

# wav.ie Case Study

How do people interact and respond to different forms of intersensory translations?

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## Contents

Introduction and Method - - - - -	2
Findings - Survey - - - - -	3
Findings - Visitor Intersensory Translations - - - - -	7
Conclusion - - - - -	10

## Introduction and Method

Intersensory translations are a method of describing one sense using another. Subtitles, alt text and audio descriptions are all examples of intersensory translations which are commonly used in current media. Intersensory translations aim to fill the void which can be left for people with sensory impairments by translating meaning, context and experience between senses.

Intersensory translations allow for some level of personalisation and creativity in their creation. While it is important to make sure that there is a clear subject and description that the translations are describing, liberties can be taken by the author which leads to translations that often are not completely objective and have a small sense of personalisation. Even when creating the most literal/objective translations, there will almost always be underlying prejudices/subjectivity in them.

wav.ie is a study to find the median response to an experimental multisensory & intersensory interactive exhibition. Through the creation of two different styles of intersensory translations, we aim to find what type of translations visitors respond to the best. These two styles are:

- Literal/Objective intersensory translations
- Poetic/Subjective intersensory translations

We aim to conduct a case study which will use the responses of visitors to gain a better understanding of the type of translations that people respond to. Additionally, visitors will create their own translations which will allow us to understand how they write translations and whether they write the same types of translations that they respond best to.

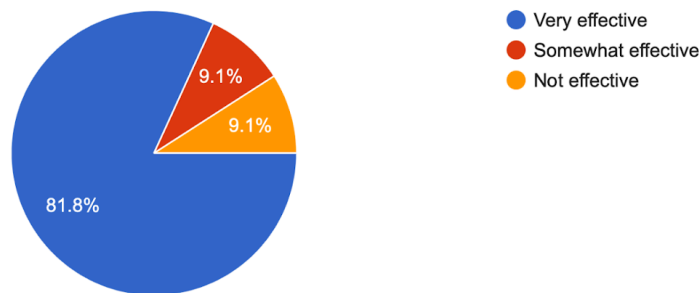
## Findings - Survey

As a result of our exhibition, we had 11 responses to our survey which provided us with the following data.

Q1.

How effective were the literal intersensory translations provided by Jackson at describing the beach setting?

11 responses

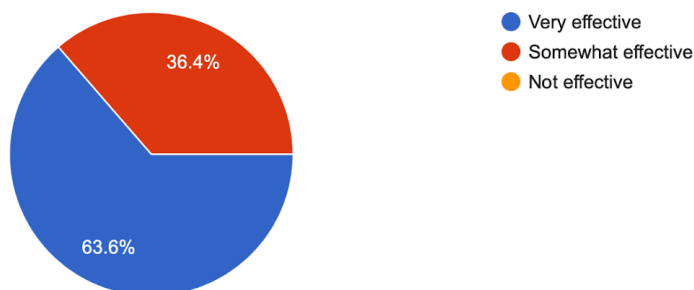


From this question, we can see that most people found the literal translations very effective at conveying what they were experiencing at the exhibition, while some found them to be only somewhat effective or not effective at all.

Q2.

How effective were the personal/poetic intersensory translations provided by Gulliver at describing the beach setting?

11 responses

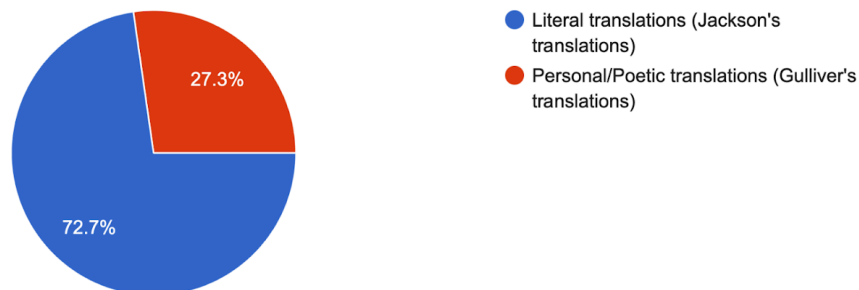


From this question, we see that nobody found the more poetic/abstract translations were completely ineffective. That said, there was a 2 - 1 split of people who found them to be very effective compared to somewhat effective.

### Q3.

Which of the two forms of verbal intersensory translations did you prefer?

11 responses

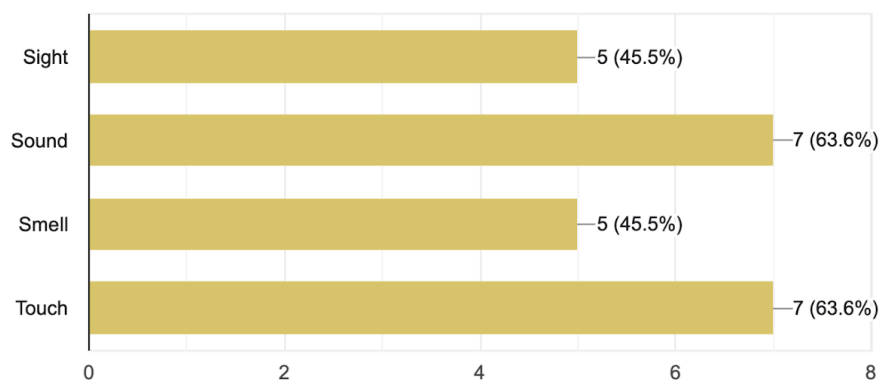


This result shows that roughly 75% of visitors preferred literal translations to personal translations. This is likely a result of more people finding the literal translations were more effective at describing the beach setting than the personal ones. Additionally, the personal nature of Gulliver's translations may have conflicted with others' feelings/experiences at a beach setting which therefore led to them relating more to the literal translations, which are less likely to conflict with their experiences.

### Q4.

Which sense/senses did you think were best conveyed through captions and descriptions?

11 responses



These results find that roughly only 45% of visitors found that the visuals and smells at the exhibit were reflected through the intersensory translations, while this was closer to 65% for the senses of sound and touch. We are unable to determine which form of translations are being referred to in this question, but it is safe to assume that these would be split between 75% literal and 25% poetic as seen in the previous question.

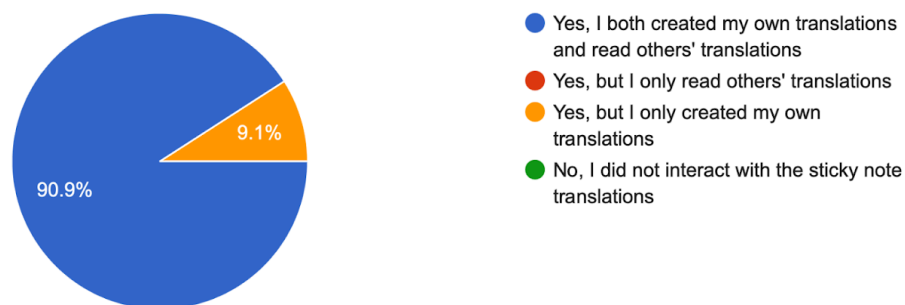
A potential reason for sound being one of the senses best represented by the translations is due to subtitles being the most common form of intersensory translations that people experience. Therefore people are more accustomed to both writing and interpreting them. Additionally, there were many more forms of tactile interaction available at the exhibit which may be the cause of these translations being better conveyed. This extends to the sense of smell too, as there were not many forms of scent at the exhibit, and it was by far the hardest sense to represent of the four chosen ones.

Lastly, sight translations were also only conveyed at a rate of 45%. This may be due in part to it being the scent which was most obscured by the intersensory translations, as text on a white background was layered over the visual content, while the other scents were left relatively untouched. This could lead to a disconnect in the way that visitors connect the visual translations with the visual content.

#### Q5.

Did you interact with the other intersensory translations provided by the sticky notes?

11 responses



We found that every visitor created their own intersensory translations and read others while few only wrote their own. This is supported by the many translations which were left by visitors at the exhibit.

Q6. - Please tell us of any emotions or memories that were evoked by the experience and please tell us what elements of the exhibit triggered these responses:

- Remind me the childhood memory of going fishing with my grannies in the fishing village.
- The ocean sound definitely added a lot more to the experience.
- Memories of holidays at the beach! Mainly the shells triggered this
- for the sound one i thought of the matted oil hair i get from the salt water. the shells reminded me of trips to the beach and that distinct dry to the touch

texture they have, but still manage to leave this unique oily feeling on my hand after.

- I like the remind to take a shower in the captions
- Going to puerto rico in 2017
- This reminded me of times I spent at the family house in golden beach
- Nostalgia and serenity
- I felt like a sense of relaxation was being pushed pretty heavily on me by both the sound design and music as well as the scents in particular - memories of psychologists' waiting rooms and overblown health spas! but in the background too, something reminded me of the gritty, sort of awkward sandy stuffy feelings i experience when i go to the beach - quite separate from the simulated relief and peace of the installation
- It reminded me of going to the beach as a child

Most people left responses that were personal memories which contradicted with the form of translations they preferred but did correlate with the types of translations they wrote.

## Findings - Visitor Intersensory Translations

We had many translations left by our visitors which were broken into four sense groups being sight, sound, smell and touch. Here are the translations that were left.

### Sight

- Respite pharmaceutical, crystal reflecting the moon, metals adjusting the waves
- Deeply mesmerising, Created a, sense of still, At peace
- No sharp edges anywhere
- Is this a nude beach? I feel very overstimulated in my clothing...
- The unnerving absence of waves, foam, receding water...
- A Deep Dark Blue Sky
- I feel overwhelmed by the scale of the ocean, but the sound calms me down. The shadows are amazing
- Soft and delicate, Crashing waves, Memories of childhood, colours I know are unrealistic but are committed to memory, nonetheless
- Cold water, warm air, calm mind, still child.

The translations left for the sense of sight were very poetic and often depicted a more abstract view of the ocean. These translations feel more personal than literal and sometimes refer to personal experiences and memories. All this creates a conflict with the survey results which show that 75% of the viewers preferred the literal translations to the poetic ones.

### Sound

- So relaxing & ethereal. I feel like I'm being carried away into the endless magical sea!
- I imagined my hair all oily and matted because of the sea salt water
- Breen space
- I was on a grey and stormy beach, just before the rain hits
- The music makes me feel good and slightly scared of the vastness of this universe
- Easily the most calming part of the exhibition, I felt like all background noises faded away and I was finally at peace. Mediating...
- My friend Gully and his friend are so talented! Also I feel like I'm on a cloud!
- If the sea was made of organs and you
- Wet bristles cannot brush the new age oZ
- Just what I need before a soccer match
- Noise cancelling headphones were s good idea, I feel like I'm in a deprivation tank
- On Saturn's ring. Spacing out... Gazing at the distant blue planet



Similarly to the sight translations, the sound translations are very personal and sometimes poetic, once again creating a contrast with the prior survey responses. These translations reference memories and experiences and are sometimes written in poems.

## Smell

- The smells are violating my nostrils but I feel dizzy
- Strange + Sweet
- A very unconvincing approximation of “natural” smells, with everything interesting stripped out
- Uncannily sweet
- Smells kinda feel artificial in comparison to the other senses (makes sense with incense not being 1:1) Interesting contrast... kinda feels distant and close at the same time (really makes you think)
- Sea breeze
- The sponge smells fishy!
- Fresh ocean glow & sunrise/dusk!
- I want to smell my fishy freshly grilled oysters.
- Mum’s neck
- Exactly what I need while tripping
- Cloning mediation
- The kinds of smells I’d welcome in a calm environment

Contrasting the prior two senses, the sense of smell translations are much more literal and non-poetic. They often describe the types of smells which people were experiencing and link them to similar, yet broadly acceptable alternatives, rather than smells specific to the author. This could be because smell, as a sense at the exhibit, was the furthest of the four senses from what you may find on a beach which as a result, may have brought visitors ‘out’ of the experience. This is furthered by some of the translations describing the smells to be ‘artificial’ or an ‘unconvincing approximation of “natural” smells. These types of descriptions are not found in the other three senses which may indicate that visitors were more immersed in those senses rather than smell.

## Touch

- I wish, I can, Talk to these, Seashells. I wanna ask, How their lives were. In the ocean. If they were free, and, Happy...
- Cadbury flake, made permanent
- Powdered death for a face scrub
- Basalt – Hard & soft at the same time... traces left on my hands
- Rough & smooth, a combination of soft & hard
- Squishy sponges

- Rough textures -> natural, but the 'artificial' presentation separates it. Interesting, I don't know?? -> reminds me of a museum display, taken out of context. Reminds me of holidays at the beach! (is memory a sense...)
- I can feel the age of everything in my fingers
- At the core, everything is just different forms of tickling
- Ever receding cavity, fingertip width
- I hate sand. It's coarse, rough, and it gets everywhere.
- I am one with mother earth, my body is a temple, the universe is within me.

Finally, the sense of touch returns to the poetic and personal form of translations left by visitors. More memories and experiences are referenced in these translations as well as more abstract descriptions, such as 'Cadbury flake, made permanent' and "I can feel the age of everything in my fingers". Given that touch was the most interactive and numerous sense to interact with as a result of the amount of things to touch, this furthered the idea that visitors wrote poetically and personally about the senses they were more immersed in.

The translations left by visitors tell us a lot about the way in-which people write and relate with their own intersensory translations. The more immersed in a sense someone is, the more likely they are to describe their experience in a poetic and personal way. Countering that, if someone is taken out of an immersive experience, they will describe it more literally. Someone is more likely to recall personal memories if a sense is stimulated in a realistic manner, similar to how smells can trigger very strong memories, which further highlights that the smells provided at the exhibit simply failed to reach the immersive highs of the other senses.

## Conclusion

Intersensory translations have the ability to describe simple things in a vast range of different ways. Literal translations are often the most well-received form of translation and are the best way to describe sense experiences to most people. That said, some people do prefer a more abstract/poetic form of translations and often this is the form that people will create their own intersensory translations in.

Our findings found that while roughly 75% of people prefer reading literal/objective intersensory translations to gain the most understanding, these people may also write their own translations in a more poetic/subjecting way. Depending on the immersion which a person feels when experiencing a sensory experience, they may be more inclined to write their own translations in a more personal way. We found that the more immersed a person was, the more poetically they wrote and the same was true for if someone was not immersed, then they wrote literally.

wav.ie was the first step in understanding the ways in which people both respond to different forms of intersensory translations and write their own translations and we will continue to explore how people respond to the two different forms with our learned knowledge in the future.