

## Audio Description Practice in the Catalan L1 Classroom: Pedagogical Challenges and Opportunities in a Minoritised Language Setting

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### Abstract

Audiovisual Translation and Audio description (AD) have been successfully used in educational settings, especially in foreign language learning and with advanced foreign language learners, in the context of higher education. The use of AD in school settings, and in connection with L1, is a promising but arguably under researched area, which our study explores through an AD workshop conducted in a Catalan secondary school. The article outlines the pedagogical design of the intervention based in action-research, its results, limitations, and ways forward. Our results indicate that the practice of AD helped students to develop linguistic skills, especially lexical and syntactic skills, as well as critical thinking and transversal competences such as digital skills. The activity also raised awareness about blindness and functional diversity. One of the challenges was to evaluate students' productions and another was to deal with a complex sociolinguistic context and translanguaging in the classroom, two key aspects that are also discussed in the article. An important outcome is that the AD workshop presented in this article is now part of a catalogue of activities to encourage the use of Catalan among students, published by the Catalan Government, and addressed to Catalan schools.

**Key words:** Audio description (AD), language teaching, language learning, action research (AR), secondary education, L1, Catalan, minority languages, minoritised languages, translanguaging.

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## 1. Introduction

Audio description (AD) is a form of intersemiotic translation that renders the meaning of images into words, to make audiovisual products accessible to blind and partially sighted persons. However, it can also benefit other audiences (e.g., students) and purposes (such as language learning) as in the research presented here, which explores the benefits of practising AD for developing L1 skills in secondary education. The study was conducted as an action research (AR) project in a Catalan secondary school with 12- to 13-year-old-students. The main aims of the study are to explore the following benefits of didactic AD:

1. For developing L1 lexical and syntactic skills, as students look for accurate words to describe what they see and express themselves in the shortest and clearest way.
2. For developing interpersonal and strategic competences, as AD offers an interdisciplinary experience in which students work on film and film analysis, and practise with voice recording and film editing software.
3. For raising awareness on blindness and functional diversity among secondary school students.

The project was designed as a collaborative action research (AR) intervention and involved two researchers (the authors of this paper), a professional audio describer (Carme Guillamon), and a teacher of Catalan (Mireia Galindo). This team guided the participating students through the process of audio describing a multi-awarded short film where blindness has a thematic importance: ماهي و من (*Mahi Va Man / The Fish and I*, Habibifar, 2020). This article outlines the theoretical background on audiovisual translation (AVT) and AD as didactic tools, as well as the AR methodological framework, the pedagogical design of the intervention, its main results, limitations, and ways forward.

## 2. Audiovisual Translation and Language Teaching

The following section explores how AVT has been investigated in language learning. The first subsection (2.1) explores the state of the art across several modalities and the second (2.2) focuses specifically on AD.

### 2.1. AVT Modalities and Benefits for Language Teaching/Learning

This research is rooted in theoretical and methodological foundations in translation and language learning that foster situated, collaborative, and task-based approaches. It draws from our commitment to situated learning and social responsibility, i.e., the use of authentic situations and materials with a focus on social action, which we apply to higher education in translation (Corrius et al., 2016), but is just as relevant – or even more – in school education. In agreement with Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2013), we emphasize the need for a communicative approach and authentic situations, here related to specialized professional skills. The publication of the *Common European*

*Framework of Reference for Languages* in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001) encouraged using translation in language learning and the development of the four skills (expression, comprehension, interaction, and mediation – or translation), as reported by Avello-Rodríguez and Fernández-Costales (2020, p. 150).

Audiovisual translation (AVT) has been successfully used in foreign language learning in different educational settings. It has been the topic of pioneering projects with European funding, such as “Learning via Subtitling” (Sokoli, 2006; Sokoli et al., 2011), “Clipflair: Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Revoicing & Captioning of Clips” (Zabalbeascoa et al. 2012), and “Subtitles and Language Learning” (Gambier et al. 2015). Didactic AVT, as it has been called by Talaván and Lertola (2022), has been explored and reviewed by Herrero and Vanderschelden (2019), Lertola (2019) and Talaván and Lertola (2022), amongst others. It has been most commonly used to improve language skills and transversal competences, especially in the mode of subtitling, and that of dubbing. The benefits of didactic subtitling have been reported for listening comprehension, for vocabulary acquisition, for writing production, for both writing production and vocabulary enhancement, and for pragmatic awareness (Talaván & Lertola, 2022). Dubbing, similarly, has been used to improve oral skills and for both writing and speaking production skills. Less frequently, other translation or accessibility modes have been used in educational contexts. For example, voice-over for oral production skills; subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing for enhancing integrating skills, or AD (Talaván & Lertola, 2022), the focus of this study, as reported in the following section.

## **2.2. AD and Language Learning**

AD is initially intended to make audiovisual products accessible to blind and partially sighted persons, but it can also benefit other audiences. As has been just mentioned, it has been successfully used in educational settings, especially in foreign language learning (e.g., Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013; Calduch & Talaván, 2017).

Lertola (2019, pp. 47–61) provides a comprehensive overview of the experimental studies on AD in foreign language learning. These are briefly summarized in the following lines. As regards methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative have been employed. The target languages are mainly Spanish and English, as well as Italian. The setting in all of them is university language classes, mostly face-to face, but also online. The audiovisual material used is mainly fiction films, but also documentaries and advertising. The research focus is linguistic competence, mainly lexical, phraseological or syntactic, and speaking skills. From the first pioneering studies, there has been an emphasis on the use of AD for integrated learning skills (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2014). This led to widening the scope towards the role of AD in increasing multiliteracy, including film literacy, as well as in raising awareness on accessibility (Herrero & Escobar, 2018). Within this broader approach, Marzà et al. (2022) have explored the use of AD for pluricultural and plurilingual competence. Similarly, Pintado Gutiérrez and Torralba (2022), as well as Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano

(2022), have researched AD as a multilayered task in foreign language learning, involving awareness of diversity and inclusion, in a global framework of translation and language learning as communicative mediation.

Our study partakes from this global communicative approach. However, these studies have focused on foreign language learners and in higher education. By contrast, Avello-Rodríguez and Fernández-Costales (2020) have studied dubbing and subtitling, and L1 in primary education (5th and 6th grades) in a minoritized language (Asturian). They point out two under researched areas in didactic AVT: school settings and minoritized languages, especially co-official languages in Spain or in Europe (Avello-Rodríguez & Fernández-Costales, 2020, p. 152). We agree with them that the use of audiovisual media can be a powerful tool for the revitalization of minority languages. Therefore, the didactic use of AD in school settings, and in connection with L1, versus L2, is a promising but arguably under researched area (Avello-Rodríguez & Fernández-Costales, 2020, p. 163), which is addressed in our study.

### **3. Collaborative Action Research Project: AD Practice in the Catalan Classroom**

As outlined in the previous section, didactic AD has been used successfully in foreign language teaching. Since AD is carried out, as a professional practice, in the audio describer's own language, it can also be suitable for language practice in an L1 classroom. In order to find out about the possible benefits of including didactic AD in language learning at secondary school level in the Catalan context, we designed a research intervention consisting in an in-class AD workshop conducted in Catalan.

#### **3.1. Methodological Framework**

Action research (AR) is a practice and community-based form of research aimed at finding solutions to improve dynamics or situations (Altrichter et al., 2002). This form of research is, by definition, active. It is accompanied by reflection on the impact of the solutions implemented in order to validate, improve, or modify them. In their review of definitions of AR from its origins in the 1940s to the present, Bogacz-Wojtanowska et al. (2022, p. 58) extract the following shared characteristics, which apply to our research:

- The term action in the definition of action research involves directing its scope to changes in the real world that researchers and other research participants aspire to.
- In action research there is a specific subordination of the research procedure to various forms of practical demand.
- For reasons arising from the requirements of scientific regime, researchers strive for equality of theoretical reflection and practical application.
- To promote research results among various stakeholders is typical of action research.

The main strength of AR is its applied approach, which ensures that solutions that are explored truly reflect the needs of the community under study, and that this community is involved in the research process. The disadvantage, of course, is that the specificity of each situation does not allow for the generalisation of the results obtained. However, by adopting a strong theoretical framework and ensuring that the research is rigorous and transparent, the results can be transferred to other settings. In the words of Cravo and Neves, who have promoted the usefulness of this approach in Translation Studies: “That which might be addressed as a local issue, as a personal or restricted problem may, at various stages, be extendable or even transposable to other or even broader contexts” (2007, p. 98).

Action research is most commonly used in the fields of social sciences, psychology, and education, which is our area of interest. Burns (2005, 2009), who has applied AR to English as a second language learning settings, identifies four core steps in the action research model (2009, p. 290):

- 1) “Develop” a plan of action to improve a situation.
- 2) “Implement” the action.
- 3) “Observe” the effects produced.
- 4) “Reflect” on these effects to modify the action or take new action.

In the study reported in this article, the action plan “developed” by the research team aims to improve, or rather contribute to improving, Catalan language learning and use in secondary education in Catalonia. The social use of Catalan in different areas, such as friendship, work, or studies, has been decreasing over the last two decades (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018, pp. 32–35). Only 35.2% of young people aged 15–29 living in Catalonia use Catalan as their usual language, with strong territorial disparities (Lluent, 2022, p. 6). Although young people are high consumers of audiovisual products, the offer in Catalan, far from being non-existent, is limited in comparison to Spanish or other languages, especially in terms of VoD services and social media (Lluent, 2022, pp. 17–21). Based on these data and the studies mentioned in section 2, above, our hypothesis is that the introduction of activities involving audiovisual media can motivate students and improve Catalan learning in secondary schools. It can also contribute to the empowerment of young Catalan speakers by encouraging them to seek out or create their own audiovisual content in Catalan. Our proposal involves the practice of AD, which, as mentioned above, has several benefits for language learning, and implies working with audiovisual materials at different levels, including analysing, rewriting, and editing.

To “implement” the practice of didactic AD in a secondary school, we designed a four-hour workshop that would introduce students to AD and allow them to create an AD for a short film. We approached potentially interested teachers, and the workshop was finally held at the Institut Joan Mercader, a public secondary school in Igualada, Catalonia. Catalan teacher Mireia Galindo worked with us to plan the integration of the workshop into her students’ regular timetable. The workshop was offered to

first year students (aged 12–13) as part of the subject called “Let’s be Journalists”, an optional course designed to introduce students to the work of journalists and the media by focussing on the reading, analysing, writing, and oral presentation of news. The introduction of the AD workshop would shed light on another aspect of the media landscape, that of audiovisual accessibility, and allow students to practise their written and oral skills. The subject was taught twice a week for six weeks during the school year, for a total of 12 hours, four to five of which would be allocated to the AD workshop. The implementation of the workshop, which took place from November 2020 to May 2021, is detailed below in section 3.2.

“Observation” of the impact of the workshop on the students’ learning process was carried out by the workshop facilitators: one research team member and the participating teacher. Observation was crucial for data collection, and was supported by other methods, as described in section 3.3. Finally, in the “reflection” phase, these data were analysed by both the research team and the teacher. This analysis is presented in section 4, together with the findings of the study.

### **3.2. Workshop Implementation**

To accommodate the students’ timetable, the AD workshop was divided into five sessions of one hour each. Eighty students from four groups participated in the workshop. After the workshop with the first group, two changes were made to the original planning, as they seemed to potentially increment the benefits of the workshop: the duration of the workshop was increased from four to five sessions, and the individual recording of AD was assigned as homework rather than as a classroom activity.

The first session was led by a professional audio describer. Beyond providing information about AD and answering the participants’ questions first-hand, she introduced AD to participants by having them listen to a scene from a TV programme without pictures and discussing their interpretations, before listening to the AD and finally watching the video. This activity allowed to raise awareness about the needs of people with visual impairments and to raise interest in the concepts developed in the talk. Although the participation of a professional was an added value, we believe that the first session could easily be conducted by a teacher trained in didactic AD.

The next sessions were led by one of the researchers with the support of the collaborating teacher. In the second session, after a brief reminder of how AD is done and what to consider (see the handout reproduced as Figure 2 in section 4.3), the participants worked on their first description of a very short excerpt, the first seconds of the short film *After seventeen hours* (Habibifar, 2013). The exercise aimed to raise questions and integrate concepts and strategies related to content selection, objectivity, accuracy, user orientation, and time constraints.

After this first practice, the session moved to the core of the workshop: the AD for the 100 second version of the short film *The Fish and I*. This part of the workshop had an approximate duration of 2.5 hours (distributed upon three classes) and entailed all phases involved in the creation of an AD:

- Film analysis. A complete film analysis was carried out with the groups, highlighting specific aspects to be taken into account for AD: appearance and emotions of the main characters, key actions, secondary elements, denouement, sounds and music, specific difficulties. The chart handed out to students to carry out the film analysis is reproduced in Figure 1.
- Writing AD scripts. This part of the activity was planned to be done in pairs as a way of enriching the problem-solving process and promoting the use of Catalan as a working language, but the COVID-19 restrictions in educational institutions at the time did not allow this, so the students worked on their scripts alone, receiving individual help and guidance from the workshop facilitators. At this point, language skills, especially lexical and syntactic skills, were practised.
- Voicing and recording the description. In the first group, this activity was done in class, but the ban on using mobile phones in the school made it logistically difficult for the students to record their voice, as they had to move around with their laptops to look for a quiet spot. Therefore, the next three groups were given the recording as homework. At this point, the participants practised their speaking skills.
- During the final workshop session, after clearing up any doubts about what had been done so far and helping a few students who had not recorded their AD at home, a video tutorial on the synchronisation software (Windows Photos) was shown, and students proceeded to synchronise their voice recordings with the original video.

**Figure 1**

*Film Analysis (Handed Out as an A4 Landscape Sheet in Catalan)*

<b>Place</b>		
<b>Characters</b>	<b><i>Appearance</i></b>	<b><i>Emotions</i></b>
<b>Events and actions</b>	<b><i>Key elements</i></b>	<b><i>Secondary elements</i></b>
<b><i>Denouement</i></b>		
<b>Soundtrack (dialogues/ sounds/music)</b>	<b><i>Sounds</i></b>	<b><i>Music</i></b>
<b>Possible difficulties</b>		

Source: *Authors' own elaboration.*

Before analysing the results of the activity, in section 4, we will detail our data collection methods.

### 3.3. Data Collection Instruments

First of all, it should be mentioned that participation in the workshop, and in particular the collection of data, was authorised by the participants' parents by means of a consent form, and that the data collected were anonymised, by means of a code assigned to each participant by the teacher. This procedure was reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Committee before the start of the project<sup>1</sup>.

Data were collected using the following instruments:

- Pre-test and initial questionnaire
- Post-test, final questionnaire and self-evaluation questionnaire
- Students' productions
- Semi-guided interview with the teacher
- Participant observation.

The initial questionnaire collected data on the socio-demographic background of the students, their previous knowledge of the subject (audiovisual accessibility and video editing) and their level of Catalan as a school subject. Apart from these questions, as a pre-test, the students had to write a description of an old man sitting in his heavily furnished library, holding a pendulum over a map<sup>2</sup>. In the post-test, students were asked to describe the same picture after attending the workshop. The aim of the pre- and post-test was to observe possible differences in the way students write their descriptions after practising AD, as analysed below in section 4.2. Apart from the post-test, the final questionnaire consisted of self-evaluation questions, their evaluation of the activity, and a specific question about the first AD practice of the workshop. The self-evaluation questions covered all aspects of the workshop, such as film analysis, language skills, technological skills, and awareness of functional disability, the results of which are reported in section 4.1. Finally, the evaluation of the students' production is discussed in section 4.3, the teacher interview in section 4.4, and observations related to the linguistic context in 4.5.

## 4. Study Results

In this section we present the results of the study and analyse them, with a view to improving the AD workshop for future editions with different groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Project 131/2020, approved on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Photograph by Jordi Borràs available at [https://www.lamira.cat/imatges/galeries/felix-el-mag/mag\\_felixcan\\_2991.jpg](https://www.lamira.cat/imatges/galeries/felix-el-mag/mag_felixcan_2991.jpg) (last accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023).

#### 4.1. Questionnaires

We collected a total of 80 filled-out final questionnaires in the 4 groups. The questionnaire (translated into English) is reproduced as Appendix 1, and results are reported and summarised below. Items were to be rated on a scale from 1 to 6, 1 being the minimum (“totally disagree”) and 6 the maximum score (“totally agree”).

##### Students’ Rating of the Activity

As displayed in Table 1 (below), students rated their enjoyment of the activity with a 4 on average, which is a satisfactory result. Nonetheless, some small modifications may help increase this score. For example, allowing students to work in teams was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions, but it would have been positive both for enjoyment and for fostering a socio-constructivist environment to conduct the workshop as outlined above in section 2. Another organisational aspect that could be improved for a positive impact on students’ satisfaction is the technological side of the activity: there too, the workshop was subject to limitations, as not all students had the same kind of device and some could not install the required software, which was time-consuming and imposed the use of multiple apps and types of devices.

**Table 1**

*Student’s Rating of the Activity:*

	I enjoyed the activity.	I worked hard.	I learnt new things.
Mean	4.013	4.700	4.850
Median	4.000	5.000	5.000
SD	1.245	0.973	1.273

Source: *Authors’ own study.*

##### Students’ Self-rating

Table 1 shows that besides enjoying the activity, most students reported to have worked hard and learnt new things. Seventy-two students rated the item “I worked hard” with a score of 4 or higher, which is consistent with our observations of a mostly studious classroom and students who were committed to doing the activity correctly at all stages, as was also confirmed by the teacher.

As reported in Table 2 (below), voicing and synching the AD were the parts that required less effort, i.e., those that “felt easy”, rated with scores of 3.722 and 3.430 respectively. In the case of voicing, as explained above in 2.2, recording the AD was assigned as homework, so that in some cases the

effort involved was in fact insufficient, but we did not have the opportunity to guide the students into repeating the process. Although the mean score for the effort is 3.722, the median score of 4 and a standard deviation of 1.560 indicate that some students did struggle a bit with this aspect. Similarly, synchronization has a standard deviation of 1.669, which suggests certain differences among students with this task. Again, working in pairs could improve the situation, firstly by favouring peer support, and secondly, by reducing the number of persons/groups the facilitators would have to attend to, thus making it easier to provide individual help during the activity. On the contrary, some technical difficulties with synchronization, due to software incompatibilities with some of the laptops and tablets used, were not a problem: although switching to different software on an individual basis slowed down the whole activity, it was easy for most students concerned.

**Table 2**

*Audiovisual Aspects. I Had to Work Hard...*

	To voice the audio description.	To synchronize the video.
Mean	3.722	3.430
Median	4.000	3.000
SD	1.560	1.669

Source: *Authors' own study.*

The results presented in Tables 3 and 4 show that selecting the right information, being synthetic, and being empathic are the aspects of the activity that required the most effort (with scores of 4.392; 4.359; and 4.266 respectively). These elements, rated as the most challenging, are key aspects of writing AD scripts, and the fact that students put the most effort into these aspects indicates that they were committed to the project.

**Table 3**

*Audio Description Preparation. I Had to Work Hard...*

	To analyse the short film.	To put myself into the shoes of a blind person.	To select the relevant information.
Mean	3.937	4.266	4.392

Median	4.000	4.000	4.000
SD	1.264	1.327	1.265

Source: *Authors' own study.*

**Table 4**

*Linguistic Aspects. I Had to Work Hard...*

	To find appropriate vocabulary.	To build clear sentences.	To express myself well with few words.
Mean	3.987	4.063	4.359
Median	4.000	4.000	4.500
SD	1.335	1.390	1.299

Source: *Authors' own study.*

Aspects of the activity that were evaluated as requiring less effort were film analysis (3.937) and vocabulary (3.987), although they are also key elements in AD creation. It must be noted that film analysis was performed as a whole group activity, as well as the selection of adequate vocabulary to describe each action on screen, and this input must have eased the individual task of writing the AD script.

### **Awareness on Visual Disability**

As shown in Table 5, the statement “The workshop made me aware about the needs of persons with visual disabilities” was rated 4.425/6 on average, with a median of 5 ( $SD=1.339$ ). Besides, 32 participants used the free comment section, ten of which mentioned this aspect. For example: “És molt recomanable perquè t’adones de les dificultats de diverses persones.” [I recommend it [the workshop] because it makes you realise the difficulties of different persons].

**Table 5**

*Functional Diversity*

	I've learnt new things about functional diversity.	I've become sensitised to the needs of persons with visual functional diversity.
Mean	3.911	4.425
Median	4.000	5.000
SD	1.351	1.339

Source: *Authors' own study.*

During the workshop, there was an open discussion about visual impairment, and many students were confronted with thinking about this condition for the first time. Understanding the difficulties and barriers faced by visually impaired people helps to break down stereotypes and creates an image of people overcoming difficulties rather than being victimised or discriminated against. This was reinforced by the audio-described film itself, as the main character in *The Fish and I* is blind.

### **Specific Question on AD Practice**

This question reproduced an image from the first AD exercise the group had worked on and asked the students to choose the most appropriate AD from three proposals and to justify their answer (see Appendix 1).

In this case, half of the students answered correctly (40 correct answers) and chose the third AD, mainly because it was both complete and synthetic, while not interpreting the image (only 7 students mentioned this latter aspect). The first of the three ADs was chosen by 14 students, mainly because it was complete and faithful to the image. In fact it was, but it was a description rather than an AD. Finally, 24 students chose the second option because it was the shortest, showing that they were aware that the AD had to be concise. Two students did not answer this question. This result is a mitigated one and shows that it is difficult to convey a full understanding of the principles of AD in just one workshop. In this sense, it could be interesting to offer AD activities several times during the school year, so that students could use, adapt and consolidate their new knowledge.

### **4.2. Pre and Post-Test**

We collected 60 usable pre- and post-tests. The tests were deemed usable if both pre- and post-tests were available, if the student had participated in the workshop, and if they had produced the

description of the old man's picture twice (as a pre- and post-test). We found that the second description (post-test) had improved in 35 of these 60 tests, as assessed by the researchers.

The following aspects were found to be of higher quality:

- Organization of the description (14)
- Concision of the description (13)
- Degree of detail and/or precision (13).

This is consistent with the language skills we wanted to practise through AD, such as lexical and syntactic skills, especially regarding concision. Besides, in some cases, we also observed that the second descriptions entailed less suppositions or inferences (4) or were better written overall (4). These observations are also consistent with current guidelines and practices of AD (AENOR, 2005; Remael et al., 2015), and with the knowledge that was transmitted in the first sessions of the workshop (see section 3.3 above).

Although it happened in very few cases (4), we must mention that some students produced the second description without any verb. This might be due to a contamination effect from the practice of AD, which is a specific type of text where time limitations sometimes require a more telegraphic style, i.e., a sentence without a verb, for example to introduce a new setting (Remael et al., 2015, p. 27). This points to the importance of insisting on the fact that concision is a priority specific to AD and, perhaps, of prioritising audiovisual material without excessive time constraints when designing future activities.

Finally, we noticed that some students produced descriptions that were worse the second time than the first, without identifying any specific problem, just that they were sloppier the second time. This could be because they did not see the point in describing the same picture twice and found it boring, which shows a certain limitation of the pre- and post-test used and the need to complement its results with further data.

#### **4.3. Students' Productions and Their Evaluation**

This section first analyses some of the challenges involved in evaluating AD in educational contexts, and then offers a brief analysis of students' productions.

Evaluation is related to learning competences, as has been researched in connection with AD (e.g., Marzà, 2010; Fryer, 2019), and AD and subtitling for the D/deaf and hard of hearing (De Higes & Cerezo, 2018). These competences are, in turn, related to the aims of the project (see section 3, above), in developing language skills, interpersonal and strategic competences, and, finally, transversal competences on blindness and functional diversity, as analysed in 2.1 and 2.2. Therefore,

students' production cannot be analysed without taking the context and the aims of the project into account.

Besides, there is the challenge of objective evaluation, as pointed at by Marzà et al. (2021). In their research on plurilingual and pluricultural competence in translation learning, an area related to our study, they argue for combining standardisation and flexibility, and the need for a holistic approach (2021, p. 136).

A common assessment tool is the use of rubrics, as De Higes and Cerezo (2018) explored in their study on evaluation criteria in subtitling for the D/deaf and the hard of hearing. They claim that rubrics are useful for both students and teachers. These rubrics help in clarifying what is expected from students; therefore, students can engage with them in their learning process (De Higes & Cerezo, 2018, p. 78).

We agree with these views. Although the practical conditions of our study made it impossible to use rubrics, the evaluation criteria were clear and had been introduced to the students. They were based on our reflections on teaching AD (Espasa, 2019) and on previous research on the evaluation of AD (Marzà, 2010; Fryer, 2019), as well as on end-user feedback on diverse types of AD (Bardini, 2020a, 2020b), and on current AD standards and guidelines (AENOR 2005; Remael et al., 2015).

Therefore, in line with the need for a holistic approach, and with the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in previous related research (see section 2, above), the qualitative assessment of student productions is analysed here, with a view to designing and conducting future studies on didactic AD.

We collected 48 usable student productions, in the form of video files. The productions were qualified as usable if they were available as video or, exceptionally, as audio files. This number (48) contrasts with the number of usable student's pre- and post-tests (60). This points to the need to ensure, in future studies, that technologies are available for the whole workshop, or that recordings are supplemented with students' transcriptions, both for security and to facilitate evaluation of their scripts.

We focused on evaluating film analysis, language skills, technological skills, and awareness of functional disability. Film analysis and language skills were assessed taking into account how they were addressed in the workshop, as summarized in Figure 2, below, which is the English version of the original handout in Catalan that was used in class with the students.

**Figure 2**

*Stages of Creating an AD for Film and Guidelines for Writing the AD Script*

<p><b>1. Preparation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Viewing the film and note taking.</li><li>b. Film analysis:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. narrative analysis (characters, actions, and denouement).</li><li>ii. film analysis (style, aesthetics, effects)</li><li>iii. analysis for AD: essential vs. secondary information.</li></ul></li></ul> <p><b>2. Writing AD script, with the following criteria:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Prioritizing relevant information: when, where, who, what, how.</li><li>b. Third person narrative: avoiding such expressions as “we see...”, “there are...”.</li><li>c. Avoiding personal opinions or interpretations.</li><li>d. Avoiding overlaps of AD and dialogue, important sound effects or music.</li><li>e. Aiming at clarity, use of present tense, connection between AD segments and dialogue.</li><li>f. Looking for precise and concise vocabulary.</li><li>g. Avoiding potential spectator saturation; not describing all the time even if there is enough time.</li><li>h. Reading out the most relevant information from credits.</li></ul>
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Source: *Authors’ own elaboration.*

In terms of film analysis, students were able to rely on the analysis they had undertaken in class and the data they had included in the film analysis table (see Figure 1 in section 3.2.). Students’ ADs ( $n=48$ ) generally showed the importance of narrative analysis in describing characters, key actions, and denouement. Therefore, the main character was described in terms of gender, as a man (27/48) and in terms of age, as “un home de mitjana edat” (8/48) [a middle-aged man], or as having grey (3/48) or white (5/48) hair. Surprisingly, the setting (the kitchen), which is relevant for the plot, was not mentioned in half of the descriptions (24/48). Similarly, the film credits were generally omitted (22/48).

**Figure 3**

*Initial credits.*



Source: *Frame from The Fish and I.*

The challenge of describing versus telling in AD could be seen in the fact that students did not mention the character's blindness but alluded to it through indirect description of the character's gaze, described as "fixa" (7/48) [fixed] or "perduda" (3/48) [blank], or through his actions: "l'home palpa el terra" [the man feels the ground] (21/48). Here, the students followed the usual norm in most AD guidelines of describing rather than interpreting the pictures, because in this case, a description without interpretation may well convey the blindness of the character.

The key actions and the denouement were also mainly reported and followed the provided AD guidelines for writing AD scripts on the use of present tense and third person narrative. This shows the connection between film analysis and language skills.

The possibilities of assessing language skills through this type of intervention are many and need to be addressed in future research. Examples include grammar use (verb tense) or the use of the definite vs. indefinite article when describing new information ("a man" vs. "the man"). Besides, in the context of minority languages, interference from the main language spoken in the area is usually a challenge. As for vocabulary and writing skills, these are present in the challenge of balancing concision and rich details. Some students' AD scripts show a good feeling for writing, and a good attention to expression:

JVM24: "Un home de mitjana edat està dret a la cuina. Es gira de cop i tomba la peixera. Busca el peix palpant amb les mans a terra. No el troba. [...] El peix li neda entre els dits i se li posa sota la mà". [A middle-aged man is standing at the kitchen. He suddenly turns and drops his fishbowl. He searches for the fish feeling the ground with his hands. He does not find it. [...] The fish swims between his fingers and hides under his hand.]

OTV10: “Va palpant els vidres sense tallar-se [...] Va omplint gerres d’aigua. Una... i una altra... i una altra... [...]. S’ajup quan hi ha dos o tres dits d’aigua al terra”). [He feels for the glasses avoiding cutting himself. [...] He fills jars with water. One... and another ... and another [...]. He crouches down when there is two or three inches of water on the floor.]

**Figure 4**

*The man feels the ground.*



Source: *Frame from The Fish and I.*

Finally, students' awareness of functional disability is not easy to elicit directly from their AD scripts. However, some aspects can be mentioned: firstly, the nature of the task itself made students aware of the need for AD for the blind or people with visual impairment: “it recreates a social service that makes content accessible for blind and visually impaired audiences” (Torralba et al., 2022, p. 171). Secondly, some formulations can be interpreted in relation to sensory perception of the blind character: feeling/touching his immediate environment; looking for different creative resources in challenging situations (the plot of the short film is related to this). Also, the use of interpretative formulations can be interpreted as resulting from students' empathy with the character's situation and the need to convey some of his feelings to a blind audience: “trist” (6/48) [sad]; decepcionat (2/48) or “abatut” (2/48) [dejected]; “es desespera”/“desesperat” (2/48); [he despairs/desperate]; “trist i rendit” (1/48) [sad and resigned]. Most of these focus on negative feelings related to the plot; exceptionally, some students emphasize the characters' assertiveness, or the happy ending: “alleujat” (1/48) [relieved]; “decidit” [determined] (2/48).

**Figure 5**

*The Man Has a Fixed Gaze*



Source: *Frame from The Fish and I.*

All these examples are instances of the challenges involved in evaluating different criteria in didactic AD, in finding a balance between didactic, linguistic, and professional criteria within a general framework of social awareness, related to both functional and linguistic diversity.

#### **4.4. Point of View of the Collaborating Teacher**

After all the groups had taken the workshop, we interviewed the collaborating teacher. She was very positive about the activity and acknowledged that most of the students took the activity seriously and that their productions would be used for the assessment of the subject. However, as AD allows for writing conventions that are not consistent with other written texts, she would not recommend using an AD activity specifically to practise writing, even synthetic writing. On the contrary, she valued AD as a particularly useful activity for practising critical thinking, and lexical and oral skills.

She recommended the activity to her colleagues for all levels of secondary education, especially for A-level students following a drama A-level, as well as for Catalan learners who have recently been integrated into the Catalan school system (“aula d’acollida”). Furthermore, following her recommendation, the AD workshop was included in the “Catàleg d’activitats per fomentar l’ús del català entre l’alumnat” [List of activities to promote the use of Catalan among students], a publication by the Department of Education of the Generalitat de Catalunya in which Catalan schools can find and order different types of workshops to promote the use of Catalan among their students.

#### **4.5. Other Observations: The Challenge of a Complex Linguistic Context**

The AD workshop carried out as part of this research was designed as a didactic proposal for Catalan as L1, since Catalan is the language of instruction in Catalan public schools. However, the linguistic reality in Catalonia is more complex. Although Catalan is the official language of schools (albeit with recent legislation imposing 25% Spanish), it is the usual language of only just over a third of the population – with strong geographical disparities (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018, pp. 13–15) – a tendency that is also reflected in the use of Catalan in schools outside the classroom (Vila & Galindo, 2012, pp. 36–38). The complexity of this context was not taken into account in the initial design of our study, but we observed that, when carrying out certain workshop tasks, students used translanguaging from their own mother tongue (mostly Castilian Spanish) to generate AD in the minority language of instruction, Catalan. Therefore, it is necessary to strategically include this aspect in future editions of the workshop by developing a translanguaging approach.

Translanguaging, as defined by Canagarajah (2011), is the use of linguistic resources from different languages to generate content in a specific language in bilingual or multilingual contexts. Cenoz and Gorter (2020) have summarised the two main approaches to translanguaging: pedagogical translanguaging and spontaneous translanguaging. Pedagogical translanguaging refers to pedagogical theory and practice that involves teaching strategies that make use of two or more languages. Spontaneous translanguaging usually refers to bilingual or multilingual use in everyday language situations where language boundaries are more fluid. Translanguaging has been studied in the context of minority languages. It is worth noting that the term translanguaging originated in the field of Welsh language teaching (Singleton & Flynn, 2022). In this context, Cenoz and Gorter (2017) defend the use of “sustainable translanguaging”, that is, a use that is rooted in the reality of minority languages and that strikes a balance between the use of resources from the multilingual learner’s repertoire and the design of contexts for the independent use of minority languages. It is this kind of translanguaging, spontaneous and sustainable, that could be used in future editions of AD workshops involving minority languages.

#### **5. Conclusion and Ways Forward**

This article presents the design and findings of an action research study into the practice of didactic audio description in secondary education. It draws on consolidated research on didactic audiovisual translation, i.e., the use of audiovisual translation as a pedagogical tool for foreign language teaching. This paper first presents a literature review on didactic AVT. This field has emerged as a fruitful avenue of research, which has so far mainly addressed foreign language learning, in university settings, in major language combinations, and has mostly focused on subtitling or dubbing. Given the claim to include didactic AVT in a comprehensive approach to language learning, this study addresses novel areas, such as the didactic use of AD in school settings and in relation to minority languages as L1.

The study we report on is a collaborative action research project consisting of the implementation of an AD workshop in Catalan and the completion of a cycle of action and reflection. Eighty students participated in the workshop, and we were able to observe the expected benefits, as our results indicate that the practice of AD helped students to develop their linguistic skills, especially lexical and syntactic skills, as well as their critical thinking and transversal competences such as digital skills. In addition, the activity raised awareness about blindness and functional diversity.

We also identified aspects that could be improved in future editions of the workshop, i.e., future action-reflection cycles, such as introducing work in pairs rather than individually to increase enjoyment and promote the use of Catalan as an instrumental language, or providing all students with the same software to complete the tasks.

Furthermore, we have provided insights into key elements related to the evaluation of students' productions in the context of pedagogical AD, and we have addressed the challenge of sustainable translanguaging as part of the design for future didactic AD activities in minoritised language settings.

We believe that pedagogical AVT activities are powerful language revitalisation tools that can be implemented in the classrooms of minoritised languages as part of a wider language revitalisation strategy, and that such activities need to be fine-tuned and mainstreamed to benefit a greater number of students, until they become part of the didactic assets of minoritised language teachers, without the need for external facilitators.

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## Appendix 1

*Final questionnaire (translated into English)*

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE						
1=totally disagree / 6=totally agree						
<b>Self-evaluation and general evaluation</b>						
I enjoyed the activity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I worked hard.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I learnt new things.	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Audio description preparation. I had to work hard...</b>						
To analyse the short film.	1	2	3	4	5	6
To put myself into the shoes of a blind person.	1	2	3	4	5	6
To select the relevant information.	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Linguistic aspects. I had to work hard...</b>						
To find appropriate vocabulary.	1	2	3	4	5	6
To build clear sentences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
To express myself well with few words.	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Audiovisual aspects. I had to work hard...</b>						
To voice the audio description.	1	2	3	4	5	6
To synchronize the video.	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Functional diversity</b>						
I've learnt new things about functional diversity.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I've become sensitised to the needs of persons with visual functional diversity.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Remembering the first audio description practice, which of these three audio descriptions is the most suitable and why?**



Frame from *After 17 hours* (Habibifar, 2013) | TCR 00'00"11

[1] A man in his 50s, wearing jeans and a shirt, and a camera, a tripod and a backpack, is standing in the middle of a meadow on a plateau of dry grass. He has grey hair and dark eyes and has a cell phone in his hand. He looks at it and raises it to the sky as if to seek signal. \\ Help.\\

[2] A man in his 50s, equipped with a camera and tripod, got lost in the mountains. He is standing in the middle of a meadow and looking for signal. \\ Help.\\

[3] On the mountain. A man in his 50s, equipped with camera and tripod, is standing in the middle of a meadow. The grass is dry. The man, with grey hair and dark eyes, looks at his mobile phone. He raises it to the sky and turns his arm, looking for signal. \\ Help.\\

I think the most suitable audio description is AD number \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Do you want to make any comment about the audio description workshop you have participated in?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Final activity**

Describe the following image (max. 12 minutes)

[The image reproduced in the original questionnaire is available at [https://www.lamira.cat/imatges/galeries/felix-el-mag/mag\\_felixcan\\_2991.jpg](https://www.lamira.cat/imatges/galeries/felix-el-mag/mag_felixcan_2991.jpg), last accessed on 16/05/23]

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