Audio Description Quality Standards, *20 years on:* Insights from expert interviews with German-speaking B/VIP users

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Panel 3. AD processes: looking into the future.

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Research question(s)
Why revisit AD quality standards now?

➢ 2024 marked **20th anniversary** of the first German AD guidelines (Benecke & Dosch, 2004)

➢ New **emerging technologies and methods**: AI, synthetic voices, enhanced/integrated AD

➢ Need for **user-centered reassessment** of quality standards

Research objectives and methodology
Exploring B/VIP users' experiences, preferences, and perspectives on the future of AD

➢ In-depth structured **qualitative expert interviews** (ca. 1 hour, phone and in-person interviews)

➢ 20 participants: B/VIP users aged 20-83 years old, different educational and professional backgrounds, various degrees of blindness/visual impairment → **AD experts**

➢ **Thematic blocks across 3 areas**: *User Experience*, *User Preferences*, *The Future of AD*

Interview Responses/Preliminary Results
User Experience: Perspectives on current AD quality standards

„[...] when a character is dreaming or there's a flashback, for instance, the AD often tells me when the effect starts, but not necessarily **when it ends**. Usually, I can figure it out from the dialogue or the context. But, occasionally, **I do lose track of the storyline and need a moment to get back in**." (B04, 22 years old, project manager in public administration)

„[...] **Mistakes happen, it's not a big deal.** [...] However, if someone rings the doorbell in a scene and the AD actually says „The doorbell rings" – which happens surprisingly often – **I sometimes wonder whether they think I'm stupid**. (B09, 60 years old, head of a coordination office for women with disabilities)

[Q4]: Think of the last film you watched with audio description at home or in the cinema. What did you like most about the AD? What bothered or displeased you the most?

Interview Responses/Preliminary Results
User Preferences: What works, what doesn't

„Personally, I'd love for AD to be **a bit more emotional**. If a scene moves sighted viewers to tears, I want to share that emotional experience. I often have the feeling that we as blind audiences are **patronised or overprotected**, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics. (B15, 67 years old, pensioner)

„I often wish there were a bit **less description**. Sometimes, I'd like to experience more of the film's atmosphere rather than having every little detailed described – it distracts me from the story. It would be great if there were **three different AD modes to choose from: detailed, medium, minimal.** (B14, 55 years old, pastor)

[Q6, regarding debate around neutrality vs. subjectivity in AD and overall impact on quality]: How do you perceive this? Do descriptions sometimes feel too neutral or too subjective to you?

Interview Responses/Preliminary Results
The Future of AD: Key Concerns and Expectations

„To be honest, I'm not a fan of that [enhanced AD]. It distorts the original in a way that makes me feel a bit manipulated. Also, I'd have to match the added sound effects to the story wherever they replace verbal descriptions. […] **At its core, AD is not about sound, but about language.**" (B03, 44 years old, preschool teacher)

„I still find real, human voices more enjoyable. But if using AI and synthetic voices meant I could have access to more audio-described films **with the same level of quality**, I'd definitely welcome that." (B11, 58 years old, artist and AD author)

[Q13, regarding the use of enhanced AD i.e. emphasis on sound design rather than verbal descriptions] & **[Q14]**: What is your stance on using AI and synthetic voices in AD? Have you personally experienced AI-generated AD or AD spoken by synthetic voices?

Concluding Remarks
Implications and Key Takeaways

➢ **High satisfaction, with emerging concerns**: Participants were generally very satisfied with current quality standards in German AD, but noted a slight decline despite (or due to?) increased content production.

➢ **Balancing Innovation and Standards**: As AI-generated content, synthetic voices and new methods become more prevalent, clear guidelines must ensure their appropriate use in AD.

Concluding Remarks
Implications and Key Takeaways

➢ **User-Centered Development**: The primary users of AD should be actively involved in shaping, evaluating, and implementing new approaches.

➢ **Professionalization and Inclusion**: The role of AD authors, especially blind authors, needs structured professionalization to maintain quality and prevent unregulated practices.

Concluding Remarks
Implications and Key Takeaways

„I am an expert in audio description, but **it's not my blindness alone that makes me an expert – it's my ability to write stories, my sensitivity to language, to authorship, to text.** What I often observe, however, is that blind individuals are sometimes included merely for token representation, giving a project legitimacy, even though they haven't actually been trained in audio description." (B06, 32 years old, Inclusion consultant and AD author)

[Q15]: If you could have three wishes for AD in the future – whether related to quality, availability, or professional standards – what would they be?

Thank you! ☺

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