

## **AUDIO DESCRIPTION FOR ALL: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF ITS PEDAGOGICAL VALUES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

### **AUDIODESCRIPCIÓN PARA TODOS: REVISIÓN BIBLIOGRÁFICA DE SUS VALORES PEDAGÓGICOS EN LA ENSEÑANZA Y APRENDIZAJE DE LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS**

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#### **Resumen**

En 2003, la Unión Europea identificó el acceso a la información como un derecho humano. Desde entonces, se han realizado esfuerzos específicos para garantizar la accesibilidad de todo tipo de productos a todo tipo de personas. Inicialmente, la audiodescripción (AD) se agregó a los eventos culturales (teatro, ópera, cine, televisión, museos, etc.) para satisfacer las necesidades de los discapacitados visuales. En esta contribución, reflexionamos sobre el estatus de la AD como un modo de traducción por derecho propio, y sobre su flexibilidad y aplicabilidad en diferentes contextos y para diferentes propósitos. Basamos nuestros argumentos en el análisis de la investigación actual sobre la traducción audiovisual (AVT), centrada principalmente en estudios de AD realizados en los últimos años. Sostenemos que, como práctica de traducción nueva pero legítima, la AD puede ser muy útil no sólo para mejorar la accesibilidad a los eventos culturales para las personas con discapacidad visual, sino también para las personas con problemas cognitivos, o audiencias de diferentes edades, diferentes orígenes sociales, diferentes culturas e incluso para aquellos que estudian una lengua extranjera, ayudándoles a desarrollar sus competencias lingüísticas e interculturales de varias maneras.

**Palabras clave:** audiodescripción, traducción intersemiótica, accesibilidad, aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, competencias interculturales.

#### **Abstract**

In 2003, the European Union identified access to information as a human right. Ever since, specific efforts have been made to ensure the accessibility of all kinds of products to all kinds of people. Initially, audio description (AD) was added to cultural events (theatre, opera, film, television, museums, etc.) to meet the needs of the blind and visually impaired people. In this contribution, we reflect on the status of AD as a translation mode in its own right, and also on its flexibility in, and applicability to different contexts and for different purposes. We base our arguments on the analysis of current audiovisual translation (AVT) research, mainly focused on AD studies conducted in recent years. We argue that, as a new, but legitimate translation practice, it can be very useful not

only to enhance accessibility to cultural events for visually challenged people, but also for people who are cognitively challenged or for audiences of different ages, different social backgrounds, different cultures and even for those who study a foreign language (FL), by helping them develop their linguistic and intercultural competences in several ways.

**Keywords:** audio description, intersemiotic translation, accessibility, foreign language learning, intercultural competences

## 1. Introduction

In Latin, *translation* means ‘to carry or to bear across’. Thus regarding, a translator is a *transferer* who carries something over. According to Jakobson ([1959] 2000), that *something* can be many different things. In the case of words that carry meaning that has to be transferred, he distinguishes between words that belong to different languages and words that are transferred within the same language. In the first case, the so-called *interlingual translation* (that is, *proper translation*), the translator gives an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; in the second case, the so-called *intra-lingual translation* (that is, *rewording*), the translator gives an interpretation of verbal signs by means of the same language. However, translation does not only relate to systems of verbal signs. In a more extensive sense, it can also apply to the transfer of nonverbal sign systems. In that case, Jakobson (1959) grants a third kind of translation, which he calls *intersemiotic translation* (also known as *transmutation*). It consists in an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal systems. This definition can also be turned around in an interpretation of signs of nonverbal systems by means of verbal signs, which is the case of audio description (hereafter AD), a cross-modal or multi-modal translation that verbalizes mostly (although not exclusively) the visual information that visually impaired people need to fully understand and enjoy the message that is being communicated. In all cases (that is, inter, intra and intersemiotic translation), translators are generally seen as mediators, not only linguistically speaking but also culturally, since language and culture are mutually interdependent. Language is an essential part of culture, and culture cannot exist without communication. In the case of AD, which focuses on people who undergo certain challenges, audio describers are also social mediators.

Regarding translation and foreign language (FL) learning, nowadays there are renovated arguments that defend translation activities in the FL classroom. Indeed, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFRL 2001) even integrated translation into a fifth language skill (in addition to speaking, listening, writing and reading). Research (King, 2000, Curry and Sherry, 2004) has shown that translation in the FL classroom can promote certain skills. Given that the aim of FL teaching is to help the learner become multilingual and intercultural, able to mediate between different languages and cultures, it seems clear that there are no more ideological impediments to introduce translation in the classroom, especially if translation activities are based on real-life situations and involve the development of transferable skills –such as interpersonal skills, teamwork, working to deadlines, problem solving, decision making, etcetera–.

Although the number of publications dealing with the use of translation in FL teaching and learning has increased significantly since the 1980s, only a few of them report on controlled empirical research. Indeed there is little empirical evidence for or against the use of translation activities in the FL classroom (Källkvist 2008). As for audio-visual translation (AVT), however, for over thirty years numerous studies have shown the benefits of its different modes in FL teaching and learning, especially the use of subtitling in all its modes, both intralingual (Lambert and Holobow 1984, Vanderplank 1988, Hervás 2001) and interlingual (d'Ydewalle 1996, 1997, Blane 1996, Van De Poel and d'Ydewalle 2001, Araújo 2008, Bianchi and Ciabattini 2008, Pavesi and Perego 2008, Sokoli *et al* 2011, Talaván Zanón 2013), and even reversed subtitling (Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón 2014). The results of those studies reveal that the use of AVT enhances especially listening comprehension (Price 1983 1989, Garza 1991, Caimi 2006) and vocabulary acquisition (Baltova 1999, Koolstra and Beentjes 1999, Jones and Plass 2002, Hayati and Mohmedi 2009, Lertola 2012). The use of subtitled material in the FL classroom also leads to more comprehensible communicative output (Borrás and Lafayette 1994). In the same vein, the implementation of revoicing (such as dubbing) in de FL classroom showed to be beneficial to improve pronunciation (Kumai 1996). More recently, AVT has also proved to be very useful to promote intercultural learning (Borghetti 2011).

AVT in particular plays an essential role in making products accessible to different kinds of audiences. Thanks to dubbing and interlingual subtitling, linguistic barriers can be overcome, whereas intralingual subtitling, which was initially conceived as an aid to the deaf and hard of hearing, nowadays proves to be also helpful for elderly people, immigrants and FL students. In the same vein, AD, one of the most recent and rapidly expanding modes of AVT, was first considered to be an aid to the blind or visually challenged, to help them obtain the information they needed, but the growing interest in the possibilities that AD offers to different groups – besides the visually impaired – has opened new horizons.

While translating images into words, audio describers, on some occasions, also feel the need to include aural information that is difficult to understand (Fryer 2010) or even to explain some cultural information that is concealed in the visual information. This makes AD also useful for audiences of different ages, different social backgrounds or different cultures and even “for those who find it difficult to follow the narrative thread” (Fryer 2016:171). Moreover, the use of AD in the language classroom has proven to promote important linguistic competences, as an aid to literacy (Snyder 2006), as well as intercultural and translation skills. In this sense, it fosters awareness of specific differences in certain language pairs, which is important to prevent the fossilization of an interlanguage (Clouet 2005, Cambeiro and Quereda 2007). It has also been proven that it helps in the linguistic practices with FL learners. Clouet (2005) was the first one to propose the use of AD as a didactic tool to develop writing skills in the class of English as FL, and Martínez Martínez (2012) described the use of AD to promote the acquisition of lexical competence. However, both authors were working with translation students, and used AD to help these students develop their linguistic skills for translation purposes. Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2013, 2014) took this idea a step forward, by applying AD to FL students. The results of their empirical studies are described in Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2017) and Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno (2017). Other researchers have

followed this line of study, showing the benefits of AD in the FL classroom (Talaván and Lertola 2016, Walczak 2016, Calduch and Talaván 2018). Additionally, AD has also been studied by Ganino (2013), De Piano and Ganino (2014) as an aid in the accessibility of visually impaired university students. Taking it one step further, recent research on AD (Matamala and Orero 2016) is concerned with the multiple roles this discipline can play in communication in today's world.

In this paper, we specifically reflect on the flexibility of AD in, and applicability to different contexts and for different purposes. We argue that, as a new, but legitimate translation practice, it can be very useful not only to enhance accessibility to cultural events for visually or cognitively challenged people, but also for those who study a FL, by helping them develop their linguistic (section 3.1) and intercultural competences (section 3.2) in several ways. We base our arguments on a thorough content analysis of current AVT research, mainly focused on AD studies conducted in recent years (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2013, 2014, the ADLAB project 2014, Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015, Ibáñez Moreno *et al.* 2015, 2016, Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2016, Talaván and Lertola 2016, Walczak 2016, Fryer 2016, Matamala and Orero 2016, Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2017, Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno 2017, Calduch and Talaván 2018) and illustrate it with our own experiences and findings in working with, and researching, on AD.

## 2. Definitions and functions of audio description

The term *audio description* refers to an aural description of visual information that is provided to people who have limited, or no, access to images. AD forms part of an audiovisual product, understood as a “semiotic construct” (Chaume 2012: 100) that conveys verbal (text) and nonverbal (image/sound) information. As is the case with other modes of AVT, it is not autonomous, but only constitutes a coherent and meaningful whole in combination with the other channels that carry meaning (the dialogues, the music, the sound effects). It is also governed by different constraints, such as time limits and interaction with the other channels.

Generally speaking, the aim of AD is helping people to fully understand and enjoy an audiovisual product, so that they can get involved and empathize with it. According to most definitions of scholars and practitioners who dedicate their studies and work to AD, it is “*a technique used for making theatre, movies and TV programmes accessible to blind and visually impaired people*” (Benecke 2004:78). Fryer (2016:1) states: “*AD (also known as video description in the USA) is a verbal commentary providing information for those unable to perceive it themselves. AD helps blind and partially sighted people access audiovisual media*”.

According to these definitions, the primary target audience consists of blind and partially sighted viewers, although the members of the ADLAB team also stress that “in addition, AD is being used by an increasingly large group of sighted viewers for an equally varied number of reasons (ADLAB 2014: 8). Fryer (2016: 171) also suggests that more work should be done on the benefits of AD for other target audiences.

AD was first created in the 1970s to make theatre accessible to blind people (Snyder 2005), but soon it proved to be beneficial to promote the accessibility of all kinds of audiovisual material, dynamic arts

(such as film, television series, documentaries, opera performances, sport events, etc.) as well as static arts (paintings, sculptures, etc.). It can be performed live (in theatre, opera, and film festivals, for instance), often combined with an audio introduction, or pre-recorded, prepared in advance by translating an AD script written in the source language of the document into the target language or by creating it directly from the images in the target language. Usually, AD is provided in the same language (original or dubbed) of the audiovisual document. In case of foreign language films the AD is rendered in combination with audio subtitling (AST) (Remael 2012), or voice-over, in the case of countries where this practice is preferred.

Using the pauses in dialogue or narration, audio describers provide oral descriptions of the setting, the time, the characters, the actions and the relevant text-on-screen. However, to reduce the AD to just a recount of what is taking place could harm its purpose. Many of the audiovisual products, such as opera, theatre, films or television series are of the narrative genre, and narrativity also involves intentional clues or hypothetical situations that trigger different states of mind in the viewers. Therefore, the audio describer should also trigger similar states of mind in the target audience. An AD is not a summary, it is a narration that also creates suspense, curiosity and surprise. So, if audio describers want to offer a narrative experience to the target audience, they need to detect and select those discourse elements that are narratively relevant (Vandaele 2012), such as the characters' reaction to the action. That is why, dealing with narrative products, Kruger (2010) suggests the term *audio narration* instead of *audio description*.

AD is a cognitively complex phenomenon, since it involves three different perspectives (Holsanova 2016): 1) A production perspective, focused on the sighted audio describer; 2) a reception perspective, focused on all kinds of receivers; and 3) the 'meeting of minds' perception, focused on the exchange between both the sighted audio describer and the users, blind or sighted users. In the following sections we will comment on all three perspectives.

In their role as social intermediaries, audio describers need to have a deep understanding of the world and reality of their target audience (sensorially, socially or culturally challenged). As is the case in any kind of translation, they need to know who they are doing it for. Secondly, they need to master a large set of skills, such as linguistic competences (Cambeiro and Quereda 2007): excellent command of the language in terms of vocabulary, grammar and syntax. They also need excellent writing skills, creativity and linguistic sensitivity that allow them to be adequate and adapt their ADs to the genre; Besides, they need competences related to the content of the audiovisual product (knowledge of the semiotics of the image), technological competences (computer literacy) and, finally, personal competences (good sight and hearing, excellent powers of observation and judgement to select the relevant parts that should be described, ability to analyze, summarize and interpret information, willingness to work in a team, excellent communication skills, empathy with the target audience, intercultural knowledge, etc.). Therefore, the skills developed while audio describing can also be very useful for language learners.

One of the most important skills that are developed is intercultural competence, as shown in Vermeulen and Ibáñez (2017), because audio describers need to develop special awareness of how what they see and interpret can affect their audience when they communicate their message. That is,

the addressee obtains a preferential spot in their concern, which is essential for communication in general. According to the Embodied Cognitive Science theory, human cognition is grounded in our experience and our experience is tied to our bodies. What we see and how we interpret the things we see is highly subjective and depends on many factors, such as education, culture, former experiences, etc. (Wilson 2002). Therefore, there is no such thing as an objective viewer. Thus, the biggest challenge for audio describers lies in the selection of relevant elements that are needed to get the information. This selection of the visual information offered in the images is highly subjective. Depending on the target audience and their needs or preferences, the audio describers have to select their language. Thus, this specific feature of AD makes it especially interesting for the FL classroom.

### **3. Audio description for pedagogical purposes in the FL classroom**

As mentioned in section 1, in the past 15 years research has been done on the benefits of AD as a pedagogical tool in the language classroom. Although initially AD was developed to help the blind and partially sighted, it soon proved to be beneficial in other areas, such as to enhance (inter)linguistic and intercultural competences. We elaborate on these subjects below.

#### **3.1. Audio description as a tool to enhance (inter)linguistic competences.**

The practice of audio describing has been proven to be a useful educational tool, in line with the recent trend of applying AVT to the FL classroom. However, AD goes even further. Regarding interlinguistic – that is, translation proper – competences, were some of the first authors who remarked on the usefulness of AD activities for translators, and even applied them in their courses to their translation students. Clouet (2005) used AD in order to enhance his translation students' writing skills. Cambeiro and Quereda (2007) considered AD as a tool to foster the learning of the process of translation in itself. In turn, Basic Peralta *et al.* (2009) have suggested that AD can help translators develop a number of specific competences in order to carry out the task of audio describing: becoming good observers, formulating what they see in a precise and accurate way, using specific language and register. Additionally, Martínez Martínez (2012) has described the use of AD to promote the acquisition of the lexical competence. Going deeper into the didactic application of AD to the FL classroom, and more specifically, to Spanish as an FL, it had not yet been explored until we, departing from these brief proposals, started working on a project in 2010 named ARDELE (*Audiodescripción como Recurso Didáctico en la enseñanza de Español como Lengua Extranjera*). In this ongoing project we explore to what extent AD can be useful to promote all types of linguistic competences with FL students. The first results (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2013) show the benefits of the use of AD in the classroom, not only regarding lexical competence, but also to enhance idiomaticity by improving the use of phraseological units. Additionally, in Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2014) it is shown that AD-based tasks in the Spanish as an FL classroom help to promote communication strategies. The results not only revealed interesting data on differences in formulation between the Dutch students and the Spanish natives (such as the use of possessives, pronominal verbs, gerund,

adverbs ending on *-mente*), but also on the interpretation of the images and the influence of different cultural backgrounds (*casa* vs. *mansión*; *rubio* vs. *moreno*).

ARDELE was launched in the Faculty of Applied Language Studies of the University College at Ghent (Belgium), now integrated into Ghent University as the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication. During the course of eight years, around 300 students have participated in the project.

By the time they take part in the project, the Belgian (Dutch native speakers) students' Spanish proficiency can be described as at B2 level (Independent User) according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages* (CEFRL 2001:24-28). To reach our final objective of raising the students' proficiency to a C1 level, we implement AD-based tasks in the framework of the task-based approach (Willis 1996, Ellis 2003), asking them to adopt a role that would normally be performed by a professional audio describer.

After a number of experiments, our results, described in several publications, strongly confirm our hypothesis. Namely, in Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2013) we show how AD is useful to promote idiomaticity. This hypothesis is also confirmed by Sadowska (2016) in a study involving Polish students of English as an FL. Ibáñez and Vermeulen (2014) demonstrate how AD can help work all the skills needed to develop the communicative competence in the classroom in a motivating and integrative way. Regarding more specific skills, Ibáñez and Vermeulen (2017) address the promotion of metalinguistic competences, which are always so complex to deal with. Calduch and Talaván (2018) focus on the development of lexical, but also of syntactic competences. In this light, AD has proven, too, to be extremely motivating for students, something that has been also supported by Talaván and Lertola (2016), who focused on the promotion of oral skills among distance-learning students of English as an FL, and by (Walczak 2016), who also confirmed the educational value of AD in English language teaching. It helped both blind and sighted children to better understand the content of educational movies and it improved their lexical competences.

### **3.2. Audio description as a tool to enhance intercultural competence**

All our research results can be cognitively explained within the theories of Mental Imagery and Embodied Cognition of Cognitive Linguistics proposed by Wilson (2002), mentioned in section 2. In this sense, Wilson (2002) states that our mental processes, within which we find language, are connected to our body. Since our body is connected to the world, she argues that cognition is situated in place and time, body-based and related to the environment.

Drawing on cognitive theories, we can state that AD is a culture-based translating activity, related to the speakers' interactions with the world and to their cultural experiences. The environment is part of our cognitive system (Wilson 2002), and as such, it is reflected in our language, which is a conceptual phenomenon that categorizes reality (Lakoff 1987).

In fact, recent research of how films are audiodescribed in different languages, such as Franca (2016) on the differences between the Italian and English ADs of *The Silence of the Lambs*, shows how

different they are, depending on the audience, and, as we presume, on the culture of the audio describer too. Furthermore, the selection of the information to be included in the AD is highly subjective in itself, as it is not only determined by the skills of the audio describers, but also by their personal taste and the target-audience requirements. Sanz Moreno (2012) illustrates how the Spanish audio describer of *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008) offers additional information that is not provided in the English AD, assuming that the Spanish audience lacks the cultural background that the English audience has: the audio describer explains that yellow is the colour of happiness, that the Taj Mahal and the Chhatrapati Shivaji station are monuments protected by the UNESCO, and that Amitabh Bachchan is a famous actor. He even changes the names of two of the three musketeers, Porthos and Athos, and adds the author's name saying: '*el maestro enseña al resto de alumnos el libro Los tres mosqueteros de Alejandro Dumas*' [the teacher shows the book *The Three Musketeers*, by Alexandre Dumas, to his students].

We have dealt with ways of describing in section 2. Some say that the style of an AD should be factual, not interpretative. Also, Udo and Fels (2009:179) state that an audio describer should "not evaluate or interpret, but rather be like the faithful lens of a camera".

However, practice has shown, as discussed above, that this objectivity rule is often hard to follow, and an interpretation cannot always be avoided. This precise fact, that we all see and interpret reality in a different way, makes AD a highly interesting tool to raise intercultural awareness and to enhance intercultural competences, which means integrating the learner's personality (individually) and sense of identity (socially) into the process of learning a language as an enriching experience. Following Holliday *et al.* (2004:19), intercultural communication deals with the way we all bring with us our own discourse and perceptions of culture and how we negotiate this in communication. Intercultural communication means understanding people, culture and society in general:

*Being sensitive to, and understanding, others' cultural productions and the way in which they play with the various identities available to them (discourses on their identities currently available in the context of this interaction) is a crucial part of good intercultural communication. (Holliday et al., 2004:19)*

When we speak or write, we tend to take a particular perspective, i.e. our own perspective, on the world, which is directly reflected in what we communicate. Intercultural communication is also concerned with language learning, because when we learn an FL, we are always confronted with culture, and, therefore, with the constructs of identity in that culture. Learning an FL is a way of reconstructing ourselves, in line with Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000), whose work draws on Vigotsky (1986), the father of social-constructivist learning theories. They state that in the process of language learning, identities are reconstructed and life stories retold because of the relationship between thought, meaning and words.

In this vein, in Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno (2017) it is shown that creating an AD makes us aware that what we communicate is influenced by our own perceptions of the world. Intercultural communication begins by understanding ourselves as much as we (try to) understand the other: "The weight of responsibility is on 'us' to understand ourselves, rather than on essentialist categories of 'them'" (Holliday *et al.* 2004:21). Language plays an essential role here: "We must be careful when



talking about, and to, people who we consider to be other, because we may be unaware of the power our words may carry” (Holliday *et al.* 2004:30).

Looking at the differences in cultural value systems that exist in the world is the first step to integrate diversity into communication in a non-essentialist way (that is, departing from the aim to establish a bridge between cultures rather than separate them). Hyks (2005: 01) argues that an AD should not be translated from an existing AD script (in case of a foreign film), but created directly from the images, because we all see things subjectively different: “even though we all agree on certain basic principles, we do see things differently and we certainly express them in very varied ways”. However, other authors (Jankowska 2015, Lopez Vera 2006) report on successful AD translation since translation from one language to another is always connected with adaptation of the cultural content.

In this line, AD can be used not only to promote all linguistic competences, but also to enhance intercultural competence (Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno 2017). It cannot be denied that implementing AD activities in the FL classroom goes beyond language learning and highlights cultural issues, especially as they involve intercultural learning.

Thus, learners are in a position to recognize, relate and develop cultural expressions of meaning. Furthermore, the learners’ role as translators who have to make explicit choices whilst carrying out the tasks should help them realize that putative culture-specific phenomena only occur through the act of comparison. Therefore, these phenomena are neither absolute nor representative, thus contributing to one of the goals of intercultural competence, namely, to raise awareness of the factiousness of essentialist concepts of culture and identity.

Implementing AD in the FL classroom makes students realize that the messages they communicate are addressed to an audience from another culture, so students have to “deconstruct” their own messages, analyze which parts of these messages are subjective, and rephrase them by taking their audience into account. Intercultural communication is a two-way process of negotiation, where cultural and personal identities are called into question and their impact on the actual communication process is assessed. Following Holliday *et al.* (2004), what we see is a projection of our resources from a familiar culture onto the unfamiliar culture.

### **3.3. A step forward: Audio description in MALL**

After the application of AD in the face-to-face foreign language (FL) classroom (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2014), as well as in distance learning education (Talaván and Lertola 2013, 2016) to improve students’ competences, with positive results, we decided to take a step forward, and we implemented AD as a tool to promote oral production skills with mobile devices (android operating systems). Thus, moving on, and in order to catch up with the new tendencies of the digital era and mobile learning, in 2014 we designed a MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) application named VISP (VIdeos for SPeaking), which invites users with a B1 level of English (CEFRL 2001) to audio-describe a short film clip. The main aim of this app is to improve their idiomaticity (fluency, vocabulary, phraseological competence). We launched our first version, VISP 1.0, within the

framework of the SO-CALL-ME project<sup>1</sup>. This app, now in its third version (VISP 2.1<sup>2</sup>), is designed to enhance oral competences in English by recording the AD of a short clip, and later on comparing it to the ‘official’ AD. Another aim of this app is to improve the users’ idiomaticity (fluency, vocabulary, phraseological competence). It contains a short introduction to AD, a pre and a post-test (for self-assessment, although users can also send their recording so that we can correct it), and it has already been tested with both Flemish and Spanish students of English as an FL. The results (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015a, 2015b), (Ibáñez Moreno *et al.* 2015, 2016), (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2016) show that it is useful to motivate students to practise their oral skills (in this case the Spanish students) and to practise their vocabulary (in the case of the Belgian students).

In line with the ARDELE project, VISP has been designed following the premises of the communicative approach, in which the teaching of languages is currently framed, and that the CEFRL advocates (CEFRL 2001). These principles have been applied to this mobile app both pedagogically and linguistically, following Martín Monje *et al.* (2014)’s suggestions for the design of pedagogically sound MALL apps. As Canale and Swain (1980) already suggested in the 1980s, the communicative approach includes not only the promotion of communicative competence, but also competition sociocultural, highly related to intercultural (Tardo Fernández 2005). Recent studies, such as Mallén (2008), highlight the importance of teaching the FL within a given cultural context. VISP has been designed according to the task-based method, which is defined as a communicative activity whose purpose is the achievement of a specific objective of learning (Ellis 2003). The presence of tasks highlights the use of language in a context instead of exposing it in isolation. In this way, a communicative task aims to develop competence in an FL through communication. Other important factors of the tasks are that they include processes or activities that are given in a real world, such as commissioning an AD from a translator, and that they have a clearly defined communicative result: that of promoting accessibility to the public.

In this way, the tasks in VISP, described in Ibáñez Moreno *et al.* (2016), fit together the concept of the student-centered approach, who in this case not only decides when and what to perform and how (time spent on it), (Ibáñez Moreno *et al.*, 2016). But he is also capable of self-correcting, by comparing his AD with the official one. In addition, from the point of view of translation applied to language teaching, and following the precepts of the communicative approach, to expose the student to audiovisual material containing certain vocabulary will help him to learn and use it (Tight 2010). Although mobile learning environments have increased exponentially and new technologies have developed to be able to adapt to new learning styles - or vice versa - (Jones and Ho 2004), we believe that for a MALL user there are still fewer opportunities to practice oral skills in an environment of this kind, especially in the case of oral production. This was one of the reasons why we focused on such skills.

In Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2015a) we outline the methodological steps that led to the creation of the second version of VISP, that is, of VISP 2.0. Once the first version had been tested with Spanish

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<sup>1</sup> 2012-2015: *SO-CALL-ME (Social Ontology-Based Cognitively Augmented Language Learning Mobile Environment)*. Reference FFI2011-29829. Funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports.

<sup>2</sup> The new version of VISP is being carried out under the framework of the SWITCHED-ON Project (FFI2016-80613-P), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Development.

and Belgian (Dutch speaking) EFL students at Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) –VISP 1.1 – and at Ghent University (Belgium) –VISP 1.2, taking into account the data obtained from a pre-questionnaire, recordings and a post-questionnaire, we addressed the shortcomings of VISP 1 at different levels, which were solved in VISP 2.0. (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015a)

Once we were satisfied with the app (see Ibáñez Moreno *et al.* 2016 for a full description of it), we tested it for different purposes. Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2015b) presented the first results of testing VISP with students. In this case, it showed the results from a case study carried out with 16 Spanish Erasmus students of English as a foreign language, during the first semester of 2014-2015 at the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication of the Faculty of Arts of Ghent University, who tested the pilot version. Based on these results some proposals we made for improvement and future research. This work was focused on the use of accurate vocabulary and concise, precise formulation when performing tasks by students of English as an FL using a MALL app. All 16 volunteers said to have enjoyed the activities and to have learned something new about this modality of audiovisual translation. However, the results showed that there still is a long way to go if we want to obtain results that are in accord with our learning objectives. Even if students showed motivation and a positive attitude towards the app, their actual learning of vocabulary still needed improvement. In the future, we will focus more on standardized phraseology instead of on the use of single words. As for the perception on their own learning process via this app, the students overestimated their performance. This is good regarding attitudinal contents, but we must do something to improve our own assessment and measurement tools in order to shorten this distance and make VISP lead to an app with which users can actually learn a major number of new words and expressions. Also, VISP 2.1. will include a large battery of clips that will be divided according to their learning content per level, and per lexical and/or grammatical categories.

In order to assess the validity of VISP, we tested it with two different user groups: Spanish and Belgian students of English as an FL. In this work (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015c) we show the similarities and differences in their use and production. Given the differences in the ways of approaching and using the app, the results state that even though VISP was more effective with Spanish students in terms of motivation, Belgian students, though less motivated, performed better. The results, in line with Byrne (2014), conclude that this type of MALL app should be ‘localized’ according to the learners’ cultural and linguistic factors, so VISP should take into account cultural factors in order to be pedagogically adequate. These results have been taken into account for the design of VISP 2.1.

Finally, in Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2016) the results are shown of testing VISP with two distance students of English from UNED. For these distance students the app was highly interesting and motivating, and they showed higher autonomy in using it than face-to-face students, who had been given specific guidelines and could count on on-the-spot assistance. However, there is still room for improvement. In Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (forthcoming) we aim at showing the results of comparing the use of VISP as a native app, in a self-directed use (that is, in an independent way, like other apps are used, such as *Duolingo*) or as a support tool for the language classroom.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

AD is a mode of intersemiotic translation that consists in verbalizing the visual content of audiovisual products, providing an aural description, narration or explanation when such information is needed to fully understand and enjoy the message. As is true of its siblings of the AVT family, revoicing and subtitling, it is a cognitively complex phenomenon whose effectiveness depends on the way all kinds of different signs are connected to, and among, each other. AD serves to fulfil different purposes aiming to fill the needs of different audiences. Therefore, an audio describer needs empathy with the audience who he is doing it for (sensorially, cognitively, socially and culturally challenged people), a good knowledge of the medium (film, theatre, opera, visual arts, etc.), an excellent command of the target language and flexibility to adapt to different text genres (fiction and non-fiction).

However, AD goes far beyond linguistic or cultural definitions of traditional translation concepts. As Holsanova (2016: 69) states:

*Research on AD offers insights about the coupling between language and thought, and can thus inform and enrich current models of cognition and communication, namely, how we conceptualize the world, how we interpret what we see, how we understand what others say and how we mentally imagine things and events.* (Holsanova 2016: 69).

Regarding the applications and uses of AD outside its own translation limits, and more specifically in FL teaching and learning, studies show that in general, students perceive AD as a useful tool that requires competences in all areas of language use: listening, speaking, writing, reading and translating. The students become more aware of the importance of accuracy of language as an essential part of communicative competence (Ibáñez and Vermeulen 2017). Results also suggest that it promotes an awareness of cultural differences between what we see and how we describe it (Vermeulen and Ibáñez 2017), because the way we interpret and express what we see directly echoes our perception of reality.

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