

Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Audio Description as Integrated Activities in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom: An Exploratory Study

Subtitulado para personas sordas y audiodescripción como actividades integradas en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera: Un estudio exploratorio

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Abstract: This paper reports on a didactic project in which subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audio description (AD) were implemented in an English Language course offered at an Italian university as part of a master's degree in foreign language teaching. The students were introduced to media accessibility (MA) as well as to the linguistic and technical aspects of SDH and AD and subsequently asked to engage in active intralingual SDH and AD for audiovisual programmes of different genres. The aim of the didactic project was to use both forms of media accessibility to promote language and mediation skills at proficiency levels (C1-C2). The exploratory study presented in this paper investigates student perceptions about the role of SDH and AD in foreign language learning (FLL). Qualitative data were collected using questionnaires which were administered at different stages of the project, and through the analysis of learning diaries written by the participants during the semester. The students' comments highlight significant benefits in terms of fostering productive skills, of promoting different forms of mediation, namely intralingual and intersemiotic, and of enhancing learner motivation and awareness about MA.

Keywords: Didactic audiovisual translation, Foreign language learning, Media accessibility, Student perceptions, Learner diaries

Resumen: En este artículo se describe un proyecto didáctico en el que se aplicaron el subtitulado para personas sordas y con problemas de audición (SPS) y la audiodescripción (AD) en un curso de lengua inglesa impartido en una universidad italiana como parte de un máster en didáctica de lenguas extranjeras. Después de introducir a los estudiantes en la accesibilidad a los medios, así como en los aspectos lingüísticos y técnicos de las SPS y la AD,

se les pidió que realizaran actividades basadas en SPS y AD para programas audiovisuales de distintos géneros. El objetivo del proyecto didáctico era utilizar ambas formas de accesibilidad a los medios para promover las competencias lingüísticas y de mediación en los niveles C1-C2. El estudio exploratorio que se presenta en este artículo analiza las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre la función de las SPS y AD en el proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras. Se recogieron datos cualitativos mediante cuestionarios que se administraron en distintas fases del proyecto, y también a través del análisis de los diarios de aprendizaje escritos por los participantes durante el semestre. Los comentarios de los estudiantes revelan importantes beneficios en el ámbito de las competencias productivas, la promoción de diferentes formas de mediación, intralingüística e intersemiótica, y el aumento de la motivación y la sensibilidad de los estudiantes con respecto a la accesibilidad a los medios.

Palabras clave: Traducción audiovisual didáctica, Aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, Accesibilidad a los medios, Percepciones de los estudiantes, Diarios del estudiante

INTRODUCTION

One of the recent interests in audiovisual translation (AVT) research has been to investigate the benefits of different AVT modes as pedagogical tools in foreign language education (Adams & Díaz-Cintas, 2022; Baños et al., 2021; Fernández-Costales, 2021; Incalcaterra McLoughlin et al., 2020; Lertola, 2019; Talaván, 2020).

Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT) refers to “a technology-based active pedagogical resource (as students produce subtitles or dub video extracts, etc.) that can enhance foreign language learning and can be employed as an effective tool in face-to-face, online, and blended contexts” (Lertola & Talaván, 2022, p. 134). Both AVT research and training have mainly focused on the roles of subtitling and dubbing, the latter to a lesser degree, as pedagogical tools in foreign language teaching and learning (Talaván, 2019). However, recent studies have begun to explore the didactic role of individual media accessibility (MA) modes, such as subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audio description (AD) in foreign language learning (FLL). Fewer studies have investigated the use of SDH and AD as integrated tools in the foreign language classroom: recently, Talaván et al. (2022) presented the teaching innovation project AUDIOSUB, aimed to assess the improvement of speaking, writing, and translation skills using AD and SDH in FLL contexts.

By focusing on the relationship between FLL and AVT as a methodological resource, this paper aims to explore the possibilities offered

by SDH and AD in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. The main idea is to provide a didactic proposal based on the integrated use of SDH and AD in order to enhance language and mediation skills at proficiency levels (C1-C2), while at the same time promoting student engagement and awareness about the role of audiovisual access services in today's society. The didactic project was implemented in an English language course offered at the University of Parma in the second year of a master's degree in foreign language teaching. The project introduced the students, who were also future foreign language teachers, to the pedagogical use of MA by asking them to engage in passive and active intralingual SDH and AD.

After being introduced to MA and to the linguistic and technical aspects of SDH and AD, the participants were asked to analyse the English SDH and AD for audiovisual programmes of different genres and carry out – both individually and collaboratively – active intralingual SDH and AD tasks. Qualitative data were collected through a pre-questionnaire and a post-questionnaire, aimed at obtaining students' opinions and feedback regarding the activities based on SDH and AD as well as their perceived improvement in terms of foreign language skills. Moreover, learner diaries were also used as a qualitative research method to gain an insight into how students experienced learning and how they made sense of it (Pavlenko, 2007). Throughout the entire semester, the participants were encouraged to keep an online learner diary where they could write down their personal thoughts about the SDH and AD tasks carried out in class or at home.

The objective that guided the development of the exploratory study is twofold: 1) to examine students' opinions and perceptions of activities related to SDH and AD; 2) to investigate students' foreign language skills perceived improvement.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW: DIDACTIC AVT (DAT)

The research area of Didactic Audiovisual Translation has become a consolidated field of study (Talaván, 2020; Talaván & Tinedo-Rodríguez, 2024; Talaván *et al.*, 2024), with several scholars investigating the benefits of both subtitling and revoicing audiovisual material “in the acquisition, improvement and polishing of the four traditional key skills of language proficiency but also in the honing of the newly added competence of intercultural mediation” (Adams & Díaz-Cintas, 2022, p. 11).

Numerous researchers have analysed the potential of subtitling as a support for language learning, discussing the benefits of intra- and interlingual subtitling in terms of the development of specific language skills, such as listening, reading, spoken and written production, grammar, vocabulary building, translation, mediation, and intercultural awareness (see, among

others, Beseghi, 2018; Borghetti, 2011; Caimi, 2006; Díaz-Cintas & Wang, 2022; Ghia, 2012; González Vera, 2002; Incalcaterra McLoughlin, 2009; 2014; Incalcaterra McLoughlin & Lertola, 2011; Plaza Lara & Fernández Costales, 2022; Lertola, 2012; 2015; Ragni, 2018; Talaván, 2006; 2010; 2011).

Furthermore, recent studies have explored the didactic value of MA modes, namely SDH and AD. As pointed out by Talaván et al. (2022, p. 2), research has focused on “the individual use of accessible AVT in the FLL classroom”. As far as AD is concerned, its examination in FLL is considerably recent: a number of studies have considered the benefits of AD for FLL in general (Navarrete, 2018) and for the improvement of specific skills such as writing (Calduch & Talaván, 2018), speaking (Talaván & Lertola, 2016), vocabulary acquisition (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013; Walczak, 2016), mediation (Navarrete & Bolaños García-Escribano, 2022), integrated language skills (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2014), as well as the development of plurilingual competence (Torralba et al., 2022) and learner motivation (Bausells-Espín, 2022). As noted by Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano (2022, p. 155), most studies have concentrated on active AD, except for Martínez Martínez (2012) who examined the potential of passive AD for the improvement of lexical skills.

Research on the didactic application of SDH is more limited, with a few studies investigating the role of SDH in FLL settings (Bolaños García-Escribano & Ogea Pozo, 2023; Herrero et al., 2017; Talaván, 2019; Talaván et al., 2022; Tinedo Rodríguez & Frumuselu, 2023). The study by Talaván (2019) describes a didactic proposal based on the use of SDH to enhance writing, listening, and lexical creativity, confirming the validity of subtitling as a pedagogical tool to enhance FLL skills. The study by Bolaños García-Escribano and Ogea Pozo (2023) discusses the uses and applications of interlingual SDH in the language classroom and shows benefits such as students' improved translation skills and greater awareness on the importance of visual, acoustic, and paralinguistic information in AVT. Tinedo Rodríguez and Frumuselu (2023) carried out a study where SDH was used as a pedagogical tool to foster L2, interculturality and awareness regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The article by Herrero et al. (2017), which offers a pedagogical method combining film literacy, AD, and SDH applied to FLL, is one of the first studies to combine SDH and AD in a didactic setting. Talaván et al (2022) research is indeed an attempt to start filling this gap in the literature by combining SDH and AD to foster foreign language skills. Their results show learners' improvement in writing and translation skills and suggest a more systematic application of MA modes in the context of FLL.

Moreover, Lertola and Talaván (2022) presented an online teacher training experience in DAT, involving foreign language secondary-school teachers-in-training, who created a dubbing and an AD lesson plan. Indeed, if it is true that AVT tasks can be integrated in the foreign language curriculum, it is important that teacher training is provided. The results of Lertola and Talaván's study (2022) showed that the participants perceived didactic AVT as an effective tool in the foreign language classroom: "they found didactic AVT a modern and motivating approach that they intend to use in their future teaching career as it can be exploited with any type of learner" (Lertola & Talaván, 2022, p. 148).

The present study follows this experimental line of research and aims to examine the benefits of the integrated use of SDH and AD in the EFL classroom, focusing especially on student perceptions.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The project at the basis of this study was developed within an English Language course offered at the University of Parma, Italy, in the second year of a master's degree in foreign language teaching, with the aim of promoting language and mediation skills at proficiency levels (C1-C2) and investigating students' perceptions concerning the didactic use of SDH and AD. The students were asked to carry out tasks –both individually and collaboratively– based on the creation of intralingual SDH and AD for audiovisual programmes and videos of various genres.

2.1. *Participants*

The didactic project involved 23 students who were attending the English Language course, which consisted of two different and distinct modules: one module provided both practical and theoretical classes on media accessibility and the other module included practical language lessons with a language assistant.

The students were 21 females and two males, with an average age of 24 years old, all native speakers of Italian. Their level of English at the beginning of the course was on average C1, and they were expected to reach a C2 level by the end of the academic year. All the participants had already a BA in Foreign languages and had previously taken courses in translation theory and practice.

The students were informed about the didactic project as well as the use of questionnaires and learner diaries for data collection. While the activities based on SDH and AD were part of the module, carried out in the classroom and therefore not optional, the learner diary was presented as a

free activity to be carried out outside the classroom. Although questionnaires and diaries were mainly used to collect data for the sake of the present study, they were also conceived as a tool to collect data for the course evaluation and to foster foreign language teaching as well as to promote student awareness about the topics of the course.

2.2. Didactic Project

The didactic project was carried out over a semester, from September to December 2022, and included different phases, summarized in Table 1 below:

Phase 1: introduction to MA (linguistic and technical aspects of SDH and AD, guidelines for the creation of SDH and AD)
Phase 2: analysis of the English SDH and AD of different types of audiovisual programmes
Phase 3: introduction to the recommended software
Phase 4: active intralingual SDH and AD (individual and collaborative tasks for clips of 3 minutes).

Table 1. Phases of the didactic project

Source. Elaborated by the author

At the beginning of the course, students were introduced to media accessibility and to the linguistic and technical aspects of SDH and AD. In this first phase, the instructor provided guidelines for the creation of SDH and AD based on Zárate's (2021) and Fryer's (2016) handbooks, as well as the BBC's Subtitles guidelines (BBC 2022) and Netflix's style guide for both SDH and AD (English Timed Text Style Guide, Audio Description Style Guide v2.5.)

The second phase involved the analysis of SDH and AD in English for different types of audiovisual programmes, including films of different genres and TV shows. The aim was to familiarise the students with the two MA modes by having a closer look at what professionals do and what strategies and conventions they apply. First, the participants analysed orally in class a clip chosen by the instructor. For the analysis of SDH, the clip was taken from the first episode of the TV show *Stranger Things*, while the audio described clip was taken from the film *Rocketman*. Subsequently, they were asked to select an audiovisual product of their choice and write an analysis of SDH and AD. This activity was carried out at home and later discussed in class.

In the third phase of the didactic project, the students were introduced to the software recommended for the practical activities; Aegisub 3.2.2 and Amara for SDH and iMovie and Windows Movie Maker for AD. Subsequently they were asked to actively engage in the creation of intralingual SDH and AD for audiovisual programmes and videos of various genres.

Concerning SDH, the instructor proposed three different activities which involved the creation of subtitles for three short clips, each with a maximum duration of 3 minutes. These were taken from an episode of the TV show *Stranger Things*, an episode of the animated series *Peppa Pig*, and the film *The Devil Wears Prada*. In the first activity the students worked autonomously in class and then compared and discussed their choices with their peers. In the other two activities they worked collaboratively, in groups of two or three students. Afterwards, another collaborative activity was proposed which involved the creation of SDH for film trailers chosen by the students, using Amara, a free open-source subtitling platform which uses crowdsourcing techniques. The participants selected some trailers on YouTube for which SDH were not available and worked collaboratively to create captions. In this way they could create something tangible that would improve access to videos for a greater number of people.

As for the AD tasks, the instructor proposed three different activities which involved the creation of AD scripts for three short clips, each with a maximum duration of 3 minutes, taken from the film *Rocketman*, the documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, and an episode of the TV show *The Queen's Gambit*. After working in teams of three-four students for the creation of the AD scripts, they compared and discussed their choices with the other groups. Afterwards, another task was proposed which involved the creation and recording of AD scripts for videos chosen by the students, using the recommended software (iMovie or Windows Movie Maker). The various audio described videos were then shown and commented in class.

2.3. Research Methods

The study involved the collection of qualitative data through two different questionnaires (a pre-questionnaire and a post-questionnaire) administered at different stages of the project and learner diaries written by the participants throughout the semester. Although the questionnaires also provided some basic quantitative data, the analysis of both questionnaires and learner diaries mainly focused on qualitative data. Both instruments were chosen to collect data for the present study and were not mandatory for the students. They were also used beyond the objectives of this research, to garner data for the course evaluation and to foster foreign language teaching.

2.3.1. Questionnaires

At the beginning of the module, before providing students with specific information about SDH and AD, an online pre-questionnaire was administered with the principal aim to investigate students' previous knowledge, awareness,

and experience of both SDH and AD. The pre-questionnaire included four questions, two concerning SDH and the other two concerning AD.

1. What is subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH)?
2. Have you ever watched an audiovisual product with SDH? If yes, describe this experience.
3. What is audio description (AD)?
4. Have you ever watched an audiovisual product with AD? If yes, describe this experience.

Table 2. Online pre-questionnaire

Source. Elaborated by the author

At the end of the semester, the participants completed an online post-questionnaire aimed at gathering students' opinions, perceptions and feedback regarding the SDH and AD tasks. Moreover, the post-questionnaire was designed to investigate students' perceptions of their improvement in terms of foreign language skills. The post-questionnaire included open-ended questions, as in the case of the pre-questionnaire, so that participants were free to express their opinions in their own words. The post-questionnaire was divided into two sections, one related to SDH (questions 1-6) and the other related to AD (questions 7-12). The final question (13) was aimed at finding out which activities the students appreciated or enjoyed the most, and which MA mode they considered the most challenging.

1. Have you changed your opinion/idea of SDH while attending this course? Why?
2. Which are according to you the most challenging aspects of SDH?
3. After attending this course, will you watch audiovisual programmes with SDH?
4. After attending this course, will you create SDH for videos?
5. Do you think that watching films with SDH has helped you improve your language skills? If so, which ones?
6. Do you think that creating SDH has helped you improve your language skills? If so, which ones?
7. Have you changed your opinion/idea of AD while attending this course? Why?
8. Which are according to you the most challenging aspects of AD?

9. After attending this course, will you watch audiovisual programmes with AD?
10. After attending this course, will you create AD for videos?
11. Do you think that watching films with AD has helped you improve your language skills? If so, which ones?
12. Do you think that creating AD has helped you improve your language skills? If so, which ones?
13. Which activities (SDH, AD) did you enjoy the most and why? Which one was more challenging and why?

Table 2. Online post-questionnaire

Source. Elaborated by the author

2.3.2. Learner diaries

Learner diaries were also used for data collection. This is a first-person account of a series of learning experiences, an intrapersonal form of writing reflecting on learning strategies and progress as well as learners' emotions (Beseghi, 2021; Gebhard, 1999; Moon, 2010). The learner diary is a qualitative research method that has been recognized in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and offers a useful tool for exploring students' personal narratives (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Pavlenko, 2007). Indeed, such narratives can provide an insight into how learners experience language learning and how they make sense of it (Pavlenko, 2007). Pavlenko (2007, p. 165) points out that there are three interconnected types of information that can be analysed in personal narratives: "subject reality" (how 'things' or events are experienced by the participants), "life reality" (how 'things' are or were), and "text reality" (how 'things' or events are narrated by the participants). The present study focuses on subject reality and text reality through a thematic analysis aimed at examining students' thoughts and feelings about their learning experience with SDH and AD. Learner diaries are, thus, useful for metacognitive reflection and introspection and give students the opportunity to focus on the process of language learning and all the aspects it entails.

At the beginning of the course, the participants were encouraged to keep a learner diary during the semester, which took the form of an intrapersonal online journal available as a free-form text on the university e-learning platform. This writing activity was not compulsory. Students were free to write down their personal thoughts about the SDH and AD tasks carried out in class or at home. In this sense, learner diaries are a form of autobiographic, reflective writing; a personal narrative reporting the experience of learning and a form of self-exploration in a safe, informal environment (Beseghi, 2021). Students were also encouraged to write about their past and present experiences with media accessibility not only in the academic context but also in their personal lives.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

This section focuses on the data that emerged from the responses given by the participants in the two questionnaires and on the analysis of the learner diaries.

At the very beginning of the course, before the pre-questionnaire was administered, the 23 participants were asked to indicate their preference of AVT modes when watching foreign audiovisual material. The vast majority (21 students, 91 %) revealed that they preferred to watch programmes in the original language (*i.e.*, English): among these, 19 students (82 %) specified that they usually watched programmes with intralingual or interlingual subtitles. Only two students (6 %) stated that they preferred dubbing.

3.1. Pre-Questionnaire

Out of the 23 students attending the course, 22 completed the pre-questionnaire at the beginning of the course.

Question 1 was aimed at assessing students' knowledge and awareness of SDH. Their responses showed that they were all familiar – at least in theory – with this MA mode. They knew that subtitles for d/Deaf and hard of hearing audiences are different from regular subtitles (*i.e.*, for hearing audiences) since they also include paralinguistic and non-verbal information (e.g., sounds and music) and are mainly targeted at viewers with hearing impairments. However, five of them (23 %) had never watched programmes with SDH.

Question 2 was aimed at verifying students' previous experience with SDH: five participants (23 %) stated that they had never used SDH, mainly because they were not accustomed to using subtitles. On the other hand, 17 participants (77 %) affirmed that they had used SDH at least once in their life.

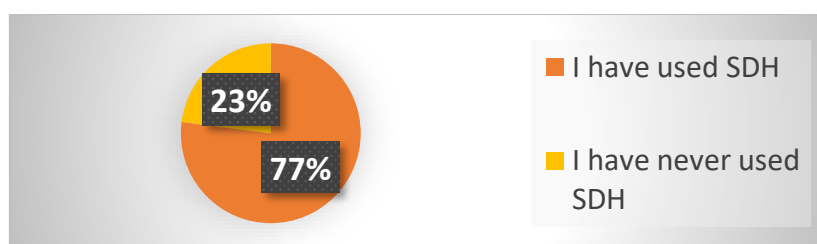


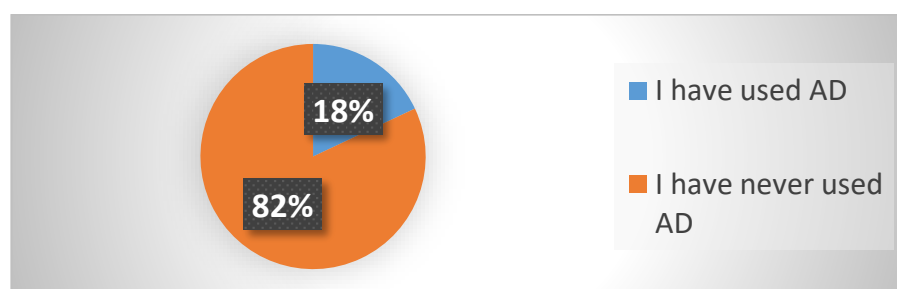
Figure 1. Pre-questionnaire: responses to question 2

Source. Elaborated by the author

However, their experiences with SDH were quite different: 10 students had used SDH out of necessity, for instance, for language learning purposes, because the dialogues were too difficult to follow or to understand, but they did not pay particular attention to the fact that information about paralinguistic and non-verbal features were included. Six students were more aware of this aspect and explained that using SDH enhanced their viewing experience. What emerged is that students had used SDH because it was the only available option at the intralingual level. In addition, while in general students' experiences with SDH were passive, one student reported a past experience that consisted in the active creation of SDH in the context of a university course.

As far as AD is concerned, students' answers to question 3 showed that most of them (95 %) knew something about this media accessibility mode. While they all emphasised the fact that AD is primarily targeted at blind and partially sighted people, six participants (27 %) also underlined that AD is a kind of art, an intersemiotic translation that creates a new product.

As for question 4, there were 18 students (82 %) that said they had never used AD, while four participants (18 %) had some experience with it.



2. Pre-questionnaire: responses to question 4

Source. Elaborated by the author

Two of them explained that they had previously used AD because of a university course they had attended in the previous year, while the other two watched programmes with AD out of curiosity or for practical reasons (*i.e.*, while doing other activities, such as ironing and folding laundry).

3.2. *Post-Questionnaire*

Twenty-one participants completed the post-questionnaire at the end of the course.

Questions 1 and 7 wanted to ascertain whether the participants had somehow changed their minds about SDH and AD after attending the module.

In the case of SDH, 19 students (90 %) explained that their idea of SDH had changed, either because thanks to the SDH tasks they understood the complexity of this practice or because they truly realised its social importance. Only two students (10 %) stated that their idea had not changed, because they were already aware of the nature of SDH.

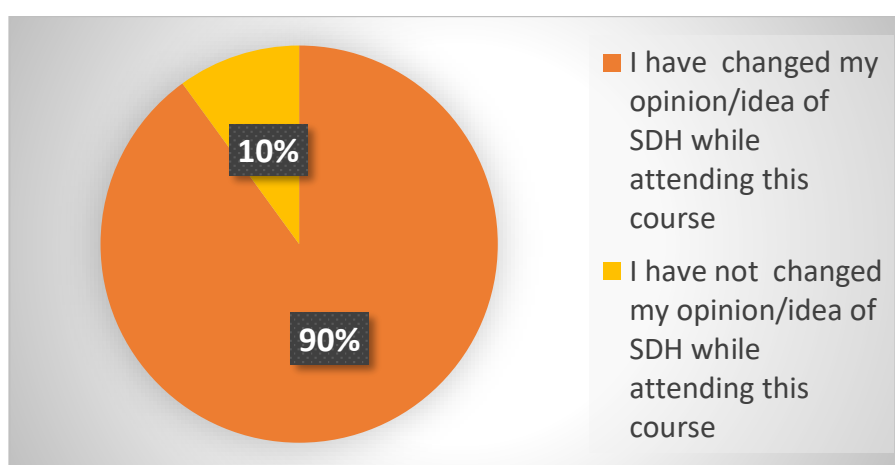


Figure 3. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 1

Source. Elaborated by the author

It was the same case regarding AD in question 7, where 19 students (90 %) explained that their idea of AD had changed for a number of reasons: firstly, they had not expected this practice to be so challenging; secondly, before attending the course some of them had preconceptions or prejudices about AD, which later turned out to be false, for example, they considered it “annoying”; thirdly, they truly realised its social importance (Rodrigues Barbosa, 2013) and the fact that media accessibility involves everyone, not just blind and partially sighted people or minority groups. Only two students stated that their idea had not changed (10 %), simply because their initial assumption that AD was a very challenging activity was confirmed.

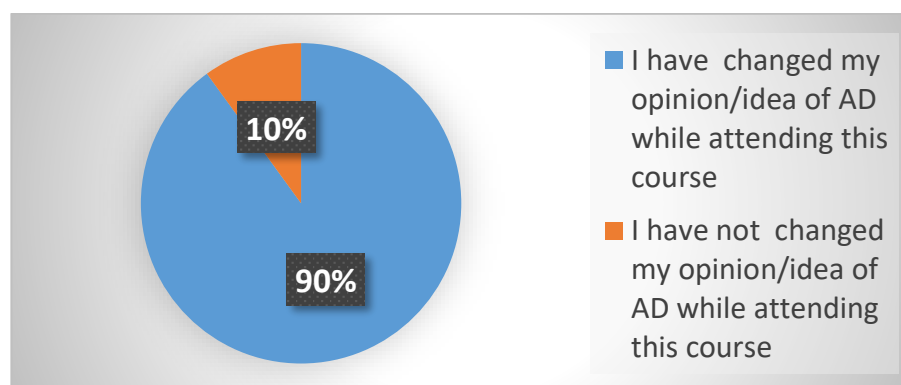


Figure 4. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 7

Source. Elaborated by the author

Questions 2 and 8 asked about the most challenging aspects of SDH and AD. As for SDH, ten students (48 %) identified some challenges or difficulties that are more generally related to subtitling, such as respecting space/time constraints and synchronisation (Lertola, 2015; Talaván, 2013). However, the vast majority (18 students, 86 %) underlined that the most challenging aspect was the description of sound effects, music, and paralinguistic features such as tone of voice and mood. Nine students (43 %) added that learning to use subtitling software was overwhelming especially at first, because they were not used to this kind of practical task. However, they also stated that their skills in using subtitling software improved with practice and thanks to peer collaboration as well as support from the instructor. Furthermore, eight participants (38 %) emphasised that it was difficult to provide d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing people with the same experience as that of a hearing person.

As for AD (question 8), the students underlined several difficulties concerning both the creation of the AD script and the oral delivery, emphasising challenging aspects not only from a linguistic point of view but also from a technical one. For instance, they described the difficulties encountered in finding the right spaces where to put the description (86 %); choosing the most salient elements to include in the description (86 %); selecting the appropriate vocabulary (76 %); being objective (71 %); being “creative”, since there is not a verbal source text (67 %); finding a balance between saying too much and not saying enough (62 %); using words that are clear, vivid and succinct (57 %); using the right intonation when delivering the AD script (52 %); and rendering camera work and film language (33 %). Twelve students (57 %) added that using dedicated software was not an easy

task especially at first, so they highlighted that additional technical support would be useful for them.

Questions 3 and 9 asked the students whether they intended to continue watching audiovisual programmes with SDH and AD. 20 participants (95 %) stated that they would certainly keep watching programmes with the help of SDH, while 19 (90 %) said they would continue using AD (when available). In both cases, they underlined that these two MA modes help them develop their competence in a foreign language, not only English, and offer an enriched viewing experience.

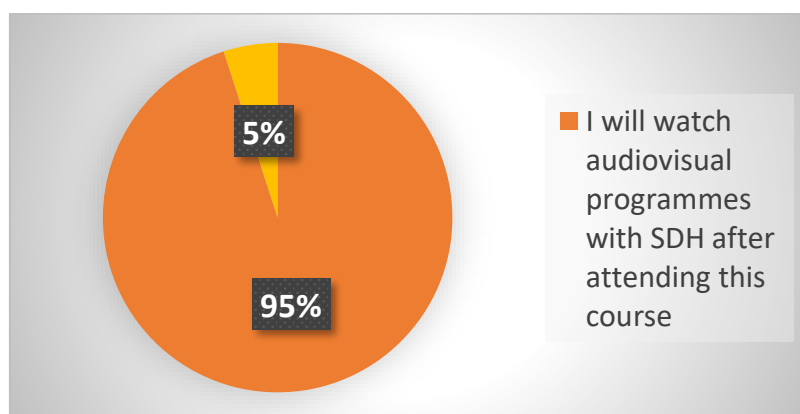


Figure 5. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 3
Source. Elaborated by the author

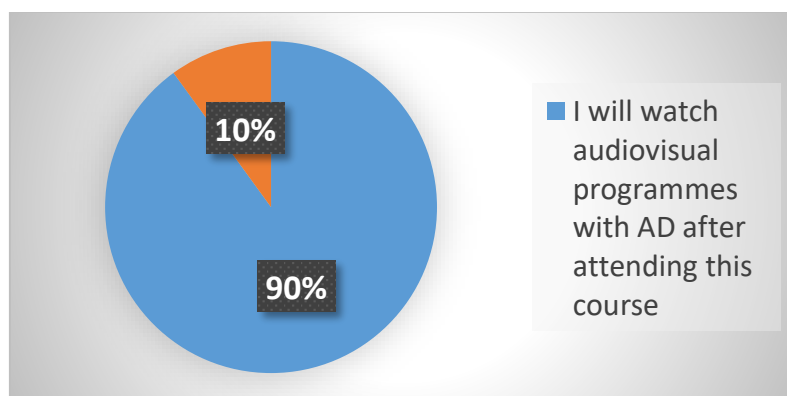


Figure 6. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 9
Source. Elaborated by the author

Questions 4 and 10 asked the students whether they would continue creating SDH and AD for videos after the end of the course. As for SDH, 18 students (86 %) were enthusiastic about this task and stated that they would create SDH in the future, because they consider it an enjoyable activity and at the same time they can contribute to a more inclusive society. Interestingly, 10 students (48 %) added that they would continue to practise creating SDH in view of their future profession as foreign language teachers, where they would like to use this type of task in the classroom. Only three students (14 %) were dubious, mainly because they were not sure they would have time for the creation of SDH in the future.

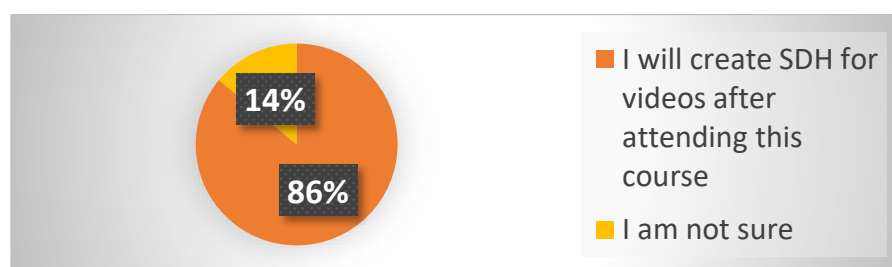


Figure 7. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 4

Source. Elaborated by the author

As for AD, on the other hand, 14 students (67 %) were sure they would try and create AD scripts for videos in the future, while seven students (33 %) were not sure, mainly because they consider the task more difficult and laborious. In this case as well, 10 students (48 %) added that they would like to propose AD tasks in their future foreign language classroom.

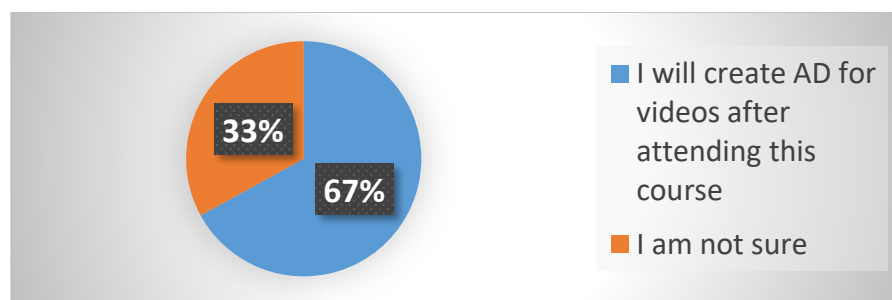


Figure 8. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 10

Source. Elaborated by the author

Questions 5 and 11 asked the participants whether from their perspective the passive use of SDH and AD helped them improve their

English language skills. All the students (100 %) agreed that watching programmes with SDH enhanced their English language skills, especially in terms of reading skills (95 %) but also as concerns vocabulary (86 %), idiomatic expressions (76 %), grammar (67 %), and orthography (67 %). Some students (57 %) also noticed that listening skills and pronunciation could improve thanks to the combined activity of reading and listening. All the participants (100 %) stated that watching programmes with AD helped them improve their foreign language skills, especially as regards vocabulary acquisition (100 %) and listening skills (95 %). Some students also underlined that passive AD helped them understand better film language (33 %) and follow the plot and character development (29 %).

Questions 6 and 12 aimed at exploring the participants' perceptions and beliefs about their English language skills and whether they improved thanks to active SDH and AD. The students highlighted that SDH tasks helped them enrich their vocabulary (100 %), improve their listening skills (95 %) as well as writing skills (95 %), and encouraged them to be more concise (86 %) and creative (81 %), as well as focus on different channels while using the language (52 %). They also noticed that they were able to develop intralingual translation skills (67 %) and "technical" skills concerning the use of specific software (33 %).

As far as AD is concerned, all the participants (100 %) pointed out that creating AD helped them develop their writing and speaking skills, also in terms of pronunciation and prosody, as well as expand their vocabulary (100 %) and descriptive language (95 %). They also noted that they had to be creative in their linguistic choices (95 %) and learn to use succinct and evocative language (90 %), aspects that may become useful in a variety of contexts besides audio description. Furthermore, several students (76 %) emphasised that they gained intersemiotic translation skills, described as the ability to interpret and then translate images into words.

Finally, question 13 asked students which activity they found most enjoyable, and which turned out to be the most challenging. 14 participants (67 %) indicated SDH as their preferred activity, mainly because they felt more confident in this type of task, while only two students (9 %) preferred AD activities, explaining that they felt more challenged, and they found the tasks more stimulating. In addition, five students (24 %) stated that they enjoyed both types of activities to the same degree, as can be seen in the following answer (extract 14):

(14) I would find it difficult to choose which of the two activities I liked best. I honestly believe that both have given me a lot in terms of language experience and more. I tried to put myself in the shoes of

a deaf person, in the shoes of a blind person. It was a very emotional journey.

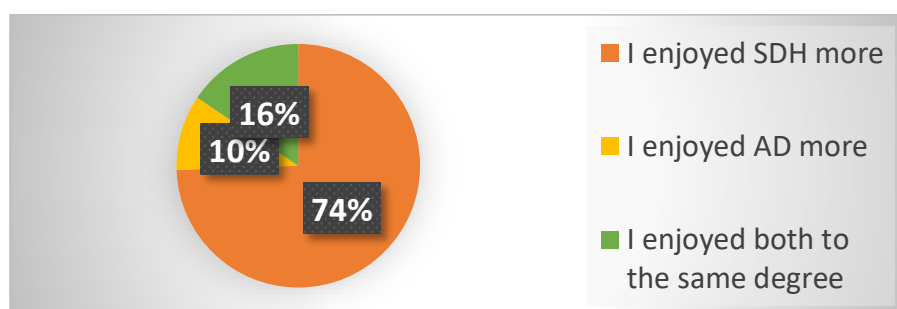


Figure 8. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 13

Source. Elaborated by the author

In the present study most participants (76 %) agreed that creating AD was the most challenging task, mainly because it was technically more difficult, it required more inventiveness, and it involved speaking as well. Moreover, the students emphasised that they found script writing in AD especially challenging since they had to “start from scratch” and did not have a verbal source text at their disposal.

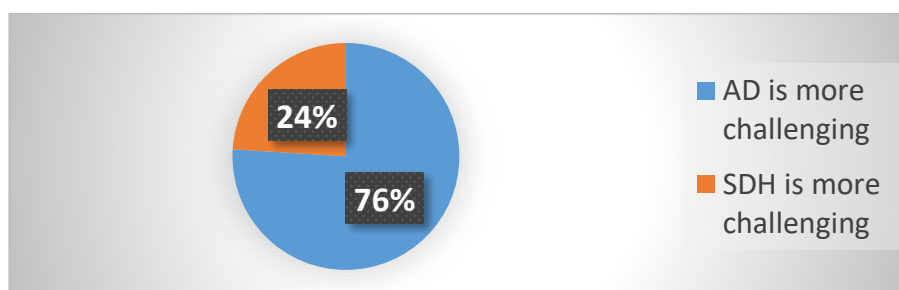


Figure 9. Post-questionnaire: responses to question 13

Source. Elaborated by the author

Other relevant data that emerged from students' answers to question 13 concern the use of both SDH and AD in the classroom. A significant number of students (67 %) emphasised that although the AD tasks were more demanding, being able to practise both MA modes allowed them to develop integrated and transferable skills.

3.3. *Analysis of Learner Diaries*

This section presents some data that emerged from the analysis of the students' diaries, which specifically focused on how the participants lived and described their learning experience (subject and text reality). As previously explained, learner diaries were presented as an optional activity which would not be corrected or evaluated by the teacher. The students were nevertheless encouraged to use the learner diary as a free space where they could register their thoughts about themselves as learners, as well as think and write about their learning experiences, feelings, personal beliefs, and views, in addition to their personal experience with MA, SDH, and AD.

Twenty students (87 %) who attended the course decided to write a diary, which they used to different degrees and with different frequency. However, it is worth mentioning that there was a general tendency to write more frequently as the course progressed. In addition, looking at their diaries from a chronological perspective, it can be observed that their texts show greater linguistic accuracy and more varied vocabulary.

From a thematic point of view, some recurrent topics that emerged from the analysis are comments about the content of the course (MA, SDH, and AD); the description of difficulties, obstacles, and emotions in relation to learning; accounts of personal experiences related to MA; comments about specific activities; reports of activities carried out independently; and perceptions of personal improvement in foreign language skills.

An aspect that can be clearly observed in the learner diaries is the significant number of comments about the content of the course (MA, SDH, and AD). All the participants (100 %) emphasised that the course contents were interesting, entertaining, and motivating for them. They also reflected on the fact that they had not considered the importance of media accessibility before attending the course, and this almost entirely new area turned out to be significant in their everyday life and way of thinking.

Furthermore, a significant number of students (80 %) reported their thoughts on the educational value of MA-based tasks and stated that they would consider implementing these activities in their future classes (see extract 1). Indeed, as previously explained, the participants were studying to become foreign language teachers.

(1) I cannot help but think that SDH and AD are a powerful tool for foreign language teaching and learning. I hope I will become a teacher soon and I'm sure I'll use audiovisual materials and media accessibility activities with my future students.

Another feature which strongly characterises the participants' learner diaries is the description of the difficulties or obstacles encountered in the learning path, an aspect that was addressed by all the students. This aspect often goes hand in hand with the description of the emotions associated with these obstacles or difficulties (Beseghi, 2021). In many cases, students were initially afraid of or worried about activities involving SDH and especially AD (extract 2). Their fear, anxiety, and worry were often caused by a lack of confidence in their skills, in particular writing and speaking, despite their advanced level of English, and by their fear of making mistakes (extract 3).

(2) I didn't have any knowledge about AD, and, honestly, when I had to do the first activity for this course what I felt is a state of *anxiety*. The *anxiety* is due, perhaps, to the fact that I am not used to it, I am just realizing that for me my sight sense is probably the most precious and developed sense I use for everything.

(3) In the beginning, I felt *lost* because I didn't know what to analyze, having never done this type of exercise I was *afraid* of making mistakes.

However, all the diaries show a clear shift in students' emotions, which become more positive as they carry out the practical activities. Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry shift to greater self-confidence, together with a sense of satisfaction and even pride (extract 4).

(4) I wasn't sure I would be able to carry out the activities proposed in this course. I was very *worried* at the beginning. I'm a perfectionist and I never want to fail. Now the course is almost over, and I'm *proud* of what I did. I think my subtitles and my AD scripts have improved in the last months. I feel *satisfied*.

Another aspect that was described in the diaries by a significant number of students (75 %) is the fact that using software to carry out the activities can be problematic, even intimidating at times. Indeed, some students (35 %) wrote that they would prefer to receive more technical support during the practical activities. Nevertheless, this difficulty was overcome by some students thanks to teamwork and peer collaboration (extract 5).

(5) I am not very good at learning how to use new software. This aspect was very *scary* for me at the beginning. However, once we started the practical activities together, working with my classmates helped me *overcome this fear*.

The diaries also include several accounts of personal experiences (65 %), especially in relation to SDH and AD as well as MA in general. For instance, a student reflected on how her mother's partial deafness affected her approach to media accessibility and how her awareness increased even

more by carrying out the tasks based on SDH (extract 6). Another student explained that while attending the course, she told her friends and relatives about the MA-based activities she was doing in class, trying to engage them in the topic of media accessibility (extract 7).

(6) I feel this topic really close to me. I see everyday with my own eyes what it means not to fully hear, or not hear at all when someone speaks to you. My mum lost the hearing to her left ear when she was three. This did not stop her from becoming a teacher and to achieve her goals. Thinking about my mum's experience and the struggles she has sometimes, I appreciate even more media accessibility. Now I enjoy watching films with SDH!

(7) I'm trying to involve my parents and my closest friends in media accessibility. I think it's important they know what SDH and AD are, and they understand its importance in our society.

All the students wrote reflections and observations on the activities carried out throughout the semester. As noted above, the participants commented positively on the MA-based tasks proposed in the course. What clearly emerges is a general positive evaluation of the activities, which are considered motivating and interesting, albeit challenging (see also Talaván et al., 2022). Some learners (65 %) felt the need to further explore topics that were covered during the in-class activities, for example by watching other episodes of the TV shows used in class to find out which strategies had been applied in SDH and/or AD, also paying attention to linguistic aspects (extract 8).

(8) I didn't expect *Stranger Things* to be such a big feature in the course; but after watching it entirely (and loving it), I completely get the point. It's challenging to make subtitles for a program like that, especially if we bear in mind that sounds and music from the 80s have weird codes in terms of wording that only a true nerd can detect. Season 4 is surely the most challenging, having tons of sounds and atmospheres to be subtitled. While watching a clip from the first episode, I even noticed a mistake in the written lyrics of Kate Bush's "Running Up That Hill": the first line says, "it doesn't hurt me"; the lyrics read, "it didn't hurt me".

A further interesting aspect that frequently characterises the diaries analysed is the description of additional activities carried out spontaneously and independently by the students (68 %). These activities involved both watching audiovisual programmes with SDH and/or AD (extract 9) and creating SDH and AD for specific scenes chosen by the students (extract 10).

(9) Speaking of AD, out of curiosity I watched *A Quiet Place* (with subs as well) on Netflix to understand how it works. The plot needs

the protagonists not to speak nor make any noise, or the creatures persecuting them will find them. If it wasn't for AD, I don't think I would've followed the movie nor enjoyed it. Every gap was perfectly filled in, I didn't even notice the describer was there: it's as if the whole movie was purposely made for AD.

(10) I made the AD script for the first scene of *Doctor Sleep* to see how the introduction of the villain could be described, and I must say it was tricky. I couldn't include all the elements that I wanted to describe, since basically there was no time.

Furthermore, some students decided to focus on scenes characterised by taboo language, violence, sex, and multilingualism in order to challenge themselves in the subtitling or description of potentially disturbing or challenging elements. Among the 15 students who reported additional activities in their diaries, nine of them practised both AD and SDH, three only created SDH and the other three students only practised AD.

Finally, an interesting feature that characterises all the students' diaries concerns their perceived improvement in foreign language skills. All the participants reported that they felt more confident in a variety of skills, both receptive and productive, written and oral. In addition, they perceived improvements in lexical skills as well as intralingual and intersemiotic translation. Their comments particularly highlight their awareness of mediation skills, not only at the intralingual level but above all at the intersemiotic level, as they emphasise that both the SDH tasks and AD tasks enabled them to improve their ability to turn sounds and images into words (extract 11).

(11) Before attending this course, I never thought about the necessity of describing sounds for SDH and images for AD. This kind of activity is very challenging but also very rewarding. I feel have new skills now which are not only linguistic, but also related to other aspects of translation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on the discussion of the findings that emerged from the analysis of the responses given by the participants in the two questionnaires and of the learner diaries. Emphasis will be placed on how learning is experienced by the participants and how the learning experience related to AD and SDH is perceived and narrated.

4.1. Questionnaires

As far as the pre-questionnaire is concerned, students' responses highlighted that they were aware of what SDH is and most of them (70 %) had watched audiovisual programmes with SDH before attending the course. On

the contrary, in the case of AD, while almost all participants (95 %) knew what it is, most of them (82 %) had never watched an audiovisual programme with AD. In the post-questionnaire 90% of the students stated that their idea of both SDH and AD had changed after attending the course: this seems to show that carrying out SDH and AD tasks led them to a different perception of two MA modes that they did not know or only knew from a passive perspective.

The post-questionnaire brought to light some interesting results concerning students' perception of the didactic application of SDH and AD: 1) they found challenging aspects in both SDH and AD tasks, with AD posing more difficulties; 2) they perceived an improvement in their foreign language skills, as a result of both passive and active SDH and AD tasks; 3) they were enthusiastic about SDH and AD tasks, with the majority claiming that they would continue watching programmes with SDH and AD as well as creating SDH and AD for videos even after the end of the course, with some students expressing their will to use DAT in their future professional career.

The most challenging aspects of SDH and AD underlined by students are summarised in Table 3:

<p>Most challenging aspects of SDH:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - description of sound effects, music and paralinguistic features (86 %); - respecting space/time constraints and synchronisation (48 %); - using subtitling software (43 %); - providing d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing people with the same experience as that of a hearing person (38 %). 	<p>Most challenging aspects of AD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finding space for the description (86 %); - choosing the most salient elements (86 %); - selecting the appropriate vocabulary (76 %); - being objective (71 %); - being creative (67 %); - finding a balance between saying too much and not saying enough (62 %); - using clear, vivid and succinct language (57 %); - using dedicated software (53 %); - using the right intonation when delivering the AD script (52 %); - rendering camera work and film language (33 %).
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Table 3. Most challenging aspects of SDH and AD

Source. Elaborated by the author

In both cases, students emphasised the difficulties related to using specific software. This finding is in line with the study by Talaván (2019) which emphasised the challenge of using subtitling software, especially at the

beginning of a course or project, but also the enhancement of students' ICT skills. Students found more challenges in AD tasks, and this corroborates previous studies (Bausells-Espín, 2022; Lertola & Talaván, 2022; Talaván & Lertola, 2016; Talaván et al., 2022). Moreover, students' responses seem to confirm the importance of fostering Film Literacy in FLL, as advocated by Herrero and Escobar (2018).

In terms of perceived improvement, Table 4 reports the skills that were improved thanks to passive SDH and AD as perceived by the participants:

Improved English language skills thanks to passive SDH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reading skills (95 %); - vocabulary (86 %); - idiomatic expressions (76 %); - grammar (67 %); - orthography (67 %); - listening skills and pronunciation (57 %). 	Improved English language skills thanks to passive AD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - vocabulary (100 %); - listening skills (95 %); - understand film language (33 %); - follow the plot and character development (29 %).
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Table 4. Improved English language skills thanks to passive SDH and AD

Source. Elaborated by the author

Table 5 reports the skills that were improved thanks to active SDH and AD as perceived by the participants:

Improved English language skills thanks to active SDH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - vocabulary (100 %), - listening skills (95 %) - writing skills (95 %), - conciseness (86 %) - creativity (81 %) - intralingual translation skills (67 %) - focusing on different channels while using the language (52 %) - technology skills (33 %). 	Improved English language skills thanks to active AD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - writing skills (100 %), - speaking skills, pronunciation and prosody (100 %), - vocabulary (100 %) - descriptive language (95 %). - creativity (95 %) - succinct and evocative language (90 %), - intersemiotic translation skills (76 %)
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Table 5. Improved English language skills thanks to active SDH and AD

Source. Elaborated by the author

As far as SDH is concerned, the findings described in Table 5 are mostly in line with the results obtained by Talaván (2019). Moreover, a significant number of students emphasised their perceived increased ability to translate at an intralingual level. This is perhaps due to the fact that Italian

students are normally more used to interlingual translation, so practising a form of mediation at an intralingual level was an opportunity for them to widen their translation skills.

As far as AD is concerned, the findings reported in Table 5 substantiate the results of previous studies on didactic AD that have focused on the development of speaking skills (Talaván & Lertola, 2016) as well as lexical and writing skills (Calduch & Talaván, 2018; Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013; 2014). Furthermore, several students emphasised that they gained intersemiotic translation skills. This widespread perception seems to go hand in hand with the perception regarding intralingual translation skills. It could be argued that SDH and AD help students to broaden their approach to translation by applying the two forms of translation that are perhaps least practised at an educational level, the intralingual and intersemiotic ones.

Moreover, 10 students (48 %) stated that they would like to propose SDH and AD tasks in their future teaching. This perception further supports the idea promoted by Lertola and Talaván (2022, p. 148), who advocate for “the systematic application of didactic AVT in the training of future teachers”.

4.2. *Learner diaries*

In terms of the findings that emerged from the analysis of learner diaries, it was possible to identify some perceptions that highlight several benefits in the integration of MA-based tasks in an EFL context.

Looking at students' diaries from a chronological perspective, their texts show greater linguistic accuracy and more varied vocabulary, which indicates greater confidence in their writing skills. This finding corroborates the results of previous research that identified the benefits of AD and SDH with regard to written production and lexical skills (Bausells-Espín, 2022; Calduch & Talaván, 2018; Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013; Talaván, 2019; Talaván et al., 2022; Walczak, 2016).

Motivation, enjoyment, and engagement are clear advantages that characterise SDH and AD tasks. Indeed, all the participants emphasised that the course contents were interesting, entertaining, and motivating for them. This finding is in line with previous research (e.g., Bausells-Espín, 2022; Lertola, 2019; Talaván, 2020). Furthermore, the diaries include the description of positive emotions and feelings such as satisfaction, pride, and self-confidence. The diaries show how students became increasingly autonomous learners, proven by the fact that they carried out additional activities spontaneously and independently, which emphasises the motivating nature of MA-based tasks (Bausells-Espín, 2022; Lertola & Talaván, 2022; Talaván et al., 2022).

Students also commented their greater media accessibility awareness, which is in line with what Talaván et al. (2022) observed. Additionally, students' accounts of personal thoughts and experiences illustrate how the integration of MA tasks in FLL can promote accessibility and enhance inclusion in the classroom and beyond, as advocated by previous studies (Guedes, 2010; Fiorucci, 2017; Talaván et al., 2022).

Critical issues that emerged concern the presence of negative emotions at the beginning of the project: fear, worry, and anxiety were reported by the students in the first phase of the project. Nonetheless, these negative emotions seem to have gradually disappeared, especially thanks to peer collaboration and the instructor's support. Another critical issue concerns the use of software, described by some students as an aspect that worried them and made them feel anxious. This finding suggests that more technical support should be provided to lower technology-related anxiety and confirms what Lertola and Talaván (2022) and Talaván et al. (2022) observed.

Finally, a significant number of students (80 %) reflected on the educational value of MA-based tasks, stating that they would consider implementing SDH and AD activities in their future classes when they become foreign language teachers. This finding further supports the results of the study by Lertola and Talaván (2022), which highlight the growing need to train future foreign language teachers in the didactic application of AVT and MA.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented an exploratory study investigating students' opinions and perceptions of SDH and AD related activities in the context of an English language course as well as their perceptions of their progress in foreign language skills throughout the didactic project. After the analysis of the relevant data, the following conclusions have been drawn: 1) all the participants emphasised that the activities related to SDH and AD motivated and encouraged them to accept a challenge, especially thanks to peer collaboration; 2) their awareness of and interest in media accessibility increased significantly. This is particularly evident in their diaries, where they reflected on the role of MA not only in learning settings, but also in society at large; 3) all the participants perceived they had improved in their foreign language skills; this included reading, listening, writing, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and prosody, thanks to the use of both passive and active SDH and AD; 4) a widespread perception concerns the development of intralingual and intersemiotic translation skills, which suggests that SDH and AD help students to broaden their approach to translation beyond the interlingual perspective.

The participants' responses to the questionnaires and their free comments in the learner diaries highlighted several positive aspects of SDH and AD combined in the EFL classroom. However, a few critical issues have also emerged. First, using software both in and outside the classroom can be challenging. Some students had initial difficulties with getting acquainted with the software recommended for the activities. They reported these problems in their diaries, showing some frustration and anxiety at times. Nevertheless, they also underlined that working in teams helped them overcome technical issues. Another potential obstacle is the fact that for some students AD was particularly challenging: they found script writing more demanding since they had to "start from scratch" and did not have a verbal source text at their disposal. In addition, they encountered some difficulties when they had to deliver the AD script orally, as not all of them felt at ease with this part of the task. However, all the students expressed positive opinions about both SDH and AD activities. Some of them could not indicate a preference between the two in the post-questionnaire as both MA modes helped them develop integrated and transferable language skills.

In conclusion, the didactic project can be considered successful since all the participants gave positive feedback and most students expressed their will to continue to practise both SDH and AD. The participants perceived they had improved in various language skills, which also increased their confidence and motivation. Indeed, the analysis of their diaries confirmed greater accuracy and variation in terms of language use. Moreover, several participants expressed their willingness to apply SDH and AD tasks in their future teaching profession, which denotes the need to train future language teachers in didactic AVT, as already emphasised by Lertola and Talaván (2022) and Talaván and Tinedo-Rodríguez (2024).

As underlined by Bausells-Espín (2022, p. 172), student perceptions can be seen as sources of valuable information in themselves: having access to students' thoughts and perceptions provides data about which learning outcomes can be expected from AVT-based tasks and "how to minimise limitations and maximise learning potential".

The main limitation of the present study concerns the small number of participants involved in the project. Further research could engage in studies on a larger scale with quantitative and qualitative data in order to fully explore the pedagogical value of SDH and AD as integrated activities in FLL. Moreover, additional studies are needed to investigate the didactic application of SDH and AD with different levels of proficiency.

The implications of the present study are in line with previous research (e.g., Bausells-Espín, 2022; Bolaños García-Escribano & Ogea Pozo, 2023;

Lertola & Talaván, 2022; Navarrete & Bolaños García-Escribano, 2022; Talaván et al., 2022) and indicate that didactic projects of this kind have the potential to support the systematic application of didactic MA in the context of FLL.

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