Enhancing Foreign-Language Creativity: A Didactic Approach through Audio Description

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ENG Abstract: This paper appraises the potential benefits of didactic audiovisual translation (DAT), aiming to enhance learners' acquisition and proficiency of English as an L2 through audio description strategies. These action-oriented tasks involve two phases: a systematic analysis of the audiovisual source text (ST), and a cross-modal rendering of meaning into a suitable target text (TT), in which learners are required not only to be faithful to the visual information, but also be fluent in the target language to produce an accurate and effective audio description.

In this regard, a qualitative study has been conducted to assess the learning outcomes of participants in a course on didactic audio description for the improvement of English as a foreign language (at B2 level according to the CEFR) developed in the context of higher education. In particular, learning outcomes are assessed in terms of speaking skills and creativity. For this purpose, a corpus has been compiled from the transcripts of the English audio descriptions made by the students for a short animation film. This corpus allows for the exploration of how learners describe orally visual aspects related to actions, physical appearance, and emotions, as well as their competence in expressiveness, utterance, and other communicative skills.

The learning outcomes related to speaking skills and creativity are promising, and advocate for a more comprehensive and integrated pedagogical approach to audiovisual translation teaching in the Translation and Interpreting and the Foreign Language Education curricula.
Keywords: Didactic audio description, didactic audiovisual translation (DAT), media accessibility, creativity, foreign language education.

ES La creatividad en lenguas extranjeras: Un enfoque didáctico basado en la audiodescripción

ES Resumen: En este artículo se evalúan los efectos beneficiosos de la traducción audiovisual didáctica, más concretamente, para la adquisición y el dominio del inglés como segunda lengua mediante el uso de técnicas de audiodescripción. Estas tareas activas constan de dos fases: un análisis sistemático del texto origen (TO) audiovisual y una transferencia multimodal del significado a un texto meta (TM), en el que los estudiantes no solo deben ser fieles a la información visual, sino también desenvolverse con soltura en la lengua meta utilizada para realizar una audiodescripción precisa.

En este sentido, se ha llevado a cabo un estudio cualitativo para evaluar los resultados de aprendizaje de los participantes de un curso sobre audiodescripción didáctica para la mejora del inglés como lengua extranjera (en el nivel C2 según el MCER) desarrollado en un entorno de educación superior. En particular, se evalúan los resultados de aprendizaje en lo que respecta a la capacidad de expresión oral y a la creatividad. Con este fin, se ha compilado un corpus a partir de las transcripciones de sus audiodescripciones en inglés realizadas por los estudiantes para un cortometraje de animación. Dicho corpus permite explorar cómo los alumnos describen oralmente aspectos visuales relacionados con acciones, apariencia física y emociones, así como su competencia en cuanto a expresividad, producción de enunciados y otras destrezas comunicativas.

Los resultados de aprendizaje relativos a las destrezas orales y la creatividad son prometedores, y abogan por un enfoque pedagógico más global e integrado de la enseñanza de la Traducción Audiovisual en los planes de estudio de Traducción e Interpretación y de Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras.
Palabras clave: Audiodescripción didáctica, traducción audiovisual didáctica (TAD), accesibilidad de los medios de comunicación, creatividad, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

Contents: 1. Introduction; 2. Audio description; 3. Methodology; 4. Data analysis and results; 5. Conclusions.

1. Introduction

Media accessibility has gained major attention within academia in recent years, emerging as one of the most promising fields in terms of both didactic and professional prospects (Sanz-Moreno 2018; Pereira Rodríguez and Lorenzo 2021; Permuy 2021). Particularly, audio description (AD) has become a fundamental mode of audiovisual translation (AVT) (Fryer 2016) and media accessibility, entailing a growing need for further and more effective training of Translation and Interpreting students in media accessibility. In this context, several authors have shed light on the skills that audio describers need to develop. For instance, Navarrete (1997) argues that audio describers need extensive knowledge of film and culture, as well as literary skills and a keen ability to appreciate cinema. Díaz Cintas (2007), on the other hand, identifies four basic competences essential for effective audio description: linguistic, thematic, technological, and personal. Among these, he emphasises the importance of proficiency in the native language and the working language, creativity, theoretical and practical knowledge of audio description and disability, and cultural mediation. Furthermore, Arias-Badia and Matamala (2020) highlight the necessity of advanced language proficiency, effective documentation skills for comprehensive information gathering, and competent voicing skills to refine prosody, rhythm, and the delivery of audio descriptions in a pleasant tone.

When exposed an action-oriented AD task in educational contexts —in which the production of an audio description script is involved—, learners may not be provided with a pre-existing text to be translated into a second language (Fryer 2016), although in actual professional practice, audio-describers are in most cases provided with the dubbed version of the audiovisual material when writing the AD script (Sanz-Moreno 2018). Instead, learners are usually prompted to prepare their own AD script from zero, then facing an intersemiotic and cross-modal translation task. To render an effective AD script, Marzà Ibáñez (2010) proposes a set of guidelines to assist students in addressing audiovisual texts. These recommendations specify which information should be described (such as images, unidentified sounds, and on-screen texts) when the description should be introduced (preferably during silences to avoid interfering with dialogues, and in synchrony with the action), and how to convey visuals through oral speech. Regarding the latter, she argues that audio describers should refine the following aspects: (1) clarity in exposition; (2) creation of a fluent, straightforward, adequate, varied, euphonic script with no redundancies; (3) selection of precise and specific vocabulary in coherence with the original elements; (4) use of present tense; and (5) avoidance of first-person pronouns and biased or personal interpretations (Marzà Ibáñez 2010, 149).

The broad spectrum of competences mentioned above underlines the need for comprehensive training programmes in higher education contexts. In fact, from the 2000s onwards, Spanish universities have been offering courses focused on accessibility (Sanz-Moreno 2018). In this sense, the multifaceted nature of AD —encompassing linguistic, cultural, creative, technological and social aptitudes— requires a robust educational methodology to ensure that students are well-equipped to meet the demands of this practice from an empathetic and conscious social perspective, deepening the study and analysis of the multiple codes of meaning that converge in the aural and visual channel, as well as in the description of non-verbal elements (Ogea-Pozo 2022). By integrating all these competences into higher education curricula, institutions can better prepare students to excel in the fields of AVT and media accessibility, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of audio description services.

Concurrently, certain scholars have directed their research efforts towards investigating the benefits of utilizing action-oriented AD tasks to facilitate the development of integrated skills in foreign language education (FLE) (Navarrete 2018, 2020; Vermeulen and Escobar 2021; Marzà Ibáñez et al. 2022; Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano 2022; Talaván et al. 2022). In this regard, Palion-Musiol (2020) asserts that AD strategies applied in the FLE classroom augment learners' efficiency and creativity, while Navarrete (2021), Talaván et al. (2022), and Ogea-Pozo (2022), among others, propose AD tasks to improve general translation skills, written and oral production, and social awareness. Additionally, Maszerowska and Mangiron (2014) and Sanz-Moreno (2017b) explore the potential of AD to foster cultural mediation skills.

Against this backdrop, this paper presents a theoretical justification for the use of didactic AD in FLE, an education approach that involves the narration of audiovisual contents as a didactic tool to improve the communicative competence and linguistic skills in the foreign language (Plaza Lara and Gonzalo Llera 2022). Subsequently, the teaching innovation project that set the framework to undertake this learning experiment will be defined, along with a selection of the outcomes obtained. These findings are mainly focused on the creative and interpersonal use of language in oral production, especially concerning the use of repetition, specific adjectives, and verbs to describe characters and actions accurately, as well as on the use of adverbs and modifiers to describe emotional states (particularly in the case of describing animated audiovisual content for children). Additionally, the analysis focused on how learners decide on pitch, pause, speed intonation, and segmentation, while respecting dialogues and relevant sounds.

This study is part of a more extensive and longer-term methodological proposal carried out within the TRADILEX and ADAS projects,[1] in which researchers from twelve European universities have examined the

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[1] TRADILEX (https://tradit.uned.es/en/proyecto-tradilex-2/) is a 3-year project (2020-2023) sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID2019-107362GA-I00 AEI/10.13039/501100011033), and ADAS (Audio Description in Language Teaching)] is a 1-year teaching innovation project.

improvement of language skills perceived through AVT practices using an action-oriented approach (AoA) in the context of foreign language education (Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano 2022).

2. Audio description

Research and training in media accessibility are becoming essential due to the growing societal awareness of the necessity to comply with current regulations on creating materials accessible to all. Since the beginning of this century, various laws and decrees have been implemented, establishing a set of rights and standards aimed at achieving universal accessibility. Thus, Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that human dignity is inviolable, and Article 26 declares that the EU recognizes and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from policies designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community (Sanz-Moreno 2017b). In Spain, the Spanish Centre for Subtitling and Audio Description (CESyA) was founded in 2007 with the purpose of researching, encouraging initiatives and promoting the use of subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing (SDH) and audio description to support communication. Furthermore, the Spanish "Ley 7/2010 de 31 de marzo", known as "Ley General de Comunicación Audiovisual", stipulates the provision of at least two hours of free broadcast television programming per day for individuals with visual or hearing impairments (Sanz-Moreno 2017a; Permuy 2021). As per the content available on streaming platforms in Spain, only a minuscule amount is accessible, as demonstrated by the study conducted by Arias Badia (2020), in which she states that in 2020 less than 3% of the total content found on Filmin, Movistar+, Prime Video, Apple TV, HBO, Netflix and Disney+ was audio-described and 2% offered sign-language interpretation in Spanish, while 80% was subtitled. Therefore, despite the advances made, audiovisual accessibility still struggles with a challenging path of development. One of the major hurdles in this regard is the lack of awareness, since society has yet to fully grasp the real need for all audiovisual products to be accessible to any user, regardless of their physical or cognitive features (Romero Fresco 2020).

Among the currently existing forms of AVT applied to media accessibility, AD has been acknowledged in recent decades as one of the main practices to facilitate access for blind and visually impaired people to performing arts, audiovisual products, countries' natural, historic and cultural heritage, and other socio-cultural events (Igareda 2012; Fryer 2016; Navarrete 2018). The Audiovisual Translation and Adaptation Association of Spain (ATRAE)[2] defines AD as a communication support service for blind or visually impaired people which compensates for the lack of relevant visual information needed for the overall understanding of a plot with an objective and clear description of the images, so that visually impaired people perceive it in a way that is as similar as possible to the way sighted people do (ATRAE, n.d.).

AD is an intersemiotic mode (Fryer 2016; Jakobson 1959) that requires creative skills and extreme attention to details (ATRAE, n.d.) to translate the visual content into words. Hence, AD entails conveying, through an additional oral narration, visual information that would otherwise not be so readily understandable to blind and visually impaired audiences. Snyder (2005, 192) defines it as a form of literary art in which "the visual is made verbal, aural, and oral", while Fryer (2016, 9) suggests that it should be understood "as the use of speech to make audiovisual material accessible to people who might not perceive the visual element themselves". In other words, AD delivers an audible input (through narration or voice-over) that translates or explains what is seen on the screen, allowing the audience to comprehend the message entirely, and entails the depiction of details about the scene, characters and actions that are essential for interpreting the plot (Ogea-Pozo 2022). Additionally, non-verbal communication conveyed through gestures and facial expressions should also be considered, since they reflect the characters' emotional state and are essential in the understanding of a film (Igareda 2012).

From the professional perspective, certain rules and guidelines should be considered when writing and delivering an AD. In Spain, the UNE 153020 standards (AENOR 2005) establish key principles for creating the script. These include tailoring information according to the target audience's characteristics and needs ; using a fluent and clear style of writing, with a preference for present tenses; using specific terminology and definite adjectives; applying the space-time rule to describe the "when, where, who, what, how" of each situation; avoiding details easily deduced from the plot or revealing events that break suspense; and refraining from providing a subjective point of view. Concerning the space-time rule when in AD script creation, it is essential to distinguish two modes: narration and description. Narrative AD sets the scene in terms of characters and location ("when", "where", "who", "what", also known as "need to know" elements), while descriptive AD provides visual details ("how", also known as "nice to know" elements) (Fryer 2016). Therefore, audio describers must conduct a systematic and detailed analysis of the source text (ST) to determine the exact meaning of each component, and then make informed decisions on how to render that meaning in a suitable target text (TT) (Vercauteren 2022).

According to ATRAE (n.d.), creative expression is essential for producing memorable and understandable AD scripts. As Braun (2007) points out, the cognitive processes involved in creative language use and the social and communicative functions of creativity in language may be relevant. Through a deep exploration of the cognitive processes implicated in creative language use, audio describers are able to select descriptive language that captures the essence of a scene more vividly. Additionally, recognizing the social and communicative functions of creative language —considering factors such as social and cultural nuances— can also help audio describers generate descriptions that are suitable for the intended audience. In this sense, audio

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[2]   Retrieved from https://atrae.org/audiodescripcion/

describers should be especially careful with the syntax and vocabulary when preparing an AD for children, since the oral descriptions should catch the children's attention by means of a friendly tone (Ramírez Barroso 2023), as well as expressive adjectives and adverbs (ITC 2000, cited in Ramírez Barroso 2023).

In summary, the preparation of an AD script differs from other forms of discourse in several key ways. It employs a straightforward style characterised by the use of the present tense and a selection of precise, yet economical and vivid language. This approach avoids ambiguities, redundancies, and cacophonies, always bearing in mind the fact that an AD script is intended to be read aloud (Fryer 2016). Additionally, it incorporates principles of discourse analysis (Braun 2007) that help audio describers improve the quality and effectiveness of their descriptions. Together, these strategies make visual media more accessible and enjoyable for audiences of all ages.

2.1. Didactic audio description

Education remains one of the contexts in which the importance of media accessibility can and should be addressed. This is essential to fulfil Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (www.un.org), which specifically pertains to "Reduce inequalities". Alternatively, the extensive benefits of use ing audiovisual content for pedagogical purposes have been thoroughly explored for the past two decades (Williams and Thorne 2000; Herrero and Vanderschelden 2019; Talaván 2020; Fernández-Costales et al. 2023). While subtitling and dubbing have been the primary modes garnering interest in research for decades, a recent shift has turned towards AD as a potential didactic tool within the realm of FLE. Indeed, this growing interest in AD in recent years may be attributed to two significant facts: the enforcement of regulations across different countries mandating accessibility in media products and thereby boosting the relevance of AD and other accessible modes, including SDH, as well as the expanding use and societal awareness towards AD (Navarrete 2018). Regarding didactic AD, Palion-Musiol (2020) suggests that the use of AD strategies in the foreign language classroom stimulates the two hemispheres of the brain, making learners more efficient and creative while improving different competences, like mediation skills and social awareness (Ramírez Barroso 2023). Likewise, AD is proven to be an excellent resource for the acquisition of audiovisual and specialised translation skills (Ogea-Pozo 2022), as well as to enhance written production (Talaván et al. 2022).

Numerous projects and studies have been conducted to investigate the use of AD as a pedagogical resource, particularly in FLE contexts, and many of these have been compiled by Lertola (2019). Noteworthy among them are the ClipFlair Project, a significant initiative funded by the European Commission and conducted by Sokoli (2013); and Rodrigues Barbosa's research (2013) on the use of AD as a language tool for teaching Spanish as an L2. Lertola (2019) also references the model developed by Burguer (2013) to employ AD as a novel tool in teaching German as a foreign language, or the ARDELE project (Audiodescripción como Recurso Didáctico en ELE; *Audio description as a Didactic Resource for Spanish as a Foreign Language) developed by (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013)Furthermore, it is pertinent to acknowledge the audio description project (ADAS) in which the present study was framed. ADAS was put into practice by UNED (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia) and UCO (Universidad de Córdoba) in the academic year 2021/22, within the broader landscape of studies exploring the pedagogical applications of AD.*

Traditionally, when it comes to the use of audiovisual content in the educational framework, students used to play a passive role. Alternatively, some of these projects emerged to promote a pedagogical approach to language learning based on the use of AoA tasks, placing learners at the centre of the process, and prompting them to create the audiovisual material themselves (Lertola 2019; Talaván 2020). In this sense, the Council of Europe's educational policies aimed at promoting multilingualism have grown researchers' and scholars' interest in the use of AVT for language learning (Navarrete 2018; Lertola 2019). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is oriented towards cultivating learners as "language users and social agents", (Common European Framework of Reference, 2020, 29) transcending the conventional role of being mere students of a given language. Within this perspective, the CEFR proposes the aforementioned action-oriented approach, in which learners are encouraged to "use the language rather than just learning about the language (as a subject)" (Common European Framework of Reference 2020, 30). This approach redirects the focus of FLE towards furnishing tasks whose aim goes beyond language acquisition, such as planning a given activity or creating a blog (Common European Framework of Reference 2020). To reach this goal, the CEFR introduces "can do" descriptors as a guiding framework. The concept of "can do" descriptors as a reference in language teaching and learning stems from the professional training of nurses, where there was a recognised need to assess competences that could not be adequately evaluated through traditional testing methods. These descriptors serve as a guide for designing the most effective communicative activities and the appropriate strategies so that the learner can meet the goal of being an active entity of the FLE (Common European Framework of Reference 2020).

Four types of AoA activities can be performed when learning a foreign language: reception activities (oral comprehension, audiovisual comprehension, reading comprehension), production activities (oral production and written production), interaction activities (oral interaction, written interaction, online interaction), and mediation activities (mediating a text, mediating concepts, mediating communication) (Common European Framework of Reference 2020).

Regarding production activities (oral production), the CEFR offers five scales: 1. Sustained monologue: describing experience; 2. Sustained monologue: giving information; 3. Sustained monologue: putting a case; 4. Public Announcements; and 5. Addressing Audiences. This study focuses on oral production activities; specifically on sustained monologue: describing experience, the kind of scale proposed by the CEFR to promote

creative, interpersonal language use. This scale, sustained monologue: describing experience, is related to describing and narrating events (Common European Framework of Reference 2020).

This didactic AD task is intentionally aligned with the oral production activities recommended by the CEFR. Specifically, it corresponds to "Sustained monologue: describing experience"(Common European Framework of Reference 2020, 62). This scale is tailored to foster and encourage creative interpersonal language use within the context of oral production. By engaging in the didactic AD task, learners not only boost their English language proficiency, but also participate actively in activities that resonate with the CEFR's objectives for promoting effective and expressive communication.

As previously mentioned, AD constitutes an intersemiotic transfer mode where visual content is transformed into words (Igareda 2012). The audio describer must create an AD script, and although this script is a written text, it should diverge from conventional formal written texts. As Arma (2012, 42) puts it, "texts are not spoken or written; they stand in between spoken-spoken texts (spontaneous, non-planned conversation) and written-written texts (formal, planned written texts)". An AD script serves as the medium to structure and shape the chosen words employed during the delivery of the AD. However, such written text does not fit into the formal, planned texts group, but instead, it stands in an intermediate position. It is considered written because it involves the depiction and organization of visual information, yet it is spoken because the ultimate purpose of the AD is to articulate such translation in the spoken mode. Therefore, AD would remain a particular language system involving a unique process (Piety 2004).

The language system is divided by Piety (2004) into three components: "insertions", "utterances", and "representations". Insertions refer to a "contiguous stretch of description that is uninterrupted by other significant audio content, such as dialogue" (Piety 2004, 11). On the other hand, *utterances* are "the unit of language that is actually spoken (as opposed to the more common construct, the sentence, which is not always a component of spoken discourse)" (Piety 2004, 13). Finally, *representations* "are the semantic units [...] divided into seven types of information: *appearance, action, position, reading, indexical, viewpoint, and state*" (Piety 2004, 14).

2.2. Oral creativity and speaking skills

The analysis presented in this paper underscores certain facets that may imply creativity skills, including the incorporation of repetition, the employment of precise descriptive adjectives and verbs, and the utilization of adverbs and modifiers to convey emotions, as well as aspects bound to oral discourse, such as utterance, intonation, segmentation, and pauses. Indeed, these elements are particularly significant when describing children's audiovisual content, as they actively contribute to enhancing the vividness, clarity, and engagement of the oral descriptions. As stated by Ramírez Barroso (2023, 53), an AD for visually impaired children should be filled "with expressive words that keep the audience's attention and a voice-over that matches the characters' feelings and emotions" and this may imply the addition of "information to contextualise some sounds or elements to ensure that children understand what is happening", such as "information about the colour, the shape or the source of a sound". In sum, AD scripts for children's audiovisual content should be structured around key topics such as the cognitive processes involved in creative language use, the social and communicative functions of creativity in language, and the specific linguistic features (Braun 2007).

In this regard, Igareda and Maiche (2009, 20) point out that "one of the biggest challenges when doing any AD emerges when emotions and gestures must be described, and it would be desirable to avoid any personal interpretation by the one who describes the audiovisual material". This phenomenon occurs mainly because each culture has distinct ways of expressing feelings and emotions, and individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds may not share gestures or experience emotions in the same manner. These variations arise from differences in prior experiences, learning, character, cultural norms and situational contexts (Igareda and Maiche 2009). Consequently, emotional expression and perception are shaped by a complex interplay of individual and cultural factors.

Regarding creativity in language, this entails intricate cognitive processes, such as the establishment of pertinent connections between concepts to construct vivid mental representations, and the employment of critical thinking to discern the most effective linguistic elements for conveying these representations. For instance, certain aspects delineated within this study, such as the use of precise descriptive adjectives and verbs, adverbs, and modifiers to articulate emotions, as well as the segmentation of utterances, serve as manifestations of these cognitive processes.

Thus, oral creativity and speaking skills are inherently intertwined, as they both involve the effective use of language to convey ideas, emotions, and information. Oral creativity encompasses the ability to innovate, embellish, and adapt language in ways that capture attention, evoke imagery, and resonate with the audience. Speaking skills, on the other hand, encompass a broader set of abilities related to communication, including articulation, pronunciation, fluency, coherence, and confidence. These skills are essential for effectively conveying creatives ideas envisaged by the learners. So, we consider that oral creativity enhances speaking skills by encouraging individuals to think flexibly, expressively, and imaginatively in their verbal communication.

Furthermore, these aspects fulfil significant social and communicative roles by fostering engagement, eliciting emotional resonance, and facilitating efficient information transfer between the audio describer (i.e., the student) and the listener. Learners can enhance their comprehension and empathy by choosing language that aligns with the user's experiences and emotions. For instance, the choice of describing a cloud as "grey" and its mood implications demonstrate an understanding of shared and contextual meanings (Braun 2007).

3. Methodology

In the framework described above, this proposal emerges as the result of the collaboration between the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and the University of Córdoba within the TRADILEX project and the Teaching Innovation Project ADAS (Audio Description in Language Teaching). These projects involve researchers from twelve European universities who collectively investigate the enhancement of language skills perceived through AVT practices, using an AoA in the context of FLE.

The main purpose of the TRADILEX project, in general terms, is to determine the degree of improvement in the process of learning English as an L2 in adults thanks to the introduction of AD as a pedagogical tool since previous studies such as those carried out by Bausells-Espín (2022), Navarrete (2018) and Talaván et al. (2022) have revealed the positive effect of this modality in FLE in a broad sense. With respect to this paper in particular, the main goal is to observe the achievements in oral creativity and speaking skills, focusing on the insights obtained from the students' sixth and last task, in which they were prompted to use expressive language to produce an AD script for a children's short film. Throughout a hybrid-format course, encompassing both face-to-face and virtual sessions, participants were provided with theoretical and practical training to eventually complete a didactic sequence designed for students with a B2 level of English as an L2 (according to the CEFRL). This didactic sequence was structured in six lesson plans (LPs) focusing on interlinguistic AD (Spanish to English). To gauge the efficacy of the course, two tests were used to evaluate the students' progress at the beginning and the end of the course, respectively. These tests, tailor-made and specially adapted to the needs of the TRADILEX project, are called Initial Test of Integrated Skills (ITIS) and Final Test of Integrated Skills (FITIS) and offer a diagnostic report of the actual English level of the participants (Couto-Cantero et al. 2021) before and after the completion of the course.

The comprehensive course was designed to foster the development of various skills, including reception and production, mediation, strengthening of grammatical, lexical, and intercultural competences, improvement of the use of ICT (information and communication technology tools), development of creativity in L2, and enhancement of motivation towards the learning of foreign languages.

3.1. Sample and procedures

This paper presents partial results derived from a didactic experiment conducted in 2022 with a group of students (N=53 out of 66 enrolled) from different Spanish higher education institutions and academic programs. These participants, aged between 20 and 25 and pursuing their bachelor's degrees, who took part in a 6-week course titled "Audio description and English as a Foreign Language (B2 level)" held at the University of Córdoba. The said course was held in the framework of the teaching innovation project ADAS and the R&D&i Project TRADILEX (2020-2023). The primary purpose was to train students to acquire basic skills to produce written scripts and deliver audio descriptions in English and Spanish.

Alongside the initial and final questionnaires aimed at assessing and reinforcing the acquired skills, as well as a plenary session in which the main theoretical contents related to AD practices and the potential of didactic AD were explained, the students of the course had to complete six action-oriented AD tasks (referred to as "lesson plans," LPs) based on the methodology formulated by Talaván and Lertola (2022, 28). These tasks followed a pre-determinate structure consisting of four sequential stages for each LP, as described below:

1. Warm-up (10 minutes). Students perform introductory exercises to delve into the main topic and deepen some aspects of English grammar and vocabulary at B2 level.
2. Video viewing (5 minutes). Students watch a 2-minute video in English (which would be subsequently used for the AD task) and are prompted to answer a list of questions.
3. Didactic AD (30 minutes). Students produce an AD script in English and record their own AD track with the freeware Lightworks for video editing, based on the guidelines provided during the plenary session.
4. Post AVT task (15 minutes). Students are exposed to a piece of text from an online source related to the topic of each LP. Subsequently, they complete writing and speaking tasks.

In reference to the didactic English AD task outlined in Stage 3, "Didactic AD", learners were provided with the following guidelines to facilitate the preparation of their scripts:

a. Lexical accuracy and richness. It is recommended to use accurate descriptions and look for exact words that build the corresponding images in the audience's mind, using short descriptions that do not interfere with the dialogue.
b. It is necessary to express actions and describe situations through specific functions and syntactic structures, avoiding unnecessary information that may be supported by aural elements, redundancy, and anticipation of content or actions, among others.
c. Additionally, creative, intersemiotic translation solutions focusing on the interpretation of the visuals are allowed, but accurate and precise words and structures must be employed.
d. Students are prompted to verify whether their descriptions convey the intended meaning and, if not, opt for more creative solutions.

After the accomplishment of each lesson plan (from a total of six LPs), students' AD tasks were individually assessed by five external reviewers to guarantee impartiality. In order to ensure consistency in the assessments, the reviewers were provided with a rubric designed within the framework of the TRADILEX methodology and which focuses on the five competences displayed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Assessment rubric used in ADAS (Talaván 2020, 577)

Competence	Qualification and punctuation			
	Poor	Adequate	Good	Excellent
Lexical accuracy and richness of the translated text	0-5 points	6-10 points	11-15 points	16-20 points
Grammatical precision and reduction	0-5 points	6-10 points	11-15 points	16-20 points
Creativity	0-5 points	6-10 points	11-15 points	16-20 points
Fluency and speed of speech	0-5 points	6-10 points	11-15 points	16-20 points
Synchrony	0-5 points	6-10 points	11-15 points	16-20 points

This paper examines the results obtained in terms of speaking skills and oral creativity. For this purpose, the discussion will be centered on the final lesson plan (LP6), with a concise comparative analysis to the initial lesson plan (LP1). It is worth mentioning that LP6 was selected for examination since the AD task placed particular emphasis on the creative dimension of oral production while describing a children's short film. To assess the creative and interpersonal use of language in oral production, a corpus of transcripts from the AD tasks performed by the 52 learners was compiled using the corpus manager and text analysis software Sketch Engine. The analysis delved into the following specific aspects indicative of creativity:

a. The use of repetition.
b. The employment of specific descriptive adjectives and verbs.
c. The use of adverbs and modifiers to convey feelings.
d. The patterns of utterance, intonation, segmentation and pauses.

These elements are crucial because they directly contribute to the vividness, clarity, and engagement of the oral descriptions. To encourage learners' creativity, the instructions provided for the activity included the following remark: "Produce a creative audio description for the second part of the video. Write down your own script trying to provide an alternative version of the original images. You can be as creative as you want trying to cause an effect of contrast and surprise on the audience who cannot see the images. Try to include humoristic elements if possible."

The short film used in LP6 for the AD task was Partly Cloudy (Sohn 2009), a Pixar animated comedy short film that tells the story of a lonely grey cloud that works at creating endangered species babies. It is noteworthy that the short film has no dialogue, so gestures, action and visual narrative are given special prominence in the story.[3]

4. Data analysis and results

As previously mentioned, the analysis of this study is focused on the final LP (LP6) titled *Partly Cloudy*, just like the short film selected for the AVT task. Special emphasis is placed on scrutinizing one of the stages integrated into the LP, i.e., the didactic AD task, in which students were actively engaged in producing their English scripts and subsequently recording their own AD tracks.

A first glance at the outcomes from the didactic AD task indicates notable improvements across all five competences assessed in the rubric (see Figure 1). These competences encompassed: lexical accuracy and richness of the translated text; grammatical precision and reduction; creativity; fluency and speed of speech; and synchrony. As illustrated in Figure 1, the average scores achieved by the participants undertaking LP6 further underscore their improvements. Given that this task marked the culmination of a sequence involving six distinct LPs, the results may suggest a positive and favourable outcome, reflecting the students' progress in the domain of AD.
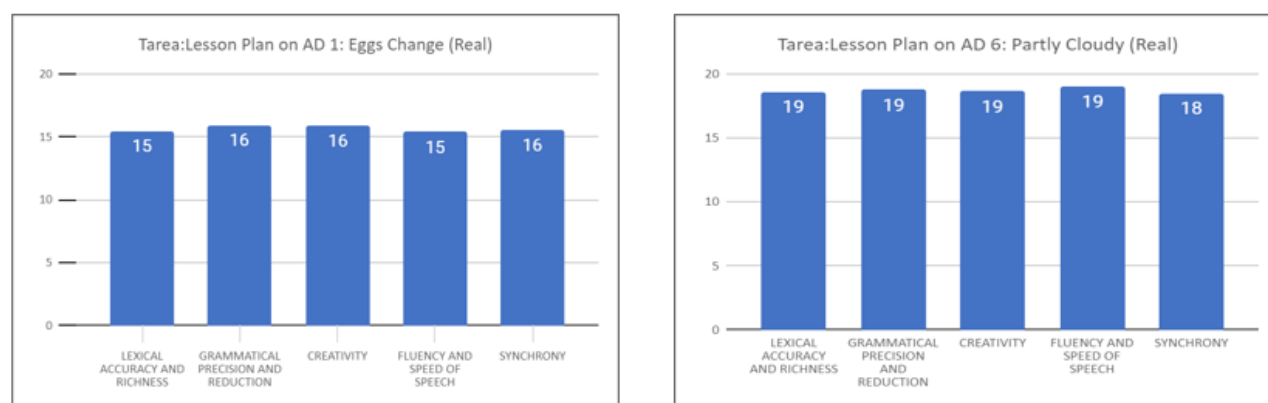

Figure 1. Average qualifications for the five competences assessed in the rubric for LP1 and LP6

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3   The short film *Partly Cloudy* is available at https://www.pixar.com/partly-cloudy.

The pivotal analysis of this study is based on the students' transcriptions obtained from their corresponding recordings for LP6. The focus was on enhancing creative language use in English, while ensuring the utility of their descriptions in providing a comprehensive understanding of the visual content.

Taking Piety's (2004) three structural components of the language system of AD (insertions, utterances, and representations), the transcriptions have been analysed at each level to show the potential of AD strategies to develop creative oral production. According to Piety (2004), the first component —*insertions*— is the essential element of audio description, since it involves the strategic placement of language within specific places of the production. In the case of *Partly Cloudy*, the clip lacks dialogue, but this absence of dialogue does not mean that the AD delivery should cover the entire duration of the clip. On the contrary, learners should be capable of discerning and selecting the appropriate instances where the AD can be delivered, carefully avoiding insertions during scenes where sounds or music are integral to the plot and need to be distinctly audible to help users understand the narrative.

The second component described by Piety (2004, 12) is *utterances*, understood as "the unit of language that is spoken (as opposed to the more common construct, the sentence, which is not always a component of spoken discourse)". According to the author, these utterances can be rendered by the audio describer in any way to fill the time available in the insertion. Utterances can be as long as the insertion itself or much shorter if needed, and they appear to the audience as short snapshots of language that describe some visible features. Additionally, Piety (2004) explained that utterances are threaded together to fill the space between dialogue.

Based on Piety's (2004) definition, it can be concluded that in those transcriptions where relevant sounds were not considered, the number of insertions was one because these students considered that there were no significant sounds contributing to the overall understanding of the scene. The utterances, then, represent the units of language used to fill in the insertion. On the other hand, other students recognised certain sound effects as relevant to the plot. Hence, they made more insertions, and within each insertion, they included descriptions, with the utterances or units of language constituting the AD. In this sense, the following example taken from the corpus illustrates Piety's view that utterances —or spoken language units in insertions— do not necessarily adhere to the same conventions governing sentence structure and distribution in written language: "Further down a darker cloud looks worried. | It kneads a piece of cloud with its hands | and creates a small crocodile." From a written perspective, the second sentence should be read as one sentence with no interruptions. However, the student opted to include the first part of the description in one insertion, paused to allow the audience to listen to the relevant sounds, and then continued in a subsequent insertion with the remainder of the description. The utterance component indicates that the structure of the language, although initially written, does not strictly follow the written conventions when delivered in audio description. This practice mirrors spoken monologue in description, where words are not necessarily continuously spoken but selectively delivered to help the listener or user construct a mental representation of the scene. This approach diverges from written modes, enhancing accessibility and comprehension in AVT contexts.

The third component of Piety's (2004, 13) model is *representations*, as he remarks: "utterances and insertions are based on the physical properties of what is said (segments of description bounded by pauses)". In contrast, representations are the semantic units that need to be selected accordingly by the audio describer to communicate what the describer means. Piety's representations are classified into seven categories, each providing distinct types of information: appearance, action, position, reading, indexical, viewpoint, and state. Fryer (2016) stresses that word choice and word order play a crucian role in to creating an economical yet vivid AD. In spoken monologue, these qualities are critical for effectively delivering a message that the audience can understand quickly and clearly. The CEFR (2020) also emphasises that the L2 user must have "a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions." It also needs to be mentioned again that the describer must remember AD's oral nature. From Piety's classification of representations, the following have been considered with examples in this study: appearance, action, and state.

The first representation —*appearance*— refers to words that describe the external and physical characteristics of any human, animated character, object, or entity. The corpus, compiled in Sketch Engine and consisting of AD scripts created by participants for *Partly Cloudy*, reveals that depicting adjectives or modifiers predominantly focused on the characters' size and colour. This emphasis was particularly notable for the main characters, being a living adult cloud, a stork, and a baby crocodile, with special attention given to the cloud character as the central figure of the story. Notably, descriptions of the cloud character had the highest frequency of occurrences in physical descriptions. Among the various adjectives used, *grey* and *dark* (see Figures 3 and 4) emerged as the two most frequently chosen descriptors by most participants.

Left context	KWIC	Right context
\<s>We see a	**grey**	**cloud** ; he appears to be evil.\</s>\<s>He starts
t of its feathers on the cloud's nose.\</s>\<s>A	**grey**	**cloud** lies below the contented ones.\</s>\<s>SI
tork takes it away, a little frightened.\</s>\<s>A	**grey**	**cloud** is isolated.\</s>\<s>She looks up sadly wi
nim.\</s>\<s>An exhausted stork is flying to the	**grey**	**cloud** and stops next to him.\</s>\<s>The cloud
waves its hand with a dubious face.\</s>\<s>A	**grey**	nervous **cloud** is apart from the previous group
cruffy stork shows up, exhausted.\</s>\<s>The	**grey**	**cloud** and the stork are good friends, and they
The cloud waves bye bye Here we can see a	**grey**	animated **cloud** which is creating a new living t
nd the stork goes to deliver.\</s>\<s>We see a	**grey**	**cloud** looking worriedly at the other's creations
says goodbye.\</s>\<s>After some thought, the	**grey**	**cloud** moulds an elongated creature and turn it
shakes.\</s>\<s>The stork flies away.\</s>\<s>A	**grey**	**cloud** stands apart from the rest.\</s>\<s>He is
th the bundle.\</s>\<s>Under the red clouds, a	**grey**	**cloud** , lonely and sad, with a piece of itself trie
stork's feather on his nose.\</s>\<s>There is a	**grey**	**cloud** that is also trying to create life.\</s>\<s>Bι
nim.\</s>\<s>A stork flies up and arrives at the	**grey**	**cloud** a little tired.\</s>\<s>He greets the cloud ε
on its nose.\</s>\<s>Near the clouds, there is a	**grey**	**cloud** .\</s>\<s>It looks sad but tries to create cι
ands on it."\</s>\<s>Near the clouds, there is a	**grey**	**cloud** .\</s>\<s>It looks sad but tries to create cι

Figure 3. *Grey* as the most used modifier for the appearance category

Left context	KWIC	Right context
d-bye with his hand.\</s>\<s>There is a	**dark**	**cloud** below.\</s>\<s>She is lonely and sad.<
s, the dinosaur attacks him."\</s>\<s>A	**dark**	**cloud** kneads a piece of cloud and creates ε
A stork comes flying and lands on the	**dark**	**cloud** .\</s>\<s>He gasps for air.\</s>\<s>The
/s>\<s>Meanwhile, a stork reaches the	**dark**	**cloud** and the cloud catches her.\</s>\<s>Th
feather the stork left on it.\</s>\<s>The	**dark**	**cloud** starts creating a new pet.\</s>\<s>It is
stork lands into the cloud.\</s>\<s>The	**dark**	**cloud** and the stork have fun together.\</s><
neepishly, his face reddened.\</s>\<s>A	**dark**	**cloud** appears isolated, it makes a small lior
cloud says goodbye.\</s>\<s>There's a	**dark**	**cloud** aside from the others and you can seε
and flies away.\</s>\<s>Further down a	**darker**	**cloud** looks worried.\</s>\<s>It kneads a piec
d the cloud looks sad again.\</s>\<s>"A	**dark**	**cloud** appears isolated.\</s>\<s>A crocodile i

Figure 4. *Dark* as the second most used modifier for the appearance category

Other modifiers were adjectives related to colours (*red*, *pink*, *black*, *yellow*) and size (*short*, *large*, *small*). In fact, the use of simple modifiers, such as *grey* or *dark*, is noteworthy in the context of children-related content. This aligns with the view expressed by Ramírez Barroso (2023) that children's AD should be straightforward and easy to understand, while also serving as a tool to facilitate their learning about the world. The simplicity and accuracy of these modifiers are particularly crucial in ensuring a clear and accessible description for the intended young audience. Using simple language enhances comprehension and engagement, meeting the need for clarity and simplicity in audio descriptions intended for children. The choice of uncomplicated modifiers contributes to a more effective and enjoyable viewing experience for the potential audience.

The second category —action— pertains to verbs that require accuracy and precision when conveying actions, bearing in mind the specificity of the verbs when communicating a particular action, their contextual relevance to depict the action in the scene, and their specificity and consistency. The most recurrent verb was *bite*, chosen by all students to describe the baby crocodile action. Additionally, verbs like *take*, *create*, *give*, and *fly* emerged as some of the most frequently used for different scenes of the film depicted in the AD scripts. The choice of these verbs reflects the students' efforts to accurately depict and articulate the dynamic actions portrayed in the animated visual content.

>The cloud points at him with a finger and the crocodile	bites	it, but he does magic and it grows t
.</s><s>She hugs and cuddles it.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	her finger and pulls it off, the cloud
xcited cloud shows it to the stork and the little crocodile	bites	the stork on the head.</s><s>The c
/hich turns into a green crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	one of his fingers and the cloud gru
th bundle, in this case, it's a crocodile But the crocodile	bites	her finger.</s><s>All of a sudden, a
o pick up what she has prepared.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the head of the stork.</s><s>The c
</s><s>The stork asks for the bundle, but the crocodile	bites	the stork's head and doesn't let it g
er powers.</s><s>They hug and play, but the crocodile	bites	the cloud finger.</s><s>The cloud i
loud shows proudly the crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the stork's head.</s><s>The cloud
odile.</s><s>The cloud hugs him.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	his finger.</s><s>The cloud grows
ne cloud shows him the crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the stork's head.</s><s>The cloud
, takes the bundle and flies away.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	a hole in the bundle and falls.</s><
odile is born.</s><s>The cloud hugs it, but the crocodile	bites	the cloud's finger off.</s><s>The cl
odile is born.</s><s>The cloud hugs it, but the crocodile	bites	the cloud's finger off.</s><s>The cl
ud shows him the crocodile.</s><s>The baby crocodile	bites	the stork's face.</s><s>The cloud v
<s>The cloud hugs the crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the cloud finger.</s><s>The finger
ne cloud shows him the crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the stork.</s><s>The cloud grabs t
loud gives the stork the crocodile.</s><s>The crocodile	bites	the stork in the face.</s><s>The cl

Figure 5. *Bite* as the preferred action verb chosen by students

The third representation considered is state, which refers to the type of information that is not always visible and is related to the identity or name of a place. State provides information regarding personal conditions, such as emotions or intentions, or specifies temporal aspects (Piety 2004). Adverbs and adjectives describing emotions are usually discouraged in AD script creation on the premise that describers should refrain from expressing particular opinions. However, it is also important to point out that the purpose of this task is to provide an AD for children which would be delivered orally while trying to help them understand or learn from a particular situation or fact. The most common adverb to express an emotion found in the corpus is *happily*, whereas the most common adjective to convey emotion is *sad*:

Left context	KWIC	Right context
ne stork asks the cloud for the baby and he	happily	shows her the baby croc, who pounces on h
.</s><s>It's a crocodile.</s><s>The cloud	happily	hugs it but it bites him in the finger.</s><s>I
ng its finger at the baby.</s><s>Then they	happily	hug.</s><s>A stork comes flying and lands
s it inflates and deflates.</s><s>The cloud	happily	prepares the bundle and delivers it to the st
r the gift for the bundle.</s><s>The cloud,	happily	, gives her the crocodile, which throws itself
ud appears creating a baby croc. -He plays	happily	with the baby croc. -The croc bites his finge
s on him wearily. -The cloud embraces him	happily	. -The stork gives him affectionate kisses. -1
takes off scared. -The cloud says goodbye	happily	.</s><s>A cloud, darker than the rest, show

Figure 6. *Happily* as the most common adverb chosen by students to convey feelings

cloud below.</s><s>She is lonely and	sad	.</s><s>She starts preparing a cloth
below the other clouds, there is a grey	sad	one that looks up.</s><s>It mixes a p
ear and leaves flying.</s><s>A black,	sad	looking cloud tries to bake a pie.</s>
es the creature and the monster feels	sad	.</s><s>"A sad cloud who tries to be
and the monster feels sad.</s><s>"A	sad	cloud who tries to be like the other or
arated from the rest, we find a slightly	sad	cloud that decides to create somethir
d with the crocodile.</s><s>There is a	sad	cloud waiting for some stork to land c
ands apart from the rest.</s><s>He is	sad	because he can't create a creature th
d throw it.</s><s>The cloud becomes	sad	.</s><s>A stork flies up to this cloud :
tork.</s><s>The cloud is isolated and	sad	again.</s><s>A cloud in the form of a
nd the cloud says goodbye.</s><s>A	sad	pink cloud is captured by an evil storl
e from the others and you can see it's	sad	.</s><s>It tries to create a pet.</s><s
</s><s>Under the other clouds, one is	sad	.</s><s>It tries to create something c
e red clouds, a grey cloud, lonely and	sad	, with a piece of itself tries to create a
, there is a grey cloud.</s><s>It looks	sad	but tries to create creatures too.</s>
ves in the bundle and the cloud looks	sad	again.</s><s>"A dark cloud appears
, there is a grey cloud.</s><s>It looks	sad	but tries to create creatures too.</s>
ves in the bundle and the cloud looks	sad	again.</s>

Figure 7. *Sad* as the preferred chosen word to express feelings

More instances of creative language use have to do with simple syntactic structures, because as Fryer (2016, 70) explains, "unusual words or images are more difficult to process and potentially more distracting". The author acknowledges that "repetition can be an irritating source of redundancy or part of the creative writer's armoury and deliberately employed", whilst noting that "when audio describing for children, repetition can be beneficial rather than dull" (Fryer, 2016, 70).
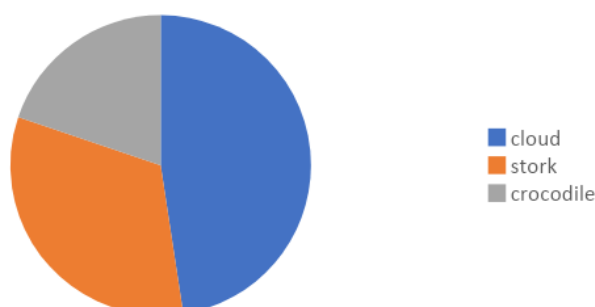
**Frequency of most used nouns
in the Didactic AD task - Partly cloudy**

- cloud
- stork
- crocodile

Figure 8. Frequency of most used nouns in the didactic AD task

Upon examination of the students' AD scripts, it becomes evident that repetition, employed as a creative and expressive linguistic tool, serves as a resourceful strategy to avoid ambiguity. In alignment with Fryer's (2016, 71) recommendations, when writing an AD script, it is important to "always bear in mind the oral nature of its delivery, with its inherent dangers of juxtapositions, ambiguity and tongue twisters". The elevated frequency of using these three nouns across the students' scripts shows their adept use of precise language use to mitigate any instance of ambiguity, as well as to strategically use repetition to make the experience easier for children when exposed to the spoken AD.

5. Conclusions

Before delving into conclusions, it is important to highlight that a primary limitation of this study is the sample size, which is confined to the analysis of only one of the six lesson plans involved. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that *Partly Cloudy* constituted the final AD task performed in the course, so the results may be representative of the overall learning process. The results gleaned from this task hold significance as they illuminate the students' knowledge of the strategies required to create a successful AD script, adhering to the standards and recommendations learned during the complete course. Despite this acknowledged limitation, it is plausible to draw optimistic conclusions, especially when looking at the progress reflected in the grades obtained in the first LP in comparison with the final one. The marks obtained for LP6 demonstrate a substantial and positive improvement compared to those initially obtained for LP1, with grades surpassing those recorded at the outset of the course across all the skills outline in the rubric. This fact indicates enhanced proficiency in all five competences aimed by the TRADILEX project.

The task described in this paper, which is an integral part to a comprehensive course on AD for improving English as an L2, appears to be both satisfactory and motivational for the participants. This assumption is bolstered by their active engagement in the learning process, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of enrolled students (53 out of the 66) successfully completed the ADAS course. They were able to deepen the study and analysis of the multiple codes of meaning that converge in the aural and visual channels, as well as to use new software programs for video editing, audio recording and script writing, and boost their linguistic, oral, and creative skills.

The AD task included in the LP6 *Partly Cloudy* presented learners with the challenge of concentrating on both the music and background sounds, alongside with visual details and actions. This concentration aimed to enable them to decode all the verbal and non-verbal information effectively. Moreover, describing visual components in an animated children's short film required a specific use of the English language, which should be not only accurate and objective but also expressive and imaginative. Therefore, students had the opportunity to boost their language and writing skills while preparing their scripts. This process prompted to consider pauses in dialogue and ensure clarity in their speech for easy comprehension by a young audience.

In conclusion, this activity has been validated as grounded in a complex and broad multidisciplinary learning methodology. Through this approach, students can learn about film language, AVT, and the different dimensions of FLE. Beyond the immediate learning outcomes, the activity described in this paper has shed light on the importance to address audiovisual accessibility in higher education contexts, to promote the students' social and personal awareness of the importance of reducing inequalities, as established by the Goal 10 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the challenges inherent in this activity, rooted in didactic AD, serve as a compelling illustration of the significance of media accessibility within a society where screens are present in our daily life, as well as the pressing need for enhanced standardization and professionalization in AD strategies. It underscores the necessity for students to acquire specific training, equipping them with the skills required to pursue roles as proficient audio describers in the future. In addition to this, participants have discovered the high potential of didactic AVT as a tool for improving their English skills, and this approach may be valuable for those who wish to engage in FLE in the future.

Acknowledgements

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