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Accessible Filmmakers: Towards a Professional Profile

Florencia Fascioli-Álvarez ✉
Universidade de Vigo – Universidad Católica del Uruguay

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Abstract

Although many film professionals have adopted the Accessible Filmmaking (AFM) approach in their work, there is yet no clear professional profile or coherent training. What is an accessible filmmaker? How do they create accessible versions of films? What production, technical, and aesthetic challenges do they face? This article will explore some current AFM practices used by film professionals in Uruguay by means of a qualitative methodology based on fourteen semi-structured interviews with filmmakers and crew members. Results indicate that the film professionals interviewed recognize different degrees of involvement with Media Accessibility, from scant and sporadic engagement to active participation. One major obstacle they face is lack of knowledge on the specifics of accessibility. Although Media Accessibility might at first seem relatively easy to implement, it is in fact challenging to navigate in audiovisual works, all the more so if the tools are organically integrated into a film. On the basis of observation, four skills useful to an accessible filmmaker are described.

Key words: Accessible Filmmaking, Media Accessibility, filmmakers, filmmaker training, Uruguayan cinema, collaboration, creativity.

✉ mfasciol@ucu.edu.uy, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8867-6376

1. Introduction

In the film industry's current production model, there are "gaps" between filmmakers, media accessibility (MA) experts, translators, and end users (Branson, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2019a). Film professionals are rarely involved in a film's translation or other attempts to make it accessible. Translation, for instance, is often left to agencies hired by film distribution companies (De Higes Andino, 2014), and filmmakers and translators alike are often far removed from viewers. Filmmakers are rarely completely aware of the impact translation and other access-oriented interventions have on how diverse audiences (foreign, those with sensory or cognitive impairments, the elderly, and so forth) engage with their works. Similarly, neither translators nor MA experts integrate those viewers into their production processes (Branson, 2018; Romero-Fresco, 2019a).

Accessible Filmmaking (AFM) (Romero-Fresco, 2019a) offers a possible solution to bridge these gaps. The AFM model promotes the incorporation of translation and accessibility into the filmmaking process prior to distribution (Romero-Fresco, 2019a, 2020), that is, at the pre-production, production, and post-production phases in a manner akin to what Greco (2018) describes as the shift from reaction to pro-action in the relevant production processes. The model also emphasizes collaboration and a close working relationship between a film's creative team and the experts who will translate it. Such cooperation, it is argued, benefits the processes, the resulting work and the individuals involved.

When truly embraced, AFM requires certain roles to be filled: a director of accessibility and translation (DAT) (Branson, 2019), consultants with sensory impairments (Romero-Fresco, 2019a) and an accessible filmmaker. This article focuses on the latter. While throughout history there have been filmmakers who incorporate, more or less consciously, features of the AFM model (Romero-Fresco, 2019a), a clear professional profile for the accessible filmmaker and the training s/he requires have not yet been defined. An analysis of the tasks performed by filmmakers working with accessibility provides a way to define this profile (Villa Sánchez et al., 2013). With these thoughts in mind, this article will describe and analyze media accessibility practices in the early stages of the filmmaking process as performed by film professionals in Uruguay. Though audiovisual translation is not widespread in Uruguay, the availability of grants for the express purpose of creating accessible versions of films has seen an increase in recent years.

Although there has been a recent shift toward a *universal* notion of accessibility that takes into account all people who cannot access a medium in its original form (Greco, 2018), the focus here is on audio description (AD), enriched subtitling (i.e., subtitles with both verbal and non-verbal information) and sign language interpretation—all of them translation-based MA modalities (Greco & Jankowska, 2020) aimed at audiences with sensory disabilities. This more restrictive perspective is adopted in order to encompass the practices observed in the Uruguayan context, where MA is still largely perceived as a set of tools that provides populations with disabilities access to cultural goods.

2. The Relationship Between Film Professionals, Translation, and Accessibility

While the topics of translation and MA receive little attention in Film Studies (Johnston, 2020), a number of filmmakers throughout the history of cinema have been aware of the problems of translation and accessibility in their work. Romero-Fresco (2019a) uses the term "inadvertent accessible filmmakers" to refer to those who have, for different reasons, intervened in the translations of their films. Quentin Tarantino, Alfonso Cuarón, and Timur Bekmambetov actively participate in the subtitling of their films; Ken Loach and Guillermo del Toro have reflected on the impact translation has on audiovisual works and on what they as filmmakers attempt to convey (pp. 221–223). Stanley Kubrick was involved not only in the subtitling and dubbing of his films, but also in their marketing and advertising (Zanotti, 2019a, 2020). He understood the importance of translation as a tool to increase the reach of his films among different audiences in commercial as well as artistic terms (Zanotti, 2019b). Other directors have approached translation and accessibility in a more conscious and intentional manner. Jon Garaño and Aitor Arregui, for instance, personally translated their Basque-language films *Loreak* (2014) and *Handia* (2017) into Spanish and then worked with their subtitlers. For Pete Middleton and James Spinney, accessibility is an extension of each film's creative intent (Romero-Fresco, 2019a). Finally, Luke Rodgers worked with accessibility experts as well as an accessibility director on the different AD versions of his short film *The Progression of Love* (2009) and its subtitles. Whereas other filmmakers participate actively and purposefully in the translation process, Rodger's collaborative work gave him not only greater knowledge of the needs of end users but also a new perspective on his own film (Branson, 2017).

Alastair Cole (2015) worked with an interpreter during the filming of some scenes of his documentary *The Colours of the Alphabet* (2016) and in viewing raw material for later editing. But his engagement with translation went much further: he developed a subtitling guide in collaboration with his language and accessibility producer and even included the subtitles before the film was actually finished. As Cole himself puts it, "This was a strategy to enable the subtitles to influence the pacing and emotional engagement of the film where necessary and permitted [*sic*] the adjustment of any scene that would create significant problems in viewing with the subtitles" (Cole, 2015, p. 138). Cole, then, integrated translation into the editing stage of his film, challenging the notion of an "original" versus a "translated" version. The different versions (original and translated) could be seen as complementary, and together they create a "global film" (Romero-Fresco, 2020). Challenging the notion of the original version of a film means challenging the notion of the original viewer, which causes filmmakers to reflect on who the intended recipients of their works are and, chiefly, who they are not. As Cole (2015) suggests, the decision about which is the original and which is the translated version has political implications: the unmediated voice is implicitly privileged over the mediated or translated voice (p. 148). By participating in the translation, he questions power structures and takes an ideological stance on, as well as responsibility for, both viewers and those represented in his work.

2.1. Not Just Filmmakers

The above recapitulation might suggest that translation and accessibility in film concern only directors. What about the other members of the artistic team? While directors may have the last word in the usually hierarchical filmmaking process, it is difficult to argue that films are the result of a strictly individual vision. As Lumet put it (1996):

> Rightly or wrongly, I've chosen a theme for the movie. How do I pick the people who can help me translate it to the screen? […] I'm in charge of a community that I need desperately and that needs me just as badly. That's where the joy lies, in the shared experience. (p. 12)

From this perspective, cinema is a process of collaborative translation that aims to portray a story from a specific point of view and with a common goal. Interaction and collaboration are crucial in filmmaking; the work of one affects the work of all the others. Filmmaking is a self-regulating system with specific dynamics; subjects must develop the skills required to foster healthy interaction and team building (Zienowicz-Wielebska et al., 2020).

All the members of the creative team are important. Branson (2017) claims that the audio describer's interactions with the screenwriters, for example, are at least as useful to the film as their interactions with the director. Similarly, Zanotti (2020) describes the "translaboration" (Alfer, 2017) performed by Stanley Kubrick, his assistant and a group of experts and technicians in dubbing his films. In both the past and the present, the production of accessible and translated versions of a film has required and requires fluid communication between the various members of the creative team and experts. The notion of the accessible filmmaker is, thus, broad and comprehensive:

> the "accessible filmmaker" […] is a much wider concept, encompassing any professional or amateur practitioner involved in the different stages of the filmmaking process. We are thus referring not only to directors, but also to scriptwriters, cinematographers, editors, text designers, etc. as well as to amateur filmmakers who may wish to upload a short film made with their phone to the Internet, bearing in mind not just the original audience but also the viewers of the translated and/or accessible version. In other words, everyone who would like to make film for all (Romero-Fresco, 2019a, p. 7).

To be an accessible filmmaker, then, often entails the declaration of an intent, a purpose, and a political stance, as well as a "sense of urgency" (Romero-Fresco, 2021). But beyond that, it can also represent a strategy: greater access means a larger potential audience. As Jo-Jo Ellison argues in relation to the documentary *Notes on Blindness* (2016), when an accessible work receives awards and critical acclaim, it not only reaches more viewers but also builds traction for the creation of more films of this nature, which in turn brings to the surface the financial and creative benefits of accessibility (Romero-Fresco, 2019a).

2.2. Training (Accessible) Filmmakers

Today, training and education in filmmaking and audiovisual translation are as distinct as their respective professional practices, which means translation and accessibility are rarely taken into account in filmmaking courses. Filmmakers have at best a vague awareness of the impact these areas have on their work and how viewers respond to it (Romero-Fresco, 2019b). Romero-Fresco (2019b) argues that AFM training should aim to connect filmmakers with experts in translation and accessibility. The few curricula that do combine these two fields are geared to a collaborative exchange. Some workshops for film and translation professionals have taken place at film festivals or conferences in audiovisual translation and media accessibility. In master's degree courses at the University of Antwerp and the University of Roehampton, translation students worked with filmmakers to create intralingual and interlingual subtitling (Romero-Fresco, 2019a). A paradigmatic AFM training course, "Introduction to Accessible Filmmaking" was developed by Pablo Romero-Fresco in collaboration with the British Film Institute (BFI). As a ten-week online course based on a MOOC (massive online open course), it offered specific content for filmmakers and translators/MA experts, but also showed a common path where both learned the "rationale behind AFM and its notions of accessibility and film; the impact that subtitling, dubbing/voice-over, and AD have on the nature and reception of translated and accessible versions; [and the] implementation of the AFM [model]" (Romero-Fresco, 2019b, pp. 62–63).

Regarding (accessible) filmmakers and their training, in 2019 Elonka Soros gave the keynote address at the European Grouping of Film and Television Schools (GEECT). The clear intent of the talk, entitled "Diversify or Die", was to place the issue of diversity on the agenda of film schools. In Soros's words, the idea was that attendees:

> consider the people and perspectives included in, or excluded from, European Films Schools in terms of the student body, the teaching staff, and the curriculum. […] [I am referring to] how personal and collective biases (conscious and unconscious), preferences and cultural norms may unintentionally be locking out talent from under-represented groups and acting as a barrier to progression within film schools and, thus, the wider industry. […] [Consider] stereotypes and micro behaviours [related to] gender, visible ethnic minorities, and disabled people's representation/imagery on film school websites and prospectus, to illustrate how intentions to be inclusive can be undermined by actions. (Soros, 2019, p. 3)

Soros argued that representativeness and an intersectional perspective on certain social issues — that is, how they overlap — and their impact on inequality in training and industry should be a central concern of training in filmmaking. How is that linked to accessibility? According to Greco (2019), accessibility training programs "have focused mainly on practical skills". "The core competences of being an accessibility expert," he continues, "have largely been ignored" (p. 41). Training programs in accessible filmmaking are usually oriented to certain specific skills and contents: (1) the characteristics of the viewers of the translated and accessible versions; (2) history, development, and current trends in Media Accessibility and Audiovisual Translation; (3) the theory and practice of some Audiovisual Translation and MA modalities with a focus on workflows, stakeholders, quality

guidelines and parameters, challenges, solutions, and applied software; (4) AFM theory and practical applications; (5) the impact of translation and accessibility both on audiovisual works and on their audiences (Romero-Fresco, 2019b). In addition to these, the profile for accessibility managers or coordinators in the performing arts (ACT, 2016) suggest having a "critical understanding of the concept of accessibility for everyone" (p. 1) and the interpersonal and managerial skills or the ability to develop the skills required to organize and coordinate an event that is accessible not only on the level of content. Furthermore, professionals in the field must "raise awareness that accessibility should form an integral part of the production of arts events from their inception" (Remael et al., 2019, p. 141).

What Greco calls "core competences" seems linked, at least in the case of filmmakers, to specific know-how where deeper and more constitutive questions and reflections on accessible filmmaking come into play, questions that go beyond the field's (necessary) practical application. Thinking about accessibility's effect on audiovisual works and on viewers might not only spur reflection on the value of difference but also problematize notions of access in relation to content, creation (Dangerfield, 2018), and representation. Accessibility could be a tool to raise awareness of the personal and collective biases about which Soros (2019) warns. Whom is cinema for? Whom is it not for? Which voices continue to be legitimized in spaces of power and which ones emerge from the margins? How is diversity represented? What does accessibility have to contribute to that representation? If those issues are taken into account, Greco's critical learning spaces (2019) become central to training in skills-oriented accessibility in a framework of reflection on social reality. On the basis of that understanding, film schools are important spaces in the configuration—social and otherwise—of the cinematographic field and in the learning and reproduction of new ways of making and thinking about cinema (Peirano, 2020).

3. A Brief Introduction to Film Accessibility in Uruguay

Although film accessibility in Uruguay is still incipient, it is worth discussing because of a few of its specific characteristics. MA in Uruguay is limited, and accessible versions of Uruguayan films are hard to come by. Of the fourteen films released in 2021 that received support from the Uruguayan Film and Audiovisual Institute (INCAU for Instituto Nacional de Cine y Audiovisual), only four are available in accessible versions (Instituto Nacional de Cine y Audiovisual, 2022; Montevideo Audiovisual, undated). Training is also limited. In Uruguay, unlike many other countries, MA training is offered mostly in university communication bachelor degrees and at translation and interpretation courses in Uruguayan Sign Language (henceforth LSU, after the Spanish acronym). No postgraduate training in MA is currently available in Uruguay. Many MA professionals have received training or worked in other areas. Sometimes the only specific MA training they have was received abroad (Fascioli-Álvarez, 2021a).

Some authors and filmmakers question whether the country has a film industry at all (Dufuur, 2014; Brown et al., 2019). Tadeo Fuica (2017) claims that Uruguayan film is discontinuous; it is "a low-

budget, piecemeal, independent cinema […] made by amateur filmmakers whose main objective was to make films rather than to become part of an industry" (p. 2). While it is important to broaden the definition of cinema when analysing a country like Uruguay (Tadeo Fuica, 2017), filmmaking in Uruguay is conditioned by the need for co-producers: public funds are scarce, and audiences too small to offset production costs (Lema, 2019).

Since 2016, three specific funds have been made available for the creation of accessible versions of films (with subtitles, AD and LSU). A number of fiction and documentary feature films are awarded 3,500 US dollars each year to be used for accessibility. Significantly, this financial support is sometimes awarded during the post-production stage (Montevideo Audiovisual, 2020), but sometimes during the production stage or even at the pre-production stage (Agencia Nacional de Desarrollo, 2020; Instituto Nacional de Cine y Audiovisual, 2021), which has unintentionally forced filmmakers to consider accessibility prior to distribution.

4. Methodology

To explore accessibility practices in Uruguayan cinema, this study employs a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with some of the key people involved (Orozco & González, 2012).

Table 1

Participants by gender, role, and type of employment

Female	Male	Total
10	4	14

Producer	Director	Post-Production Supervisor	Total
8	5	1	14

Freelancer	Production company employee	Total
5	9	14

Source: author's own elaboration.

A total of fourteen interviews were conducted with Uruguayan film professionals (eight producers, five directors, and one post-production supervisor). Ten of the interviewees were women and four were men, all between the ages of thirty and fifty. Their professional experience in the audiovisual field was diverse. All producers alternated between executive producer, line producer or production coordinator roles in their projects. Two of the directors also worked as directors of photography and as editors. One director was also the producer of both his own films and small-scale projects. Of the

fourteen participants, five were freelancers and the others were employees of production companies that work on feature and short films, be they fiction or documentary, as well as on TV series, as majority or minority co-producers. Except for one, none of the interviewees had had accessibility training before participating in the development of an accessible version. All interviewees worked on projects that received some type of financing for MA between 2017 and 2020. Using snowball sampling, a method where an initial group of participants recruits others (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014, p. 34), seven film professionals initially selected then suggested the rest of the candidates. Information on the projects that have been awarded MA funds is publicly available on the websites of the corresponding public agencies (Agencia Nacional de Desarrollo, 2020; Instituto Nacional de Cine y Audiovisual, 2021; Montevideo Audiovisual, 2020).

The fourteen interviews were conducted between April 2020 and August 2021; twelve were carried out virtually on Zoom due to the COVID-19 restrictions in effect in Uruguay. The remaining two were carried out at the interviewees' workplaces. The interviews lasted on average one hour; those conducted via Zoom were recorded with image and sound, and the sound was transcribed for use in this analysis. A voice recorder was used in the two interviews carried out in person.

The interviews were transcribed automatically using the speech-to-text online platform *Trint*. The text was then edited and proofread by the author. Inductive coding was used, as was a coding template (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014) based on the topics covered in the interview (i.e., knowledge of accessibility, collaboration with MA experts, impact of translation on films). As the analysis progressed, new levels and sublevels of coding emerged. For example, "close collaboration" and "scarce collaboration" were detected as sublevels within the "collaboration" tag. Content analysis was performed with the NVivo software for processing qualitative data. The data was stored in an online repository to which only the author has access as per the informed consent signed by the participants. Both the interviews and their analysis were conducted in Spanish, and the quotes presented here were translated in collaboration between the translators and the author of this article.

The topics covered included the description of the participants' role, the tasks they performed and the types of projects they worked on locally. A second block of questions focused specifically on each professional's experience with media accessibility, with special emphasis on the stages, tasks, players involved, timeframes and modes of engagement and collaboration with MA experts. The interviewees were also asked about their motivations, the challenges, and difficulties they encountered, their contact with people with disabilities during the accessibility work, and their perceptions of the accessible versions of their films. A final block of questions was dedicated to their educational background in audiovisual media and previous training in accessibility. The results reported in this article focus on some of the topics in the second block of questions.

5. Results and Discussion

This section will describe how the film professionals engage with accessibility, some of the challenges they face, and some of the reflections that arise during the process. On the basis of these results, a possible skill set is laid out.

5.1. Involvement: Fulfilling a Commitment

This study suggests that while some film crew members engage in a number of different roles relating to media accessibility, it is producers who are the most involved in the issue both at early and later phases of film projects. Some of the producers interviewed encourage directors, editors, sound designers and post-producers to participate in, or even supervise, certain aspects of the adaptation. Producers oversee, among other things, incorporating accessibility in post-production and distribution phases, drawing up contracts with MA experts and paying for outsourced services. The most common accessibility task mentioned by the directors interviewed is collaboration with MA experts to create the AD, the subtitles, or the sign language interpretation on screen. These findings support Romero-Fresco's claim (2019a) that film professionals might engage in accessibility at different stages of their projects and for different purposes. Further research is required to determine, for example, the advisability of having specific profiles such as an accessible producer or accessible director on the film crew (the need for those roles might vary with the project).

The interviews reveal different degrees of involvement with accessibility and a corresponding amount of collaboration with MA experts. This involvement can be broken down into four degrees of intensity, from scant and sporadic contribution to active participation on the part of the creative team (Fascioli-Álvarez, 2021a).

When involvement is scant, producers are generally in charge only of exchanging documents and copies of the film with the MA experts or, even with mediating companies that play a role like the DAT described by Branson (2019). Here, work on accessibility begins in the post-production stage, and MA experts work in isolation; the exchange is limited to returning the accessible versions of the film to the producer.

In the next of the four degrees of involvement, exchanges between MA experts and filmmakers are fluid and sustained, and filmmakers even exert a measure of influence over what MA experts do. Some of the professionals consulted actively participate in, for instance, the choice of certain terms in subtitles and AD, or in the voices chosen for AD; they provide input on the position, colour, and typography of the subtitles, and the position and size of the image of the sign language interpreter. This exchange is valued by the filmmakers as an opportunity to learn about, for instance, different access modalities, the viewers reached by accessible versions, as well as the barriers certain groups face when it comes to accessing cultural goods. According to one producer:

> Beyond the final product, the process raises awareness among those who work on a film. It seems to me that, if you delegate everything and only see the final [accessible] material once it is returned to you, that version will not be as good as it could be. I mean, it will not contain the view of those who made the film. So, viewers miss that, and those working on the film miss an exchange in which you learn. (Producer 2)

Similarly, some interviewees recognize the value of their contribution to the application of MA modalities, since producers and directors "know their project like the back of their hand" (Director 4) and "know what matters [for a film]" (Producer 5). Some of the film professionals reflect on the need to have input on the accessible versions to make sure they maintain the essence of the original. As one producer puts it, "audio description is not alien to the film," and hence the director should be involved in decision making regarding the AD script as s/he is in all other areas of a film project (Producer 1). This producer agrees with Cole (2015) that the director should not shirk responsibility for translation when it is central to how a portion of the audience will receive the work. Several interviewees state that they have decisive input on the final stages of the adapted work, namely in relation to the sound and visual integration of AD, subtitles, and LSU in a practice like the one used by the active accessible filmmakers described by Romero-Fresco (2019a). In this second degree of involvement, however, participation is limited to assessing MA experts' proposals, and supervising their work. Kubrick's notion of "total artistic control" over a work (Zanotti, 2019b) is at play in the reflection of one filmmaker:

> Ultimately, it is your film being shown to people and your name being put on it, […] your creation. Anyone who is studying cinema makes a commitment: every film you are going to show, everything that is seen, must get your approval — otherwise, there is a risk of carelessness. (Director 1)

In the third category of involvement, the interviewed professionals actively participate in creating and advocating accessibility. That means, for example, that some of them work directly with an audio describer to write the AD (the audio describer reads a pre-script aloud and modifications are effected jointly). Four out of the five directors consulted specify aspects of images that, in their view, require AD. These film professionals value the expertise of audio describers and are willing to collaborate with them on a task about which they themselves know very little. To some interviewees, the MA experts provide an objectivity necessary to a process that, from the filmmakers' perspective, is highly subjective: AD provides "poetic brushstrokes [that enable] the blind to see [the film] with other eyes" (Director 1). Further research might problematize that reflection considering the creative and subjective aspects of MA (Romero-Fresco, 2021) and, specifically, of AD (Walczak & Fryer, 2017).

Furthermore, in this third group, some of the interviewed professionals integrate MA in the filmmaking process itself in different ways: including the AD's edits in the soundtrack post-production; defining visual parameters for subtitles and editing the LSU image during the post-production of the film's final image; finalizing the accessible Digital Cinema Package (DCP, a standard delivery format for digital film screenings); and promoting screenings of the accessible versions at

theatres and film festivals (Fascioli-Álvarez, 2021a). Involving other members of the creative team (i.e., editors, sound designers, image post-production experts) in these tasks is common.

In the fourth degree of involvement, close collaboration with experts is complemented by exchanges with end users. Although some MA experts in Uruguay propose that people with visual impairments be brought into the AD process (Fascioli-Álvarez, 2021b), that is by no means common practice. On the basis of the interviews, it appears that AD is the MA modality where exchanges with end users are mostly likely to occur. Subtitling and LSU, however, involve almost exclusively expert subtitlers and hearing sign language interpreters. The relationship between filmmakers and people with visual disabilities enables reflection on the impact MA has: "the [AD] script has a lot to do with what the viewer is going to experience later" (Post-Producer Supervisor 1). At the same time, if filmmakers, audio describers, and end users participate in the writing of the script, concerns might arise over where each person speaks from, where s/he is anchored when s/he describes. As one director puts it, "It really helped me to think that I am always going to write as a sighted person" (Director 4) — a statement that indicates empathy with the experience of others.

5.2. Ignorance, the "Exogenous Layer," and Other Challenges Facing Accessible Filmmaking

Ignorance is one barrier to filmmakers' engagement with media accessibility. All those interviewed report that, before contact with MA for their films, sign language interpretation was the accessibility modality they were most familiar with because of a recent law (Law Nº 19.307, 2015) mandating the inclusion of sign language interpretation in Uruguayan television programming. That does not mean, however, that filmmakers understand what implementing the sign language interpretation modality implies. They are largely ignorant about whom to hire, how LSU inclusion would affect their work schedule, how much it would cost, and so forth. Despite Branson's (2017) assertion, recognition of sign language as an access modality does not suffice to spur filmmakers on to incorporate it into their work. The interviewees confirm that ignorance plays a role in concrete decisions on, for instance, when to become involved, how to collaborate with MA experts and how to engage and supervise the entire accessibility process. MA experts, then, ultimately lead the way, since filmmakers are not informed enough to develop a counterproposal that might be more aligned with their project and work.

Although most of the interviewees give thought to MA from before the distribution stage, none of them implement media accessibility prior to the post-production stage, that is, not until after the final cut. In practical terms, one producer states that incorporating MA into earlier stages of the filmmaking process would not be hard to do. MA experts should be identified and, costs permitting, hired, that is, they should become participants in the ongoing work (Producer 7). Furthermore, some of the producers state that the expectation of having to include MA in the production process enables them to think about access beyond the film itself in, for example, accessible advertising and promotion.

Challenges set in when media accessibility encroaches on artistic issues or questions ways of working that are taken for granted. There is no consensus among those interviewed on when it is best to bring MA into the process. For some directors and producers, it remains something to be added once the film is finished. That "allows them to work freely to find the film's image and sound and, once satisfied, dedicate all their attention to how to translate it" (Director 1). Some interviewees state that early incorporation is more feasible in fiction than in documentary production, because in documentaries the final work requires weaving together spoken texts, images, and sounds at the editing stage. Indeed, they assert that is where the film really takes shape. Incorporating MA at the editing stage in a documentary would therefore mean bringing yet another creative dimension into an already complex process.

In this scenario, once the final cut is finished, the multiple accessible versions would be generated according to the logic of the "global film" (Romero-Fresco, 2020). However, even if accessibility is devised and planned in advance, watching the accessible version sparks different reactions to MA's impact on the film. In the words of two producers: "[MA] interferes with the work as it was conceived […]; it is an exogenous, as opposed to integral, layer" (Producer 3); "sign language is complicated for us because it changes the image of the film [...], after all, the frame is an artistic construction" (Producer 5). Although some, like Branson (2017), recognize that MA offers another perspective, there is some resistance: filmmakers have "to learn to let go and incorporate [MA], from both the technical and the conceptual point of view" (Producer 5). Some point out the need to debate what accessibility really implies and whether all cultural productions should be accessible:

> [What is needed is] an honest, respectful discussion where each person speaks their mind. I don't know what is inclusive and what is not inclusive, but I do know I don't have the theoretical training to take part in that discussion (Producer 5).

It seems crucial, then, to open up critical learning spaces (Greco, 2019) where the spontaneous reflections of those involved can be further explored and developed constructively.

Nevertheless, some of the professionals interviewed question the very possibility of creating a film that integrates MA in its narrative and aesthetic endeavours. As Cole (2015) argues, creative alternatives only emerge when MA is brought into the film organically. In such cases, some shots could be made to last longer to facilitate the inclusion of the AD and framing could be designed with subtitles and sign language interpretation in mind. If that were the case, the interviewees agree, it would be "another experience, another film" (Producer 3). They are of the opinion, however, that such requirements should not be made for all audiovisual works. The question that arises as a consequence is how to determine which projects should integrate MA from inception and which should not. The interviewees offer no conclusive opinions on this issue, but they do reveal that there is a need for further research. As one producer says regarding his latest TV series, "This is the first work with a true commitment to accessibility, […] because one of the characters is deaf" (Producer 4). This begs the question what "commitment to accessibility" means in this case. Several other interviewees also state that they are interested in accessibility when their stories deal with disability in some way. More specifically, disabled characters seem to have a direct impact on recognition of

MA as a necessary component to be included from the outset of the project. In that context, the possibilities for more synergy become clearer:

> The important thing is to envisage, from the beginning, from the outset, that the projects are accessible […] In the future, it should also [be considered] in the content from a project's inception […]. Hopefully, in ten years' time, we will have another way of being inclusive. I never get tired of saying that what is at stake is more than new tools, [sign] language, or audio description: it is a creative point of view. As far as I'm concerned, that is where the real revolution is (Director 4).

The representation of diversity on the screen could evidently build a bridge between the problems of access and of content from the very early stages of production. Diversity could be the trigger to place the accessibility issue on the agenda, and MA could then provide filmmakers with a new and creative way to explore film practice. However, it is necessary to deepen this strategy in order to avoid a restrictive approach that values accessibility only when talking about disability.

5.3. An Accessible Filmmaker's Skill Set Proposal

The data obtained from the interviews largely confirm the validity of the skill set and content proposed by Romero-Fresco (2019b) and the ACT project (2016) for a training program in accessibility. Items to be considered include understanding the workflow in an AFM project, contemplating accessibility management beyond the film itself, and understanding the specific characteristics of target audiences and how they consume accessible versions of films. Some new data suggest the need to reformulate and expand Romero-Fresco's proposal with four specific skills:

- *Anticipation*: planning, managing, and evaluating the technical, human, and economic resources required for MA at every stage of a film project
- *Collaboration:* devising, planning, executing, and evaluating the degree of collaboration with MA experts at each stage of the process
- *End users & validation*: identifying the end users of the accessible versions and planning, executing, and evaluating a validation process that includes them in every stage of the film project
- *Creation:* the use of language, image, and sound to explore and create audiovisual contents accessible to diverse viewers

Although Romero-Fresco's proposal (2019b) calls for introducing MA in the early stages of the film process, skill 1 above refers to the actions and resources an accessible filmmaker should think about before embarking on the project. The second point considers collaboration itself a skill (skill 2). The interviews show that filmmakers engage MA experts in a variety of ways: some spark little collaboration, even at the post-production stage. Furthermore, collaboration does not happen by default when media accessibility is included in the early stages of the film project or when filmmakers and MA experts get to know each other's work. Collaboration requires actively planning a path for

working together and learning to build collectively the agreements that define the limits of the participation of both film and translation professionals. Those agreements should take into account not only the knowledge of the respective disciplines but also context issues. At stake in skill 3 is, essentially, knowing the characteristics of the end users and how they receive accessible films (Romero-Fresco, 2019b) in order to proactively include them in the accessible filmmaking process. Lastly, skill 4, the most innovative contribution listed here, proposes that filmmakers explore creative and artistic aspects of media accessibility at every stage of the filmmaking process, encouraging other professionals (not only audiovisual translators or MA experts) to think about MA in a creative way.

6. Conclusions

The interviews with Uruguayan film professionals indicate that not only directors, but also producers, editors, sound designers, and post-producers are involved in MA in Uruguay, be it to varying degrees. Overall, knowledge of MA is limited, and AD is the modality that the interviewed directors and producers are most familiar with. It is through their work on AD that the directors and producers reach potential end users, often due to the contributions of MA experts.

In practical terms, when the participants become aware of what accessibility entails, the players, processes, and the costs involved, incorporating it at an early stage may seem possible. However, when the interviewees reflect on artistic questions, the impact media accessibility may have on audiovisual works causes some concern as does the question of how it can be more organically integrated into a film. Characters with disabilities or plots that touch on this topic and have links with issues of diversity seem to facilitate greater engagement with accessibility generally.

Furthermore, the interviewees' responses not only confirm the pertinence of some of the skills and contents included in Romero-Fresco's AFM training courses (2019b), but also suggest that it would be beneficial to reformulate them around four basic skills that deal with planning the inclusion of accessibility in the filmmaking process, collaborating with MA experts, identifying end users and validating accessible films, and exploring and creating audiovisual contents accessible to diverse viewers.

However, these findings need to be corroborated and elaborated on the basis of further research since the present study is carried out in a single country (Uruguay) with a specific film environment. Further studies might also include additional professionals, i.e., crew members other than producers, directors, and post-production supervisors to paint a broader picture of accessibility practices both in Uruguay and elsewhere. The further development of the specific skills proposed here could constitute a significant contribution to filmmakers' ability to (co)create as an alternative to maintaining traditional approaches to MA (Chottin & Thompson, 2021). Studies such as this one also could reveal how "ableism" (Goodley, 2014) can permeate professional practice, even on the part of those committed to MA. It will be important to deepen and continue to discuss the skills proposed here and to study their impact on the development of AFM. Only based on evidence and indicators

will it be possible to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to be an accessible filmmaker.

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