INTO THE SHOES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED VIEWERS: A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIMENT TO IMPROVE AUDIO DESCRIPTION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

EN LA PIEL DE LOS ESPECTADORES CON DISCAPACIDAD VISUAL: UN EXPERIMENTO DIDÁCTICO PARA MEJORAR LAS COMPETENCIAS EN TRADUCCIÓN AUDIOVISUAL, AUDIODESCRIPCIÓN E INGLÉS

MARÍA DEL MAR OGEA POZO
UNIVERSIDAD DE CÓRDOBA (ESPAÑA)

RESUMEN

La accesibilidad audiovisual se ha convertido, desde principios del siglo XXI, en uno de los campos relacionados con la traducción audiovisual más interesantes y prometedores tanto a nivel académico como profesional (Pereira y Lorenzo, 2021; Permuy, 2021; Sanz, 2017). Los audiodescriptores han de desarrollar, entre otras competencias, la sensibilidad social, el conocimiento del lenguaje cinematográfico, la fluidez en su propia lengua y cultura y la comprensión de la semiótica de la imagen (Díaz-Cintas, 2007; Navarrete, 1997). Además, tal y como han demostrado estudios anteriores, la audiodescripción —originalmente entendida como un servicio de apoyo a la comunicación (AENOR, 2005) para personas invidentes o con discapacidad visual— puede servir como una excelente herramienta para el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras (Talaván et al., 2022; Vermeulen & Escobar, 2021; Navarrete, 2018). Con el objetivo de profundizar en la adquisición de las competencias necesarias para la audiodescripción y, al mismo tiempo, mejorar el nivel de inglés como lengua extranjera de los alumnos durante un curso dedicado a la audiodescripción y didáctica del inglés, se llevó a cabo un experimento pedagógico que consistía en la identificación de los elementos acústicos y visuales presentes en un corto audiovisual y relevantes para la trama, así como en la posterior preparación y locución de una AD en inglés. La actividad contó con 35 participantes de diferentes universidades españolas, matriculados en el curso "Audiodescripción y didáctica del inglés" desarrollado en el marco del proyecto ADAS (Audio Description for lAnguage didacticS). Este estudio presenta los resultados obtenidos a partir de esta actividad estructurada en cinco fases, en lo que respecta a la adquisición de competencias específicas y la concienciación acerca de la importancia de la audiodescripción en la industria cinematográfica en la actualidad.

Palabras clave: Traducción audiovisual, Traducción Audiovisual Didáctica, Audiodescripción, Accesibilidad audiovisual, Didáctica del inglés.

ABSTRACT

Audiovisual accessibility has become, since the beginning of the 21st century, one of the most interesting and promising fields at both academic and professional levels related to audiovisual translation (Pereira and Lorenzo, 2021; Permuy, 2021; Sanz, 2017). Audio describers need to develop, among other skills, social sensitivity, knowledge of film language, fluency in their own language and culture, and an understanding of the semiotics of the image (Díaz-Cintas, 2007; Navarrete, 1997). Moreover, as proved by previous studies, audio description —originally understood as a communication support service (AENOR, 2005) for blind and visually impaired people— may work as an excellent tool in foreign language learning (Talaván et al., 2022; Vermeulen & Escobar, 2021; Navarrete, 2018). In order to delve into the acquisition of the necessary skills for audio description and, simultaneously, to improve the students' level of English as a foreign language during a course on AD and didactics of English, a pedagogical experiment was carried out involving the identification of aural and visual elements found in a short movie and considered relevant to the plot. Subsequently, the preparation and delivery of an AD in English was to be performed. The activity was carried out with 35 participants from different Spanish universities, enrolled in the course "Audio description and English as a foreign language education" developed within the framework of the ADAS project (Audio Description for Language didactics). This study reveals the results obtained from this five-stage activity, in terms of the acquisition of specific skills and the raising of awareness of the importance of audio description in today's film industry.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, Didactic Audiovisual Translation, Audio description, AudiovisualAccessibility, EFL, Learning.

1. Introduction

Film language and audiovisual translation have been inextricably bound since the origins of the latter. The notion of "film" may be understood as a form of art, entertainment, communication, or dissemination of culture, as well as a specific language and an audiovisual text subject to translation. Regarding the latter, it is essential to understand the indivisible nature of the union between image and sound in order to translate the audiovisual text, since these two components merge in one product, i.e., the film brought to viewers. Hence, the union between image and sound is one of the most important values of the film (Mayoral, 1993) and, consequently, it must be studied in depth by audiovisual translators. When working with film language, the focus should not be put exclusively on the linguistic units, since when translating a film, we are not just dealing with verbal elements, but also with non-verbal components that, although not susceptible to translation, must be synchronised with the verbal ones (Sokoli, 2005; Chaves, 2000). Additionally, we should bear in mind that viewers perceive information through two channels, the visual and the acoustic, whose components interact constantly. Therefore, we must conceive a film as a multisemiotic text in which information is perceived through both channels (Chaume Varela, 2004), comprising the moving picture (conveying relevant elements such as colour, rhythm, lighting, proxemic and kinesics signals, etc.) and the soundtrack (composed of the word, noise, and music) (Mayoral, 1990).

In modern society, images have become even more prominent than in previous decades, given the overwhelming amount of information delivered through screens. The demand for films in all their forms (short films, feature films, series, and documentaries, among others) has skyrocketed thanks to the variety of media providers that facilitate their consumption, from conventional theatres and television channels to video streaming platforms and internet sites. Regarding the interpretation of films, Mayoral (1993: 46) maintains that the greatest volume of information is rendered through images, whereas the audio becomes a mere complement. Nevertheless, viewers must pay attention to both channels, as words contribute to the comprehension and support of the visual information. In this regard, the latest data published in 2008 by the INE (Spanish Statistics Institute) revealed that 799,100 people in Spain have some sort of visual impairment of which 47,600 are blind, meaning that this group of the audience with special needs may not be able to appreciate every detail that constitutes the intricate structure of the film. Therefore, the need for awareness and further training to achieve more and better accessibility to films has become evident because, as Sanz (2017) manifests, facilitating access to culture in cinemas, theatres, museums, and media is an essential guarantee of cultural rights. Indeed, Sanz (2018) points out that audio description (AD), understood as a communication support service, has gained ground in Spain in recent decades, since cinemas, mobile phone applications and television channels are progressively changing to address the need for accessible contents. According to the author, a consequence of this demand is a search for professionals who are devoted to tasks such as the creation of AD scripts or subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), and who are able to work with the same celerity and professionalism required in more consolidated sectors such as dubbing or interlinguistic subtitling.

Accordingly, since the beginning of the 21st century, media accessibility has earned notoriety as a field of specialisation within audiovisual translation (AVT), being increasingly recognised as a constituent part of the discipline (Fryer, 2016) and becoming one of the domains with the greatest potential and possibilities at both academic and professional levels in Spain (Pereira & Lorenzo, 2021; Permuy, 2021; Sanz, 2017). This entails a need to deepen and enhance the training of AVT students in terms of the set of skills related to audio description, as well as to raise their awareness about the importance of providing more accessible audiovisual content.

1.1. A portray of audio description

Audio description consists of the implementation of a system designed to convey, through supplementary spoken narratives, visual information that would otherwise be imperceptible to blind and visually impaired audiences. In short, it is a literary art form that "provides a verbal version of the visual whereby the visual is made verbal, aural, and oral" (Snyder, 2005, p. 192). Besides, Fryer (2016, p. 9) suggests that we should think of AD "as using speech to make audiovisual material accessible to people who might not perceive the visual element themselves". In other words, audio description provides aural information (in the form of a narration or voiceover) which translates or explains what is seen on the screen, so that the audience can perceive the whole message; and it involves the depiction of details on the scene, characters and actions which are essential for interpreting the visual narrative. The standard UNE 153020:2005 regulation defines it as a communication service that applies a set of techniques and skills to overcome the lack of visual feedback in any kind of message, by supplying audible information that translates or explains it, so that the visually impaired receiver perceives the message in a way similar to how sighted viewers do. Beyond the film sector, which is the focus of this study, AD also works as a service for visually impaired users in other culture-related environments, such as galleries, museums, performing arts and video games (Pereira Rodríguez & Lorenzo, 2021; Fryer, 2016), enabling them to enjoy the experience as close as possible to that of sighted audiences (Permuy, 2021).

As previously mentioned, audio description extends beyond the film industry. For this reason, Díaz-Cintas (2007) sets out the three types of audio description described below:

1. AD recorded for the screen. This includes audiovisual productions such as films, television series, documentary films, shows, etc., regardless of the medium on which they are distributed or marketed (television, cinema, DVD, Internet, streaming content platforms, etc.).

2. AD recorded for audio guides. This service is offered in static structures such as monuments, museums, art galleries, churches, palaces, exhibitions, natural environments, and themed sites in which there are no moving images and the tactile or new technologies simulating this kind of experience are of great importance.

3. Live or semi-live AD. This concerns AD taking place during the performance of plays, musicals, ballet, opera, sports, and other shows, as well as conferences and public events.

In this paper, we will now focus on the first category proposed by the author, as this comprises the fictional short film chosen for our pedagogical proposal.

As for the AD task, such projects do not come with a pre-existing text to be translated from one language to another, but rather often involve intersemiotic or intermodal mediation (Fryer, 2016), like in the case presented in this paper, in which the participants worked solely with the images and their second language (i.e., English). This task may be challenging and enriching for students since, despite not undertaking the interlinguistic translation assignment, they must design an AD script in their foreign working language. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that audio description is no longer a process of intersemiotic nature exclusively, but an AVT modality that sometimes involves an interlinguistic shift as well. As a result, most of the professionals dedicated to audio description are freelance translators who combine it with other types of audiovisual translation, other translation expertise, or teaching (Permuy, 2021; Sanz-Moreno, 2018). Audio description provides an additional audio track that supports those viewers who cannot perceive the visual elements, and consequently, cannot fully comprehend nor enjoy the film. This service consists of describing not only the most relevant visuals, but also any component that may be difficult to understand without resorting to the images (Fryer, 2016, as cited in Arias & Matamala, 2020). As noted by Arias-Badia & Matamala (2020), selecting what to describe and how to describe it are two central aspects in the AD practice, since the amount of visual elements in any audiovisual content is complex and the

time allotted to AD is limited. In this sense, Fryer (2016) explains that the narration must introduce the scene by taking into consideration the characters and locations that will go on to be significant as the story unfolds. According to the author, narrative elements are crucial for blind people to follow the course of action and are known as "need to know" elements. In contrast to these, descriptive elements are considered as "nice to know" elements and may be dispensable. Therefore, when developing the AD script, learners should bear this distinction in mind, in order to discern between information that is essential and information that is likely to be eliminated if they are forced to synthesise the text due to spatial and temporal constraints.

1.2.   The skills of professional audio describers

In order to enhance further and more comprehensive training for audiovisual translators and accessibility professionals, several researchers have shed light on the competences that audio describers should cultivate (Arias-Badía & Matamala, 2020; Espasa, 2019; Talaván & Lertola, 2016; Fryer, 2016; Díaz-Cintas, 2007; Badia & Matamala, 2007; Snyder, 2005; Navarrete, 1997). A selection of these is presented below, with a special focus on the competences that we aimed to foster most intensively in the students who took part in the course.

Regarding the AD process, Fryer (2016) distinguishes three main skills based on the phases involved: writing, script preparation and delivery. When it comes to writing, she claims that "word choice and word order are critical to create AD that is economical yet vivid. When writing a script the describer must always bear in mind the oral nature of its delivery" (Fryer, 2016, p. 71). During the script preparation, describers must learn how to use screen software, and pay attention to the ease of reading. Besides, she explains that delivery concerns the way in which the audio description is voiced, contemplating supra-linguistic aspects of speech that convey meaning, such as stress, pitch, tempo, dynamic range, and words segmentation.

Moreover, Navarrete (1997) expounds that, for the purpose of audio describing a film, it is important to first interpret the film itself as a form of art that encompasses two facets: the dramatic (entailing the events and action) and the plastic (a plastic art that is not static, but in movement, in transformation). Thus, the author argues that each film poses descriptive challenges of various natures, and that dramatic action may prevail over the plastics and vice versa. Additionally, it is important to learn about the stylistic resources employed by the director for a particular intent which may affect the rhythm and style of the narrative. Based on these ideas, Navarrete (1997) outlines a profile of audio describers in which they must meet the following conditions:

- Extensive and eclectic training in filmmaking.
- Profound and not ideologically influenced cultural grounding.
- Great literary skills, with the ability to employ different writing styles.
- Being a good, sensitive film watcher who enjoys the cinema.

According to Snyder (2005), trained describers must hone four elements to offer AD in ways that will be most useful for films, performing arts and museums: observation, editing, language and vocal skills. The author ponders on how audio describers should be able to interpret the visual information so as to deliver it to the receiver: "Effective describers must learn to 're-see' the world around them, to truly notice what is perceived with the eyes, and then express the pertinent aspects of those images with precise and imaginative language and vocal techniques that render the visual verbal" (Snyder, 2005, p. 196).

Similarly, Díaz-Cintas (2007) suggests a collection of professional competences that experts on accessibility need to develop. In his study, the author focuses on the training of professionals, academics and researchers who wish to enter the audiovisual media accessibility industry or to research about this discipline, encompassing both subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing people

and audio description for blind and visually impaired people. He distinguishes four categories which, in turn, divide into subcategories as follows:

– Language skills. These include a thorough knowledge of the mother tongue; creativity and linguistic sensitivity; the acquisition of the necessary competence for the classification, revision and editing of texts in one's own language; and, where relevant, knowledge of the foreign language.
– Thematic or content competences. These embrace, on the one hand, general knowledge of disability, accessibility, the world of blindness and visual impairment; on the other, knowledge of film language and the semiotics of the image, the theory and practice of AD, the modalities of audiovisual accessibility, the professional sector, and the current legislation.
– Technological and applied competences. These refer to the knowledge and use of computers and the Internet, willingness to learn how to use new software, as well as documentation strategies.
– Personal and general competences. The last group involves general culture, autonomy, the ability to analyse and interpret information; the ability to organize, plan and manage information; the ability to argue critically, solve problems and make decisions; flexibility at work and the ability to work under stressful conditions, in multicultural environments and in groups.

In certain cases, audio describers may also be requested to perform the voicing; hence, they should also have a good intonation and be able to construct an appropriate load of meaning for the target audience (Talaván et al., 2016).

Students are thus expected to achieve a comprehensive learning that awakens their social sensitivity and fosters their skills in English as a foreign language, as well as their technical expertise and their knowledge of film, semiotic codes, and audiovisual translation.

1.3. Didactic audio description

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the main competences needed by describers is the linguistic proficiency. In consequence, AD may become an excellent tool for developing linguistic skills in a foreign language if learners work with an audiovisual text in the language they are studying. In this sense, AD has gained attention in academia, and many authors have explored the potential of active AD tasks in the context of foreign language learning (FLL) (Talaván et al., 2022; Herrero & Escobar, 2018; Navarrete, 2018; Ibáñez & Vermeulen, 2015).

In this sense, Herrero & Escobar (2018) point out that this form of active learning through films can be versatile and offer multiple benefits, since learners benefit from training on how to elaborate AD texts and develop active viewing strategies, improving their intercultural awareness and film literacy (they eventually become familiar with the multiple modes of meaning).

More specifically, Ibáñez & Vermeulen (2013) delve into the use of AD as a tool to improve the lexical and phraseological competence in a foreign language, while Navarrete (2021), Ibáñez et al. (2016) and Talaván (2009) reveal the benefits of using AD to improve oral skills in English as a foreign language (EFL). Moreover, since the audio describer needs to be capable of assessing how the same visual cultural reference should be depicted in two languages (Sanz, 2017) and that demands a profound knowledge of the two cultures involved, Vermeulen & Ibáñez (2017) suggest that didactic AD enhances the skills for intercultural mediation.

All the above justifies the design of the pedagogical activity presented in this study and described in the next sections, in which students would not only become familiar with the professional aspects of audio description and the principles applied to the selection of information

during script writing, but they would also gain an insight into the potential of AD as a tool for the acquisition of skills in English as a foreign language.

2. Objectives

The present paper introduces a pedagogical experiment conducted during the last session of the course "Audio description (AD) and English as a foreign language" organized in the framework of the project ADAS (Audio Description for lAnguage didacticS), as a result of a collaboration between Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) and the University of Cordoba. The course, held in Cordoba during the second semester of the 2021-2022 academic year, lasted 6 weeks and offered a weekly session. It aimed to train Spanish native students from different higher education institutions for the acquisition of the skills required to produce and delivery AD scripts in English and Spanish, as well as to explore the potential of audio description as a form of AVT suitable for teaching English as a foreign language.

In the light of the results obtained from such activity, we will review the design of the methodology applied and discuss the learning process based on the participants' feedback, in terms of the achievement of specific competences, the students' motivation, and their self-awareness when it comes to the role of audio description in today's audiovisual industry. Eventually, we will bring to light the need for further study and training related to certain aspects of audiovisual translation, accessibility, audio description and didactic AD in the EFL framework.

Therefore, the specific objectives of our present proposal are as follows:

- To demonstrate that the methodological approach presented in this paper helps students to effectively distinguish between aural and visual elements.
- To suggest that leading students through a step-by-step process enhances their ability to focus on the multiple semiotic codes and to produce AD scripts successfully.
- To prove that allowing students to place themselves in the shoes of the blind or visually impaired audience enhances their empathy and awareness towards accessibility.

The responses obtained in the questionnaires, in addition to the outcomes observed in their audio description scripts, shall be instrumental in confirming whether the participants did indeed achieve the expected skills.

3. Methodology

As previously mentioned, the experiment was performed during the sixth and final session of the course, which consisted of a face-to-face closing session convened at the University of Cordoba, in which a group of students (N=35) from different degrees took part. The main purpose was to boost the students' interest towards the practice of audio description, encouraging them to identify verbal and non-verbal elements conveyed in the visuals and to deliberate on their relevance for the plot. In this way, students were expected to identify the semiotic codes interacting in the audiovisual text, to acquire greater social sensitivity and empathy towards the blind and visually impaired audience and, ultimately, to perform a successful project consisting of the preparation of an AD script in English and the recording of the AD track in English.

The video selected for this activity is a short film titled *Being different is normal*, created by the Jerome Lejeune Foundation for 2015 World Down Syndrome Day, which uses visual narrative to display information unexpectedly and to pose a main underlying message that prompts the viewer to reconsider social norms and the notion of "being different". The film tells the story of a boy who, through a narration, relates that he is attending a new school and is afraid to not fit the rest of the group, since he is "different." However, the other pupils welcome him and cheers him up. The face of the boy is not seen until the end of the story, when the viewer finds out that all the pupils have Down syndrome except the new boy, setting out the question of what should be considered as

distinct. Given the crucial role of the images, this short film may imply an important challenge for audio describers, who must compensate for all the visual information but, at the same time, carefully choose their words to preserve the surprise factor.

To lead the students in the preparation of this script, they were provided with some basic principles of AD, according to the *Standards for Audio Description and Code of Professional Conduct for Describers* published by the Audio Description Coalition (ADC) (2009), which are summarised below:

– Describe what you see (physical appearances and actions), not what you think you see (motivations and intentions). Preview the material to identify the visual information that is inaccessible to visually impaired and blind people. Describe essentials first and the, if possible, describe further elements.
– Describe objectively. Allow listeners to form their own conclusions.
– Allow listeners to hear the dialogue. You may talk over background music and repeated songs but do omit the description if a dialogue is heard.
– Trust listeners' ability to comprehend the materials. Do not condescend, patronize, or talk down to them.
– Do not censor information. Maintain the factual information so listeners may know everything that is evident to sighted people.
– Keep the language consistent. Use language suitable for the expected age group. Avoid metaphors, similes, etc., and use slang, colloquialisms, and regional terms only when appropriate. Use the correct terminology, vivid verbs, and precise pronouns.
– Do not provide your own interpretations of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Describe skin colour and facial features.
– Describe from the listeners' perspective.
– Remember that good techniques make for good descriptions.

3.1. The design

The task consisted of five stages that allowed, through different steps, for the identification of the verbal and non-verbal elements engaged in the visual channel and pertinent to the plot, and for the subsequent preparation and delivery of a comprehensive AD script. The five stages are the following: (stage 1) "blind screening" of an English short film, meaning that only the audio could be heard while the screen remained black; (stage 2) note-taking on the perception of the story and the aural elements; (stage 3) full viewing of the original short film; (stage 4) note-taking on the visual narrative and the perception of the story, discussing the details that had been partially appreciated, not understood or unnoticed. By doing so, the students should be able to recognize the information conveyed through the visual channel which, therefore, may be imperceptible to the blind or visually impaired audience if an AD service is not provided; (stage 5) In the fifth and final phase, the students performed the AD task (script preparation and delivery) of the selected short film, based on their own answers to questionnaires 1 and 2.

It is worth mentioning that this model had already been put into practice in a previous pedagogical experiment on the first semester of the 2021-2022 academic year, in which students of the Translation and Interpreting degree from the University of Córdoba undertook the five-stage activity during one of the sessions of the AVT course included in the university curriculum. In that occasion, students carried out an intralinguistic task in Spanish and no foreign language was involved, as the main purpose was to analyse the visual and acoustic information, and to raise the students' awareness of the crucial role of AD. The results were satisfactory, and the activity proved to be beneficial and enriching for the students, whose motivation and involvement in the learning process was consistently high (Ogea-Pozo, 2022). Since the participants proved to have acquired

the ability to interpret film language, in terms of narrative, aesthetic and aural features, we considered worthwhile to replicate the work model, in this case, putting an additional emphasis on English as the working language for the listening and visualization of the film, as well as for the script preparation and delivery.

3.2. The materials

The five-stage task was explained to students by means of a work guide which describes each stage, provides clear and concise instructions, and refers to two questionnaires attached. The following is a reproduction of the guide:

1) Listen to the short film and keep your eyes closed. The screen will remain black, so focus on the aural information to understand the story.
2) Answer the following questionnaire:

Q1.1. Describe in brief what you think that happened in the story
Q1.2. Who do you think is the main character?
Q1.3. Who are the other characters involved?
Q1.4. What linguistic elements would you emphasize in the narrative?
Q1.5. What suprasegmental features would you emphasize?
Q1.6. What did the music accompaniment instil in you?
Q1.7. Have you detected the presence of diegetic sound? If so, please add examples.
Q1.8. Have you detected the presence of non-diegetic sound? If so, please add examples.
Q1.9. Do you think you managed to understand the whole story without the visual information?

3) Watch the full short film.
4) Answer the following questionnaire:

Q2.1. Summarise in brief what happened in the story.
Q2.2. Who is the main character?
Q2.3. Who are the other characters involved?
Q2.4. Did the linguistic elements that you highlighted before enable you to understand the narrative properly?
Q2.5. Did the suprasegmental features that you highlighted before enable you to understand the narrative properly?
Q2.6. Did you find any iconographic elements that, when not read, hindered your understanding of any part of the story?
Q2.7. What did the photograph instil in you (lighting, colour, etc.)?
Q2.8. Which information regarding the spatial situation and landscapes did you find significant to the plot? List briefly.
Q2.9. What information regarding the gestures and attitude of the characters have you found relevant to the plot? List briefly.

Q2.10. What information regarding physical features and clothing have you found relevant to the plot? List briefly.
Q2.11. Do you think a visually impaired person could enjoy the short film without the support of audio description?
Q2.12. What information do you think would be imperceptible to a visually impaired person?
Q2.13. Do you think this information can be rendered to the visually impaired audience through audio description?
Q2.14. Do you think that the "blind screening" in step 1 allowed you to better appreciate the aural information?
Q2.15. Do you think that putting yourself in the shoes of a blind person helped you to better appreciate the visual information in step 3?
Q2.16. Do you think this experiment helped you become more aware of the need to provide accessible audiovisual products?
Q2.17. Is there anything else you would like to say about this experience of watching a non-accessible video?

5) Based on your answers to the previous questionnaires, prepare your AD script and provide as much information as you think is indispensable for the blind and visually impaired audience to fully understand and enjoy the film. Use your script to record your own narration in English.

4. Results and discussions

The following section examines the responses of the participants in the activity, with the purpose of illustrating their overall perception in terms of their understanding of the story and their appreciation of the visual and aural information as outlined in the different points of each questionnaire.

4.1. First questionnaire

During the first screening of the short film (with a black screen), the students were expected to focus their attention on the sound and to interpret the aural information as efficiently as possible; hence, the first questionnaire focused specifically on their perception of the acoustic channel and on the obstacles encountered for interpreting the whole message.

The answers to the first question ("Describe in brief what you think that happened in the story") reveal that though most of the participants grasped the story, they only understood it partially and occasionally misinterpreted the facts, as some of them related the story to bullying, unnoticed the fact that the protagonist feels different or believed that he had been discriminated beforehand in other schools: "I think that this is the story of a boy with a kind of disability that has suffered any discrimination before and now is describing how he has been received and welcomed in his new school where they have a clear idea that been different is normal." Since the narrative aims to confuse the audience at first, and afterwards, to surprise them, it is not unexpected that most of the answers to question 2 were misleading, inclined to think that the main character was "a boy with some kind of disability", "a boy with a neurological and physical disability", or "a boy who suffered bullying." In relation to the other characters (question 3), most of the students realized that other students and a teacher took part, since this was mentioned in the voiceover; however, only one answer pointed out that the second boy could have some kind a disability affecting his speech.

The following questions intended to bring the students' focus to the main features of the oral narrative. Concerning the linguistic elements, the answers highlighted the use of the first-person narration, in the form of a monologue; the presence of verbs in present simple tense; affirmative, short, and simple sentences; and the use of descriptive words to express the character's feelings.

As for the suprasegmental features, one student highlighted that "a boy with some kind of aphasia speaks", and two other students noticed that the second boy speaking had Down syndrome: "One line has been uttered with the distinctive manner of speaking of people with Down syndrome". This proves that only three students were able to understand the plot twist without the image, at the same time and in the same way that the sighted audience would.

Regarding the music, all of the students connected it with the boy's feelings and the events occurring: "The music initially portrays sadness and gradually builds in intensity to turn into epic music", "This makes the story even more exciting and makes you feel somehow what the child is feeling at that moment", "This is emotive music. It conveys a sense of achievement and a feeling of empathy." That leads us to think that they relied on audible elements that sometimes go unremarked upon, in order to find emotional appeal and to get the impression that they are following the story.

Among the answers to the question "Have you detected the presence of diegetic sound?", we found that a 58.8% of the students answered affirmatively and highlighted components such as the sound of a door closing, a swing rocking, and kids playing. That helped them place the story in a school. Concerning non-diegetic sound, 41.2% of students responded affirmatively and pointed at the music.

To conclude, the question "Do you think you managed to understand the whole story without the visual information?" put the emphasis on a comprehensive understanding of the narrative. We found out that 64.7% considered to have understood the plot partially, while 20.6% did not understand it and 14.7% believed to have understood the full story.

4.2. Second questionnaire

In the answers to the second questionnaire, we found that many of the students had indeed understood the story partially and others who thought they had fully grasped the story had done it incorrectly. Consequently, many modified their answers to the first question or added further information, including physical features ("A thin, blonde boy"), the gender of the protagonist and the approximate age ("He is a boy between 11 and 12 years old"), or the fact that he does not suffer from any disability ("It is an ordinary boy", "A boy with no apparent disability").

The question "Did the linguistic elements that you highlighted before enable you to understand the narrative properly?" was intended to confirm whether they had comprehended the plot without the support of the visuals. Whereas only 14.3% of students said yes, 17.1% declared to have understood the story partially, 5.7% to not have understood, and interestingly, 62.9% of them answered "I thought so, but I had misunderstood the information."

Since the students could observe the visuals for the first time during the second screening, the following questions put the focus on the information rendered by images. Regarding the iconographic components found relevant, it is worth noting that only four students responded negatively, while the rest of them underlined details such as the signs on the school gate and on the head's office, and the facial features of the characters. One of the students recounted the importance of the visuals to cause an impact on the audience: "The first part deliberately misleads the viewer by claiming that people mark the boy as special, predisposing the viewer to believe that the boy is somehow distinct from the majority, namely non-disabled people." We can infer from the answers to the question about the photography that the students were able to relate this aspect to the underlying subjectivity and connotations. For instance, one of the students suggested the following idea: "The lighting and the colour which accompany the kid walking from the street to the classroom seem rather sad and dull, but they brighten and enliven the instant we see the smiling faces of his classmates." Besides, the spatial situation was accounted as important because, as stated by one student: "The setting is crucial; even though it can be deduced from the audio that

they are in a school, it is not clear whether they are in the playground, in the classroom or in the headmistress' office." Some gestures and facial expressions were also emphasized, such as hand movements (for example, when the headmistress puts her hand on the new boy's shoulder to express her sympathy), and the facial expression of both the protagonist, who expresses anxiety and concern, and the rest of the class, who greet him with smiles. Although no notable characteristics of the clothing were found, all the students agreed that the physical features were extremely transcendent for the story, as one student brought up: "Of course the physical features are particularly important, as we are facing a multitude of people who have a type of disability in common, which a priori is Down syndrome. The appearance of a person without this condition makes it seem that he is indeed 'not normal' (alluding to the title), which is why it is crucial to understand the plot." Therefore, as discussed by other student: "The information given is that the narrator, although he claims to be different, does not appear to be so, as he fits into the social canons of what a 'normal' person would be." This question made the participants think deeply about the importance of the image, about what to describe and how to do it to cause the same impression on the blind audience, and even generated a debate in the class that went beyond the audiovisual concepts and questioned social matters concerning inclusion, canons, and disability.

With respect to the reception of the short film by blind and visually impaired people, most students (68.6%) considered that this group of audience could not enjoy the short film without the support of AD, and 31.4% thought that they could follow the story partially. None of the students gave a categorical yes. This is because all the information described in the previous points would be imperceptible if not accurately described. Nevertheless, the motivation towards this experiment was high, and this translates into the fact that not a single participant admitted feeling incapable of transferring the information identified as relevant by means of AD (74.3% responded affirmatively, and 25.7% said that they could possibly fulfil this task).

The last group of questions aimed to ascertain the students' personal appreciation in terms of the development of their social awareness on disability, the usefulness of the methodology applied in the pedagogical experiment, and their additional opinions. While 65.7% of the respondents acknowledged to have achieved a better comprehension of the aural information thanks to the blind screening, 34.3% were not sure about that. Moreover, 97.1% of them were convinced that they had grasped the visuals more easily after putting themselves in the role of a blind person, as this permitted them to detect everything which had been missed previously. Only one person (2.9%) said to be unsure of this. All students (100%) declared that this experiment had raised their awareness of the need to increase the amount of accessible audiovisual products.

4.3. The AD in English

In the final stage, the students submitted a video clip that contained the AD in English according to the script they had previously written. After reviewing these videos, we observed that they were able to objectively describe in English the facial gestures denoting the attitude and feelings of the characters, as well as the action in motion, the key events at the time of their occurrence, and the relevant physical features. As a sample, below we reproduce two passages from the script written by one of the students, in which two important scenes for the plot are described: the arrival of the new boy to the school, and the moment during which viewers would find out that the rest of the characters (pupils and headmistress) have the features associated with the Down syndrome. The key information mentioned before is marked in bold (i.e., facial gestures and features, movement, events):

> The boy reads a report and **sighs**. He **goes across** the playground to the entrance and opens the principal's door. The boy is **escorted** to the classroom. […]
>
> A young **teacher with Down syndrome smiles** at him and the faces of the rest of the **classmates with Down syndrome** is centred on him but **smiling**.

Therefore, we can confirm that participants were able to capture the visual information which is key to the story and describe it with synthetic and precise vocabulary in English. They objectively portrayed the visuals that denoted the characters' state of mind (i. e. the child sighing timidly reflects his concern before entering the school), the interactions between them (i. e. classmates welcoming him with smiles) and the visual narrative, as well as the physical features that are crucial for the blind viewer to learn about the characters involved and to perceive the plot twist that brings the subject of disability into question.

5. Conclusions

The union between image and sound is without a doubt the basis of any film production and, for this reason, all audiovisual translators must have a certain knowledge of film language, as words assume their meaning when they interact with what is seen on the screen. The need to know how to interpret the informational function of the image is even greater in the case of AD tasks since the blind audience depends on this service to fully enjoy the film, as proved by the experiment presented in this paper. Therefore, audiovisual translators who deal with this task require, on the one hand, linguistic skills to render information effectively (through the written text and the subsequent oral delivery) and a comprehensive knowledge of the AD; on the other hand, a basic understanding of film language, so as to be capable of examining the numerous concepts and components involved and considering which visuals are relevant to the plot. In this sense, previous studies as the one carried out by Herrero & Escobar (2018), prove that the application of AD in a pedagogical model enables learners to pay attention to the multiple codes of meaning comprised in films and their interaction, developing their ability "to render a comprehensive linguistic, social, cultural, and intercultural description" (p. 31). As evidence of this, the answers obtained from the participants in this activity illustrate the relevance of the information found in each code of meaning.

Furthermore, audio describers should work from a perspective of social awareness and empathy, putting themselves in the shoes of the blind audience. Thus, they would be able to determine what information is needed in order to enjoy the film, while avoiding being patronizing, anticipating information, and influencing the audience's opinions through value judgements or personal interpretations. We strongly believe that, through this learning experience, we have been able to inculcate these values and skills in the participants.

In terms of training in AVT, this practice has triggered different abilities that had already been reported by Herrero & Escobar in their study (2018, p. 45), such as: enthusiasm, confidence, and motivation; improved attitudes to writing; increased attainment in writing; improved linguistic skills; better understanding and application of concepts. The experience described in this paper has proved to be beneficial and fulfilling for the students, whose motivation and implication in the learning process was remarkably high. They were able to deepen the identification and analysis of the multiple codes of meaning that converge in the acoustic and visual channels, as well as to use new software for video editing, audio recording and script writing.

The first part of the activity challenged the participants to focus on the dialogue, music, and background sounds, so that they would be able to decode all the verbal and non-verbal information conveyed through the acoustic channel. This task becomes especially valuable for improving their listening and oral comprehension, since the characters of the chosen video speak in a foreign language (English). In addition, the description of visual components required the use of accurate and factual language in English, so that students could also improve their language and writing skills. Finally, recording their own AD in English allowed them to improve their pronunciation, pitch, and timing, bearing in mind that their speech should be clear enough to be easily understood by the audience.

In short, this activity confirms to be a complex and comprehensive multidisciplinary learning methodology in which students learn about film language, AVT, and different facets of EFL. It has

also enabled students to become more aware of the amount of information perceived through visuals and of the need for greater professionalization in AD. Additionally, they have discovered the potential of AD as a useful tool for teaching English as a foreign language, and this approach may be of value to those who wish to pursue a career in foreign language teaching in the future.

Acknowledgement

References

AENOR (2005). Norma UNE 153020. Audiodescripción para personas con discapacidad visual. Requisitos para la audiodescripción y elaboración de audioguías. Madrid: AENOR.

Arias Badía, B., & Matamala, A. (2020). Audio description meets Easy-to-Read and Plain Language: results from a questionnaire and a focus group in Catalonia. *Zeitschrift Für Katalanistik*, *33*.

Badia, T. & Matamala, A. (2007). La docencia en accesibilidad en los medios. *Trans. Revista de Traductología*, 11, pp. 61–72. https://doi.org/10.24310/trans.2007.v0i11.3098

Chaume Varela, F. (2004). *Cine y traducción*. Cátedra.

Chaves García, M. J. (2000). La traducción cinematográfica: El doblaje. Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Huelva.

Diaz Cintas, J. (2007). Por una preparación de calidad en accesibilidad audiovisual. *Trans. Revista de Traductología*, 11, pp. 45–59. https://doi.org/10.24310/trans.2007.v0i11.3097

Espasa, E. (2019). Retos de la formación en línea sobre audiodescripción: experiencias "a ciegas" y con personas ciegas. In J. F. Carrero Martín, B. Cerezo Merchán, J. J. Martínez Sierra, & G. Zaragoza Ninet (Eds.), *La traducción audiovisual: aproximaciones desde la academia y la industria* (pp. 21–37). Comares.

Fryer, L. (2016). *An Introduction to Audio Description*. Routledge.

Herrero, C., & Escobar, M. (2018). A Pedagogical Model for Integrating Film Education and Audio Description in Foreign Language Acquisition. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, *4*(1), pp. 30–54. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00003.her

Ibáñez Moreno, A., Vermeulen, A., & Jordano, M. (2016). Using audio description to improve FLL students' oral competence in MALL: methodological preliminaries. In A. Pareja-Lora, C. Calle-Martínez, & P. Rodríguez-Arancón (Eds.), *New perspectives on teaching and working with languages in the digital era* (Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 245–256). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2016.tislid2014.438

Ibáñez, A., & Vermeulen, A. (2013). Audio Description as a Tool to Improve Lexical and Phraseological Competence in Foreign Language Learning. In D. Tsagari & G. Floros (Eds.), *Translation in language Teaching and Assessment* (pp. 41–65). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Ibáñez, A., & Vermeulen, A. (2015). Using VISP (VIdeos for SPeaking), a Mobile App Based on Audio Description, to Promote English Language Learning among Spanish Students: A Case Study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 178, pp. 132–138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.03.169

Mayoral Asensio, R. (1990). El lenguaje en el cine. *Claquette*, 1, pp. 43–54.

Mayoral Asensio, R. (1993). La traducción cinematográfica: el subtitulado. *Sendebar*, 4, pp. 45–68.

Navarrete, F. (1997). Sistema AUDESC: el arte de hablar en imágenes. *Integración*, *23*.

Navarrete, M. (2018). The use of audio description in foreign language education. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, *4*(1), pp. 129–150. https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00007.nav

Navarrete, M. (2021). *Active Audio Description as a Didactic Resource to Improve Oral Skills in Foreign Language Teaching*. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED.

Ogea Pozo, M. (2022) Concienciar y enseñar sobre accesibilidad: un experimento didáctico en el aula de traducción audiovisual basado en la audiodescripción. *Avanca | Cinema Journal,* pp. 20–30. https://doi.org/10.37390/avancacinema.2022.a457

Pereira Rodríguez, A. M., & Lorenzo, L. (2021). Accesibilidad en femenino: Investigadoras españolas en subtitulación para personas sordas y audiodescripción para personas ciegas. In C. Botella Tejera & B. Agulló García (Eds.), *Mujeres en la traducción audiovisual Perspectivas desde el mundo académico y profesional* (pp. 91–132). Sindéresis.

Permuy Hércules de Solás, I. (2021). El panorama actual de la accesibilidad a la televisión y las artes escénicas desde una perspectiva profesional. In C. Botella Tejera & B. Agulló García (Eds.), *Mujeres en la traducción audiovisual Perspectivas desde el mundo académico y profesional* (pp. 221–246). Sindéresis.

Sanz Moreno Raquel (Universitat de València), R. A. F.-S.-M. (2017). The Audio Describer as a Cultural Mediator. *Revista Española de Lingüística Aplicada/Spanish Journal of Applied Linguistics: RESLA/SJAL, 30*(2), pp. 538–558. https://doi.org/10.1075/resla.00006.san

Sanz Moreno, R. (2017). La audiodescripción. O la desminorización como derecho. In E. Monzó Nebot & J. Jiménez Salcedo (Eds.), *Les llengües minoritzades en l'ordre postmonolingüe* (pp. 121–136). Universitat Jaume I, Servei de Comunicació i Publicacions.

Sanz Moreno, R. (2018). Perfil socioprofesional del audiodescriptor en España Socio-professional profile of the audio describers in Spain. *Hikma: Estudios de Traducción = Translation Studies,* 17, pp. 119–143.

Snyder, J. (2005). Audio description: The visual made verbal. *International Congress Series*, *1282*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ics.2005.05.215

Sokoli, S. (2005). Temas de investigación en traducción audiovisual: La definición del texto audiovisual. In P. Zabalbeascoa (Ed.), *La traducción audiovisual: Investigación, enseñanza y profesión* (pp. 177–185). Comares.

Talaván, N. (2009). *Aplicaciones de la traducción audiovisual para mejorar la comprensión oral del inglés*. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.

Talaván, N., & Lertola, J. (2016). Active audiodescription to promote speaking skills in online environments. *Sintagma, Revista de Lingüística*, *28*, pp. 59–74. https://doi.org/10.21001/sintagma.2016.28.04

Talaván, N., Ávila Cabrera, J. J., & Costal, T. (2016). *Traducción y accesibilidad audiovisual*. Editorial UOC.

Talaván, N., Lertola, J., & Ibáñez, A. (2022). Audio description and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing. Media accessibility in foreign language learning. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, Vol. 8(1), pp. 1-29. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00082.tal

Vermeulen, A., & Escobar, L. (2021). Audiovisual translation (dubbing and audio description) as a didactic tool to promote foreign language learning: The case of Spanish clitic pronouns. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, *7*(1), pp. 86–105. https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00060.ver

Vermeulen, A., & Ibáñez Moreno, A. (2017). Audio description as a tool to promote intercultural competence. In J. Deconinck, P. Humblé, J. Deconinck, A. Sepp, & H. Stengers (Eds.), *Towards Transcultural Awareness in Translation Pedagogy* (pp. 133–153). LIT Verlag.