Enhanced Audio Description:
towards conveyance of cinematography and picture editing through sound design

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Introduction

The Enhancing Audio Description II project seeks to explore the potential of sound design practices and spatial audio to provide accessible film and television experiences for visually impaired audiences. It fuses audio technology and creativity to widen the notion of media accessibility and increase the quality and quantity of provision, providing cutting edge techniques to the UK cultural sector. This poster presents work in progress corresponding to one of our main research questions.

What is EAD?

Enhancing Audio Description is a project that proposes a new paradigm in accessible experiences, in which there is not an overreliance on a narrator's spoken word, as in traditional Audio Description practices. Instead it utilises new accessibility features that include: the addition of sound effects, the spatialisation of dialogue and sounding objects, and first-person narration, to provide accessible experiences that are seamlessly integrated to the soundtrack of a film or television programme. These techniques are integrated into film and television workflows from the development phase up to final delivery.
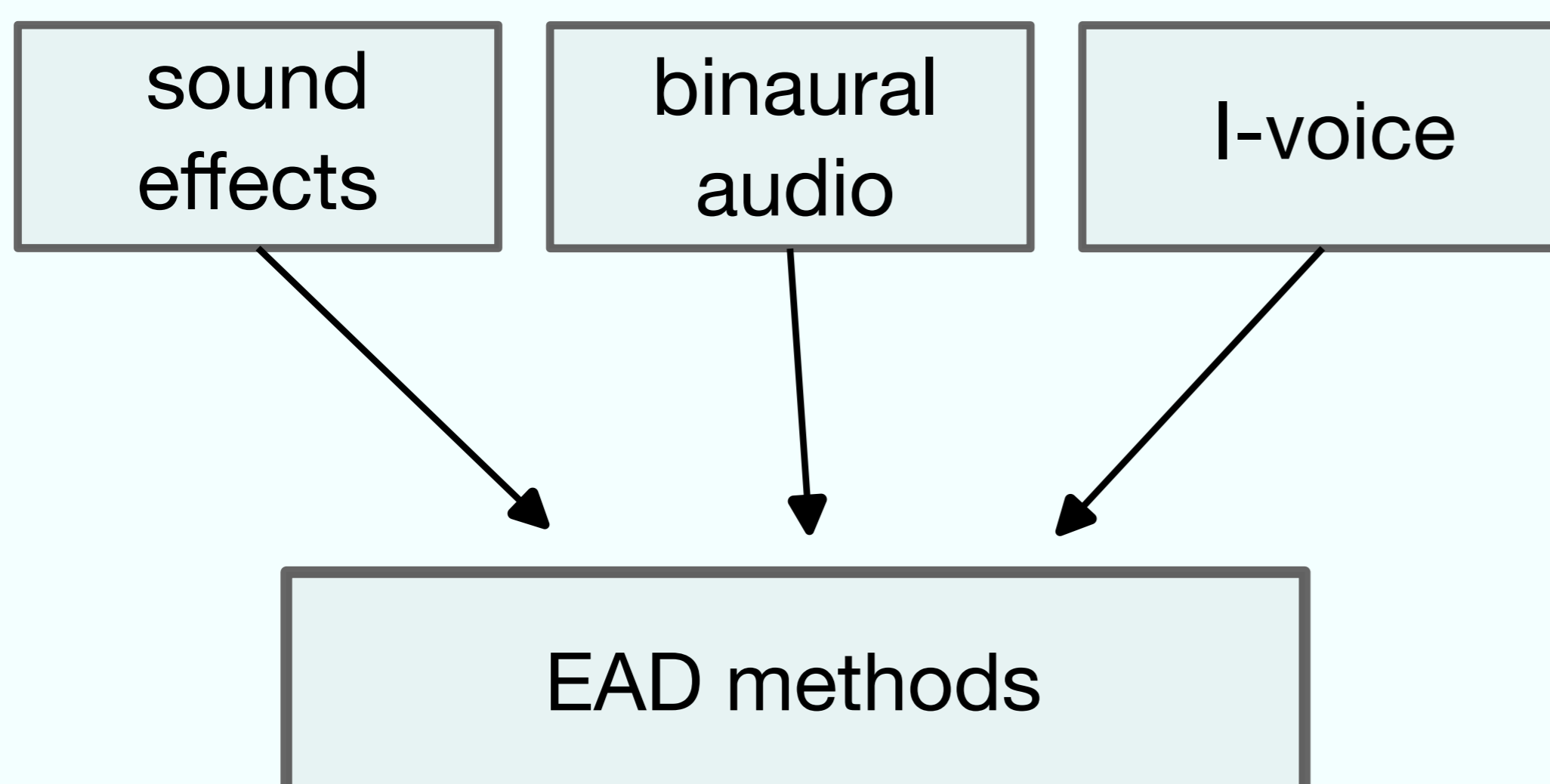
Research question

How can the EAD sound design methods be developed further to convey cinematographic and picture editing elements, such as types of shot, composition, camera angles and pace?

Research stages

1. Literature review
2. **Interviews with postproduction sound professionals**
3. Sound design work on pre-existing audio-visual assets
4. Evaluation sessions with visually impaired participants

Interviews (n=24)

Topics:

• The connection between sound and picture
• Sound techniques used to convey the meaning of cinematographic and picture editing choices
• Effective techniques to connect sound and picture
• Aspects of collaboration across departments
• Awareness of visually impaired audiences
in the film and television industries

Method

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Steps:

1. **Data familiarisation**
2. **Coding**
3. **Generating initial themes**
4. Developing and reviewing theme
5. Refining, defining and naming themes
6. Writing

Some initial thoughts

We have not yet finalised the process of generating themes because the work is in progress, but concepts are beginning to take shape. For instance, interviewees mentioned that the story and the symbiotic link between sound and vision greatly affect sound decisions. They utilise a combination of EQ, reverb, and levels in their sound design to represent the distance depicted in the image while maintaining dialogue intelligibility. They advise subtly altering the volumes of various sound elements to convey shot changes using sound. Also, interviewees confirmed that there is limited awareness of visually impaired audiences among film and television professionals.

References

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