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Evaluation of audio description

Susanne J. Jekat

Zurich University of Applied Sciences
Centre for Computational Linguistics

Susanne.jekat@zhaw.ch

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The semantic differential as a measuring instrument for audio description

Semantic differential (Osgood et al. 1957)

- Method for the quantitative analysis of affective word meanings and connotations
- Subjects rank a given concept using pairs of adjectives
- Pairs of adjectives opposite in meaning and arranged on a semantic scale
- Seven points on the scale prevent accidental choices (Osgood et al. 1957: 85)

The semantic differential as a measuring instrument for audio description

GOOD

BAD

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1 absolutely true for GOOD, 7 absolutely true for BAD

2 somewhat true for GOOD, 6 somewhat true for BAD

3 hardly true for GOOD, 5 hardly true for BAD

4 neither true for GOOD nor BAD

Comparison of reception of main characters in “Happy Go Lucky” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Content of “Happy Go Lucky” (2008, British tragicomedy)

- Single woman Poppy is happy go lucky, whereas Scott, her grumpy driving instructor, is the opposite of her, yet he falls in love with her.
- Subjects divided into two groups:
- 12 sighted (4 females, 8 males)
- 12 visually impaired (4 females, 8 males; 9 of them visually impaired, 3 of them blind from birth)

Visual presentation of Poppy as peace-loving and Scott as aggressive in Happy Go Lucky (2008)



English audio description of Poppy (peace-loving): Poppy raises her forearms and shows her hands which are closed in loose fists. She wears a ringed red and white sweater, large red earrings and a smile spreads across her face.



English audio description of Scott (aggressive): Scott looks at the person opposite to him knitting his brows and contracting his face. He bares his teeth and shows his clenched fist with his index finger stretched out. He wears a grey jacket and a grey-blue shirt.

Comparison of reception of main characters in “Happy Go Lucky” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Test design

- Sighted subjects watch German version of “Happy Go Lucky”
- Visually impaired hear German version and German audio description of “Happy Go Lucky”
- Subjects then provided with 15 seven-point scales with pairs of adjectives to describe the characters of Poppy and Scott
- Adjectives for the scales taken from film reviews, blogs and descriptions of the German DVD and combined with adjectives with the opposite meaning

Comparison of perception of main characters in “Happy Go Lucky” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Results Poppy

- Sighted and visually impaired participants in the study perceived Poppy in a very similar way concerning the features peace-loving, crazy, friendly, colourful, self-confident and original.
- Clear divergence between the perception of sighted and visually impaired subjects was found in 4 out of 15 pairs: beautiful - ugly, carefree - serious, rousing - irritating and likeable - unpleasant.
- Sighted participants found Poppy less beautiful, less carefree, less rousing and less likeable than the visually impaired subjects (one to two points on the scale)

Comparison of perception of main characters in “Happy Go Lucky”

Results Scott

- Sighted and visually impaired participants in the study perceived Scott in a similar way concerning the features aggressive, orderly, well-behaved and serious.
- Clear divergence between the perception of sighted and visually impaired subjects was found in 6 out of 15 pairs: conservative - crazy, inconspicuous - brash, beautiful - ugly, credible - implausible, self-confident - complex-ridden, original - boring and clever - stupid.
- Sighted participants found Scott more inconspicuous than the visually impaired (two points on the scale) and less conservative, beautiful, credible, self-confident, original and clever than the visually impaired subjects (one point on the scale)

Illustration showing how visually impaired subjects perceive Poppy's features in the audio description (depicted with a blue line) and how sighted subjects perceive her features in the film (depicted with a red line). The red line and the blue line run closely to each other and end in dots lying close to each other.

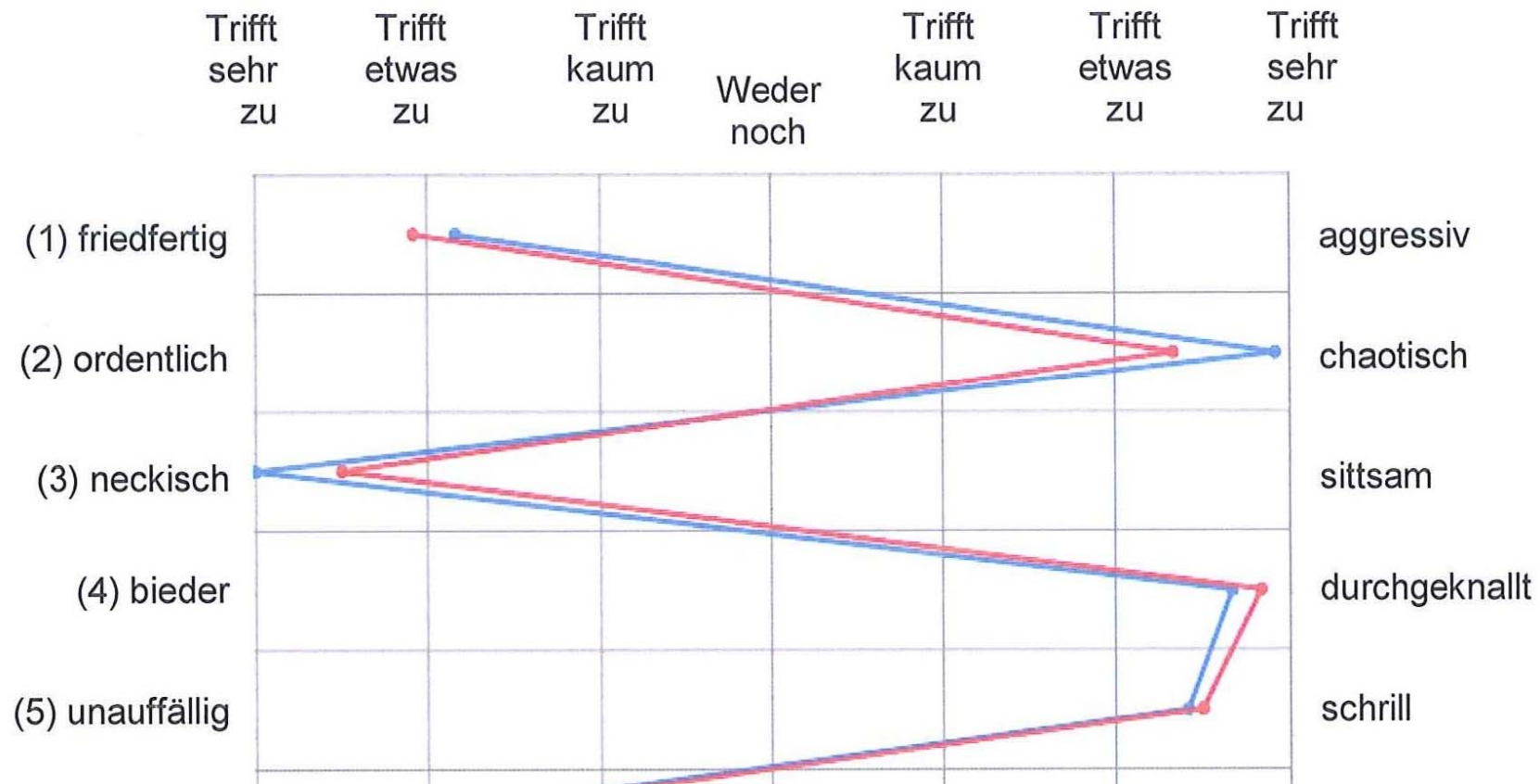


Table from Eichenberger et al. 2012, therefore adjectives and scale categories in German

Comparison of perception of rooms in “The Reader” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Content of “The Reader” (2008, German and US Drama)

- Teenager Michael falls in love with Hanna, who is twenty years older. He becomes her reader. Many years later, Michael learns about Hanna’s past as a concentration camp guard in WWII.
- Subjects divided into two groups:
 - 12 sighted (6 females, 6 males)
 - 12 visually impaired (7 females, 5 males; 6 of them visually impaired, 4 of them late blind, 2 of them blind from birth)

Comparison of perception of rooms in “The Reader”

Perception of two rooms analysed

- Hanna’s apartment: old, small, sparsely furnished (first part of “The Reader”)
- Hanna’s prison cell: furnishings change over time, since Hanna spends more than 20 years in the cell (second part of “The Reader”)

Comparison of perception of rooms in “The Reader” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Test design based on Eichenberger et al. (2012)

- Sighted subjects watch German version of “The Reader”
- Visually impaired hear German version and German audio description of “The Reader”
- Subjects then provided with ten seven-point scales with pairs of adjectives to describe the two rooms
- Adjectives for the scales taken from architecture and furniture catalogues and combined with adjectives with the opposite meaning

Comparison of perception of rooms in “The Reader” (visually impaired and sighted subjects)

Results Hanna’s apartment

- Sighted and visually impaired participants in the study perceived Hanna’s apartment in a very similar way.
- 3 out of 10 pairs of adjectives show nearly identical values for both groups.
- Remaining pairs show very small differences for both groups which do not exceed the value of one point on the scale.

Comparison of perception of rooms in “The Reader”

Results Hanna’s prison cell

- Sighted and visually impaired participants in the study perceived Hanna’s prison cell in a slightly different way.
- 3 out of 10 pairs of adjectives show different values for both groups, i.e. cool-warm, colourless-colourful, decorated-bare.
- The group of sighted subjects found Hanna’s cell more warm, more colourful and more decorated than the visually impaired subjects.

Summary and Outlook

Results: The studies by Eichenberger et al. (2012) and of Berri & Fricker (2013), which were carried out using the same method, show that the concepts examined, “features of the main characters” and “features of the rooms”, in the audio descriptions of “Happy Go Lucky” (2008) and “The Reader” (2008) were mainly perceived in a very similar way by sighted and visually impaired subjects.

Single divergences in the way Poppy and Scott and the two rooms were perceived can be isolated by means of the semantic differential and examined in secondary studies.

In future studies, different types of audio descriptions can be tested on the basis of the studies by Eichenberger et al. (2012) and Berri & Fricker (2013) with regard to their effect on visually impaired persons.

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