Audio description in video games

Translation or creation?

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Video gaming has become a widely popular form of entertainment globally. However, visually impaired individuals frequently encounter challenges when trying to access most games. Audio description (AD) provides a solution by converting visual elements into spoken words, thus making content accessible to those with vision loss. While recent studies suggest translating audio description scripts for films and TV as a cost-effective strategy across languages and cultures, audio descriptions for video games remain relatively underexplored. This paper presents the findings of the *TransAD4Games* project, which examined whether translating audio descriptions from English is more time and cost-efficient than creating audio descriptions from scratch in Spanish, and also explored the differences between the two versions. Focusing on the game *Before I Forget* (3-Fold Games, 2020), audio descriptions were translated into Spanish by a professional translator, while another describer generated audio descriptions in Spanish from the ground up. Interviews with both the translator and the describer gathered their insights on the process and the challenges encountered. A subsequent comparison of the two versions highlighted the differences. After outlining the current state of audio description in video games and providing a brief review of existing scholarly discussions on the translation of audio description scripts, the research design and principal findings are shared. The study indicates that translating audio descriptions is faster and more cost-effective than creating it from scratch in Spanish, although the originally crafted Spanish audio descriptions offer greater detail. Future research involving a larger corpus would be essential to validate the findings of this study.

Keywords: video game, accessibility, audio description

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1. Introduction

The gaming industry stands at the forefront of technology and culture, with video games emerging as a highly popular form of entertainment in the digital era. By 2023, the global gaming population reached 3.38 billion, generating an astonishing annual revenue of USD 184.0 billion (Newzoo 2023). Video games provide a platform for developers to showcase their creativity and individuality, impacting global culture and modern digital society. Although they have widespread appeal, many video games are still inaccessible to the 1.3 billion people worldwide living with significant disabilities, which represents 16% of the population (WHO 2023). Recognizing accessibility as essential for full societal participation, the United Nations emphasizes the importance of ensuring equal digital access for all individuals (United Nations 2013). However, achieving game accessibility for players with sight loss presents challenges due to the interactive and visual nature of games (Mangiron and Zhang 2016). Audio description (AD) provides a solution by making audio-visual content accessible to visually impaired users, a practice already established in films, TV, theatre, and other performances, both live and recorded. Despite its potential to enhance game accessibility, audio descriptions remain underutilized in video games, particularly in cinematic elements such as trailers, demos, and cutscenes (Mangiron and Zhang 2016).

In a previous project, AD4Games, which was funded by the Brigstow Institute at the University of Bristol, the audio description was developed and integrated into the game *Before I Forget* (3-Fold Games 2020). The version with English audio descriptions was tested with English-speaking players located in the UK, and the results indicate that audio descriptions improved accessibility for players with vision loss. Building on the research findings and outcomes of the *AD4Games* project, the *TransAD4Games* project explored potential methods for making an audio-described game accessible in different languages and cultures, aiming to enhance game accessibility for blind and low-vision players. Existing research indicates that translation serves as a feasible, quick, and cost-effective strategy for providing audio descriptions across languages (e.g. Jankowska 2015; López Vera 2006). However, these findings are based on studies of the translation of audio description scripts for feature films, rather than for video games, and only between European languages (Jankowska et al. 2017; López Vera 2006; Remael and Vercauteren 2010).

This paper presents the findings of the *TransAD4Games* project, which investigated whether translating audio descriptions from English is more time- and cost-efficient than creating audio descriptions from scratch in Spanish, and examines the differences between the two versions. After introducing the development of audio description in video games in Section 2, a review of current scholarly

discussions on the translation of audio description scripts is provided in Section 3. Section 4 details the research design, while Section 5 discusses the results; the conclusion highlights the main findings and outlines future research avenues.

2. Audio description in video games

While audio games, designed exclusively for sound-based play, have been available to blind users since the 1970s (Hugill and Amelides 2016, 356), commercial video games have generally remained inaccessible to blind individuals due to their heavy reliance on visuals. These games often lack information that could be conveyed through other channels, such as sound or touch. One proposed solution to improve accessibility for blind players is the integration of audio description into games. Mangiron and Zhang advocated for this by suggesting that audio descriptions could be included in cinematic scenes, accompanying audio menus to clarify visual elements, and within the heads-up display (HUD), where game statistics are typically communicated through text and images (Mangiron and Zhang 2016, 88–89).

Moreover, Mangiron and Zhang (2022, 381) suggested incorporating audio introductions in games to convey information about characters and scenarios, accessible from the settings menu or the game website. They stressed the necessity of designing games with accessibility in mind from the pre-production phase, as retrofitting accessibility features after development can be expensive and complicated. They also pointed out challenges such as the non-linear nature of games and the importance of integrating audio descriptions seamlessly with other game sounds, recommending that the voice for audio description should be distinct from character voices to enhance differentiation (Mangiron and Zhang 2022, 382).

The Researching Audio Description: Translation, Delivery and New Scenarios (RAD) project, funded by the Spanish Government from 2019 to 2022, investigated game accessibility for blind and low-vision users in Spain. The project surveyed 106 participants and conducted 15 interviews to understand users' accessibility needs and preferences. Results indicated that the audio description was the second most desired accessibility option after screen readers. Participants expressed a desire for audio descriptions not only in cinematics, but also during gameplay to provide information about scenarios, objects, and characters (Larreina and Mangiron 2023).

Larreina, Di Rosa, and Dupire (2023) undertook a project to integrate audio description into gameplay. For their final project in the Master's degree program in Video Games and Interactive Media at Cnam-Enjmin (École nationale du jeu et des médias interactifs numériques), eleven students developed the game "Death

of Internet" (2023). This single-player, first-person, point-and-click PC game was created with the help of an audio description researcher. The game's interactions focus on object handling and include a "Blind Mode" designed specifically for players with visual impairments (Larreina, Di Rosa, and Dupire 2023). In Blind Mode, players navigate through Point of Interest (POI) locations using a fixed-position camera. When they reach a scenario, audio descriptions are automatically activated, providing details about the scene, POI, and events in the first person, voiced by the main character. Text-to-speech technology is also used to vocalize all textual elements on the screen (Larreina, Di Rosa, and Dupire 2023, 337–338). Although the game has not yet been tested with blind users, this initiative to incorporate dynamic audio descriptions into gameplay is impressive, especially considering it was developed by students within a three-month timeframe.

In the game industry, audio description is referenced in various guidelines to promote accessible game design, such as the Game Accessibility Guidelines (GAG) (Ellis et al. [2012] 2023). The GAG, a collaborative effort involving studios, experts, and academics since 2012, highlights audio description as an advanced accessibility feature, typically aimed at specific niche audiences. It provides a solution for visual accessibility and is recommended for implementation, particularly in cutscenes, where gameplay is already accessible through sound design or text-to-speech (Ellis et al. [2012] 2023).

Microsoft also released the Xbox Accessibility Guidelines (XAG) for developers in January 2020, with the latest version, 3.2, available as of June 2023. Guideline 111, titled "Audio Descriptions," includes information about its objectives, an overview, scoping questions, key focus areas, implementation guidelines, potential player impact, and resources and tools (Microsoft 2023). The goal of this guideline is to ensure that full motion videos (FMVs) or other scripted cinematic events within games offer an additional audio track that describes all essential visual information and context (Microsoft 2023). Regarding in-game areas where audio descriptions could be implemented, Microsoft (2023) suggests FMVs, cutscenes, in-game advertisements or promotional videos for downloadable content, as well as tutorial or in-game "how-to" guides presented through prerecorded and scripted content methods.

The community has also started efforts to promote audio description in games, including the Transcribing Games Project led by British gamer SightlessKombat (SightlessKombat 2025). This project offers audio description transcripts for various commercial games, such as *God of War* (2018), *Mortal Kombat for PlayStation 3* (2011), *Mortal Kombat 10* (2015), and the opening scene of *Bioshock* (2007). The project's website features links to videos that showcase audio described scenes from other games, providing detailed descriptions of characters,

enemies, locations, important items, encounters, and side quests, particularly in *God of War* (2018).

Despite a growing interest in audio description from both academia and the community, along with the presence of numerous guidelines promoting its inclusion in games, the industry has been slow to adopt it. In 2020, Ubisoft started incorporating audio descriptions in trailers for some of their games, including *Assassin's Creed Valhalla* (2020) and *Far Cry 6* (2020). However, without audio descriptions in game cutscenes, access to video games for blind and low-vision players remains limited. A significant development occurred in 2022 with the inclusion of audio descriptions in games, as several releases featured audio descriptions not only for cinematics but also for gameplay. Three indie games — *Cyberchase: Duck Dash* (Bridge Multimedia), *Brok the InvestiGator* (CowCat Games), and *Stories of Blossom* (Soft Leaf Studios) — incorporate audio descriptions to portray locations, characters, scenes, and event sequences, while also combining audio description with other accessibility features such as text-to-speech (TTS). The 2022 remake of *The Last of Us Part I* by Naughty Dog became the first AAA title to feature audio descriptions in its cinematics. Other mainstream studios followed suit, like Turn 10 Studios, the developers of *Forza Motorsport* (2023), and NetherRealm Studios, the creators of *Mortal Kombat 1* (2023), both of which included audio descriptions for their fatalities' cinematics. Additionally, Marvel's *Spider-Man 2* (Insomniac Games, 2023) introduced audio descriptions in multiple languages through a post-release update.

Although it is a recent phenomenon, audio description for games has been developing rapidly. As audio description increasingly becomes a standard feature in games, more titles are expected to incorporate audio description in various languages to enhance accessibility for blind and low-vision individuals players.

3. The translation of audio description

The economic and operational elements of media accessibility create challenges that differ from conventional economic models. The cost of media production has already peaked, and the excessive reliance on advertisements to finance private broadcasting is putting pressure on viewers (López Vera 2006). The question of how media will become accessible given the increased production costs was addressed at the Media for All conference held at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona as early as June 2005 (López Vera 2006). Since then, the distinction between translating audio descriptions and creating audio descriptions from scratch has drawn scholarly attention in recent decades, and the practice of translating audio descriptions for films and television from English into other languages has been adopted by the industry (Jankowska et al. 2017).

López Vera (2006) presents an experiment testing whether translating or adapting audio description scripts is a faster and more cost-effective method for creating audio descriptions for films. A team of two professional subtitlers, two dubbing translators, a university professor, and a dubbing director participated in the experiment, even though they lacked prior experience in audio description creation. They worked with audio description scripts produced in the US or UK for films such as *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Iris* (2001). Each researcher created four audio description scripts for the first ten minutes of each film, following two procedures: one involved creating Spanish audio descriptions from the original film, while the other involved translating English audio description scripts. The aim was to compare the duration and evaluate the creative process of each procedure. In the third stage, subtitlers created Spanish Hard of Hearing (HoH) subtitles, then prepared and recorded Spanish audio description scripts based on them. Finally, a dubbing director refined the translated audio description scripts and tracked the time spent on adaptation and recording. The experiment aimed to identify the profile of a commercial audio describer suitable for the Spanish market. Results were analyzed from the perspectives of translation and adaptation, suggesting that translating an existing audio description script may be slightly less time-consuming. However, the participants' prior experience in translation may have influenced this outcome, while the film's length did not significantly affect the time spent on creating audio descriptions. López Vera (2006, 9) suggests that the translation of audio description scripts should be considered as the way forward.

Remael and Vercauteren (2010) conducted case studies on the translation of recorded audio descriptions from English to Dutch and suggest that claims about the efficiency of translating audio descriptions are premature. Although audio descriptions share similarities with other forms of audiovisual translation (AVT), they present unique challenges due to their status as a new text type and their role as a pivot translation. Their analysis indicates that certain types of words and grammatical forms appear more frequently and fulfill different roles in audio descriptions, which could lead to translation challenges, especially regarding Extralinguistic Cultural References (ECRs). Moreover, the cultural distance between the film, audio description, and translated audio description presents further challenges. Although audio descriptions generally consist of clear sentences, the variation in style makes it difficult to quantify the translation effort. They advocate for incorporating audio descriptions and their translation into audiovisual translation courses because of the necessary skills involved, and they also emphasize the need for further research on extensive corpora to better understand the specifics of audio description as a text type and their translation.

Jankowska (2015) reports findings from a three-stage investigation aimed at determining whether translating audio description scripts from experienced British describers into Polish is a cost-effective solution. Furthermore, the study analyzed whether the translated scripts maintain the quality expected by target recipients. The results indicate that translating audio description scripts is not only feasible but also advantageous regarding time, costs, and the quality of the audio descriptions provided. Furthermore, Jankowska et al. (2017) present some of the outcomes of the ADDit! project, which aimed to investigate the transfer of ECRs in audio description. The researchers defined and systematized ECR types and strategies for audio description. They also investigated the translation of locally created audio description scripts from non-English-language films into other languages. The findings reveal the inadequacy and inconsistency of current ECR frameworks for audio description. Translating audio description scripts requires intercultural competence and adherence to local style guidelines. Translating these scripts into English, a pivot language, may prevent cultural loss and provide a feasible alternative to existing practices, as previous studies suggest it is less time-consuming and more accepted by audiences. However, translating audio description script translation must consider the original content and images, as it involves more than a simple text translation, as highlighted by Remael and Verecauteren (2010).

This brief literature review reveals that current scholarly debates primarily focus on studies related to translating audio description scripts for feature films and are limited to European languages. The translation of audio description scripts for video games remains largely unexamined, as audio descriptions in video games are a relatively recent phenomenon.

4. Research design

The *TransAD4Games* project is a continuation of the *AD4Games* project, which explores various ways that assistive technology can enhance game accessibility for blind and visually impaired players. One of the outcomes of the *AD4Games* project is an English version of the game *Before I Forget* (3-fold Games, 2020), featuring audio descriptions created by two professional audio describers in English. *Before I Forget* is a slow-paced, story-driven environmental narrative game that was nominated for a 2020 British Academy Games Award in the Game Beyond Entertainment category

In Before I Forget, the player guides Sunita Appleby, a scientist with early-onset Alzheimer's disease, in navigating her house. Interacting with various objects triggers memories, helping her piece together her past. The game is played

from a first-person perspective and features puzzle-like elements, such as remembering the locations of mementos. Alzheimer's disease is incorporated into the main scenarios and with the objects players can interact with. When entering a new room, players can press a button to hear a description of the room, and when they approach an object they can interact with, a sound cue helps them locate it before pressing a button to hear its description. The results of playtesting indicate that the audio description in this game is beneficial for visually impaired players (Mangiron and Zhang 2025)

Building on the research findings and the audio descriptions developed in the *AD4Games* project, the *TransAD4Games* project further investigates three research questions: (1) Is translating more cost- and time-efficient than creating audio descriptions from scratch? (2) What are the differences between translated audio description scripts and those created directly in the target language? (3) What challenges arise in translating and creating audio descriptions for games?

To address the first research question, a translator was engaged to translate the audio description scripts from English to Spanish and recorded the time spent. Simultaneously, an audio describer was asked to create audio description scripts for the game from scratch and logged the time used. The expenses for both translation and audio description were determined based on current average rates in the Spanish market.

We selected the two professionals because they both hold an MA in Audiovisual Translation from the same program, which covers various modes of audiovisual translation, including audio description and video game localization. Additionally, they have similar work experiences, having been professional audiovisual translators and audio describers for eight years. The audio description scripts they previously produced were mainly for film and television, and they always created these scripts from scratch. Although they had never drafted audio description scripts for video games, they are avid gamers. Both were given two hours to play Before I Forget before starting their work

To answer the second research question, a comparative analysis of the two audio description scripts was carried out. A number of examples are presented here. The original audio descriptions in English, the translated audio descriptions in Spanish, the original audio descriptions in Spanish, and its back translation are presented in a table and subsequently the main differences are analysed (see Table 1).

To answer the third research question, the audio description translator and the audio description creator were interviewed after they had submitted their audio description scripts in order to know their opinion about the process.

5. Results

The results of the study are presented in this section in relation to the three research questions.

5.1 Is translation more cost and time-efficient than creating AD from scratch in Spanish?

Regarding the first research question, the experiment showed that the audio describer took 18 hours to create the audio descriptions from scratch, while the translator spent 13 hours translating the audio description script from English into Spanish. In terms of cost, the translator was compensated at a per-word rate based on the word count of the English audio description script, while the audio describer was paid an hourly rate. Comparatively, the cost of translation was 13.2% less expensive than creating audio descriptions from scratch. Therefore, it can be concluded that translating the audio description script was both quicker and less expensive than creating audio descriptions from the ground up.

5.2 Differences between the translated AD script and the script created directly in Spanish

Regarding the second research question, the analysis of the two styles of audio description showed that the audio descriptions created from scratch in Spanish were generally longer than the translated audio descriptions. They described the rooms and items in greater detail and in a more literary style, as can be seen in the examples in Table 1. This result aligns with a previous study comparing audio descriptions in Spanish with those in English, which concluded that Spanish audio descriptions were longer and did not allow much time for the soundtrack (Hirvonen and Igareda 2017).

Table 1. Transcriptions of audio descriptions of items and rooms

	Original EN AD	Translated ES AD	Original ES AD	Original ES AD (Back translation)
1	Modern Scientist Magazine. February 1974. Indian Cosmologist Sunita Appleby Boldly going where no woman has been before. Sunita's	Revista de Científicos Contemporáneos. Febrero de 1974. La cosmóloga india Sunita Appleby Boldly llega donde ninguna mujer ha llegado antes.	Revista de Científicos Contemporáneos. Febrero de 1974. Una mujer morena de unos treinta años aparece en la portada de la revista. Superpuesto	Modern Scientist Magazine. February 1974. A brunette woman in her thirties appears on the cover of the magazine. Superimposed on the

Table 1. *(continued)*

	Original EN AD	Translated ES AD	Original ES AD	Original ES AD (Back translation)
	picture appears on the cover.	En la portada hay una foto de Sunita.	en la fotografía de la mujer: La cosmóloga india Sunita Appleby Boldly llega donde ninguna mujer ha llegado antes. Debajo de la fotografía siguen los titulares: "Los cúmulos de galaxias y el misterio de la masa perdida. Construye tu propio calentador solar de agua." En la parte inferior derecha de la portada: "Microprocesadores: Un vistazo al Scelbi (Escelbi) ocho hache."	woman's photograph: Indian cosmologist Sunita Appleby Boldly goes where no woman has gone before. Below the photograph, the headlines continue: 'Galaxy clusters and the mystery of lost mass. Build your own solar water heater.' In the bottom right corner of the cover: 'Microprocessors: A glimpse of the Scelbi (Escelbi) eight H.'
2	A framed photograph of Sunita and Dylan smiling on their wedding day	Un marco con una foto de Sunita y Dylan sonriendo el día de su boda.	Un marco con una fotografía de una boda. Los novios miran sonrientes al objetivo. Ella es morena, lleva el pelo recogido, un vestido blanco y sostiene un ramo de flores. Él es rubio, más alto, lleva americana, camisa y una rosa en el bolsillo de pecho. Tiene los brazos alrededor de la novia. Tras ellos, los invitados los miran con alegría.	A frame with a photograph from a wedding. The bride and groom smile at the camera. She is brunette, with her hair up, wearing a white dress and holding a bouquet of flowers. He is blond, taller, wearing a jacket, shirt, and a rose in the chest pocket. His arms are around the bride. Behind them, the guests watch them joyfully.
3	A flashback. Looking out at a vast starry sky in India then a more confined tunnel view through the telescope. The view can be	Flashback. En La India, un vasto cielo estrellado da paso a una vista a través del telescopio. Puedes moverte a través del	Flashback. Miras a través del telescopio dorado hacia el cuadro colgado en la pared. Junto a un río en La India, una mujer y una	Flashback. You gaze through the golden telescope at the painting hanging on the wall. By a river in India, a woman and a

Table 1. *(continued)*

	Original EN AD	Translated ES AD	Original ES AD	Original ES AD (Back translation)
	panned by using the movement keys.	cielo mediante los botones de movimiento.	niña contemplan el cielo nocturno a través de un telescopio. Las estrellas brillan intensamente en el firmamento. En la esquina superior izquierda se muestran los puntos cardinales. Mueve el ratón hacia arriba para ir al norte, hacia abajo para ir al sur, hacia la izquierda para ir al oeste y hacia la derecha para ir al este.	girl gaze at the night sky through a telescope. The stars shine brightly in the firmament. In the upper left corner, the cardinal points are displayed. Move the mouse upwards to go north, downwards to go south, leftwards to go west, and rightwards to go east.
4	Study. Back in the study. A painting of an Indian woman on the wall with a scarf draped around her head and shoulders. A chessboard has appeared on the coffee table in front of the sofa.	Despacho. De nuevo en el despacho. En la pared ahora hay un cuadro de una mujer india con un pañuelo que le cubre la cabeza y los hombros. Sobre la mesa de café frente al sofá ahora hay un tablero de ajedrez.	Despacho. De nuevo en el despacho. En la pared ahora hay un cuadro de una mujer de piel oscura con el pelo largo, negro y ondulado que mira pensativa al frente. Lleva la cabeza cubierta con un pañuelo blanco y los labios pintados de rosa. Sobre la mesa de café frente al sofá ahora hay un tablero de ajedrez.	Study. Back in the office. On the wall, there is now a painting of a dark-skinned woman with long, black, wavy hair looking thoughtfully ahead. She has her head covered with a white scarf, and her lips are painted pink. On the coffee table in front of the sofa, there is now a chessboard.
5	Bathroom. The floor and walls are tiled. A toilet with the lid up. Towels and bottles stand on shelves at the foot of the bath. There's a frosted window above the bath looking out onto	Baño. Las paredes y el suelo son de baldosa. Hay un váter con la tapa levantada. A los pies de la bañera, en unas estanterías hay toallas y botellas. En la pared junto a la bañera, hay una	Baño. Unas baldosas cuadradas de mármol se extienden en el suelo y las paredes del cuarto de baño. Cerca de la puerta de entrada hay un inodoro con la tapa abierta. Unas ventanas de vidrio	Bathroom. Square marble tiles cover the floor and walls of the bathroom. Near the entrance door, there is a toilet with the lid open. Frosted glass windows with the blinds up provide a

Table 1. *(continued)*

	Original EN AD	Translated ES AD	Original ES AD	Original ES AD (Back translation)
	the street. A small sink has a shelf above it with a pillbox on top.	ventana translúcida que da a la calle. En el baño también hay un lavabo sobre el cual hay una balda con un pastillero.	mate con la persiana subida dan al exterior. Debajo de las ventanas hay una bañera, una estrecha repisa con dos toallas dobladas y un jarrón con flores. En el suelo, cerca de la bañera, se encuentra una alfombra de baño, un cubo y un estante con toallas y varios botes. En una pared hay un lavamanos con espejo y un estante en el que reposan un vaso, jabón de manos y un pastillero.	view outside. Below the windows, there is a bathtub, a narrow shelf with two folded towels, and a vase with flowers. On the floor, near the bathtub, there is a bathmat, a bucket, and a shelf with towels and various containers. On one wall, there is a sink with a mirror and a shelf holding a glass, hand soap, and a pillbox.
6	A flashback. Up close on the details of an antique star map showing the constellations and illustrations of a winged horse in the bottom left hand corner and a swan in the top right hand corner. The view can be panned by using the movement keys.	Flashback. Detalle de un mapa celeste antiguo con constelaciones e ilustraciones de un caballo alado en la esquina inferior izquierda y un cisne en la esquina superior derecha. Puedes moverte a través del mapa mediante los botones de movimiento.	Flashback. La carta estelar se amplía. Puedes mover el ratón sobre la carta estelar. En la parte superior, un cisne vuela del revés. En la parte inferior, un caballo galopa del revés. Una estrella brilla en tonos morados y azules. Una línea une Markab (Marcáb) con Scheat (Sheat). Una línea une Scheat con Alpheratz (Alferáz). Una línea une Alpheratz con Algenib. Las líneas forman un cuadrado. De la esquina superior izquierda del cuadrado salen otras dos líneas	Flashback. The star chart expands. You can move the mouse over the star chart. At the top, a swan flies upside down. At the bottom, a horse gallops upside down. A star shines in shades of purple and blue. A line connects Markab to Scheat. A line connects Scheat to Alpheratz. A line connects Alpheratz to Algenib. The lines form a square. From the upper-left corner of the square, two more lines extend, forming the front legs of Pegasus. From the lower-left corner,

Table 1. *(continued)*

Original EN AD	Translated ES AD	Original ES AD	Original ES AD (Back translation)
		que forman las patas delanteras del Pegaso. De la esquina inferior izquierda sale otra línea que se dobla, imitando el cuello y la cabeza del animal mitológico.	another line extends, bending to mimic the neck and head of the mythological creature.

In all examples, the English audio descriptions and translated audio descriptions are significantly shorter than the original Spanish versions, which offer more detail about items, locations, and characters. In the first example, the original ES AD depicts the image of the woman on the magazine cover before reading the headline aloud. They also include information about the other headlines. It is important to note that both the audio description translator and the audio describer believed that the term "Boldly" was part of the character's surname. This is because there is no punctuation in the headline. Although it introduces the next sentence, "boldly going where no woman has been before," they assumed it was part of the surname. Additionally, in Spain, people typically have two surnames, and in English, sometimes there are double-barreled names, which may also have led them to believe it was a surname. However, since this does not affect the description, it has no implications for understanding the fragment or the overall story, and it does not impact the gameplay.

In Example 2, along with the more detailed description of the characters in the picture found in the original ES AD, the other notable difference relates to the naming of the characters. The EN AD and the translated ES AD identify the characters as Sunita and Dylan on their wedding day, but the ES AD does not mention their names; instead, it provides a thorough description. The issue of character naming in AD has garnered academic attention and varies by country (Rai, Greening, and Petré 2010). In AD produced in the UK, character names are typically given at the beginning of the story, except when it's crucial for the plot to keep them hidden (ibid.), which may explain their early mention in the EN AD. However, this guideline is less clear-cut in Spain, where it is not specifically addressed in the Spanish guidelines (AENOR 2005). When we asked the Spanish audio describer about this, he expressed that he believed the names of Dylan and Sunita were revealed too quickly in the English AD. He opted to describe the individuals in the pictures without mentioning any names, allowing the players to deduce who Sunita and Dylan were, as a sighted person would do.

In Example 3, the original ES AD gives more detail about the scenery. It also offers additional information on navigating the map to explore it, which can enhance gameplay.

In Example 4, the EN description and the translated ES description indicate the character's ethnicity, while the original ES description provides more detail about the woman in the painting, mentioning her dark skin, long black wavy hair, and makeup, without specifying her ethnicity. Currently in the UK, audio description scholars and practitioners advocate for including information about ethnicity to avoid the assumption that everyone is white by default (Fry 2016; Thompson, Hutchinson, and Cock 2020). Spanish guidelines do not address this aspect; however, some scholars, like Jiménez Hurtado (2007), include ethnicity as one of the traits that can be described about characters. When asked why he did not mention that Sunita was Indian, the ES audio describer said he aimed to be objective and only described the character's appearance based on what he observed in the picture. He did not indicate Sunita's Indian heritage, just as he did not specify that the husband was Caucasian. He believed that as players progressed in the game, they would learn that information while interacting with letters, objects, and pictures, as the magazine cover states that Sunita is Indian.

In Example 5, the description of the bathroom in the original ES AD provides significantly more detail about the room and its contents than the translated ES AD. The register of the original ES AD is also more formal, using the term *inodoro* for "toilet," while the translated ES AD employs the more colloquial term *váter*.

In Example 6, the original ES AD is again much longer and more detailed. It includes additional information about the star constellations, such as the names of the stars Scheat, Alpheratz, and Algenib. It also mentions the name of the constellation, Pegasus, which the EN AD and the translated ES AD only refer to as "the winged horse" and *un caballo alado*, respectively. The original ES AD also talks about *un caballo galopa del revés* (a horse gallops upside down) at the beginning, but later it mentions *Pegaso* (Pegasus). Interestingly, the order in which some of the information is presented differs between the EN AD and the translated ES AD compared to the original ES AD. The former describes the horse first and then the swan, while in the original ES AD, the swan is presented first. Additionally, the information regarding instructions and gameplay differs in the two versions. In the EN AD and the translated ES AD, details on how to pan the view using the movement keys are provided at the end. In the original ES AD, this information is presented at the start, probably because the description is quite lengthy. Furthermore, it mentions the mouse (*ratón*) instead of the movement keys. Although the game can be played using both input methods, the movement keys are more accessible for players with visual disabilities than the mouse.

A study on the style of audio description was conducted. The findings indicate that players preferred the original Spanish audio descriptions created from scratch. Nonetheless, they also appreciated the translated audio descriptions, suggesting that translating audio descriptions could be a viable and acceptable option (Mangiron and Zhang 2025).

In terms of gameplay experience, the participants engaged with the translated audio descriptions, and their playing experience was unaffected, as they still enjoyed the activity. They also did not raise any issues related to the translation. This suggests that the translation did not hinder their overall enjoyment or performance. In future studies with larger sample sizes, it would be valuable to include two separate groups — one using the translated audio descriptions and the other using the original version. This would allow for a more comprehensive comparison of their gameplay experiences and levels of enjoyment. By gathering more data across diverse participant groups, we could better understand the potential impact of translation on user engagement and satisfaction.

5.3 The challenges of translating and creating AD for video games

Both the translator and the audio describer were interviewed after finishing their tasks to reflect on the processes and challenges of translating audio description scripts for video games and creating audio descriptions for video games from scratch.

Regarding the translation of the English audio description script, the translator found it challenging to align the translation with the audio description guidelines for film and TV in Spain. For instance, certain elements, such as the time of day, should be indicated according to Spanish guidelines, but this was not included in the English audio descriptions. The translator was uncertain whether to add these elements to the translation, as there are currently no guidelines on audio descriptions for games. Furthermore, she paid attention to specific game elements while playing from a different perspective than that of the English audio describer, and would have created audio descriptions for those elements differently. Ultimately, she respected the source text when translating the existing audio description script. Overall, while she would have preferred to create the audio descriptions from scratch, she also felt that translating it is intellectually less challenging, as all the decisions regarding what and how to describe are already made.

When it comes to creating audio descriptions from scratch, the biggest challenge is that video games are dynamic and interactive. This means the environment and events can change rapidly based on player actions, making it quite difficult to describe these changes accurately and in real-time. In *Before I Forget*, players can move around a house with many rooms. The position they stand in

and the direction they face determines what they see in front of them. Although the audio describer can theoretically provide multiple audio description scripts from various viewpoints, the current build of the game does not allow for their implementation due to technical limitations, as pointed out by the game developer. Ultimately, the audio descriptions were created for each room from the perspective at the door, describing what a player sees upon entering the room.

Additionally, the game features complex storylines and narratives that require audio descriptions to effectively convey the plot, character interactions, and significant story elements. In film and television, there are visual cues, such as close-ups, that indicate the importance of certain elements. However, in *Before I Forget*, objects are presented similarly. The audio describer initially found himself somewhat lost when trying to determine which elements were most important for the audio description. The game offers several objectives for players to discover, each of which triggers a memory of the protagonist. Some of these objectives relate to the gameplay but are intended to be discovered by the players themselves. To provide sufficient description without overwhelming detail, a solid understanding of the game's narrative and mechanics is essential. The describer found it beneficial to play the game first and then draft the audio descriptions. Furthermore, being a gamer himself facilitated a quicker understanding of the gameplay.

Moreover, there are several cutscenes in the game that serve as flashbacks to the protagonist's life. The audio description should indicate that there is an image on the screen and meet the time constraints. For other elements in the game, since the player's progress is controlled by them, and the audio description can be turned on or off and replayed as often as necessary, the length of the audio descriptions is not strictly time-restricted. However, if an audio description is too lengthy, the player may lose interest, and it will increase the size of the audio file, making the game itself larger

In summary, the interviews with the translator and the audio describer provided key insights into the complexities and challenges of translating and creating audio descriptions for video games. These findings highlight the need for customized guidelines and methodologies for developing and implementing audio descriptions in video games.

6. Conclusions

This paper has explored the rapidly evolving field of audio description in video games, underscoring its development driven by initiatives from both the gaming industry and academia. Despite being a relatively recent phenomenon, audio descriptions in games have made swift progress, highlighting the industry's

commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. As audio description increasingly becomes a standard feature, it is expected that more game titles will include audio descriptions in various languages, thereby enhancing accessibility for blind and low-vision players.

The findings of the *TransAD4Games* project provide valuable insights into the efficiency and effectiveness of translating audio description scripts compared to creating them from scratch. The research reveals that translating audio description scripts is quicker and more cost-effective. However, audio descriptions created from scratch in Spanish tend to be longer and more detailed, adopting a literary style that resonates well with players (Mangiron and Zhang 2025). This indicates that translation is a viable and acceptable option for incorporating audio descriptions in video games, offering a balance between cost-efficiency and quality. Nevertheless, further studies are necessary to confirm this, using larger corpora and different language combinations, such as English and Chinese. It would also be interesting to explore translating audio description scripts using machine translation and post-editing, comparing their cost and time effectiveness against human translation and audio descriptions created from scratch.

This study also identified significant challenges that need to be addressed to further advance audio descriptions in video games. Among these challenges is the lack of specific guidelines for audio descriptions in games, leading to uncertainty and inconsistency in implementation. Additionally, the interactive nature of video games and their complex storytelling mechanics present unique difficulties for audio description creators. Accurately describing dynamic and interactive environments requires innovative approaches and a deep understanding of the game's narrative mechanics.

Addressing these challenges will be essential for the ongoing advancement of audio description in video games. Establishing specific guidelines and honing techniques for creating and translating audio descriptions will ensure that this crucial accessibility feature is effectively implemented, enhancing the gaming experience for blind and low-vision players and promoting a more inclusive gaming industry.

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Ludography

Assassin's Creed Valhalla (Ubisoft 2020)
Before I Forget (3-Fold Games 2020)
BioShock (2K Boston for PC, Xbox 360; Digital Extremes for PS3, Feral Interactive for Mac OS X, Demiurge Studios for art and opening scene 2007)
Brok the InvestiGator (CowCat Games 2022)
Cyberchase: Duck Dash (Bridge Multimedia 2022)
Far Cry 6 (Ubisoft 2020)
Forza Motorsport (Turn 10 Studios 2023)
Death of Internet (Cnam-Enjmin 2023)
God of War (SCE Santa Monica Studio 2005 to date)
Mortal Kombat saga (NetherRealm Studios 1992 to date)
Mortal Kombat 1 (NetherRealm Studios 2023)
Mortal Kombat 10 (NetherRealm Studios for PS4, Xbox One, Android and iOS; High Voltage Software for PC 2015)
Stories of Blossom (Soft Leaf Studios 2022)
The Last of Us I (Naughty Dog 2022)

Resumen

Los videojuegos se han convertido en una forma de entretenimiento popular en todo el mundo. Sin embargo, las personas con discapacidad visual suelen enfrentarse a desafíos para poder jugarlos. La audiodescripción (AD) ofrece una solución al traducir los elementos visuales a palabras y hacer el contenido más accesible para las personas con pérdida de visión. A pesar de que hay estudios recientes que proponen traducir guiones de AD para películas y televisión para aumentar la disponibilidad de la AD en otros idiomas y culturas de forma rentable, la AD para videojuegos es un área relativamente inexplorada. Este artículo presenta los resultados del proyecto *TransAD4Games*, cuyos objetivos son investigar si traducir AD del inglés al español es más eficiente que crear AD directamente en español desde un punto de vista económico y temporal, así como examinar las diferencias entre ambas versiones. Una traductora profesional tradujo al español la AD del juego *Before I Forget* (3-Fold Games, 2020) y un audiodescriptor realizó la AD en español desde cero. A continuación, se les entrevistó para conocer su opinión sobre el proceso y sobre los desafíos a los que tuvieron que enfrentarse. Finalmente, se compararon las dos versiones para identificar las principales diferencias. En este artículo, tras presentar el estado de la cuestión sobre la AD en videojuegos y la traducción de guiones de AD, se describen el diseño de la investigación y los principales hallazgos del proyecto. Los resultados indican que traducir AD es más rápido y económico que crearla desde cero en español, aunque

la AD hecha en español es más detallada. Para confirmar los resultados de este proyecto, se deberían llevar a cabo más estudios en el futuro con un corpus más amplio.

Palabras clave: videojuegos, audiodescripción, accesibilidad

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