongues, all professionally involved in the field of AD and dance. Five were native Spanish speakers, three were native French speakers and two were Dutch speakers. This diversity made it possible to gather perspectives both from countries where audio description has a consolidated trajectory and from contexts with emerging approaches in the field of the performing arts. In terms of their professions, the participants included professional audio describers, translators, researchers and dancers. Some of them combined several of these activities.

Below is a brief demographic description of each participant by nationality and professional profile. Although the participants gave their consent to record the interviews and authorised the publication of their names, we have chosen to anonymise their identities in order to preserve their privacy and also that of those who did not respond or did not ultimately participate in the study. This approach ensures confidentiality and avoids any possible direct association that could compromise their professional environment:

Participant 1	
Nationality	Spanish
Working language	Spanish
Formation	Translation and Interpreting (University of Valencia)
Profession	Professional dancer and trainer in accessibility in dance
Experience	She works in Arnhem (the Netherlands) as a guide in a programme for students interested in accessibility in dance. She researched how to prepare and perform contemporary dance AD, working with her own choreography, <i>Minerva</i> .

Participant 2	
Nationality	Spanish
Working language	Spanish
Formation	Translation and Interpreting (University of Granada), master's degree in Professional Translation and Accessibility
Profession	Audio describer and researcher
Experience	She collaborated with TRACCE group and did an internship at Kaleidoscope, participating in more than 20 accessible cultural visits, especially for people who are blind or visually impaired, affiliated to ONCE. Her doctoral thesis focused on museum audio description. She collaborates with the dance company Vinculados, performing dance AD.
Participant 3	
Nationality	Spanish
Working language	Spanish
Formation	Translation and Interpreting (University of Granada), master's degree in English Language, accessibility courses
Profession	Researcher and creator of LATRIUM, an inclusive translation laboratory
Experience	Her doctoral thesis focuses on the reception of AD. Since 2020, she has been leading accessibility projects in performances in the Region of Murcia and is currently researching contemporary dance.
Participant 4	
Nationality	Spanish
Working language	Spanish
Formation	Master's degree in Audio Description and Subtitling (University of Granada)
Profession	Audio describer and organiser of inclusive dance festivals

Experience	She started researching dance AD after her master's degree. Since 2010, she has been creating AD scripts for theatre and contemporary dance, and since 2017 she has been organising inclusive dance festivals in Zaragoza.
Participant 5	
Nationality	Spanish
Working language	Spanish
Formation	Translation and Interpreting (Universidad Complutense of Madrid), Master's degree in Audiovisual Translation (UAB)
Profession	Audio describer, subtitler and content manager at accessible theatre
Experience	She has worked in more than 500 accessible performances in Spain and performs touch tours. She is a regular contributor to AD and subtitling projects in film, television and theatre.
Participant 6	
Nationality	French
Working language	French
Formation	Anthropology
Profession	Professional dancer and audio describer
Experience	Trained in AD through the association Accès Culture, where she now directs the dance specialisation. She has written her first ballet, Romeo and Juliet, and is currently working at the Théâtre National de Chaillot, focusing on classical dance.
Participant 7	
Nationality	Canadian
Working language	French
Formation	Training in AD with Valérie Castan (France)
Profession	Professional dancer, choreographer and researcher
Experience	She lives in Montreal, where she trains future dance audio describers at Danse-cité. She leads dance projects with AD.

Participant 8	
Nationality	Canadian
Working language	French
Formation	Theatre and Art History with a specialisation in specialist performance (MA, Goldsmiths College, UK)
Profession	Audio describer and cultural mediator
Experience	She works in live performance and television, teaching workshops on movement, storytelling and visual arts in Montreal, Quebec and London.
Participant 9	
Nationality	Belgian
Working language	Dutch
Formation	Master's degree in Literature and Linguistics (English), master's degree in Translation (English-French, University of Antwerp)
Profession	Freelance audio describer and researcher
Experience	She started her career in AD through her doctoral thesis on opera, which she extended to dance AD, describing dance scenes in operas.
Participant 10	
Nationality	Belgian
Working language	Dutch
Formation	PhD in Translation Studies
Profession	Professor of audiovisual translation and accessibility
Experience	She directs the OPEN Expertise Centre for Accessible Media and Culture. Her research addresses linguistic and multimodal aspects of AD and computer-assisted translation tools.

Table 1. Sample of participants

In summary, the sample is composed of ten women with diverse profiles and experience in AD and accessibility in dance and performing arts. Seven are Spanish, two are Belgian and one is French, with working

languages including Spanish, French and Dutch. Their backgrounds include Translation and Interpreting, Anthropology, Literature and Linguistics, as well as PhDs and master's degrees in Translation and Audio Description. They occupy roles such as audio describers, professional dancers, researchers, choreographers and organisers of inclusive dance festivals. Their experience includes the creation of AD for live performances, television and museums, training of future audio describers and leadership in cultural accessibility projects. Innovative initiatives such as inclusive laboratories, accessible dance festivals and leading roles in institutions such as the Théâtre National de Chaillot and the OPEN Expertise Centre stand out.

3.3. *The materials: the interview*

To collect the information, a semi-structured interview was designed in two large blocks, introduced by an initial pre-question (Q1) about the interviewee's experience in the field of AD and, in particular, of dance AD. The first block included five questions (Q2-Q6) aimed at gathering information about the process of AD, namely the different steps in the process (Q2), difficulties in reproducing images (Q3) and possible solutions (Q4), the language used (Q5) and the key aspects to be considered (Q6). The second block consisted of four questions (Q7-Q10) focused on collecting information about three elements additional to AD and prior to the performance, touch tours (Q7), previous workshops (Q8) and audio introductions (Q9). The interview concluded with a final open-ended question in which the interviewees were invited to contribute data they considered relevant, and which had not been covered in any of the questions.

The following is a list of the different questions:

1. What is your experience in dance AD?
2. What steps do you follow when developing a script for AD?
3. What difficulties might a dance audio describer encounter when reproducing visual discourse?
4. How could they be solved?
5. What language do you use in dance audio description?
6. What is the most important thing to consider in dance AD?

7. Do you have experience of pre-performance touch tours? If so, could you describe the development of these sessions?
8. Do you have experience with pre-performance workshops? If so, could you describe the development of these workshops?
9. Do you have experience with audio introductions prior to representation? If so, could you tell us what challenges AD poses in its development and what information it should include?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

3.4. The procedure

The present study uses a qualitative methodology based on interviews with specialists to collect and contrast their experiences (Rojo López 2013).

Between September 2022 and January 2023, a total of 18 audio describers and 2 audio describers were contacted through social networks (such as Facebook and Instagram) and email. Some of the first audio describers to be interviewed provided us with new contacts of colleagues, thus expanding the network of participants. Finally, in January 2023, interviews were carried out with 10 female audio describers with prior experience in dance AD.

The interviews were conducted by video call via Microsoft Teams, ensuring flexibility and accessibility of the sessions. Before each interview, the informed consent form was read, in accordance with the requirements of the Ethics Committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona. The participants gave their consent to record the interviews in order to transcribe them later in the original language of the interviews. In addition, all ten participants authorised the publication of their names in this study.

3.5. The analysis of results

The interviews explored experiences in Spain, Belgium, France and Canada, which allowed for a comparison of differences in the methodology and planning of dance AD between these countries. Once the responses had been collected and transcribed, the data was entered into Taguette, a programme for the analysis of qualitative data. In Taguette, the transcripts

were sorted by tags in order to facilitate analysis and organise the information into different categories:

1. GAD: information related to the process of drafting the AD script.
2. Difficulties: difficulties encountered when audio describing dance, and the solutions implemented.
3. Language: specific terminology and language used in dance AD.
4. Relevant aspects: key elements to consider when audio describing dance.
5. Tactile visits: content and development of tactile visits, including their relevance for accessibility.
6. Dance workshops: information on workshops prior to performances.
7. Audio Introductions (AI): content and development of the AI as a complement to AD.
8. Complementary information: other aspects related to the elaboration of dance AD.

After classifying the data into these categories, it was analysed and compared with the aim of answering the five main research objectives. This approach allowed us to delve deeper into cultural and methodological differences in dance AD, highlighting relevant practices and resources such as working methods (live or recorded AD), the use of specific programmes, the role of audio introductions and additional strategies such as workshops and touch tours.

3.5.1. The process of developing and voicing the AD script

The process of developing and writing AD in dance shares similarities with other performing arts, such as theatre and opera, but presents significant differences due to the visual and dynamic nature of dance. This process and its particularities are detailed below:

The interviewees described a similar general process that includes the following steps:

1. Visualisation of the work: all audio describers start by visualising the work, either through rehearsal videos or by attending dress

rehearsals. In some cases, they receive a video file of an initial rehearsal without lighting, costumes and final effects, which limits the full understanding of the staging.

2. Development of a first draft: based on this visualisation, a first version of the AD script is written. This draft usually focuses on identifying key elements and important transitions between scenes.
3. Revising and fine-tuning the draft: One month before the premiere, the audio describer usually attends dress rehearsals to fine-tune the script and adjust it to the final edit. This allows details such as lighting, costumes and visual effects to be included. In touring productions, access may be limited to video of the final production with no in-person attendance, or with very limited in-person attendance in the hours leading up to the performance.
4. Voice-over testing of the script: prior to implementation, the script is tested with a volunteer with visual impairment. This ensures that the AD is comprehensible and effective. In many cases, the staging director also assists in reviewing the script to ensure that the AD reflects the original artistic intent.

3.5.1.1. Differences from other performing arts

In dance, the audio describer must adopt a strategy that alternates between a global vision and a focus on important details. This skill is crucial in order to capture the essence of the choreography and its particularities. In contrast to theatre or opera, where the script usually focuses on dialogue or narrative elements, in dance the focus is on describing movements, spatial formations and visual changes on stage (Fryer 2018a).

Two central aspects of dance AD are live improvisation and artistic collaboration:

- Live improvisation: In contemporary pieces that include elements of improvisation, the script of the AD should be flexible, prioritising the identification of interpretative patterns over the description of fixed actions.

- Artistic collaboration: Although collaboration with the artistic team is important in all the performing arts, in dance it is essential to capture the intention of the choreographer. In this sense, it would be ideal for the AD to be integrated into the production of the show from its earliest stages, applying the principles of universal design, as suggested by Romero-Fresco (2013) for film and following Patiniotaki's (2022) idea of developing a more integrated and artistic dance AD.

3.5.1.2. Recording and voiceover of AD

The recording and voice-over of the script present the following variations according to the country and the resources available:

- Recording with specialised software: in France, the company Accès Culture has developed specific software for AD in dance and theatre. This software allows the audio describer to record his or her voice while watching the video, timing the reading speed. During the performance, the recording is played back in segments synchronised with the play. In the case of improvisations or live changes, the audio describer intervenes in real time via microphones, adjusting the AD to the moment.
- Live voice-over from an interpretation booth: in other contexts, such as in Spain, the voice-over of the script is done live from a booth. This allows for adaptation to possible variations in the performance. Some voice recognition software can be used to transcribe the script, but the final interpretation is done manually.
- The use of synthetic voices: in some Spanish theatres, such as those working with the company Aptent, pre-recorded, synthetic voices are used. This technique is more common in theatre, but in dance it is still limited due to the need for flexibility and adjustment in real time.

3.5.1.3. Key aspects of dance AD development

Three key aspects of dance AD development are outlined below:

- The importance of going from general to detail: the audio describer must decide when to focus on a general picture of the stage and when to highlight significant details, such as a specific gesture or interaction between the performers. This approach is less common in theatre or opera, where dialogue and narrative structure the AD.
- The need for close collaboration: interaction with the artistic team, especially the choreographer, is essential to reflect the emotional and narrative intentions of the choreography.
- The relevance of review with volunteers: final testing involving people with visually impairment is a key practice to ensure accessibility, although it is not always standard in other performing arts.

3.5.2. *Difficulties and solutions in dance AD*

Dance audio description faces specific challenges due to its abstract and multimodal nature. The following are the main difficulties identified in the interviews, together with the solutions proposed to address them:

1. The transmission of abstract movements

Difficulty:

Abstract dance movements are complex to describe, especially due to cross-linguistic and cultural differences in the expression of movement events. While some specialised terms, such as *plié* or *relevé*, may be sufficient in one language, others require the use of detailed descriptions, similes or metaphors (e.g., ‘the heels rub together in a “V”’; bend the knees as if an invisible thread is pulling them towards the earth’).

Solutions:

- The use of technical terminology combined with clear visual descriptions, according to the needs of the audience.

- Organising pre-performance workshops for the audience to physically experience the described movements, thus facilitating their understanding during the performance.
- The training of audio describers in the linguistic and cultural particularities of dance.

2. Time constraint

Difficulty:

The time available to describe is limited, especially in contemporary group pieces where each dancer performs different movements simultaneously. This makes it difficult to cover all the crucial elements, forcing the audio describer to carefully select what to describe.

Solutions:

- Prioritising the movements most relevant to the narrative or overall aesthetics of the piece.
- Coordinating description with pauses and music, ensuring a balance between description and silence so as not to saturate the listener.
- The use of linguistic synthesis strategies, such as the use of technical terms or metaphors, to describe more in less time.

3. Subjectivity in interpretation

Difficulty:

Dance is a ‘predominantly abstract’ art, and each spectator may interpret its message differently. The audio describer, as the first spectator, must convey a mental image that allows the audience to construct their own interpretation.

Solutions:

- The need for a deep understanding of the piece and its message before AD.

- Collaboration with the choreographers or artistic directors to identify the key symbolic elements of the choreography.
- The development of a descriptive narrative that respects the inherent ambiguity of dance, leaving room for audience interpretation.

4. The unfamiliarity of the audience

Difficulty:

Many audio description users are unfamiliar with dance performances, making it difficult to create mental images of the movements described.

Solutions:

- Implement dance workshops prior to performances, where attendees can experience the movements described and become familiar with the technical vocabulary.
- Provide support materials, such as guides or brief explanations, to prepare users to enjoy the experience.

5. The innovation of the area

Difficulty:

Dance AD is an emerging field, with few established standards and unique challenges, such as adapting to the multimodality of the work and its similarity to abstract art description.

Solutions:

- Encourage the training of dance audio describers, including specific techniques for this type of performance.
- Create guidelines and standards to help establish consistent practices.
- Explore interdisciplinary collaborations with specialists in music, visual art and theatre to enrich descriptions.

6. The use of voice as a stylistic tool

Difficulty:

According to the audio describers, the voice of the audio describer should reflect the aesthetics and rhythm of the dance, using intonation, emotion and rhythm to complement the music and atmosphere of the piece.

Solutions:

- Train audio describers in vocal and stylistic techniques that allow them to adapt their voice to the specific needs of each piece.
- Synchronise the narration with the music and rhythm of the performance, ensuring that pauses and vocal flow align with the visual and auditory experience of the performance.

Dance audio description combines technical, linguistic and creative challenges, but also offers opportunities to explore new forms of accessibility. Through appropriate training, the implementation of pre-workshops and the development of specific standards, it is possible to overcome these difficulties and ensure that dance is an enriching experience for all audiences.

3.5.3. *Language used by dance audio describers*

The choice of language and its adaptation to the rhythm and atmosphere of the music are crucial aspects of dance AD, as they directly influence the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the choreography. The language used varies between two main approaches: the use of technical terminology and poetic language. Both have advantages and challenges, and their choice often depends on the context and the needs of the audience.

In relation to technical language, some audio describers prefer to use specialised terminology, such as *plié*, *rond de jambe* or *cambré*, for their precision and agility. However, in order to make this terminology accessible, it is essential to organise workshops prior to the performances in which the audience can experience the movements in their own bodies. This approach allows the movements to be described concisely, facilitating a smooth following of the narrative thread of the piece.

In terms of poetic language, the use of more evocative language, based on metaphors and similes, makes it possible to convey images and sensations associated with dance, rather than simply describing technical movements. This approach is particularly useful in abstract or contemporary works, where symbolism plays a central role. Resources such as alliteration, repetition and the synchronisation of language with music are fundamental to creating an immersive experience. For example, in works with a lot of dynamism, cascading verbs are used to reflect the continuity of movement.

Although the UNE standard emphasises the need for objectivity and accessibility in audio description, which seems to be in tension with the evocative approach of poetic language, in artistic fields such as dance this evocative approach is necessary. Dance, especially in abstract and contemporary styles, is a deeply symbolic and emotional art, in which the technical characteristics of the movements are not always sufficient to capture their meaning and atmosphere. The use of metaphors, similes and other stylistic devices should not be understood as a break with objectivity, but as a way of reflecting the essence and aesthetics of the work faithfully. Indeed, in contexts where symbolism and emotion are paramount, adhering strictly to a technical approach may limit the ability of audio description to convey the full experience to the audience. It is therefore important to consider that in dance, objectivity must be reinterpreted as the ability to faithfully represent not only the visible movements, but also the feelings, emotions and rhythms that the choreography seeks to evoke.

3.6. Additional elements

3.6.1. Touch tour

The touch tour is a complementary activity that can serve to enrich the experience of people with visual disabilities in dance performances. However, among our interviewees, only six of the audio describers have participated in these visits. According to their testimonies, this activity allows attendees to familiarise themselves with the stage space, touch costumes and set design elements, as well as interact with the artistic and technical team of the production.

The experiences shared highlight that one of the aspects that most interest the audience is the physical description of the dancers. Participants often ask about characteristics such as musculature, height, type of hair (whether it is loose or tied back) and other details related to their appearance. One participant noted that “dance is like a sport where the body matters”, and spectators want to know what the performers look like physically.

In France, these tours usually last between 30 and 40 minutes and take place shortly before the performance, either an hour before or during the morning of the show. During these sessions, the audience has the opportunity to touch the set, costumes and props, as well as to meet the dancers in person. The latter is particularly relevant since, during the AD afterwards, the dancers are often identified by name, which reinforces the connection between the audience and the work. In addition, the lighting that will be used in the show is explained, an important aspect for those attendees who have visual impairment or retain memories of what the light looks like.

Although the structure of the tour is adapted to the characteristics of each production, the experience of the audio describers suggests that it can be divided into four main steps:

1. Exploration of the stage space: the visit begins with a tour of the theatre and the performance hall. The dimensions of the space are explained, including the stalls, the amphitheatre, the stands and the stage. This first step helps the audience to situate themselves in the environment in which the performance will take place.
2. The presentation of the dance company: the principal dancers are then introduced. Although it is not always possible to have the whole cast present, when dancers are present they usually describe themselves. In cases where their participation is not feasible, alternatives such as dummies dressed in the costumes or detailed descriptions are used.
3. The description of the costumes and props: in this step, the assistants have the opportunity to touch the costumes and perceive the real textures and dimensions of the garments. If the complete

costume is not available, fabric fragments or miniature models are used. With props, a similar process is followed: priority is given to what is most relevant to the work, using models if real furniture is not available.

4. The presentation of scenography elements: in stagings where a complete tactile visit is not possible, the experts suggest solutions such as the recreation of the stage space and furniture in mock-ups. These models are also useful to present the most important elements of the scenography to those who have not been able to attend the visit. The models are usually placed at the entrance of the theatre and are accompanied by a brief initial audio description to orient the audience before the show.

In all the experiences described, tactile tours have proven to be a valuable tool for improving the accessibility of dance performances by enabling people with visual impairment to engage more directly and meaningfully with the work. However, the realisation of these visits depends on the characteristics of the production and the policies of the theatre or the director, which may limit their implementation.

3.6.2. *Dance workshops*

Dance workshops for the visually impaired are more common in some countries than in others, depending on the tradition of cultural accessibility and the availability of resources. France has established itself as a benchmark in this practice, with a regular offer of inclusive workshops and courses to train professionals in their organisation. In Spain, although these workshops are less frequent, the audio describers interviewed have had the opportunity to attend or learn how they are carried out, which has allowed them to value their usefulness in enriching the audience's experience and facilitating the understanding of AD.

In these workshops, participants learn some of the key movements of the performance. This can be done in two ways: either the participants perform the movements themselves, or the dancers hold static postures while the participants explore the figures with their hands. During this

exploration, the technical team contextualises each movement, explaining where it fits into the staging. This experience is extremely valuable, as it provides the audience with a tactile understanding of the movements, which helps them visualise themselves in the scene during the audio description. Thus, the AD is enriched by allowing the listener to identify with the movements and relate them to the sensations experienced in the workshop.

In addition, workshops facilitate the use of specialised technical terminology, such as *plié* or *retiré*, in the ADs. This vocabulary allows for more concise and fluid descriptions, leaving more space for listeners to enjoy the music or the contemplative pauses in the performance.

In France, these workshops cover a wide range of dance genres, such as African, hip hop, classical and contemporary. Their structure combines objective descriptions with metaphors to explain the body figures. The participants then reproduce them themselves. If they have difficulties, dancers or accompanying assistants offer direct support, allowing participants to touch the postures with their hands. In the case of continuous movements, dancers adopt successive figures that form part of a dynamic sequence, while assistants explore them tactily, understanding how they fit together in a continuous flow.

When attendees are unable to participate in previous workshops, alternative solutions are implemented to ensure a more inclusive experience. For example, dolls representing body figures have been used, allowing participants to touch them before the performance to familiarise themselves with the movements and terminology. In other cases, live audio descriptions include more detailed explanations to compensate for the lack of interaction beforehand.

As for the differences between the dance workshops and the touch tours described in the previous section, although both services share the objective of improving the accessibility of the performances, their approaches and objectives are significantly different. Dance workshops are configured as practical classes in which attendees have the opportunity to experience the movements of the choreography, providing a direct experience that, as

Castan (2014) points out, favours the understanding and enjoyment of the shows.

Touch tours, on the other hand, are designed for audiences to explore the stage environment, including sets, costumes and furnishings, but without being involved in the performance of the dance movements. These visits focus more on contextualising the space and physical elements of the work. Although in some cases workshops can be integrated within a touch tour, each activity has different purposes and methodologies that, together, enrich the experience of the public from complementary perspectives.

3.6.3. *Audio introductions*

Audio Introductions (AI) are essential to facilitate the understanding of AD in dance performances. According to the interviewees, the first step in their elaboration is to discuss what content should be included with the artistic company. In general, the AIs begin with an introduction about the stage space and continue with the description of key aspects such as synopsis, costumes, characters and performers' physiognomy.

Participants emphasise that AIs are even more important than the AD, as they provide people with visual impairment with a tool that allows them to situate themselves in the play before it begins. These introductions should include essential information such as the approximate number of people on stage, the layout of the space and, if there are background projections, details of these.

Interviews with audio describers have provided key information on three essential aspects of the AIs: content, strategies employed and function.

Regarding the specific content of AIs, it was noted that, compared to AIs used in theatre or film (e.g. Matamala 2019), dance AIs require similar information about context, setting and costumes, but with some specific additions. In the case of dance, it is crucial to detail aspects such as whether the dancers will speak at some point in the performance and, where possible, to describe their physical appearance. This last point is relevant because dancers often do not have specific names in the narrative and are referenced by visual descriptions such as 'the tall blonde' or 'the tall

brunette'. While this information can be presented during the touch tour, it should also be integrated into the AI for those who cannot attend the tour.

However, there are cases where it is not possible to physically describe the dancers, for example, when their permission is not given. This is especially the case in inclusive dance productions where some performers have disabilities and prefer not to disclose them. In these cases, audio describers opt for a general description mentioning the inclusion of disabled and non-disabled dancers, but without specifying individual details.

Another important aspect concerns strategies for good AI. All participants agree that effective AI requires finding a style of description that suits the characteristics of the work. This involves mentioning the specific challenges of the staging, explaining how the AD has been designed and guiding the listener to better enjoy the experience. In addition, the text must be flexible enough to respond to logistical variables, such as when the audience enters the auditorium, the possibility of providing hand programmes in Braille, and information on whether visually impaired audiences will be able to explore the space before the general public arrives.

On the other hand, the AI must undergo a final review by the director of the production, who will verify that the information is accurate and that the plot is not given away, preserving the narrative experience for all viewers.

Finally, it is important to consider the role of the AI. It is a key text that, prior to the show, provides essential visual and contextual information. It should include detailed descriptions of the costumes, stage space, lighting, props and any other information relevant to understanding the work, without revealing elements that may compromise the audience's surprise or shared emotions. Its elaboration is a process that requires multiple parameters to be considered, but its correct implementation guarantees an accessible and inclusive experience for the visually impaired spectator.

3.7. The most relevant aspects of dance audio description

The interviews conducted with the audio describers identified three key aspects that must be considered in order to guarantee effective AD in dance

performances. These contributions highlight the importance of deeply understanding the work, adapting to the characteristics of the audience and combining resources that facilitate a multi-sensory experience.

In relation to understanding and decision-making, all participants agree that the most important thing is to understand the work in its entirety before developing the script. It is essential to be clear about what you want to convey and how to convey it, so that the person listening to the AD can imagine and create their own mental representation of the piece. This process is intrinsically related to decision-making, as you must carefully select which visual aspects to describe and which to omit. For example, in a group choreography where each dancer performs different movements, the audio writer must decide which elements to emphasise so as not to overload the listener with too much information.

In addition, interviews have revealed that the attention span of the visually impaired audience tends to decrease after about fifteen minutes. It is therefore essential to include moments of pause in the AD to allow the listener to relax, listen to the music and regain concentration. These strategic silences not only encourage attention but also enrich the sensory experience of the performance.

Adaptation to the target audience is another crucial aspect. It is necessary to ensure that visually impaired viewers receive the same information as sighted viewers, but through the auditory channel. This implies knowing the play in depth and respecting both the subtleties of the message and the rhythms of the choreography. In addition, it would be useful to consider the cultural background of the audience in order to adjust the language used. For example, the use of technical terminology can make the AD more fluid, allowing for more pauses to enjoy the music.

Finally, we must not forget that dance is a multi-sensory experience. For the dance experience to be truly meaningful, participants suggest that AD should be accompanied by multisensory elements whenever possible. This includes allowing visually impaired attendees to physically experience some movements, touch the textures of costumes and props, and receive both the sensations of the music and the description of the image

generated on stage. These prior experiences not only complement the AD but also enhance the audience's emotional and cognitive connection to the work.

In conclusion, the interviews have shown that effective audio description in dance requires a holistic approach that combines thorough knowledge of the work, careful adaptation to the target audience and the use of strategies that allow for a multi-sensory experience. These aspects are essential to ensure that visually impaired spectators can fully enjoy dance performances on equal terms.

3.8. Supplementary information on the development of dance AD

Interviews with professionals have provided key information on the challenges and opportunities in developing AD for dance performances, highlighting the importance of pilot projects, inclusive workshops, creative approaches and institutional support to develop accessible culture.

Pilot projects to explore interest in audio described dance: the two Canadian participants pointed out that, due to low attendance at audio described dance performances, the question arises as to whether people with disabilities really enjoy such events or whether the problem lies in lack of knowledge. They proposed that it would be useful to implement pilot projects in which, after attending a performance, visually impaired attendees are surveyed to identify whether their interest increases when they receive an appropriate experience. This type of research would help to differentiate between real disinterest and lack of access or information, allowing more effective strategies to be designed to attract this audience.

Inclusive workshops and their impact on experiences in countries such as France and Canada have shown that inclusive dance workshops can significantly enhance the experience of people with visual impairment. These workshops allow participants to experience some movements of the choreography before the performance, facilitating their understanding of AD and promoting a deeper connection to the work. In Spain, where such workshops are not common, their implementation could be a valuable tool to bring people with disabilities closer to a field as visual as dance.

Projects such as those of Latrium (Laboratorio de Traducción Inclusiva de la Universidad de Murcia) already work in this direction, promoting access to dance for these audiences and exploring new ways of enjoying this art form.

Another point highlighted by the interviewees is that dance AD not only benefits people without access to images but can enrich the experience of all audiences. Dance, because of its abstract and symbolic nature, can be difficult to interpret even for sighted viewers. Tools such as tactile tours, pre-workshops and detailed audio introductions could provide everyone with a more comprehensive understanding of the piece, facilitating a more accessible and enriching experience for the audience as a whole.

Creativity and teamwork: for the audio describers, good dance AD requires creativity in language and voice as well as in multisensory design. However, they believe that this level of quality cannot be achieved by working alone. A collaborative approach is needed that integrates other professionals, dancers, choreographers and technicians, encouraging an exchange of ideas and strategies. Even small adjustments to the performances, made in collaboration with the artists, could be explored to make the pieces more accessible without compromising their artistic essence.

Finally, in terms of institutional support and resources, interviewees stressed the importance of external support, both financial and political, for accessible culture projects to be viable. Accessibility in dance is not limited to hiring a person to conduct AD, but requires additional resources such as sound technicians, tools to prepare descriptions, rehearsals with the artistic team, and time to plan and coordinate all stages of the process. Without this support, the implementation of truly inclusive AD is difficult to sustain.

In summary, the interviews have shown that the development of good dance AD involves not only creativity and knowledge, but also a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, supported by sufficient resources. Such a model would not only benefit people with visual impairment but also broaden the scope of dance as an art accessible to all.

4. Conclusions

This study has explored and described in depth the process of AD of dance performances, highlighting the main challenges and strategies based on interviews with audio describers from different geographical contexts. It has also provided key information on how practitioners prepare the AD script, organise tactile tours and use additional resources to improve accessibility and understanding of these works for people with visual impairment.

One of the main findings is that, regardless of the region (France, Spain, Netherlands, Canada, Belgium), the process of creating ADs follows common steps. These include detailed analysis of the play, reviewing recordings of the scenes, attending rehearsals (where possible) and, in some cases, testing with volunteers with visual impairment to assess the effectiveness of the description. However, there are regional variations in the organisation of pre-workshops and touch tours, which are more common in France and are in development in countries such as Canada. In Spain, these activities are still less common, although initiatives such as those of Latrium and Cía Danza Vinculados are beginning to close this gap.

4.1. Challenges in dance audio description

Dance presents unique challenges for audio describers because of the abstract nature of the movements and the simultaneity of actions in group choreography. One of the main challenges is to convey movements that, although subtle, can communicate complex meanings, such as the way dancers walk. This requires the audio describer to carefully select which aspects to describe to avoid overwhelming the listener, ensuring that they receive an experience comparable to that of the sighted viewer. In addition, the need to incorporate strategic pauses to allow the audience to enjoy the music and process the information highlights the importance of balanced narrative design.

The use of language is also critical. Audio describers rely on metaphors, analogies and emotional descriptions to convey the symbolism of the dance. These tools must be combined with an appropriate use of tone

and intonation to generate sensations in the listener, always adapting to the style and content of each work. Pre-workshops, where spectators can physically experience some movements, have proven to be a valuable resource to facilitate understanding and enrich the experience of AD.

4.2. Additional resources and their impact

Touch tours and audio introductions are fundamental resources to complement AD. Touch tours allow the audience to become familiar with the stage space, costumes and dancers, which helps to contextualise the experience. In cases where it is not possible to attend these visits, audio introductions become an indispensable tool. These introductions provide additional details that cannot be included during the performance due to time constraints, such as a summary of the touch tour and fuller descriptions of the staging.

In addition, the audio describers point out that dance AD not only benefits people with visual impairment but can also enrich the experience of sighted spectators by offering interpretative clues to better understand an abstract and symbolic discipline such as dance.

4.3. Future avenues of research

This research has identified several areas for future research. One interesting avenue would be to analyse the emotional reception of dance ADs, comparing the experiences of visually impaired and non-visually impaired viewers. Also, investigating the impact of previous workshops could offer a clearer perspective on their contribution to the enjoyment and understanding of dance. It would also be relevant to extend this research to other disciplines related to body expression, such as circus or musicals, to address specific challenges, such as the description of acro-dances or live performances.

Another field of interest would be to explore the relationship between dance AD and the perception of sculptures through the imitation of movements. This proposal would make it possible to analyse whether physically experiencing sculptural figures helps visually impaired people to mentally

recreate these images, opening up new possibilities at the intersection between visual arts and dance.

As an overall conclusion, this study has provided a detailed insight into the practices and challenges associated with AD for dance performances. It has demonstrated the importance of familiarisation with the performance and, as far as possible, of collaborating with the artistic team to ensure a faithful and enriching depiction. Despite differences in practices between regions, the results of the work have been very useful.

Although there are variations in practices between regions, detailed analysis of the performance, testing with volunteers and the use of supplementary resources are common steps that reflect a professional and tailored approach to the needs of visually impaired audiences. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of adopting an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to transforming dance into a truly accessible and inclusive experience for all. In the end, ensuring that dance is accessible not only enriches those who enjoy it, but also redefines dance as a space for equality, shared creativity and true inclusion.

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