A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN MUSEUM AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS
Implications for Translation

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Abstract – As the Translation Studies community moves forward in an increasingly networked globe, and the needs of the new market change, the range of interests of translation as a discipline broadens, new proposals are raised by the market stakeholders and new challenges are discussed in academia. The challenges discussed in this paper come from research on Audio Description (Díaz Cintas 2007) with particular reference to museum Audio Description (AD), an intersemiotic translation which pursues the aim of disseminating knowledge and helping social integration "by performing inclusive practices" (Jiménez Hurtado *et al* 2015). Starting from the assumption that the language used by the people performing the AD (the audio describers) is a special language shaped by the communicative needs of its users, this research focuses on issues of discursive representation, construction and mediation in English and Italian Audio Descriptions. While the existing literature has shed some light on this type of translation and its main features (i.e. verbal and adjectival constructions; see Neves 2012; Hurtado *et al* 2015), the area of analogies does not appear to have been investigated from a contrastive perspective. Thus, this paper seeks to address this gap by focusing on the use of analogies and claims that they should be considered as a creative strategy of intersemiotic translation.

Keywords: Audio description; visually impaired people; analogy; metaphor; translation.

1. Introduction

Due to legal, cultural and economic pressure we are witnessing a growth in the market of audio described products worldwide, which reflects the real 'turn' in the digital age (Neves 2018, p. 415), i.e. social inclusion and cultural accessibility. In the context of museums, the need to make the cultural heritage of humanity, both in its tangible and intangible forms, more accessible to people with visual impairments (henceforth PVI) has resulted in the proliferation of commodities under the guise of tactile reproductions of artworks, interactive devices, specialized tours and audio descriptions. These creative initiatives contribute significantly to the achievement of the main objectives of museums, that of preserving, communicating and making cultural heritage accessible to all visually impaired persons. Hence, communication strategies (e.g. the use of metaphorical formulations) are crucial to the way information is delivered to various audiences, with translation strategies having a leading role in the process of new meaning reconstruction when moving from the visual to the verbal text.

This study accounts for a critical use of language in the field of museum audio description (AD). Its aim is, firstly, to explore figurative language used in the description of visuals in order to contribute to research on the idiosyncratic features of this specialized language. More particularly, it aspires to ascertain the main semantic fields involved in the metaphorical process across English and Italian for translational purposes. Finally,

following Neves' recommendation (2016) to create more engaging descriptive guides which combine creativity with the basic function of giving information, this work also contributes to translation research in terms of inter-semiotic transcreation (for details on transcreation see Spinzi *et al*, 2018). This implies the enactment of mediation strategies to make tourism products comprehensible to audiences with different (dis)abilities and from different socio-cultural backgrounds (cf. Agorni and Spinzi 2019).

The main point here is that even though audio describers are expected to recount the visual aspects of an image in an objective way, they inevitably leave traces of themselves, above all when dealing with creativity in language (e.g. the choice of figurative language may be more cultural-bound). As a matter of fact, the main assumption in this research is that, "Translators and translation researchers are cultural mediators, professional communicators, and above all, specialists in adapting spoken and written source texts into target languages and cultures, aimed at specific groups" (Jímenez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2015, pp. 278).

In order to carry out this investigation, a specialized corpus of museum AD was designed with the aim of creating a comprehensive collection of texts, which is still at a pilot stage. This cross-cultural study adopts an integrated multi-method framework which combines quantitative and qualitative analysis. Furthermore, the empirical research implemented here enhances our understanding of the intercultural aspects of this multi-sensorial experience. This paper is organized as follows: museum AD will be described in Section 2 in relation to visual impairment; Section 3 will focus on metaphors and guidelines which mention them; Section 4 will illustrate the data and methodology for the analysis; and Section 5 will report on the quantitative and qualitative investigation to draw conclusions on implications in translation in the last section.

2. Museum Audio Description and Blindness

Located in the dynamic realm of Audiovisual Translation (Díaz Cintas 2007) and, quite recently, also within the most specific area of reception studies (Di Giovanni *et al* 2018),[1] AD is an inter-semiotic transfer mode (Jakobson 1959/2001) originally conceived for a specific target audience and likely to be extended to other vulnerable users such as children, the mentally disabled, immigrants and so on (cf. ADLAB Project 2018). Considered also as "a form of assistive audiovisual translation or inclusion service" (Perego 2019, pp. 114), AD is the transposition of visual museum artworks and artefacts into words, with the aim of making most audio-visual products available to VIPs.

The investigation of audio-described products started in the field of film AD with Salway's pioneering study (2007, pp. 159-161), where the idiosyncratic features of the special language used by audio describers are outlined, together with the descriptive richness, the lexical density and the use of very specific words. From a contrastive perspective, Arma's research (2012) on English and Italian audio-described films shows that the two languages mainly differ in the Italian abundance of embedded secondary clauses with respect to the English texts and against any rules in the guidelines.

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[1] Reception studies look at how communication for sensory impaired people is made accessible going "beyond any social, cognitive, age, gender divide and mental, sensory, physical impairment" (Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018, p. viii).

Museum AD is still in its infancy, as noted by Hutchinson *et al*. (2018, p. 42), compared to the professionalized practice of screen AD, even though the former contributed to the advancement of the latter. Despite this, research in the field of museum AD is noteworthy in that it represents an example of a "successful transdisciplinary encounter" among disciplines (Randaccio 2017, p. 187) and, socially speaking, its mediation practices are critical to the representation and interpretation of cultural heritage for disabled people (Perego 2019, p. 114). A number of reasons have indeed been recognized behind the visually impaired audiences' personal willingness to visit museums despite their physical disabilities: for entertainment, educational and aesthetic goals (Neves 2012, p. 277). From the social perspective, blind visitors are able to be involved in the process of sharing feelings with other people by appreciating the same works of art. Hence, accessing culture favours social integration and reinforces learning processes in non-formal contexts (Gibbs *et al.,* 2007*)*. As a matter of fact, museums, traditionally recognized as sources of knowledge dissemination through vision, are questioning this ocular centrism in favour of a multisensory-based approach that supports their conversion into a site where an experience-based process of knowledge acquisition may take place. Thus, the new version of museums, called 'post-museums' (Hopper-Greenhill 2000) have got the "potential to recruit, support and sustain non-traditional audiences through a model of experiential learning and as one iteration of the public sphere that culminates with a scientifically engaged public" (cf. Watermeyer 2012, p. 2). A recent study closer to the main aim of the present research (Soler Gallego *et al.* 2018) has investigated subjectivity, a rather controversial issue, in a corpus of audio-descriptive guides from art museums in four different countries. Results have shown that the use of rhetorical devices (e.g. metaphors) and expressions of subjectivity facilitate comprehension and enhance the appreciation of works of art. The two authors conclude by saying that more research is necessary in order to fill the gap between descriptive research and professional research in this field.

Finally, research from a translational perspective (Hutchinson *et al*. 2018) has highlighted the relevance of three main categories of translation decisions in the field of screen AD that seem to have implications for museum AD: the questions of the describers'/translators' visibility; the nature of the source text; and the impact of translational choices on the target audience (Hutchinson *et al*. 2018, pp. 43). This study places an emphasis on the first issue, namely the translators' visibility, and their role as agents of change when re-creating texts from visual images.

3. The Guidelines and Metaphors

Different countries have issued guidelines, or have simply 'norms' according to government mandates or professional associations, in order to respond to the local need to homogenize AD scriptwriting. AD guidelines for films have been the starting point for regulating museum ADs, even though −as noticed by Perego (2019) −these prescriptive norms lack a uniform structure. As far as metaphors are concerned, the only guidelines which mention them in relation to museums are those issued by the American organization, Art Beyond Sight (2010). In these guidelines, the term 'analogy' is used with reference to the description of intangible concepts which are more arduous to render in an objective way (2010, p. 59). The example provided concerns the AD of Pablo Picasso's Cubist painting *Girl with a Mandolin* (1910). The suggested analogy of the fragmented picture with a shattered wine bottle, whose broken pieces have been reassembled in

different positions, serves the purpose of making the whole image of the picture more concrete and perceptible. Analogies of this type imply that features and attributes of a well-understood source domain are aligned with those of an unfamiliar target domain and projected to the target via inference. Metaphors and similes are two different ways to draw analogy (see Boerger and Henley 1999), or better, metaphor is a special type of analogy where the two domains involved in the relation are semantically distant. As a matter of fact, "A metaphor triggers projection by transferring a conflicting concept into an alien conceptual domain. Simile compares different things each rooted in its own conceptual area" (Prandi 2010, p. 323). This means that both metaphor and simile promote an interaction between dissimilar concepts, but whereas the former focuses on extraneousness, pushed beyond the threshold of conflict, the latter preaches an analogy, avoiding conflict and minimizing the impact between heterogeneous concepts (Prandi 2009, p. 22).

For the purpose of this study all those formulations which instantiate resemblances or comparisons between two dissimilar domains will be investigated viz. from literal similarity to the application of an abstraction. This is because the choice of the domains for comparisons may be challenging for the translator, above all when dealing with congenitally blind people who lack a visual memory.

Of most relevance to the present discussion is Steen's (2015, p. 2) three-dimensional model of metaphor, where metaphor is not only a matter of language and thought, but also of communication. A distinction is also made between deliberate and non-deliberate metaphors where the former are characterized by a communicative property which generates a contrast between textual and local functions of the referents, and the latter where there is a contrast between contextual and basic senses of words. This means that when constructing deliberate metaphors, language users pay distinct attention to the source domain as part of the referential meaning of the utterance in which it is used (Steen 2017, p. 2). This difference is central to this study in that analogical constructions in museum ADs are intentionally made by describers who rely on some features which alert the addressee, "to move away their attention momentarily from the target domain of the utterance or even phrase to the source domain that is evoked by the metaphor-related expression (Steen 2015, p. 68). Such signalling-metaphor cue may come in the form of one of those markers listed in Figure 1.

4. Data and Methods

The comparable corpus compiled for the analysis comes from a collection of English audio-described texts published on the websites of the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum. Both these London museums are known for being pro-active and taking a holistic approach to ensure inclusive access for all visitors. Most texts are usually outsourced to an external company, the British AD charity VocalEyes. The American audio-described texts were drawn from the website of the American organization, Art Beyond Sight, which serves many museums in the USA. In the case of the Italian sub-corpus the texts were collected from three museums with the collaboration of the curators: Anteros in Bologna, Omero in Ancona and Palazzo Madama in Turin.[2] The visuals

considered as source texts comprise paintings, sculptures and items of furniture. With respect to size, the American sub-corpus contains 23,033 running words, the British sub-corpus totals 30,647 running words and the Italian sub-corpus comprises 32,395 running words.

The research methodology adopted both a quantitative and qualitative approach. It consisted of a first stage of systematic observation of the recurrent language devices introducing metaphors and a second stage of closer inspection of the semantic fields involved in the metaphorical formulations. The first stage of the analysis was developed drawing on Goatly's taxonomy (1997, p. 172; see Figure 1) of metaphorical markers in order to detect almost all the instantiations of metaphorical formulations and those signalling figurative language were filed for later analysis. The quantitative analysis was carried out through WordSmith Tools 7.0 (Scott 2017). The qualitative analysis looks at the semantic fields involved in the metaphorical comparison and relies on Steen's distinction between deliberate vs non-deliberate metaphors.

Marker category	Metaphorical markers
1. Explicit markers	*metaphor/-ically, figurative/-ly, trope*
2. Intensifiers	*literally, really, actually, in fact, simply, fairly, just, absolutely, fully, completely, quite, thoroughly, utterly, veritable, regular*
3. Hedges and downtoners	*in a/one way, a bit of, half-…, practically, almost, not exactly, not so much … as…, … if not*
4. Semantic metalanguage	*in both/more than one sense/s, mean(-ing), import*
5. Mimetic terms	*image, likeness, picture, parody, caricature, model, plan, effigy, imitation, artificial, mock*
6. Symbolism terms	*symbol(-ic /-ically), sign, type, token, instance, example*
7. Superordinate terms	*(some) (curious, strange, odd, peculiar, special) sort of, kind of*
8. Copular similes	*like, as*
9. Precision similes and other comparisons	*material verb + like x, the y of a x, y's x; noun-adj., the x equivalent of*
10. Clausal similes	*as if, as though*
11. Perceptual processes	*seemed, sounded, looked, felt, tasted, + like/as though/as if*
12. Misperception terms	*delusion, illusion, hallucination, mirage, phantom, fantasy, unreal*
13. Cognitive processes	*believe, think, regard, unbelievable, incredible*
14. Verbal processes	*say, call, refer to, swear*
15. *So to speak*	
16. Orthography	*" " . ! white space*
17. Modals + Verbal Processes	*could say, might say*
18. Modals	*must, certainly, surely, would, probable/-ly, may, might, could, possible/-ly, perhaps, impossible/-bility*
19. Conditionals	*if … could, would, might, imagine, suppose*
20. *As it were*	

Figure 1
Metaphorical markers (Goatly 1997, pp. 174-175).

5. Analysis

5.1 Quantitative Observations

Following Goatly (1997), the quantitative analysis starts from the identification of the metaphorical devices in the data. In this section, we shall concentrate only on the significant quantitative differences across the two languages displayed by the graph in Figure 2, where all the devices not used as metaphorical signals were not taken into account. As illustrated, explicit markers are only found in the Italian sub-corpus (0.02%), where the device *metafora* is employed to introduce immaterial concepts. An example is

live audio description for VIPs; the curators of Museo Omero in Ancona, and last but not least Anna La Ferla, head of Educational Services at Palazzo Madama in Turin.

given in the following citation, where a metonymical relation between the figure's legs and their balance is visible:

(1) *Sospese e incrociate le gambe, sinistra di Atalanta e destra di Ippomene, incarnano visibilmente e tangibilmente la* **metafora** *di un precario equilibrio.*
[Suspended and legs crossed, Atalanta's left leg and Hippomene's right leg, they visibly and tangibly embody the metaphor of precarious balance.]

Again, looking at the graph, it shows that symbolism terms are more or less equally distributed across the three sub-corpora, although with a higher frequency in the Italian data. The presence of this category may be interpreted as an idiosyncrasy of the description of works of art which express values through symbols and allegories that can be decoded on the basis of precise religious, mythological and cultural beliefs. As expected, the canonical form used to construct analogies in English is the copular simile *like*, which is found in both the American and British data with a percentage of 0.21%, whereas this figure decreases by more than half in the Italian dataset (0.9%). This mismatch can be accounted for by two main reasons: firstly analogies in the Italian data were constructed either through hidden figurative formulations (e.g. implicit metaphors) or, secondly, as might be inferred from the graph, they are signalled by the employment of perceptual processes with the verbs *sembrare* (seem) and *rappresentare* (represent), as the two most frequent cues for metaphorical instances. During the qualitative analysis, it was noted that most of the instantiations of *sembrare* were found to have a hedging function and for this reason they were then classified as 'variants' of downtoners. Considering the use of these perceptual processes in their context of situation, it follows that the real percentage of downtoners in the Italian data amounts to 0.75%. This particular usage may uncover a vaguer, but deliberate, attitude from Italian describers in their creative introduction of analogical formulations, as in the following example, where the presence of the hedge *quasi* (almost) reinforces a cautious stance.

(2) *Il corpo di Cristo è giovane, non sconvolto dallo strazio, anzi* **sembra** *dormire un sonno tranquillo,* **quasi** <u>*fosse un bambino addormentato tra le braccia della Madre*</u>, **forse** *ad indicare la spiritualità di un volere divino che trascende il dolore umano.*
[The body of Christ is young, not upset by the torment; on the contrary, he **seems** to sleep peacefully, **as if he were** a child asleep in the arms of a mother, **perhaps** to indicate the spirituality of a divine will that transcends human pain].
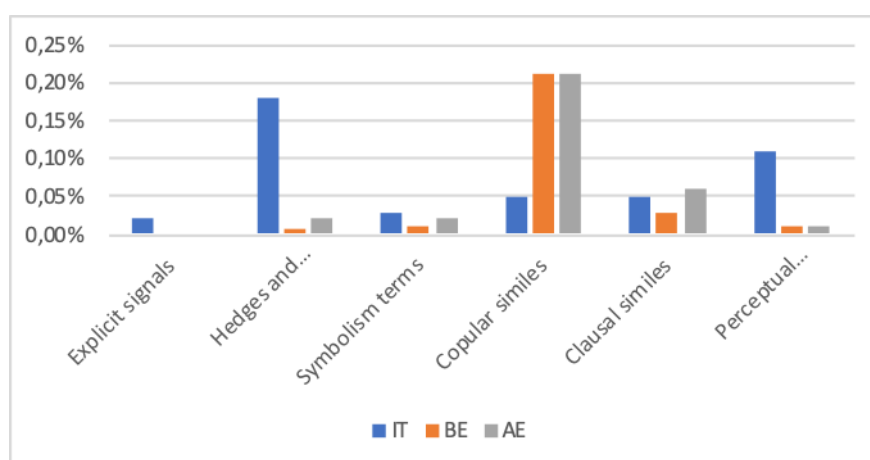

Figure 2
Distribution of the metaphorical devices in the three sub-corpora.

The qualitative analysis in the following sub-section will shed more light on these discursive analogical strategies. In order to describe them, groups were identified on the basis of the specific function analogies performed. Thus, four main categories were identified and were termed: 'Composition'; 'Space'; 'Colour'; and 'Emotion'. We decided to consider 'Colour' as a separate group considering the relevance of this aspect in the case of people with visual impairment.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis

A rapid scan of the concordances of *like* as node soon reveals that the semantic domains mainly exploited by the British and American ADs when constructing analogies come from concrete items which are an integral part of our everyday experience. A glance at the right co-text, which contains the source domains of the analogical formulations, reveals the presence of touchable items (e.g. *anklet, puzzle*) as displayed in Figure 3.
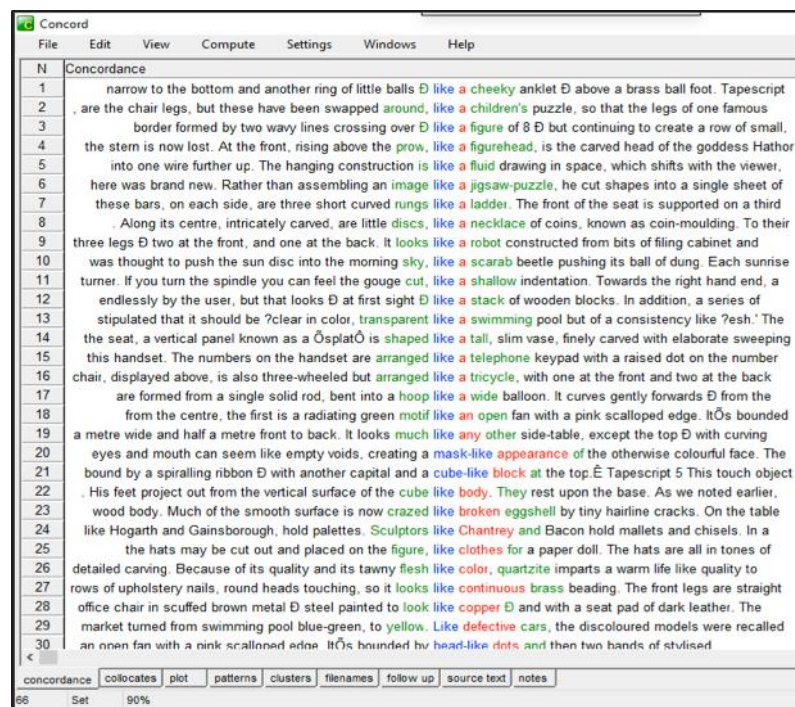

Figure 3
Concordances of 'like' from the American and British sub-corpora.

All these citations, as we can see from the enlarged concordances in the examples below, are processed as similes, where analogy conveys chiefly attributive commonalities for the purpose of describing the target entity. In example (1), the components of an elegant semi-circular side table, made by George Brookshaw, are compared to tangible objects: the cracked surface of the table is compared to a *broken eggshell*, the legs of the table to *fluted classical columns*, a ring of little balls to a *cheeky anklet* and decorations are associated with *piped icing on a wedding cake*. In example (2) the shape of the statue is like that of a *stone block* whose material looks like *sandpaper*. In a similar vein, in example (3) the chair and its components are compared to a robot and its constituents.

*(1) Much of the smooth surface is now crazed **like** <u>broken eggshell</u> by tiny hairline cracks.*
*On the table top, the decorative bands form concentric semi-circles. Working outwards from the centre, the first is a radiating green motif like an open fan with a pink scalloped edge. It's bounded by <u>bead-**like** dots</u> and then two bands of stylised honeysuckle in coral pinks, green and dark maroon.*
*In contrast to the table top the frieze is more subdued: two bands of white decoration on pale grey – **like** <u>piped icing on a wedding cake</u> – divided by a gilded lotus-leaf moulding.*
*The table's legs are **like** <u>fluted classical columns</u>. At the top are acanthus leaves with beneath, a ring of little balls and a pinched-in neck. Vertical grooves narrow to the bottom and another ring of little balls – **like** <u>a cheeky anklet</u> – above a brass ball foot.*

*(2) The figure is cloaked in a garment. So, the contours of his body are visible only through the smooth surface of his garment. The statue maintains the <u>cube-**like** shape</u> of the stone block. [...] It's sculpted in brown quartzite, which is a very hard, grainy stone. This material feels gritty to the touch, somewhat **<u>like sandpaper</u>**, and it was very popular in Dynasty 13. This graininess tends to soften the hard edges of detailed carving. Because of its quality and its tawny flesh-**like** color, quartzite imparts a warm life-like quality to statuary (Block Statue of Senwosret-Senebefny, Egypt, between 1878 and 1814 BC, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York).*

*(3) The chair has three legs – two at the front, and one at the back. It looks **like** <u>a robot</u> constructed from bits of filing cabinet and oversized Meccano, the screws proud of the surface. <u>The robot's 'head' is the backrest</u> – a rectangle, almost as wide as the chair, on a central upright, that continues down to make the back leg. <u>The 'eyes' are two decorative grids</u> perforating the backrest with little square holes. Below the backrest, a horizontal bar curves round widening into rectangular slabs that form the arms (from Albert and Victoria Museum website).*

What is remarkable in these examples is that these analogical formulations are usually preceded by either a verb (e.g. *narrow*) or an adjective (e.g. *gritty*) which pre-announce the quality or function that is made more explicit by the comparison. Thus, the adjective *gritty* in example (2) requires sensorial interpretation of the material, through touching, and constructs in the addressee's mind the abrasive sensation typical of sand. Put otherwise, analogies are not introduced *tout court* in that they rely on a set of relations developed by other means. For example, in the enlarged concordance (3) *like* is part of the prepositional verb 'look like' which is a cue for the analogical metaphor whose function is that of providing a holistic vision of the piece of furniture, i.e. the chair, and the further segmental description is based on the analogy itself. The comparison between the chair and a robot is also an example of the extension of a direct/deliberate metaphor in that it is not restricted to the sentence but there are further explicit developments which leave the addressee no scope for alternative interpretations (Steen 2010, p. 56). Thus, the local function of the robot referents is to evoke the domain of robot components, but the textual function of these referents is to provide a source domain (e.g. robotics) for a cross-mapping to the target domain of the design of the chair.

In both the English and American data, in more than half of its occurrences, both copular similes *like* and *as* are mainly used to introduce analogical formulations by means of similes, which serve the purpose of explaining, or better describing, the compositional dimension (i.e. arrangement, size and structure) of the work of art. In order to do that, most of the lexical items used in the source domain derive from the semantic field of animals (e.g. *The spikes are shaped like fat claws*), from materials (e.g. *sandpaper, wood*), and from everyday objects; kitchen tools might be introduced as they are closer to people's daily life. When colours are described, food is the privileged source domain (e.g. *The white paint in Convergence, which looks like whipping cream on the black background*) and this is explained by the fact that dealing with food and liquid is a basic need in human life. Precision seems also to characterize these analogical constructions as

best exemplified by the following example: *This painting, **as tall as** an average person and **as** wide **as** a seven-foot couch, fills an entire wall in its massive one-foot wide frame.*

By contrast, the analysis of the Italian sub-corpus does not reveal such a tangible and recipient-oriented description. First of all, the preposition *come* ('like') is primarily used as a figurative signal in only 6.5% of its occurrences, and the analogies it constructs mainly describe movement rather than composition, as is evident from the following examples:

(4) Questa contrapposizione di linee genera nella figura una serie di <u>esplosioni, o meglio implosioni, di pura energia</u>: il braccio sinistro, che regge la fionda, è piegato verso la rispettiva spalla, mentre l'altro è disteso lungo il fianco destro e termina con la grande mano dal polso nervosamente sollevato verso la gamba destra verticale che regge il peso del corpo, […] mentre sembra improvvisa la rotazione della testa verso sinistra, con il viso concentrato al massimo, le sopracciglia corrugate **quasi come** se guardasse lontano per prendere la mira e colpire Golia. Il <u>movimento</u> della figura non si espande nello spazio, ma si contrae su sé stesso, **come** un'implosione, appunto.
[*This contrast of lines generates in the figure a series of explosions, or rather implosions, of pure energy: the left arm, which holds the slingshot, is bent towards the respective shoulder, while the other is stretched along the right side and ends with the large hand from the wrist nervously raised towards the vertical right leg that holds the weight of the body, [...] while the rotation of the head to the left seems sudden, with the face intensely concentrated, the eyebrows wrinkled almost as if looking away to aim at and hit Goliath. The movement of the figure does not expand into space, but contracts in on itself, like an implosion, precisely.*]

(5) La scultura appartiene ad una serie di creazioni che lo scultore denomina "Opere" e "Idee", strutture imprevedibili in un continuo divenire che si disegnano nello spazio **come** nuclei generatori di energia, simboli delle ansie profondamente religiose che caratterizzavano il suo temperamento.
[*The sculpture belongs to a series of creations that the sculptor calls "Works" and "Ideas", unpredictable structures in a continuous becoming that are drawn in space as nuclei generating energy, symbols of deeply religious anxieties that characterized his temperament.*]

Both examples, and many others in the sub-corpus, put an emphasis on the description of the movement through metaphysical and physical concepts, in particular that of energy. Example (4) relies on a conflictual metaphor in that the physical concept of implosion, which refers to the "act of falling towards the inside with force," is used to provide addressees with a perception rather than a concrete object; this is also the case in example (5). This citation is indeed replete with metaphorical expressions from the 'unpredictable structures' to 'the continuous flux' until the final simile, supported by its symbolic interpretation. Similarly, examples (6), (7) and (8) reconstruct the visuals through conflictual metaphors whose reconstructed images are not contemplated in our shared natural ontology: we do not conceive of an unfinished work in terms of a fragmented thought; impertinence is a human quality; light is not a person who can feel tired.

(6) *L'opera non-finita **sembra** assumere <u>il valore di un pensiero frammentato</u>* [The unfinished work seems to assume the value of a fragmented thought]

(7) *Dagli altri due oculi che si aprono sul blu del cielo, si affacciano <u>impertinenti dei pappagalli</u>* [From the other two oculi that open onto the blue of the sky, impertinent parrots are overlooking]

(8) *La luce <u>percorre</u> instancabile il suo volto, addensandosi sotto il mento, tra le rughe profonde della fronte spaziosa, tra le folte ed irrequiete sopracciglia e - appena percettibile-, negli angoli della bocca.* [The light runs tirelessly through his face, thickening under his chin,

between the deep wrinkles of his spacious forehead, between his thick and restless eyebrows and - barely perceptible - in the corners of his mouth.]

Unlike English analogies which are processed by categorisation, the Italian analogical metaphors operate at the conceptual level and affect issue viewpoint via the underlying affective mechanism which highlights the emotive function of the artwork. This also implies a self-expression of the artist's personal, internal emotions, experiences or ideas. Considering that not all knowledge is experiential the examples in the Italian corpus show the ability of an easy-to-understand metaphoric language in order to awaken knowledge in analogy with other senses or emotions. Metaphor in this case seems to inhabit the privileged place between language and the other senses. Furthermore, in most of the examples from the Italian sub-corpus, we notice that analogies are strongly mitigated by the use of downtoners, either lexicalised as *sembra* (seem), or by the use of adverbs (*quasi* 'almost', *forse* 'perhaps'):

> (9) *Il gesto solenne che la caratterizza, con la mano sinistra allontanata dal corpo e con il palmo rivolto verso l'alto, <u>sembra alludere alla sua rassegnazione alla volontà divina e a richiamare l'attenzione di chi guarda sulla tragedia del Figlio. Quel gesto misurato sembra essere il punto dove tutte le energie dell'opera si riversano.</u>*
> [The Virgin, with a beautiful young face, does not show an overwhelming compassion for her dead son, but seems to accept the fact and contemplate the lifeless body with a thoughtful composure, in the classical manner. The solemn gesture that characterizes her, with her left hand removed from her body and her palm facing upwards, seems to allude to her resignation to divine will, and to drawing the attention of the viewer to the tragedy of her son. That measured gesture seems to be the point where all the energies of the work pour out.]

As noticed by Prandi and Raschini (2009), these downtoners present the writer's interpretation as mitigating the factuality of the statements and this downgrading operates on the parameters of precision. The analogical formulations are more speaker-oriented and the writer's responsibility is reduced. According to Fraser (1980, p. 342) mitigation of this type softens interlocutors' hostility and indicates the speaker's intention to communicate a personal opinion.

Among these downtoners, only *seem* is found to perform the same function in the English sub-corpus and the only difference is quantitative. If we consider the higher frequency of the mitigating expressions (that in the Italian sub-corpus signal the presence of analogical formulations, more metaphorically accentuated in Italian), it can be safely stated that the analogies sound vaguer, less precise and less tangible with respect to the English formulations.

We might conclude that in aesthetic experience similes and metaphors, being potent cognitive tools, may enhance and also facilitate the comprehension of the artwork. As noted, "poetic descriptions and narration, recreate images of the world in our mind, redefining iconic or non-iconic representations" (Secchi 2014, p. 198). This happens because our mind is the site where optical or haptic visions, coming from our sensory perceptions, are then elaborated.

6. Conclusions and Implications for Translation

English and Italian museum ADs differ considerably with regard to both semantic domains involved in analogical constructions and style. The very nature of metaphor and analogies enables the conceptualisation of a typically alien notion in a more

comprehensible way, by the use of a more tangible domain of experience. In the task of creating the AD of specific works of art for people with visual disabilities, it comes as no surprise −despite controversial opinions in matters of subjectivity in translation (see Soler Gallego *et al*, 2018) −that metaphorical constructions are often exploited to disseminate the knowledge of art with particular reference to compositional, spatial and aesthetic dimensions of the product being described.

The American and British sub-corpora resort to the same strategies for constructing analogies: deliberate similes are signalled by the canonical preposition *like* and, less frequently, by *as*. This first finding does not match with the Italian data, where the equivalent Italian preposition *come* is found only in a few cases as a signal for analogies, and either downtoners are preferred as metaphorical markers or the verb *seem* is employed to contribute to mitigating assertions. Thus, in the two English sub-corpora, analogies appear in their established form and promote an interaction between visuals, or parts of visuals, and tangible objects. Whereas, Italian metaphorical instantiations in the texts analysed are based more fully on metaphorical analogies, which may be allocated on a cline that goes from literal comparisons to formulations closer to abstraction.

With regard to their function, English analogies identify aspects of composition rather than movement or emotion, and are more exploited at the level of description. In contrast, analogies in the Italian data come out more frequently under the guise of metaphors, rather than similes, and perform an expressive function used more for emotional and aesthetic purposes. At the level of interlingual translation, these findings are useful in terms of the different communicative styles between the English and Italian languages. Indeed, results are in line with Hall's theory of High Context Cultures and Low Context Cultures (1990; see also Katan 2006), according to which Italian culture tends to be more emotionally expressive than English culture, and is characterized by a different behavioural and communicative style. For the purpose of this work, it is enough to say that, whereas the Italian language emphasizes indirectness and feelings, the English language accentuates directness and objectivity. Quantitatively speaking, by the use of metaphorical analogies rather than literal comparisons and canonical similes, and by resorting to mitigating strategies when introducing figurative language, the Italian texts confirm this tendency towards subjectivity, namely the presence of the describer in ADs. Far from stating that one cultural orientation is superior to the other in achieving accessibility in audio-described texts and, given that the texts considered are examples of best practice, what is worth highlighting is that analogies, both as metaphors and similes, lie at the root of some of the most captivating and creative thinking and writing. Furthermore, considering that the use of sensorial descriptions fills the gaps of visual disabilities, both similes and metaphors should be carefully handled when audio-describing works of art. Our claim is supported by a recent study (Walczak and Fryer 2017, p. 6) which has pointed out that, "creative scripts may stimulate presence and thus increase the chances of AD users having a more immersive viewing experience".

At the inter-semiotic level of translation, the analysis of analogical constructions in audio-described texts has shown that the final aim of these formulations is that of simplifying the comprehension and allowing access to the works of art, even though different styles are employed in the two languages. For this specific role, and its intrinsic deliberate aspect, analogy can be considered a cross-modal translation strategy, a 'locus' where creativity takes place, that is to say the locus of the "intermodal transcreator", where inventiveness finds fertile ground to accomplish a number of tasks, from a simple tangible description through to an emotional narration. By the use of imagery, AD has the potential to guide all people, visually impaired or not, to experience and enjoy artistic

knowledge in a way which can widen the seeing-based approach to museum appreciation. Furthermore, the multisensory experience, which is enhanced by figurative language, together with semantic or factual information, would boost memorability. Considering their intrinsically deliberate nature, and the multiple functions which they perform in audio-described texts, subject to transcreational practices, all types of analogical formulations deserve a place in the training of describers/translators. In addition, contributions from psycholinguistics (e.g. the use of deliberate metaphors) would give insights into, and support to, a more consistent reconstruction of meanings via analogies.

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