

A Critical Review of Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH): Representing Emotional Meaning through Interjections

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ABSTRACT

Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) are an indispensable accessibility service in contemporary audiovisual media, providing Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) people access to materials that may otherwise be conveyed by sound. Standard SDH guidelines have evolved sufficiently to establish a coherent body of conventions governing the representation of dialogue, speaker identification, sound effects, music, and other non-verbal auditory elements. Despite improvements in audiovisual provision, the construction of emotional meaning in audiovisual works remains sparsely engaged. This limitation is especially relevant to the treatment of interjections, which often constitute spontaneous expressions of emotion, attitude, and psychological reaction. This study critically examines whether present-day SDH theories and instructions sufficiently convey emotional substance through interjections. Using a qualitative approach through a Critical Literature Review (CLR), this study draws on scholarly literature, institutional directives, and theoretical writings related to SDH, audiovisual translation, pragmatics, emotion studies, and accessibility research. This review also covers the main SDH frameworks developed by the BBC, Ofcom, and Netflix, as well as recent studies on emotional accessibility and multimodal communication. It shows that current SDH practices are largely built on an informational accessibility model that focuses on transferring auditory information rather than representing emotional experience. Conventions, on their face, communicate sounds and paralinguistic information, but the latter provides little guidance for conveying the emotional and pragmatic meanings embedded in interjections. Not to mention, today's Ortho typographical conventions fail to accommodate the

complexity of emotional expression. This research contends that emotional accessibility should be recognized as a fundamental dimension of SDH. The article recommends a more context-sensitive and emotion-oriented model that can enable DHH audiences to benefit from both informational and affective equivalence.

Keywords: subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH), emotional accessibility, interjections, audiovisual translation, Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital media platforms has drastically changed audiovisual content consumption for audiences. Worldwide, streaming services, social media platforms, and online video-sharing websites have proven popular channels for entertainment, learning, and information. As this transformation occurred, it also led to increased concern about the accessibility of audio and video media, particularly for those who encounter hurdles in accessing audiovisual information, raising awareness of media accessibility. In these groups, Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) audiences often face challenges in acquiring information in speech, sound effects, music, and other audio communications. As a result, subtitle services for accessibility are becoming increasingly central to ensuring egalitarian access in contemporary media contexts (Romero-Fresco, 2015; Zárate, 2021). Recent research reveals that having accessible media is a social and cultural necessity as well as a technological one, fostering inclusiveness and equitable access to information (Yang et al., 2025). Among the types of audiovisual access, Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) have emerged as one of the most widely used solutions. While standard interlingual subtitles transfer spoken dialogue from one language to another, SDH seeks to bring information that the hearing listener receives as sound (Neves, 2005; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2020). As a result, additional aspects, such as speaker identification, sound effects, music descriptions, and paralinguistic cues, are included in SDH. These features, of course, endeavor as much as possible to reproduce the type of communicative experience available to the hearing audience. Thus, SDH has been incorporated into media accessibility policies by broadcasters, streaming services, and governmental entities in many countries (Mejías-Climont & Richart-Marset, 2022; Zárate, 2021). SDH has emerged from a protracted history of technological, institutional, and scholarly initiatives. The early studies and reports mostly concerned practical implementation and audience accessibility, such as Kyle (1992), Sancho-Aldridge and IFF Research Ltd. (1997), and Jensema (1999), which sought to measure the performance of television subtitling services for Deaf audiences. In both

professional discourses, the role of SDH as a sub-language of subtitling was acknowledged as having unique conventions and practices (Ivarsson, 1992; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998). As Neves (2005) notes, SDH was considered primarily technical rather than an appropriate area of study in translation at the outset. As a result, many early pieces focused on technology implementation and technology standardization rather than on the linguistic, pragmatic, and affective aspects of subtitle production. The position of SDH within AVT studies has gradually consolidated, with the works of Gambier (2003), Díaz-Cintas (2001, 2010), and De Linde and Kay (1999). Their efforts contributed to and solidified SDH as an acknowledged field within translation studies and motivated scholars to explore subtitling beyond technical contexts. Later studies examined audience reception, subtitle readability, cognitive processing, and multimodal communication in audiovisual texts (Romero-Fresco, 2015; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015a, 2015b). Recent studies focused on user-centered approaches to accessibility and highlighted the need to understand what DHH viewers experience and prefer (Yang et al., 2025; Mejías-Climent & Richart-Marset, 2022). All these developments significantly affect the quality and accessibility of subtitles across the media devices used. Most SDH practices currently adopted are shaped by institutional guidelines from leading broadcasters and streaming services. As per the recommendations proposed by the BBC (2019), Ofcom (2017), Netflix (2020), etc., organizations provide a lot in terms of synchronization, reading speed, subtitle segmentation, speaker identification, and sound for all audio segmentation. This guidance offers a good level of consistency and readability, enabling subtitle producers to maintain accessibility standards across a wide range of audiovisual productions. However, the focus of these guidelines is again on the transmission of auditory information. Although they measure the occurrence of sounds, speakers, and nonverbal events, their analyses provide relatively little information about how to approach DHH audience members and about emotional meaning (Neves, 2005; Zárate, 2021). Emotional accessibility has received growing scholarly notice in the past couple of years. Braun and Orero (2010), Remael (2012), and Romero-Fresco (2015) argue that accessibility should not only be a measure of information equivalence but also aim to provide equivalent viewing experiences. Likewise, research by Pataca et al. (2023) and Kim et al. (2023) shows that prosodic and paralinguistic information is a significant factor in shaping how audiences interpret emotions and interpersonal relationships in audiovisual texts. Their research reveals that captioning processes are frequently ineffective at conveying emotional subtleties that are naturally conveyed through vocal articulation, intonation, rhythm, and pitch. As such, DHH viewers might experience limited access to emotional meaning and to narrative data. This

shortcoming is most clearly visible in the description of interjections. Interjections are a unique linguistic category because they often serve as a means of explicitly expressing feelings, reactions, attitudes, and psychological states (Ameka, 1992; Wierzbicka, 1992). Unlike a regular single word, interjections emerge spontaneously during speech, and much of what they mean comes from prosodic awareness or context. Norrick (2009) asserts that interjections play important pragmatic functions for speakers in interpersonal language—they may express surprise, praise, perplexity, disappointment, sympathy, and frustration and are also sources of affective states. The expressive meaning of sentences such as “oh,” “ah,” “wow,” “ugh,” “huh” extends beyond their literal forms. The complexity of interjections is a major challenge for subtitle manufacturing. Jing and White (2021) found that interjections tend to be removed, simplified, or reduced in subtitles during translation, despite their important contribution to the emotional and interpersonal significance of meaning. While hearing audiences can appreciate such emotional subtleties through intonation, pitch, duration, and sound quality, DHH audiences frequently rely solely on written subtitles. Currently, SDH guidelines are comprehensive in their guidance on sound effects and speaker identification, but rarely, if ever, do they explicitly provide systematic guidance on representing the emotional functions of interjections. Thus, the emotional content associated with these expressions may not be entirely comprehensible to DHHers. Although there is an increasingly active research area in audiovisual accessibility, there are comparatively few works that critically analyze whether existing SDH theories effectively reflect emotional meaning in interjections. The scholarly literature has, to date, largely focused on technical accessibility, readability, subtitle speed, audience reception, and multimodality (De Linde, 1995, 1996; Franco & Araújo, 2003; Araújo, 2004; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015a). As a result, a theoretical gap still exists regarding the relationship between emotional accessibility and subtitle representation. This disparity is particularly striking given the importance of emotional meaning to narrative immersion, character development, and audience engagement. Hence, in the present context, this study will endeavor to provide a critical review of current SDH theories and guidelines, with an emphasis on the representation of emotional meaning and the role of interjections. By incorporating insights from audiovisual translation studies, accessibility research, pragmatics, and emotion studies, the article seeks to shed light on existing SDH frameworks and explore ways to introduce accessibility through the lens of emotion. This research ultimately suggests that accessibility refers more to the emotional and experiential aspects of audiovisual communication than to mere access to information.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative research design using a Critical Literature Review (CLR) approach was employed. Rather than summarizing previous studies and offering a straightforward account of research to the community, a critical literature review aims to critique existing theory and practice by examining underlying assumptions and identifying conceptual gaps within the body of evidence (Grant & Booth, 2009; Torraco, 2016). This approach was chosen because the aim of the current study was not just to describe existing Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) guidelines but to critically assess their theoretical capacity of reflecting emotional meanings conveyed through interjections. As the current study challenges the adequacy of existing theories and practices, a critical review approach was recognized as particularly well-fitting for uncovering overlooked dimensions within contemporary SDH frameworks. The research is situated within the interdisciplinary fields of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), Accessibility Studies, Pragmatics, and Emotion Studies. This multidisciplinary orientation builds on existing SDH scholarship, which has drawn on numerous fields to examine the multifaceted nature of accessible audiovisual communication (Neves, 2005; Gambier, 2003; Zárate, 2021). Although AVT studies offer theoretical underpinnings for subtitle production and accessibility, pragmatics offers insights into the communicative roles of interjections. In contrast, emotion studies offer insights into how affective meanings are encoded and engaged with in discourse. Integrating these views allowed the researcher to assess SDH not only as a technical access service but as a multimodal communicative technique that helps shape viewers' emotional experiences. It also contained key academic sources, professional guidelines, institutional reports, theory on SDH, captioning, audiovisual accessibility, interjections, emotional communication, and multimodal meaning (rephrasing in another language, etc.). Literature was gathered from scholarly repositories such as Scopus, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, and institutional repositories. For relevance to current SDH practices, particular emphasis was placed on data from 2020-2025, including reports by Yang et al. (2025), Pataca et al. (2023), Kim et al. (2023), and Mejías-Climent and Richart-Marset (2022). Despite this, core studies that have greatly contributed to SDH theory were also part of this research, such as Neves (2005), De Linde and Kay (1999), Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2020), Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992), and Norrick (2009). The selection of both high-quality and seminal sources enabled the study to chart the evolution of SDH theory while also unearthing enduring theoretical constraints. The selection of literature was based on three inclusion criteria. First, the source had to address SDH, captioning, audiovisual translation, or accessibility to Deaf and Hard of Hearing

audiences. Secondly, the source must address at least one of the following dimensions: emotional communication, paralinguistic information, audience reception, multimodal meaning, pragmatics, or interjections. Third, the book or publication had to be a peer-reviewed journal article, a scholarly book, a book chapter, a doctoral dissertation, an institutional report, or an official subtitle guideline from a recognized organization. Thus, relevant institutional documents like the BBC Subtitle Guidelines (BBC, 2019), the Ofcom Code on Television Access Services (Ofcom, 2017), and the Netflix Timed Text Style Guide (Netflix, 2020) were included in the scope of the present work as these continue to influence current SDH practices worldwide. Sources focused solely on creating subtitle software or on other accessibility-related issues were excluded at this stage of the review. The analysis process consisted of four closely related stages. Mapping the historical and theoretical development of SDH meant in the first stage. The researcher also then examined foundational works discussing the emergence and evolution of SDH, including Ivarsson (1992), Ivarsson and Carroll (1998), Kyle (1992), Sancho-Aldridge and IFF Research Ltd. (1997), Jensema (1999), De Linde (1995, 1996), De Linde and Kay (1999), Franco and Araújo (2003), Araújo (2004), and Neves (2005). This historical mapping was essential for appreciating how prevailing subtitle formats had evolved and why the principle of informational access was taken as the reigning paradigm in SDH. It examined even the process by which SDH began to be acknowledged in Translation Studies by authors such as Gambier (2003), Díaz-Cintas (2001, 2010), and Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2020). For the second stage, the main conventions that are currently used were identified in the SDH guidelines. Special focus was laid on rules for speaker identification, subtitle synchronization, reading speed, sound effects, musical representation, punctuation, capitalization, typography, and paralinguistic descriptions. These conventions were pulled from institutional guidelines and matched with scholarly literature to describe them (BBC, 2019; Ofcom, 2017; Netflix, 2020; Zárate, 2021; Mejías-Climent & Richart-Marset, 2022). The goal of this stage was to examine how present-day SDH systems approach accessibility and which types of information are prioritized for transmission. By this discovery, the researcher also recognized a consistent focus on auditory-event descriptions and informational equivalence. Stage 3 focused specifically on emotional communication and interjections. Utilizing pragmatic theories espoused by Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992), and Norrick (2009), the study investigated the mediating role that interjections serve as carriers of emotional, attitudinal, and interpersonal valences. Special attention was observed to the frequent introduction of the words oh, ah, wow, ugh, huh, ouch, and oops. These expressions were examined in relation to prosodic features such as pitch, intonation, stress, duration, and voice quality. The

results were then compared with current SDH protocols to assess whether contemporary subtitle practice is a sufficient account of the emotional functions of interjections. Findings were supplemented by interjection translation and multimodal meaning-construction studies of audiovisual texts (Jing & White, 2021). The fourth step was critical analysis and theoretical integration. Following the criteria for critical review set out in Torracco (2016), the collected sources were compared, contrasted, and interpreted to identify conceptual strengths, weaknesses, inconsistencies, and gaps in existing research. We focused on the distinction between informational accessibility and emotional accessibility. A particular insight was shaped by recent research emphasizing viewer experience and affective communication in accessible media (Braun & Orero, 2010; Remael, 2012; Romero-Fresco, 2015; Pataca et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2023). At this stage, the research also reviewed the extent to which existing SDH theories adequately account for emotional meaning and whether further theoretical perspectives would be necessary to enhance emotional accessibility to DHH audiences. Methodological triangulation, which involves evaluating three source types: institutional guidelines, empirical studies, and theoretical scholarship, was used to increase the credibility and scope of the findings. Institutional references offered evidence regarding actual subtitling practices, empirical findings reflected audience response and accessibility experiences, and theoretical resources provided conceptual insights for understanding. This integration of perspectives is informed by the dialogic framework proposed by Neves (2005), who posits that real progress in SDH must occur at the practitioner, institutional, and research levels. By merging these diverse forms of evidence, this study aims to build a robust, critical case for how currently accepted SDH frameworks account for the emotionally charged meanings found in interjections and to identify potential directions for further theorizing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Existing SDH Guidelines Prioritize Informational Accessibility Rather than Emotional Accessibility

In a recent analysis of the present-day Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) guidelines, accessibility is primarily understood as the conversion of auditory information into text. The BBC Subtitle Guidelines (BBC, 2019), Ofcom Code on Television Access Services (Ofcom, 2017), and Netflix Timed Text Style Guide (Netflix, 2020) are among the leading institutional frameworks where issues relating to synchronization, subtitle segmentation, reading speed, speaker identification, and sound effect representation receive great attention. These conventions provide a means of conveying information that Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) audiences are unable to access through hearing. Subtitle production has traditionally

emphasized clarity, readability, and rapid information transfer (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2020). As a result, currently implemented SDH frameworks excel at conveying events occurring in an audiovisual text. Yet they are still less powerful in communicating how things happen emotionally to characters and audiences. This focus on information on an accessible basis mirror a more general historic conception of SDH as a service to enable access to missing auditory content. Neves (2005) also notes that early perspectives in the area of SDH were shaped far more by technological and institutional considerations than by linguistic or experiential ones. Accessibility was thus assessed mostly by assessing the ability of viewers to identify speakers, understand dialogue, and recognize relevant sounds. Gambier (2003) makes similar suggestions, arguing that audiovisual accessibility historically has emphasized transmission of information rather than recreation of communicative experiences. While these priorities have advanced media inclusion, they have also created a structure in which emotional meaning tends to be treated less as information to be consumed and more as supplementary information to be absorbed. An overview of SDH guidelines in the context of the world suggests that informational concerns predominate. Mejías-Climent and Richart-Marset (2022) discovered that the objectives for subtitle regulations in various countries are quite similar, especially with regard to readability, synchronization, and sound identification.

There may be minor differences in format, but for the most part, the guidelines focus on the precise depiction of the audible event and not the emotional interpretation of it. For instance, subtitles often call for a label such as [phone ringing], [door slams], [music playing], or [audience applauds]. These labels effectively inform viewers that a sound has occurred, but they only indicate the physical presence of a sound in its narrative context and do not capture the emotional weight that sound carries within that meaning. This creates accessibility at the event recognition, not the emotional engagement level. The predominance of informational accessibility becomes especially apparent in terms of paralinguistic information. Previous guidelines suggest that they should integrate the identification of vocal behaviors that generate meaning with words (e.g., [laughs], [cries], [whispers], [shouts], and [sighs]) within their lists (BBC, 2019; Netflix, 2020). Such conventions certainly enhance accessibility by making those who watch visible communicative behaviors that are otherwise inaccessible. But the labels often are generalizations, not expressions of emotional texture. For example, a sigh might convey relief, disappointment, resignation, frustration, exhaustion, nostalgia, or satisfaction, all depending on the situation. But SDH conventions tend to aggregate them all under a single descriptive classification. This means that emotional differences that audience members who can listen might hear

from vocal delivery can be partially lost in subtitle context as well. Indeed, this is in line with Zárte's (2021) suggestion that accessibility should be understood to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon as well as just a process of transmitting a piece of information. Zárte (2021) states that accessible subtitles should ensure to deliver experiences as much as the hearing audiences experience them.

However, the existing frames for SDH have mostly focused on the dissemination of objective information. This format is effective and has much use for interpreting what is happening in a scene, but it often ignores the ways that a character feels or negotiates a relationship, and how emotions shape the narrative journey. As a result, DHH viewers may have access to non-emotional content while the experience is less emotionally immersive. The study thus indicates that the current SDH philosophy can be characterized by an informational model of accessibility. It assumes that if we convert auditory information into written language, we achieve successful accessibility. While this assumption has led to significant modifications in subtitle quality and consistency, it may not encompass all the experiential aspects of audiovisual transmission. We're trained to see that emotional meaning is not only something that is buried in words, in another layer, but rather a core element of the way viewers make sense of tales, how characters are evaluated in stories, and whether their relationship with stories and others truly resonates. For this reason, emphasizing the accessibility of information to users is a theoretical rather than a genuine answer for achieving the goal of incorporating audiovisuals. The trend in the increase in standardization of SDH practices may only further worsen this limitation.

Technical consistency, readability, and efficiency (BBC, 2019; Ofcom, 2017; Netflix, 2020) are heavily weighted in guidelines developed by major institutions. Although these are necessary standards for accessibility purposes, it also promotes lean and inexpensive subtitle creation. In such circumstances, subtitlers are usually forced to focus on what matters and to omit the secondary content. The emotional subtleties often present in prosody, hesitation, or impromptu responses, for example, can be diminished or filtered out altogether. This tendency is particularly problematic in emotionally charged audiovisual texts where audience engagement is heavily contingent on affective interpretation. In their analysis, we conclude that existing SDH guidelines have met with exceptional success in their performance in improving the accessibility of informational communication, whilst neglecting emotional accessibility. This difference is important because the presence of access to information has nothing to do with the availability of experience. Given the growing focus on user-centered and experience-driven methods found within current accessibility research (Yang et al., 2025), it is a matter of further

thought as to whether informational equivalence is sufficient. The findings of the current study indicate that prospective SDH frameworks may be expected to progress beyond accurate transcription of the auditory event and consider ways emotional meaning can be better represented for DHH audiences.

The Treatment of Interjections in SDH Remains Underdeveloped

Interjections are the most obvious aspect of emotional expression in audiovisual discourse; in the way language is constructed. Language Interjections have long been recognized as a subcategory whose main purpose is to convey feelings, responses, attitudes, and psychological states. In short, Ameka (1992) defines interjections as conventionalized vocalizations that can function as full sentences and directly represent speakers' emotionality. Interjections also offer unique insight into human emotional experience. As Wierzbicka (1992) points out, interjections usually encode meanings that cannot be fully summarized or paraphrased with regular lexical material. Therefore, interjections occupy an especially important position in audiovisual communication. Though critical, interjections remain broadly absent from large SDH guidelines. And reviews of the BBC (2019), Ofcom (2021), Netflix (2024), and FCC (2023) recommendations provide thorough examinations of sound effects, music, speaker changes, and vocal values, but offer no direct recommendations on which to consider in terms of emotional interjections. Very commonly, phrases like 'oh,' 'ah,' 'wow,' 'ugh,' 'huh,' 'ouch' have been transcribed in full. This is an approach that assumes words on paper are enough to create significance.

However, research in pragmatics shows that interjections derive much of their communicative force from contextual and prosodic dimensions rather than from lexical content (Norrick, 2009). This complexity of interjections especially becomes stark as common forms are studied. The interjection "oh" can express surprise, disappointment, realization, admiration, sympathy, or disbelief depending on the intonation and context (Wierzbicka, 1992; Norrick, 2009). Conversely, "ah" can indicate understanding, relief, satisfaction, recognition, or discovery. Generally, hearing audiences comprehend such meanings through auditory cues such as pitch, duration, loudness or softness, rhythm, and voice quality. These prosodic resources may have had little to no access to DHH viewers. Thus, the accompanying written subtitle often fails to convey the intended emotional meaning. Thus, the lack of particular guidelines for interpreting these expressions is a notable shortcoming in SDH theory. Studies focusing on subtitling and interjections specifically support the issue. Another study by Jing and White (2021) explored the treatment of interjections in intralingual film subtitling, finding that these expressions are often

excluded, diminished, or simplified, as they are treated as expendable elements.

The omission of interpersonal and emotional information, though, is rarely random, as the researchers argued. They seem to note that interjections have an important bearing on characterization, emotional tone, and audience engagement. From this perspective, treating them as optional linguistic features may be at odds with creating an environment conducive to accessibility. It could reduce viewers' access to emotional meaning. It becomes even more salient in a multimodal context. Audiovisual narratives are a method for making meaning through the interaction among spoken words, visual images, sound design, music, and performance. Audiovisual translation thus has to be seen as a multimodal process of mediation rather than a matter of linguistic translation (Pérez-González, 2014). Interjections tend to function at the confluence of verbal and auditory meaning, since their meanings cannot be explained except by word of mouth. The presence or absence of prosody within SDH may result in a significant loss of original communicative content when SDH reproduces only the written structure of an interjection. This limitation emphasizes the need for more sophisticated approaches to emotional accessibility within SDH.

Orthotypographical Conventions Are Insufficient for Conveying Emotional Meaning

Additionally, the literature found that the orthotypographical conventions used in representing emotion were a limitation. Contemporary SDH protocols use different visual representations, such as capitalization, italics, punctuation marks, and brackets, as well as color coding and musical symbols to express auditory content (BBC, 2019; Netflix, 2024). These devices make it easier for viewers to distinguish between speakers, differentiate off-screen dialogue, identify sounds, and decipher primary vocal features. Orthotypographical markers have been regarded as a core medium by which auditory phenomena can be converted into visual information (Neves, 2005). On the other hand, the visual strategy, widely adopted by non-specialist learners, is necessary in subtitling, which is accessible to everyone.

In contrast, these conventions afford only a narrow access to emotive subtlety. Capitalization can imply increased volume, but not whether the speaker is angry, frightened, interested, excited, enthusiastic, or desperate. The same cannot be said of labels like [SHOUTING], which indicate that loud speech is being heard but do not specify the emotional motivations for that loudness. The same problem seems to be seen with descriptors like [LAUGHING], [CRYING], and [SIGHING], which aggregate emotional experiences into broad buckets. Although these labels make it easier to read

and perform, they often reduce intricate emotional states to simpler terms. Particularly when prosody drives emotional interpretation, the limitations of orthotypographical conventions are brought to the fore. Prosody includes aspects like intonation, stress, rhythm, pitch variation, and speech tempo, all of which strongly affect emotional expression. Pataca et al.'s research shows that DHH users often have difficulty retrieving emotional information that is processed mainly through prosodic variation. They discover that classic captioning systems only partially capture emotional speech, emphasizing lexical content while ignoring vocalizations. So viewers may pick up what characters say while not necessarily decoding how they say it. Kim et al. (2023) reached similar conclusions and proposed experimental captioning systems designed to model paralinguistic speech cues. In their study, DHH users reported enhanced emotional tone comprehension when captions used visual indicators of vocal expression. These results contradict the notion that classic orthotypographical conventions alone represent affective contents. The authors instead hint that accessibility is likely to require new visual strategies that communicate prosodic and emotional nuance, rather than a simple list of sentences.

Theoretically, these results indicate a significant mismatch between current SDH practices and recent definitions that inform our understanding of these communicative strategies. Emotion is not just a function of words, but is also negotiated through the language, voice, situation, and society. Consequently, if we treat emotional communication only as simple typographical markers, we inevitably underutilize its expressive richness. Existing conventions can assist in information accessibility; however, they are often unable to engage emotional accessibility. This restriction is problematic in certain genres, for example, drama, comedy, romance, and animation, in which emotional involvement is the most critical component of the audience's experience.

Toward an Emotion-Oriented SDH Framework

This review suggests the need for a broader theoretical framework to incorporate emotional accessibility into SDH interventions. Existing guidelines sufficiently cover a broad range of issues related to informational accessibility, yet offer minimal support for representing the emotional meaning of a given message. Thus, future models of SDH should be sensitive to, and move beyond, the assumption that accessibility depends on the transfer of auditory information. Accordingly, accessibility should be considered as a multidimensional concept including informational, experiential, and emotional dimensions (Zárate, 2021). One such avenue is that of the consideration of interjections as a type of complex expressive emotional categories, not as a form of ordinary lexical information. Drawing on Ameka (1992), Wierzbicka (1992), and Norrick (2009), the SDH

guidelines might classify them based on functional, pragmatic, and emotional roles. Rather than a blanket assessment that each “oh” or “ah” occurs identically each time, subtitlers might also take context-dependent factors into account in their interpretation. This would not only recognize for the first time the semantic and pragmatic complexity of interjections, but it would also ensure consistency between subtitled products. A second option would include contributions from recent research on emotional captioning and multimodal accessibility. Studies by Pataca et al. (2023) and Kim et al. (2023) show that visual representations of prosodic data can improve DHH emotional representation in public. These developments suggest that subtitles may communicate more than lexico-linguistic content alone can. In future SDH frameworks, methods might be considered to integrate emotional and paralinguistic content without sacrificing readability or cognitive ease of access.

Last but not least, the notion of affective equivalence should be addressed more in the field of audiovisual translation. Conventional SDH practices seek to achieve informational equivalence by ensuring that DHH viewers have access to sounds that hearing viewers can hear. Access to factual information does not imply access to emotion in the same way. Building specifically on developments made in accessibility studies (Romero-Fresco, 2015; Zárate, 2021), my research suggests that emotional accessibility should be regarded as a valid SDH objective. That perspective could avoid an over-explanation or over-subtitling. Instead, it would foster the development of subtitle practices that strike a balance among readability, informational accuracy, and emotional representation. Finally, this transformation in design can help facilitate a broader approach to audiovisual access, allowing DHH audiences not only to hear what characters are saying but also to feel how they feel.

CONCLUSION

In this study, existing Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) theories and guidelines were critically assessed, focusing on how they represent emotional meaning through interjections. The results show that the available SDH models and conventions significantly enhance audiovisual accessibility by establishing comprehensive standards for synchronization, speaker identification, sound effects, music representation, and other non-verbal auditory information. Such conventions have significantly increased access to audiovisual materials for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) audiences and have played a key role in implementing inclusive media practices. However, while these studies yield positive results, they suggest that emotional accessibility remains an underdeveloped aspect of SDH theory. The existing guidelines are

predominantly concerned with the transmission of audible communication through writing, as the affective component of communication has lagged. These emotional cues are usually translated into generic labels, e.g., [LAUGHS], [CRIES], [SHOUTS], that describe when a sound occurs but do not express the mood. This restriction becomes much more apparent with respect to interjections, which often act as spontaneous depictions of emotion, attitude, evaluation, and psychological response. The analysis further demonstrates that the current common orthotypographical forms (capitalization, punctuation, labels, and formatting devices) do not properly represent emotional interpretation. While these conventions facilitate the readability and accessibility of the text, they typically favor the information's similarity to meaning rather than its emotional quality. As a result, DHH viewers may learn what characters will say and do, although the feelings themselves may be missed. Our results indicate that accessibility isn't just about access to information but may also entail access to the emotional and experiential aspects of audiovisual narratives.

The primary contribution of this study is that it exposes a theoretical void in the literature on SDH: there is no systematic way to depict emotional meaning through interjections. By recognizing this deficiency, the study extends contemporary discussions of audiovisual accessibility beyond technical and linguistic perspectives towards affective accessibility. It posits that emotional meaning must be considered an inherent aspect of communication rather than auxiliary material. Additional work should address the interpretation of emotional interjections and subtitling strategies to better communicate emotional impact in subtitles for DHH audiences. Specific empirical studies on audience reception, multimodal discourse analysis, and experimental subtitle designs would be highly significant to establish a richer, context-sensitive, more emotion-based SDH framework. These developments have the potential to inform a more comprehensive model of audiovisual translation that seeks not only to share content but to produce comparable emotional experiences for all viewers.

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