Persian Audio Description Quality of Feature Films in Iran: The Case of Sevina

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Abstract

Audio description (AD) is an inter-semiotic translation for the benefit of people with vision impairment. AD research aims to enhance the quality of this accessibility tool and users' satisfaction. Nevertheless, parallel to the fledgling state of AD practice in Iran, local research on the topic is substantially scarce, and the current article is the first published in the English language. To study the quality of current AD production in Persian, the work of Sevina, a newly-formed Iranian NGO pioneering in AD services in Iran, was examined. More specifically, considering the non-professional status of the group, the purpose of the research was to determine whether the group had developed a systematic approach to producing intralingual AD for Persian-language feature films. The findings revealed that the sampled intralingual AD produced by Sevina was based on a fairly consistent approach, even though there is room for much improvement. The article discusses the necessity of further research to support the professional practice of AD in the Iranian mediascape.

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1. Introduction

Exploring cultures and enjoying the wealth of enlightenment and entertainment that cultural content and programs have to offer is a basic human right. In this sense, inclusion and accessibility refer to the fact that all people—even though differently advantaged—are entitled to equal access to any cultural product (Greco, 2016). Multimedia products, as richly charged with culture, are the perfect example of the said content, the distribution of which is a pivotal matter in providing equal access for all (Gambier, 2006). A relatively overlooked area in media accessibility is audio description (AD), which is mainly intended for, but not limited to, blind and partially sighted people (Braun, 2008).

AD services can be used for a wide range of programs and events, from feature films and television programs to museums and exhibitions (Puigdomènech et al., 2010). As "a tool for social and cultural inclusion" (Di Giovanni, 2018a, p. 226), AD is beneficial for both blind and sighted people in assisting literacy development and language acquisition (Greco, & Jankowska, 2020; Orero, 2005; Perego, 2016; Vermeulen & Escobar-Álvarez, 2021). The early practice of AD in many countries has been "a job performed by well-meaning volunteers, with few professionals engaged in the commercial production of ADs" (Orero 2012, p. 195). The change in AD status, from a voluntary activity to a legal requirement, and the increasing value given to quality rather than quantity has led to regulatory bodies drafting AD guidelines.

As for the systematic investigations on AD, early studies mainly explored "its role and status in different countries followed by studies on its fundamentals, (corpus-based) analyses of its linguistic and semantic priorities and features, and in general research on guidelines" (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020, pp. 44-45). Recent AD studies, in contrast, have primarily focused on the receptive and educational aspects of the practice (Di Giovanni, 2018b).

As for media localization in the Iranian mediascape, there has been a long tradition of dubbing into Persian. Subtitling into Persian has also been on the rise to complement or even replace dubbing as an audiovisual solution. Given the long-standing tradition of these two modalities, attempts have been made to capture the varieties of dubbing and subtitling activities in the Iranian context. Focusing on non-expert dubbing, Nord et al. (2015) provided an overview of dubbing activities within the Iranian context. Later, Khoshsaligheh (2022) sought to update the overview, catering to the latest developments in dubbing in Iran (See Figure 1).
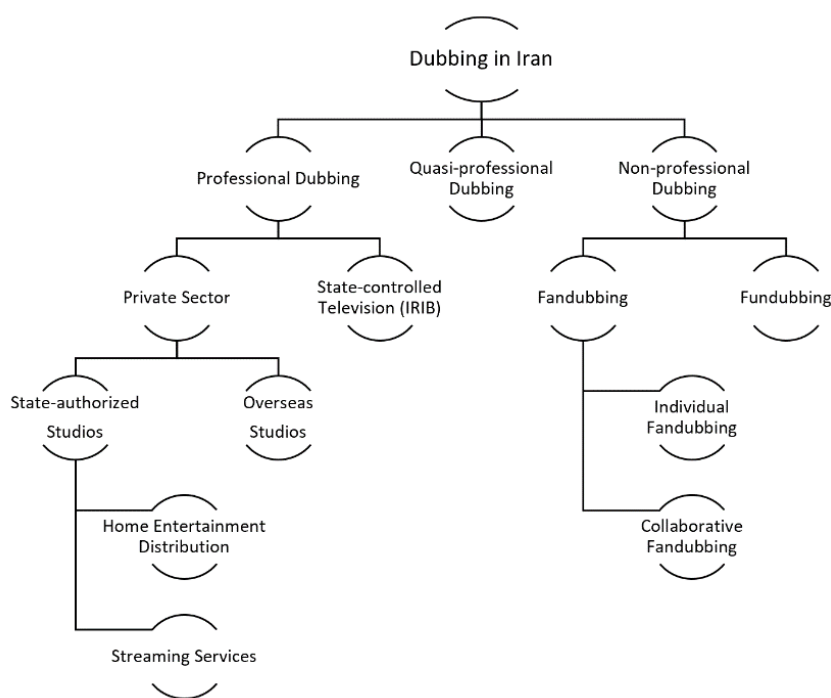

Figure 1
Dubbing Typology in the Iranian Mediascape (Khoshsaligheh, 2022)

The typology in Figure 1 shows the most recent varieties of dubbing within the context of Iran. Dubbing research has been focused on both professional (e.g., Imani & Khoshsaligheh, 2021, 2022; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2019) and, to a lesser extent, non-professional dubbing (e.g., Delnavaz & Khoshsaligheh, 2020). Along the same line, subtitling has also been the focus of AVT research in Iran. One of the most prominent works in this regard is that of Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020), who attempted to provide an overview of subtitling activities in Iran. Figure 2 represents the varieties of subtitling in Iran.
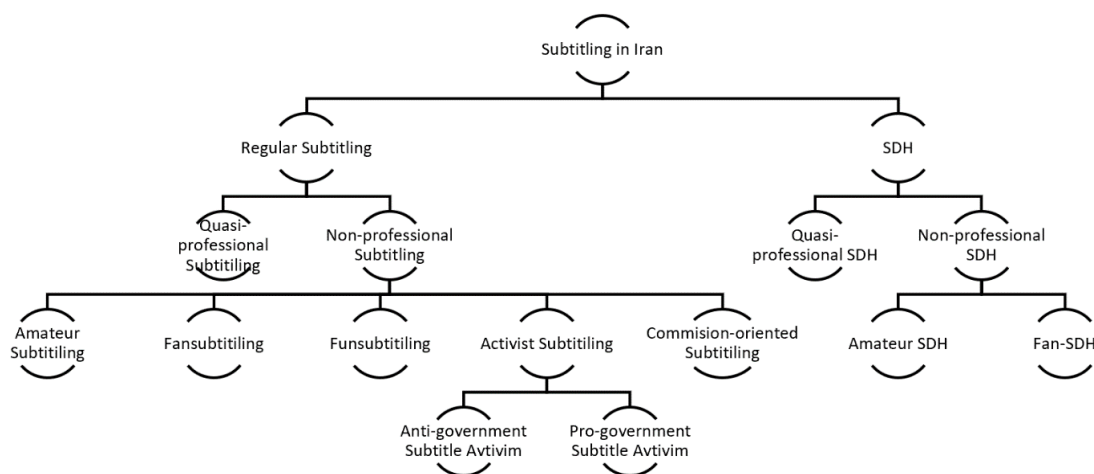

Figure 2

Subtitling Typology in the Iranian Mediascape (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020)

As Figure 2 suggests, the range of subtitling activities in Iran can have been directed toward both regular users and those with disabilities, which highlights the importance of delving ever deeper into the needs of users with hearing impairments. However, the users of AVT products can also be those with visual impairments, which is the focus of AD.

Unlike the considerable and exponentially increasing research on AD by numerous scholars in the European context (e.g., Taylor & Perego, 2022), language services for inclusion and accessibility have been technically non-existent in Persian in Iran. Subtitling for the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) and particularly AD services are not any older than a few years despite all the long-standing regulations and mandates in the Iranian Constitution (Shokoohmand, & Khoshsaligheh, 2019; Khoshsaligheh & Shafiei, 2021).

There is a fledgling yet valuable movement in the service provision of AD in Iran. In recent years, a group of volunteers, Sevina Group, has been formed to provide a number of services for people with impaired vision, including rendering audiovisual content accessible to the blind community of Persian language speakers. The name 'Sevina' comprises of the initial letters of the phrase "cinema for the blind" in the Persian language. The group is undertaking a variety of activities, including audio describing Persian-language feature films, producing special radio programs for blind listeners, and introducing audiobooks, and podcasts, which are all available online on their website (https://sevinagroup.com/) as well as their social media networks. In an article published in Persian, Khoshsaligheh and Shafiei (2021) described the services and products of Sevina as a major agent in the thriving field of AD in Iran. A distinctive aspect of Sevina is that the founder, Gelareh Abbasi, and many of the contributing volunteers are professional film and television actors. Furthermore, in this group, many volunteers with impaired vision, besides "consumption", play significant roles in the process of providing accessibility services—an excellent example of what Di Giovanni (2018b) refers to as "participatory accessibility" (p. 158). The topic of AD has hardly received any attention in Iranian academia. More importantly, there is no information in terms of the quality of the AD products. Therefore, the present research set out to address whether the current Persian AD produced by Sevina in Iran has been following

a consistent and systematic approach. To this end, ADLAB guidelines (Remael et al., 2015) were used as the framework for data collection and analysis. ADLAB holds a cinematic and strategic approach to AD while considering the actual needs of users with poor eyesight (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020).

2. Recommendations Derived from AD Guidelines and AD Research

Over the past decades, scholars and practitioners from different fields such as media, communications, translation, and disability studies have come up with guidelines to ensure the quality of accessibility services (European Association for Studies in Screen Translation, n.d.). Although every speech community should have its own set of guidelines for drafting AD (Tor-Carroggio & Rovira-Esteva, 2020), some rules are widely confirmed by scholars and practitioners regardless of any specific languages or cultures.

The golden rule of AD states that the descriptions should be inserted in the silent gaps of a film and should not overlap with dialogues, sound effects, and important music (Braun, 2008). Therefore, the describer ought to act selectively. According to Ofcom (2021), "to the extent relevant to the storyline, the audio description should describe characters, locations, time and circumstances, any sounds that are not readily identifiable, on-screen action, and on-screen information" (p. 6).

As for characters, quick identification of key features such as "dress, physical characteristics, facial expression, body language, ethnicity and age" helps the viewer to concentrate on the event if it does not spoil the plot (Ofcom, 2021, p. 6). ITC (2000) recommends early identification of principal characters to avoid confusing the viewers. Relevant gestures of characters should also be described because they may and often do influence the meaning (Jankowska & Zabrocka, 2016).

Sounds should be described if they are difficult to comprehend aurally (Fryer, 2016; Szarkowska & Orero, 2014; ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2021). Considering the context, the describer should decide to describe sounds earlier or later in each situation; either to "maintain a dramatic effect", in the latter or to help viewers "recognize the sound more quickly

and reduce the effort required" (Chmiel, 2015, p. 38), in the former.

Indicating location and time is an essential part of AD (Ofcom, 2021). Describing a scene change gives the viewers "a starting point" and helps them not to lose the thread of a story (ITC, 2000, p. 13). AD should clarify "the relations between settings and the characters in them and/or their actions" (Remael & Vercauteren, 2015, p. 26).

Texts on screen, such as captions and credit lists, should be included in AD (ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2021; Matamala & Orero, 2015). The describer should also differentiate captions and descriptions by "either the use of their voice (e.g., stating the obvious, 'He says in Russian …' or 'A caption reads …') or a second voice" (Ofcom, 2021, p. 6). Apart from these strategies, ADLAB (Matamala & Orero, 2015) recommends "changing the intonation, using 'earcons' (sound indicators) or integrating the content in the AD" to indicate text on screen appears (p. 40).

Cinematic language can also be used in the AD script to supplement the description of a particular film, bearing in mind time limitations (Fryer & Freeman, 2013). Cinematic language may have an aesthetic function, show what is important for the narrative, reflect the characters' feelings, and evoke particular moods or emotions in the audience (Perego, 2015; Remael et al., 2015), determine if and how the describer should describe them, if a significant technique is adopted frequently, the same linguistic formulation should be used consistently throughout the AD text. Despite ADLAB (Perego 2015), Kruger (2010), Fryer and Freeman (2013), who opt for describing the purely filmic elements, Ofcom (2021), and ITC (2000) assert that cinematic terms such as camera angles should not be used since cinematographic terminology is not informative for all viewers.

Describers are advised to pay attention to the genre and choice of words and structures in the program and use the intended style in the AD script (Ofcom, 2021; Maszerowska, 2015). The guidelines forbid the use of 'We see …', 'In front of us …' in ADs intended for adult viewers (ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2021). Although consistency in terms of word choices is a positive point, the frequent use of words in

a description such as 'Now ...', 'Now on the stairs ...', 'Now outside …' can become a distraction (ITC, 2000, p. 13).

AD generally tells the viewer what is happening at a given time, so the guidelines usually recommend using the present tense and the present continuous for ongoing activities (ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2008; Taylor, 2015c). To decrease the cognitive load on the part of the audience, clear diction and simple and short structures are recommended in many AD guidelines and studies (Arias-Badia & Matamala, 2020; Bernabé-Caro & Orero, 2019; Bernabé & Orero, 2021; Fresno et al., 2016; ITC, 2000; Ofcom, 2021; Taylor, 2015b). Besides, AD should recreate textual links by adding information wherever necessary (Taylor, 2015c) to create cohesion in a text and to foster the "process of linking ideas, taking place in the recipient's mind" (Braun, 2011, p. 647).

Recent studies have shown that moving to subjective approaches and using adverbs and adjectives in ADs could benefit viewers in terms of immersion (Geerinck & Vercauteren, 2020), and having a film experience "more closely matched to that of sighted viewers" (Bardini, 2021, p. 94). ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015) recommends finding a balance between personal phrasing (subjectivity) and more text-based phrasing (objectivity) to allow further interpretation by the viewers.

Apart from AD quality, quantity issues have also been controversial in AD practice and research. The type of the program tends to help AD script writers determine the optimum amount of descriptions (Remael et al., 2015). In some situations, too detailed descriptions tend to "dilute the mood of a scene", while in other situations, little additional information help to minimize confusion (ITC, 2000, pp. 15-16). According to ITC (2000), blind viewers with visual memory usually opt for detailed audio descriptions, while blind viewers from either birth or an early age, may find the details pointless.

To date, no empirical research has been conducted on any aspect of AD in Iran. This explains the significance of the present research and, at the same time, calls for further research and investigation on the various aspects of AD in Persian.

3. Methodology

This study was based on a phenomenological research design, which aimed to explore and describe the emerging phenomenon, AD, focusing on the quality of the services provided. The study was concerned with the pioneering practices of Persian AD produced by the Sevina Group through a purposive selection of Iranian feature films. Specifically, the present research investigated the level of the systematicity of the approach adopted by the group in the selected AD products. Considering the purpose and the qualitative approach of the study, the sample data of the study were selected based on a criterion sampling technique. Three Persian-language feature films produced in Iran, which were audio described by Sevina Group recently, were identified and selected for analysis. The sampled multimodal corpus of the study included the following films and their pre-recorded audio descriptions:

- Film 1: *Gholamreza Takhti* (Tavakkoli, 2019),
- Film 2: *When the Moon Was Full* (Abyar, 2019), and
- Film 3: *The Warden* (Javidi, 2019).

These films with Sevina AD are available on Filimo Streaming (https://www.filimo.com), the largest video-on-demand (VOD) service based in Iran. Filimo offers Iranian and foreign-language feature films, short films, animations, and a variety of documentaries. While a few Iranian feature films are accompanied by AD or SDH, foreign content is often both dubbed and subtitled into Persian. It needs to be pointed out that some of the less popular content is merely subtitled into Persian and English, with Persian dubbing being added much later or sometimes never (Khoshsaligheh et al., in press).

For analysis, the transcript of the ADs of the three films was obtained, and the AD transcripts were classified in tables with three columns: one for descriptive segments, one for their categories based on ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015), and another for the analysis of commentary on the descriptions.

ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015) was used as the conceptual framework of the study. ADLAB recommends a usable formulation including

nine elements related to AD scriptwriting: "characters and action, spatio-temporal setting, genre, film techniques, sound effects and music, text on screen, intertextual references, wording and style, and cohesion" (p. 16). It also provides some possible strategies for AD scriptwriting along with practical examples. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. For the coding of the data, a theory-led approach (Braun & Clarke 2006) was used. The identification of themes was oriented toward the nine elements recommended by ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015). The analysis allowed us to identify what recommended features have or have not been included in the ADs and whether these decisions have been systematic and coherent throughout the ADs.

4. Results

The full AD transcripts of the three films were analyzed based on ADLAB guidelines (Remael et al., 2015). The analysis resulted in findings that were manifested in the seven categories of

- characters and actions,
- spatio-temporal settings,
- film language,
- sound effects and music,
- text on screen,
- wording and style, and
- cohesion.

The descriptive information of the analysis is presented in Table 1. No content was found regarding the categories of genre and intertextual references. However, there were two intertextual references in Film 1, which were not mentioned in the AD. In the following sections, the quality of representing visual elements in each category is discussed, and some relevant examples from the descriptions are provided.

Table 1
The Overview of the Content of the Descriptions in the Films

Categories	Frequency		
	Film 1 | Gholamreza Takhti	Film 2 | When the Moon Was Full	Film 3 | The Warden
Characters and action	260	440	402
Spatio-temporal settings	52	52	51
Genre	0	0	0
Film language	4	4	4
Sound effects and music	1	0	4
Text on screen	9	40	7
Intertextual references	0	0	0
Wording and style	45	81	76
Cohesion	28	13	18
Total	399	630	562

4.1. Characters and Actions

In the ADs, the appearing characters were mainly introduced by their name and/or their posts right away. They were also introduced by their nationality or their relations with the known characters, particularly if they were not given any name during the film (Table 2, Parts A and B). If the characters' links to the known characters could be inferred based on the dialogues, the description did not reveal them right away. Apart from naming, descriptions were also presented on the unique features of the new characters' looks (Part C). If a character had a significant change of look, it was also referred to (Part D).

Table 2
The Description of Characters and Actions

Part A	Name and post
Film 1	Takhti celebrated the victory with two teammates and his coach, Habibollah Bolour.
Film 2	Hamid and Faezeh, with the child in her arms, are sitting in front of the travel agency consultant.
Film 3	Susan Karimi, a prison assistant, enters the yard in heavy rain.

Part B	Naming the relation between characters
Film 1	People are crying and wailing in his absence. <u>Babak, the 4-month-old son of Takhti,</u> is in the arms of his wife in the crowd.
Film 2	<u>Musa, or Faezeh's godfather</u> and <u>Shahab, or Esmat's wife, Hamid's uncle,</u> and <u>Ghamnaz, or Hamid's mother,</u> are sitting in silence.
Film 3	A woman's voice draws Jahed's attention. It is the voice of <u>Ahmed's or the Warden's wife.</u>
Part C	Name and a description of the character's look
Film 1	<u>Takhti</u> is preparing his will with his lawyer. <u>He is very upset and distressed.</u>
Film 2	Faezeh <u>is in a black hijab and walks in the marketplace with a leg shorter than her other leg and looks at the stores.</u>
Film 3	<u>Seyed Davoud is in prison outfit,</u> sitting on a chair with a paper in his hand.
Part D	Lapse of time and change of character's look
Film 1	Takhti, <u>who has gained weight,</u> is alone in the room.
Film 2	Hamid, <u>with beards,</u> is sitting behind the steering wheel, happy to have his wife and children.
Film 3	Jahed notices Ahmed's frog, <u>which is now dead and lying on the floor.</u>

Given ADLAB's recommendations, one shortcoming of the ADs was that, in some cases, the characters and their actions were described sooner than they should have been, resulting in spoilers. In addition, some descriptions were considered redundant and even interpretive as they were aurally presented or were supposed to be inferred based on the plot. The inaccurate descriptions also had negative effects in other ways. For instance, the inappropriate use of passive tense in "the knife has been put underneath Shahab's neck" (Film 2) did not identify the killer and stopped the audience from understanding that killing relatives—as a heartbreaking act—was happening in the film. This under-description may reduce the emotional elicitation of the scene and may lead to some confusion. In Film 2, Hamid and his brother were speaking, and tension was raised between them that made Faezeh look at them in surprise. This tension has not been referred to in the description. This may lead to incomplete comprehension on the part of the audience.

4.2. Spatio-Temporal Settings

Based on ADLAB (Remael & Vercauteren, 2015), global, real, and narrative settings should be described in more general terms, while local, imagined, and symbolic settings need more details. This rule was followed in the ADs unless temporal constraints forbade it (Table 3, Parts A & B).

ADLAB (Remael & Vercauteren, 2015) recommended that a setting can be described by mentioning how it links to characters. The ADs used this technique for identical settings and for situations in which a short description of a setting was preferred (Part C).

It also suggested AD explains if some spatio-temporal features have been changed. In Part D, the descriptions in Films 2 and 3 explained a significant spatio-temporal transformation. In Film 2, the image of "the completing moon" was a change that had a symbolic function because it was associated with the title of the film. Some spatio-temporal features that did not change over time can also be significant. In Part D, Film 1, the description explained that the picture was 'still' on the wall despite the passage of time.

The implicitness or explicitness of the descriptions was situation-based, as suggested by Remael and Vercauteren (2015). If the implicitness of a setting would increase the audience's enjoyment, as in the original version, it was kept implicit in the description (Part E, Film 2). However, if it would result in audiences' confusion or losing content, it was described explicitly (Part E, Films 1 and 3). In Film 1, the description explicitly referred to the change of temporal setting, whereas the original presented this change implicitly through the characters' clothing or visual features. In Film 3, the explicit description of "The pencil he has taken from Susan" reminded the viewer of the temporal setting when Susan gave the pencil to Jahed. Based on ADLAB (Remael & Vercauteren, 2015), a setting should be clarified whether it is real or imaginative. Film 1 narrated the story of a famous Iranian wrestler. In a scene, the images of the wrestler's real funeral were screened. However, the description did not refer to the authenticity of these images.

Table 3
The Description of Spatio-Temporal Settings

Part A	A general description of a global spatio-temporal setting with a background function
Film 1	At night, in the street. Takhti gives money to the old man in need.
Film 2	In the morning. The road.
Film 3	It is cloudy and rainy.
Part B	A detailed description of typical and relevant aspects of a local spatio-temporal setting with a narrative function
Film 1	Tehran. Takhti's father's house. The funeral of one of the neighbors.
Film 2	Esmat's house. Faezeh's courting ceremony. The childhood photo of Faezeh is hanging on the wall.
Film 3	The high walls of an old prison. The gallows are located in the backyard of the prison.
Part C	Describing an identical setting by using the relations
Film 1	Outside Ahmed's house. The slum and poor neighborhood.
Film 2	At Esmat's house. At night.
Film 3	The office of Jahed.
Part D	Describing the transformation of an identical setting
Film 1	Takhti's father's house. The picture of Mosadegh with a black ribbon on it is still hanging on the wall.
Film 2	In the darkness of night, the house is in the light of the completing moon.
Film 3	The yard of the prison has got empty, and a cat walks alone in the rain.
Part E	Describing a setting implicitly or explicitly
Film 1	A while later. Takhti wrestles with the local children in a small field.
Film 2	Hamid, Faezeh, and Shahab enter a big and three-story mansion.
Film 3	Looking at the maps, Jahed has a pencil in his hand. The pencil he has taken from Susan. He smells it, looks at it.

4.3. Film Language

ADLAB defined film language as "the sum of a combination of various film techniques that are all used simultaneously" to tell a story (Perego, 2015, p. 30). There are three categories of film techniques: mise en scène, cinematography, and editing. Mise-en-scène includes what is being shown in a shot, i.e., setting, costume and makeup, and staging. Cinematography refers to the filming aspects of framing, duration, and photographic qualities. Editing deals with the relations between different shots. These techniques serve four functions: denotative, expressive, symbolic, and aesthetic (Perego, 2015). Based on these techniques and their functions, ADLAB recommended three strategies to render film language in AD: to name the technique, to name it and describe its function, or just describe its function (Perego, 2015).

Among the three films, only in Film 1 a film technique was named, and its function was described (Table 4, Part A). The black-and-white footage had an expressive function because they intended to generate the mood of

the old days and the sorrowful mood of the main character. Mentioning this technique was necessary because the audience would not understand the color of the shots during the film. However, the meaning of the function was almost clear and could have remained implicit.

In all three films, the frequent strategy was describing the function (Part B). Using cinematic language in ADs has been a matter of debate; nevertheless, the three ADs were quite successful in rendering the meaning of film language. Merely naming the technique was not used in the ADs. Using the technique of slow motion in Film 1 was not referred to in the AD and was not pertinent to the plot. Mentioning flashbacks was necessary to help viewers understand the temporal setting (Part B, Film 1). The close-up scene in Film 2 and mentioning it in the AD were merely due to aesthetics (Part B, Film 2). In Film 3, Ahmed was hiding himself from other characters, and he was not shown throughout the film. The framing attempted to render his hiding (Part B).

Table 4
The Description of Film Language

Part A	Naming the technique and describing the function/meaning	Category	Function
Film 1	This film is made in <u>black-and-white footage</u> <u>to show the atmosphere of the old days</u>. (Black-and-white scheme)	Cinematography	Expressive
Part B	Describe the function/meaning of the technique	Category	Function
Film 1	We go <u>to the old days</u> little by little. (Flashback)	Editing	Denotative
Film 2	<u>We see the image of Faezeh's eyes,</u> which are full of tears. (Close-up)	Cinematography	Aesthetic
Film 3	<u>Through a crack on the wooden board,</u> <u>from Ahmed's view</u>, we see his daughter and his wife smiling at him. (Framing)	Cinematography	Symbolic

4.4. Sound Effects and Music

Film sound includes dialogues, voice-over narration, lyrics, sound effects, and music. The "cohesion" between these items and the AD script is essential, which means that AD should not overlap with film's soundtrack (Chmiel, 2015, p. 36). The film sound may have very short pauses in a scene. Based on ADLAB, if the visuals are significant enough to be audio described, the overlap between original sound and AD is inevitable (Chmiel, 2015).

Except for Film 3, which had almost no overlap between sounds and AD, there were some overlaps between the ADs and the original soundtrack in Films 1 and 2. In some cases, the overlaps might lead to the distraction of the audience since they hinder listening to dialogues or monologues in the film.

In Film 1, due to off-screen narration, the describer tried not to interrupt the narrations throughout the film and occasionally delivered the AD later than the appearance of visual images. Describing visuals was significant in these scenes with off-screen narration; however, audio describing the settings in the beginning of the Film 1 hindered the audience in hearing the significant dialogues of the film. Additionally, the describer of Film 1 rarely gave information during the meaningful lyrics at the end of the film. The lyrics were about losing a good man, and it was relevant to the images screening the real funeral of Takhti, i.e., the main character of the film. Films 2 and 3 had neither off-screen narration nor meaningful songs.

Based on ADLAB, the source of a non-recognizable sound should be included in the AD (Chmiel, 2015). Naming the sound or its source is suggested as the best technique. In some cases, it is also important to explicitly identify the source of the easily identifiable sound. The source of sound was not consistently identified in the ADs. In Films 1 and 3, the describer mentioned the source of the sounds directly. For instance, in Film 1, the AD explained: "the musicians are playing a song in a restaurant", or in Film 3: "the sound of the passing airplane shatters the windows". However, this was not the case in Film 2. In one scene in Film 2, the describer explained: "the brothers are playing a song", mentioning the source of the sound directly. However, in another scene, when Faezah fell down, and a falling sound was heard, the describer did not mention her fall and the source of the sound.

ADALB recommended that the source of internal diegetic sounds (e.g., thoughts in a character's mind) and non-diegetic sounds (e.g., off-screen voices) should be identified explicitly if the source of the sound is significant but non-recognizable (Chmiel, 2015). The data shows that the AD producer failed to describe such information consistently. For example, in Film 1, the AD directly mentioned that the sound is in the protagonist's mind in one scene and did not do so in the other scenes. In the same film, when an off-screen voice narrated the story, the AD did not mention the source of the sound. The off-screen narrator was recognizable; however, it would be helpful to mention the narrator's name directly to avoid any possible confusion or delay in realizing on the part of the audience.

4.5. Text on Screen

Text on screen includes credits, titles, intertitles, subtitles, or any other texts that appear on the screen (Matamala & Orero, 2015). According to ADLAB (Remael et al., 2015), adding an explanation before reading the text, changing the intonation, using another voice, and integrating the content in the AD itself are possible strategies for rendering on-screen texts. In all three films, before the opening credits, a sentence was added reading that the AD resulted from the cooperation between Sevina Group and Filimo. Indicating film titles at the beginning of the films was not consistent. In Film 1, the title was not shown on the screen, but the AD mentioned the title, and the reverse was true for Films 2 and 3. The titles of Films 2 and 3 were also read at the closing credits. The describer did not read the opening credits in Films 1 and 2. In Film 3, the describer mentioned the name of the director/writer without explicitly mentioning the appearance of these texts on the screen. At the end credits of all films, the names of leading and supporting actors along with the main cast and crew were read.

In Film 1, intertitles were used to indicate either spatial and temporal settings or newspaper headlines. For the former, the AD only read the texts without mentioning the appearance of texts on screen. However, for the latter, the AD mentioned the appearance of texts on screen: "Newspapers under the printing press. Takhti's photo at the front page. Big headline: 'defeat must be forgotten. Wake up, the homeland is in danger'". In Film 2, intertitles related to spatial or temporal settings and other informative texts were read without mentioning the appearance of texts on the screen, with an exception in one case: "militia operation in Tasuki area under the command of Abdul Malek Rigi, written on the screen". In Film 3, the describer changed his intonation and integrated the text in the AD to indicate the appearance of the texts on screen: "Officer gave the paper to Jahed. He opens it. Whoever finds this frog, please throw him in a pond behind the prison. May God bless you". This strategy was not consistently used in this Film. Subtitles were only observed in Film 2, where the describer read all of them by changing her intonation and with minor changes in the lexicon. The describer did not indicate the

appearance of subtitles on the screen, which might lead to confusion on the audience's part.

4.6. Wording and Style

The language of the ADs had many shortcomings regarding fluency, redundancy, interpretation, necessity, and repetition. Concerning fluency, some sentences should have been written more fluently to be processed more easily. For instance, in Film 3, the description read: "Modaber sits in the back seat, and the driver sits behind the wheel, and the car moves away from the prison".

Redundancy refers to giving information presented aurally in the film either through dialogue or sounds (Taylor, 2015c). In Film 1, for instance, the sound of clapping could be heard, but the describer mentioned it. Mentioning silence in Film 2 was redundant as well since the audience could hear the silence.

In some scenes, the description became interpretive. For example, in Film 1, the describer mentioned, "Takhti left the cinema sadly" although the visuals did not provide such information.

In the ADs, some unnecessary actions were described which did not contribute to the plot. In Film 3, the describer explained, "Susan looks at the spider webs on the pipes" while she was searching for a man. Looking at the spider webs did not move forward the story. Repetitive phrases were another drawback of the descriptions. For example, in Film 3, "the servant was unable to hear" was mentioned three times.

There were also some inaccuracies in the descriptions. For instance, in Film 1, the name of Takhti's sister was mentioned incorrectly even though her name could have been understood easily in the film. In Film 2, the video clip showed the execution of three men on Hamid's cell phone, but the description mentioned only one man. In Film 3, the Colonel pointed to Major Jahed with his hat, implying that Jahed was the new head; however, the description failed to render the message.

Regarding grammar, ADLAB (Taylor, 2015c) suggests that descriptions are preferred to be written in present tense and third-person pronoun. This suggestion was employed in the

ADs, with few cases of using first-person pronouns (Table 5).

Based on ADLAB (Taylor, 2015c), some specific jargons are usually imposed on the AD by the content of the story. Film 1 was about the life of a famous wrestler, and the AD used wrestling jargon to maintain vivid and concrete language.

Table 5

Examples of Using Second-Person Pronoun

Film 1	We only hear the voice of Takhti's wife.
Film 2	We see the image of Faezeh's eyes, which are full of tears.
Film 3	We see the frog with which Susan is playing.

4.7. Cohesion

Cohesion refers to implicit and explicit links that hold a text together and should be recreated in audio description script (Remael et al., 2015). According to ADLAB (Taylor, 2015a), part of cohesion is mentioning characters' change of look. This feature was not consistently described in Film 1, where most of the intramodal links to characters' changes were implicit. When the film flashbacked to Takhti's childhood in Film 1, the AD explicitly referred to "when he was a little boy". However, in a flash forward to the time when Takhti won the Olympic medal in Finland, there was no explicit mention of his age. In the case of an explicit intermodal link to a change in character's appearance, when Takhti's brother mentioned that he was very fat in the dialogue, the describer repeated the fact that Takhti had become very fat. Mentioning characters' change of look in Film 2 was also sporadic. While Saeed's growing stages could be mentioned throughout Film 2, the change of this little boy was mentioned only once: "Saeed, son of Hamid and Faezeh, has grown up". No significant change in the characters' looks was observed in Film 3.

According to ADLAB (Taylor, 2015a), it is quite situation-based to describe the visuals as they appear on the screen (i.e., synchronously) or to describe them earlier or later (i.e., asynchronously). Due to off-screen narration in Film 1, the AD did either precede or follow the narration during the film. In some scenes in both Films 1 and 2, the ADs were not synchronous even though there was enough time for giving information close to the actions.

There were also many overlaps between descriptions and dialogues as well as subtitles in Films 1 and 2. In contrast, the number of overlaps was low in the audio-described version of Film 3 due to many gaps and pauses between its dialogues.

Moreover, consistent lexis and syntax are essential for a cohesive script (Taylor, 2015a). In Film 2, various words were used to refer to the same place or person, such as "Esmat's house" and "house of Faezeh's mother" which would confuse viewers. In Film 3, "the gallows" and "the execution stick" were used to describe the same thing as well. The describer used formal and colloquial language close together, resulting in a fairly unorganized text.

5. Concluding Remarks

The overall purpose of the current research was to review the quality of Persian AD scripts produced by a thriving Iranian NGO, Sevina Group. To this end, the study analyzed the AD scripts of three films produced by the Sevina Group based on ADLAB guidelines (Remael et al., 2015). The specific aim was to determine whether the group had developed a systematic approach to producing AD scripts. The data from the three audio-described films shows that the current AD has much room for improvement, bearing in mind that these products have been the only initial attempts in this direction in Iran. Nonetheless, the characteristics shared between the ADs and ADLAB's recommendations verify that Sevina has been systematic to some degree in AD production. There is a succinct summary of the results presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Summary of the Findings

ADLAB's categories	Merits	Demerits
Characters and actions	appropriate use of a variety of techniques	- early description - over/under description
Spatio-temporal settings	- appropriate use of implicit/explicit description - appropriate use of general/detailed description - references to significant changes/constancy of settings	- no references to the authenticity of some settings
Genre	---	- no references to genre information
Film language	references to the function of some film techniques	sporadic references to film techniques
Sound effects and music	- references to diegetic internal/external sounds - limited overlaps with meaningful lyrics	- inconsistent and sporadic indication of the sounds' sources - overlaps between the ADs and the original sound - no references to the non-diegetic aspect of narration
Text on screen	use of a variety of techniques	inconsistent and sporadic indication of on-screen text
Wording and style	- use of specific jargons when needed - frequent use of third-person pronouns	- redundant and repetitive description - interpretive description - inaccurate description - use of first-person pronouns
Cohesion	- mentioning characters' change of look - avoiding overlaps in many cases	- inconsistent lexis - inconsistent syntax - asynchronous description of actions

The findings of this study have implications for AD services in Iran, but the results need to be best verified through triangulated designs using larger corpora. Reception research is also needed with a view to verifying if these products meet the intended users' needs and expectations. Tests on the reception of Persian AD with different user profiles and content types are needed to shed light on the reception of this practice. This study investigated the AD products of one producer in Iran; however, products of other AD producers need to be studied in the future, and consequently, more research is necessary to help establish professional associations and national guidelines to regulate AD production. If we consider media accessibility as a human right, the development of AD research and practice in the future will lead to a world that benefits all people with different needs.

Acknowledgments

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