Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

Cristina Plaza-Lara[1] · https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0409-1646

Universidad de Málaga

Campus de Teatinos, s/n, E-29071 Málaga

Alberto Fernández-Costales · https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5120-8181

Universidad de Oviedo

Despacho 250, C/ Aniceto Sela S/N 33003, Oviedo (Asturias)

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on empirical evidence from TRADILEX, a project intended to develop a methodological proposal integrating different AVT modes to enhance communicative competence in an L2. To this end, a didactic sequence has been articulated with 15 lessons that will be tested with B1 and B2-level learners from Spanish universities. In this article, we present the results of the pilot study for the subtitling sequence. The participants were students of English Philology (B2) at the University of Jaen. Before working on the lessons, participants took an initial test of integrated skills to assess their language command of the L2. Once completed, they started the didactic sequence, consisting of six lessons. Finally, participants took a final test of integrated skills, the results of which are compared with those obtained from the initial test. The preliminary conclusions of the pilot study confirm that the communicative competence and the translation skills of students were enhanced. Beyond verifying the impact of didactic AVT on the learning process, the paper offers a model for pilot testing that can be used in future studies on didactic AVT.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, didactic AVT, subtitling, language teaching, pilot testing.

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta resultados preliminares del proyecto TRADILEX, cuyo objetivo es desarrollar una propuesta metodológica que integre diferentes modalidades de traducción audiovisual (TAV) para mejorar la competencia comunicativa en la L2. Con este fin, se ha diseñado una secuencia didáctica con 15 unidades que serán probadas con estudiantes de nivel B1 y B2 de universidades españolas. Presentamos aquí los resultados del estudio piloto para la secuencia de subtitulado, que se probó con estudiantes de Filología Inglesa (B2) de la Universidad de Jaén. Antes de trabajar con las unidades didácticas, los participantes hicieron un test de destrezas integradas para valorar su competencia lingüística en la L2. Posteriormente, comenzaron la secuencia didáctica, consistente en 6 unidades. Finalmente, los estudiantes realizaron un post-test cuyos resultados se compararon con los del test inicial. Las conclusiones preliminares del estudio piloto confirman que la competencia comunicativa y las destrezas traductoras han sido reforzadas. La principal contribución del trabajo es presentar las fases de validación y pilotaje del proyecto, ya que no hay estudios previos de TAV didáctica en los que se describan estos procesos.

Palabras clave: Traducción audiovisual, TAV didáctica, subtitulado, enseñanza de lenguas, pilotaje.

1. Introduction

Research into active subtitling and dubbing in formal learning contexts has delivered promising results concerning students' engagement, improved translation skills, and the promotion of oral and written

---

[1]   **Corresponding author** · Email: cplaza@uma.es

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

17

comprehension and production (Díaz-Cintas, 2012; Incalcaterra et al., 2018; Talaván, 2013). More recently, other less familiar Audiovisual Translation (henceforth, AVT) modes, such as Audio Description (AD), Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDHH) or voice-over have also been introduced in language learning (Alonso-Pérez & Sánchez-Requena, 2018; Ibáñez & Vermeulen, 2017; Navarrete, 2018; Talaván et al., 2016). The potential of AVT in non-university settings has also recently been scrutinized (Fernández-Costales, 2021a, 2021b), and results underline the suitability of using subtitling and dubbing as teaching resources in Primary Education and bilingual Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) settings, where students learn content-subjects through an L2.

This article reports on empirical evidence from TRADILEX –a project funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science. The primary objective of TRADILEX is to develop a methodological proposal integrating different AVT modes to enhance communicative competence in the L2. To this end, a didactic sequence has been articulated with 15 lessons (three per AVT mode) that will be tested with B1 and B2-level learners from Spanish universities.

We present the results of the pilot study for the didactic subtitling sequence developed for the B2 level. The participants were students of English Philology at the University of Jaen. Before working on the lessons, participants took an initial integrated skills test to gather information on their prior knowledge. Once completed, they started the didactic sequence, consisting of six lessons divided into four sections (warm-up, video viewing, interlingual and intralingual subtitling, and post-AVT production). Finally, participants took a final test of integrated skills, the results of which are compared with those obtained from the initial test.

Our intention is to contribute to the research on didactic AVT (Talaván, 2020) by providing a didactic sequence model for subtitling and reporting on empirical evidence on the piloting of such an experience. To date, research on AVT has been characterised by small-scale experiments and case studies that provide relevant data on the possibilities and challenges of one AVT mode in a specific context. However, the number of papers offering tested didactic sequences or models that have been piloted and validated are scarce. This article aims to fill this gap by offering the results of a pioneering experience in the emerging field of didactic AVT in which we try to validate a model that can be used with active subtitling to enhance language competence and translation skills among university students.

There is a dearth of research on pilot testing and validation of AVT teaching sequences. To the best of our knowledge, the design process of an initial test of integrated skills has only been addressed by Couto-Cantero et al. (2021). In this sense, the current article will complement that publication on the design process and may contribute to the field of didactic AVT by offering the results of systematic testing that can be replicated in other settings and educational contexts.

2. Active subtitling in the classroom

AVT is one of the most fruitful avenues of research within Translation Studies (TS), and in the last few decades, "it has been, without a doubt, one of the most prolific areas of research in the field of Translation Studies, if not the most prolific" (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 1). The coming of age of AVT has also promoted new lines of enquiry, such as didactic AVT (Talaván, 2020), which has gained momentum in the last decade as a bountiful field of study. Didactic AVT should be understood as the active application of AVT modes –not only subtitling and dubbing but also AD, SDHH, voice-over, etc.– in Foreign Language Learning (FLL). In other words,

18

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

students actively use AVT in the language classroom to perform active AVT in one or more modes as part of a lesson or didactic sequence, or as an isolated task.

Although this section is not intended to provide an exhaustive record of the research published in this field, some of the most significant contributions will be discussed. The pioneering studies on the use of subtitles as support in language learning (Price, 1983; Vanderplank, 1988) paved the way for research into active subtitling as a real task in the classroom, with seminal studies –such as Danan, 2010; Sokoli, 2006; Sokoli et al., 2011; Talaván, 2006; Williams & Thorne, 2000– analysing the possibilities and the potential of active AVT in FLL contexts. In the second decade of the 21st century, didactic AVT started to receive scholarly attention, with the publication of two key monographs in the field: Talaván (2013) provides a systematic approach to subtitling in FLL in a proposal that combines a solid theoretical framework with clear practical guidelines. Talaván's model is the first to approach the introduction of active subtitling in the classroom that takes into account the learners' needs and methodological issues in the teaching process. Lertola (2019a) contributes to the field by offering didactic recommendations and guidelines for teachers aiming to introduce subtitling in the classroom, paying attention to critical issues to guarantee that productive and receptive skills are promoted through active AVT.

Since 2009, several theses on didactic AVT have been read (Beltramello, 2019; Lertola, 2013; Navarrete, 2021; Sánchez-Requena, 2016; Talaván, 2009; Torralba, 2016), edited volumes on AVT have started to include chapters on the topic (Incalcaterra et al., 2018; Talaván, 2020), and there has been a steady flow of papers published on the active use of AVT in language teaching (among others, Calduch & Talaván, 2017; Lertola, 2018, 2019b; Lertola & Mariotti, 2017; Sánchez-Requena, 2018; Talaván, 2019, 2020; Talaván et al., 2015; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Talaván & Costal, 2017). Although subtitling and dubbing are the predominant AVT modes in the field, recent contributions also focus on less researched modes, such as AD, SDHH, and voice-over (Calduch & Talaván, 2017; Ibáñez & Vermeulen, 2017; Navarrete, 2018; Talaván, Ávila-Cabrera, et al., 2016; Talaván, Lertola, et al., 2016; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2016; Talaván & Lertola, 2016).

Research conducted on the didactic possibilities of AVT concurs in emphasizing the positive impact of active AVT in language learning. Studies in the field have reported empirical evidence to support didactic claims that AVT favours vocabulary retention (Danan, 2010; Lertola, 2019b), intercultural awareness (Borghetti, 2011; Borghetti & Lertola, 2014), productive skills (Talaván & Costal, 2017; Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2018), and fluency (Herrero et al., 2017; Sánchez-Requena, 2016). Recent contributions have also focused on the potential of AVT in bilingual education (Fernández-Costales, 2021b), the combination of subtitling and dubbing in language teaching (Fernández-Costales, 2021a; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera, 2015), or the promotion of creativity through active AVT (Talaván, 2019).

The increasing number of papers in the field, the interdisciplinarity and varied perspectives of the studies, and the growing complexity of the methodological designs suggest research on didactic AVT is gaining momentum (Fernández-Costales, 2021a). Nevertheless, to maintain the momentum, the field would benefit from incorporating more robust techniques and procedures that allow for triangulation and replication, as most studies focus on case studies that cannot be tested in or exported to other settings. Although research in didactic AVT is using more complex and robust tools –mainly questionnaires, but also semi-structured interviews, participants' observation and focus groups–, there is a dearth of research on the designs and methods used in AVT projects which could then be exported and replicated by other studies.

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

19

3. Methodology of the study

3.1. Sample

Convenience sampling was used for the current research. Since the main purpose was to conduct a pilot study for the research tools used in the TRADILEX project, a representative sample was not required. The sample of the pilot study comprised 10 students (n=10) enrolled in a translation course of the last year of the degree in English Philology at the University of Jaen. 80% of the participants were female and 20% male and all were aged between 21-28. Apart from one student whose mother tongue was Italian, all the participants were native speakers of Spanish. According to the information provided by the participants in the initial questionnaire, 50% of the group held a B2 English certificate, 20% a B1, 20% a C1, while one student had no certificate.

3.2. Research tools

The research tools used in the pilot testing were two questionnaires, two language assessment tests and three rubrics.

An initial questionnaire was employed to collect general data on the participants, their perceived command of English, and their prior experience with AVT inside and outside the classroom. The final questionnaire had a dual focus: on the one hand, to collect data on the development of the methodological proposal (aiming to analyse which areas needed to be improved in the future implementation of the project) and, on the other hand, to ascertain the students' perception on their degree of improvement and satisfaction with the project and its methodology.

Both the language assessment tests were developed within the TRADILEX project, and they aim to examine the scope and validity of AVT tools in promoting the communicative competence of a foreign language (Couto-Cantero et al., 2021). The Initial Test of Integrated Skills (ITIS) and the Final Test of Integrated Skills (FITIS) were used in our study. As argued by Couto-Cantero et al. (2021), the design of a new integrated skills test was needed for quality assessment, as no prior tests were available in the framework of didactic AVT. The ITIS focuses on the assessment of three dimensions: 1) foreign language teaching assessment standards; 2) ICT and AVT as teaching tools, and 3) mediation in integrated skills.

The main objective of the test is to assess the participants' general level of integrated skills in the English Language and the extent to which they have developed different communicative skills. In this sense, the test examines the reception and production skills of participants in an integrated way, so that we have a clear vision of the possible impact of AVT activities on the students' learning process. The first section of the test covers listening and reading (reception skills) while the second deals with writing and speaking (production skills).

The ITIS test covers a range of non-specialised topics, including the following: "5 reasons why you should sleep more", "Country kids", "How whales can teach us about us", "Make the most of your free time", "Science is for everyone", and "TV series". The videos used for the reception activities lasted between 1:30 and 2:00 minutes so that participants could listen to them twice. As for the production task, in the first part, students had to record two oral productions based on a video, and in the second part, they had to write between 100 and 150 words using a text as reference. The maximum duration of the test is 2 hours.

The FITIS test follows the same patterns as the ITIS and it is administered to the students after the AVT intervention has been implemented in the classroom to examine the possible impact of didactic subtitling on the

20

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

students' learning process. The topics for the FITIS test comprise "Iceland's magical world of elves", "Skills needed for the 21st-century workplace", "Fake news", and "Selfies".

The ITIS and FITIS assessment was based on two rubrics developed for the project (Tables 1 and 2). For the evaluation of the AVT activities, a rubric (Table 3) following the guidelines of Talaván (2020) was used.

	Poor (5%)	Adequate (10%)	Good (15%)	Excellent (20%)
Spelling				
Grammatical precision				
Punctuation				
Word usage				
Text composition, coherence and cohesion				

Table 1. Written performance rubric used for the ITIS and FITIS.

	Poor (5%)	Adequate (10%)	Good (15%)	Excellent (20%)
Pronunciation and intonation				
Range of vocabulary				
Grammar				
Fluency				
General coherence				

Table 2. Oral performance rubric used for the ITIS and FITIS.

	Poor (5%)	Adequate (10%)	Good (15%)	Excellent (20%)
Accuracy and appropriateness of the translated text				
Subtitle length and duration				
Condensation strategies				
Appropriateness segmentation				
Synchrony				

Table 3. Sample assessment rubric for didactic subtitling (Talaván, 2020).

All the tools used in the study –the two questionnaires, the language tests and the rubrics– had previously been validated by a group of experts.

3.3. Procedure and structure of the didactic sequence

Students took the initial questionnaire and the ITIS at the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic year. They then worked with the didactic sequence (6 lessons), and subsequently completed the FITIS and the final questionnaire, enabling the researchers to collect data on the impact of AVT on the students' language competence and to analyse their satisfaction with the project.

The didactic sequence and its lessons are organized in a scaffolded manner so that the tasks become more difficult as students move from one lesson to the next. A description of the complete didactic sequence is included here below, adapted from Talaván and Lertola (2022):

Lesson plan 1: intralingual subtitling in English with a gap-fill exercise.

Lesson plan 2: intralingual subtitling in English with a gap-fill exercise in the first half and blank subtitles in the second, where students must include their subtitles (spotting and timing are provided to the students).

Lesson plan 3: intralingual creative subtitling in English, in which students write creative subtitles reinterpreting the original. In the second half of the video, students have to spot the script (i.e., decide the in and out times of the subtitles).

Lesson plan 4: intralingual creative subtitling in English; in this case, students produce subtitles and spot on their own.

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills
through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

21

Lesson plan 5: interlingual subtitling (English-Spanish), in which students have to create subtitles in Spanish without any previous linguistic or technical support.

Lesson plan 6: interlingual reverse subtitling (Spanish-English), in which students have to create subtitles in Spanish without any previous linguistic or technical support.

Each lesson includes not only the AVT task, but also activities created *ad-hoc* to support the AVT task (grammar or vocabulary exercises, text composition, mediation, speaking tasks, etc.). Table 4 presents the structure of one of the lesson plans on subtitling used in the project. These lesson plans are structured in four sections: warm-up, video viewing, didactic subtitling and post-AVT task.

CEFR level	B2
Session number	LPS1 B2.
Video fragment	One minute time machine.
Function	Socialising: introductions.
Didactic AVT mode	Subtitling - intralingual keyword captioning.
Aims of the session	To introduce students to subtitling. To express desires and intentions.
Structure of the lesson	**Warm-up (10 minutes)** • Reception and production tasks (speaking, reading and mediation). • Anticipating video content, characters and events, presenting new vocabulary, structures and cultural information. Objective: To gather the necessary background knowledge to face the didactic AVT phase. **Video viewing (10 minutes)** • Reception task (listening and mediation). • The video extract to be subtitled is watched twice, with Spanish subtitles activated; attention paid to the information missing. Objective: To understand the messages to be subtitled and to become familiar with the key linguistic content. **Didactic subtitling (30 minutes)** • Reception and production task (listening, mediation and writing). • Students familiarise themselves with the subtitling editor and with subtitling by completing missing keywords within subtitles. Objective: To work on AV mediation skills and strategies and to develop lexical competence. **Post AVT (10 minutes)** • Production task (writing and mediation). • Related writing tasks to practise elements present in the video. Objective: To make the most of the linguistic and cultural content of the video and to complement the previous mediation practice.

Table 4. Example of lesson plan on subtitling for B2 (the type of activity varies from one lesson to another).

Instructions offered to the students for the completion of the subtitling tasks were provided by means of video tutorials on the use of the software –*Aegisub* and *Subtitle Edit*–. Students also received specific instructions on

subtitling, including guidelines on subtitle length, duration, synchrony, condensation and segmentation strategies.

4. Data analysis

This section offers an account of the data obtained from the initial and final questionnaires, as well as from the ITIS and FITIS. These instruments were used to obtain qualitative and quantitative information that allowed for data triangulation. These research tools had previously been validated by a panel of experts and needed to be tested with a group of pilot students.

In this section, the results from the initial questionnaire will be presented to offer a detailed description of the sample; secondly, quantitative data retrieved from the ITIS and FITIS will be discussed; lastly, the answers to the final questionnaire will be shared to triangulate the findings obtained from the previous analysis.

4.1. Initial questionnaire

One of the objectives of the initial questionnaire was to gather information on the language competence of the participants, specifying their English level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). As mentioned in section 3.1, 50% of the group held a B2 certificate in English, 20% a B1, 20% a C1, and one student had no language level certificate. As this certification may not be a true picture of their current level, seven items were used to assess the students' communicative competence in English according to the CEFR. Apart from the four skills –listening, reading, speaking and writing–, three items focused on grammar, vocabulary and English culture, as these areas are addressed in the six AVT lessons.

Figure 1 shows that all participants perceive their level ranges between B2 and C1. If the results obtained for the listening and reading skills are compared with those of speaking and writing, a higher degree of self-confidence can be observed in the case of reception skills. Culture has not been included in Figure 1, because it cannot be assessed using the CEFR. For this item, 50% of the students answered that they consider their level of cultural knowledge to be high, 40% think it is intermediate and 10% answered that it is low. Nobody indicated the extreme values of the scale (very low and very high).
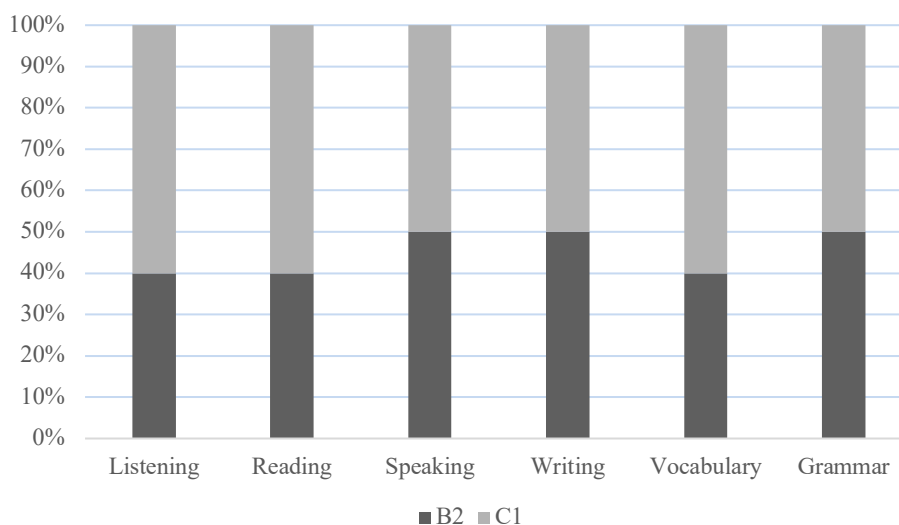

Figure 1. Students' perceptions of their level of knowledge.

*Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills
through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)*

23

Concerning students' prior experience with AVT to enhance their English level, only 20% stated that they had previously carried out subtitling tasks in their English lessons. The same applies to the use of AVT outside the classroom: only 20% of the students reported that they had ever used subtitling to improve their English skills (one of them had also answered affirmatively in the item regarding the use of these tools in the classroom). It should be highlighted that none of them had previously worked with dubbing, voice-over or AD. In contrast to these items, 90% of the sample reported that the use of audiovisual material for learning English in their classroom or their daily lives is quite frequent.

The items included in the last section of the questionnaire were based on a Likert scale (from 1-6 to avoid neutral answers). The whole group showed interest in the English language and in the opportunity to take part in the project. Although 90% of the students stated they knew what AVT was, 50% were not familiar with accessibility modes such as AD and SDHH. There also seemed to be some uncertainty regarding the definition of linguistic mediation, with 40% of the students stating that they were not aware of this concept.

Since the use of subtitling as a pedagogical tool involves the activation of other competencies, such as creativity and technological skills, two items were formulated to allow students to assess their competencies in these areas. All of them considered themselves to be creative and technologically skilled, except in the case of one student, who that stated that they did not possess good technological skills.

In a final group of items, the participants were asked if they thought their participation in the project could contribute to their general level in English, focusing especially on listening, reading and writing competencies, motivation, and technological and mediation skills. All of them agreed with these statements, except for one student (see Figure 2).
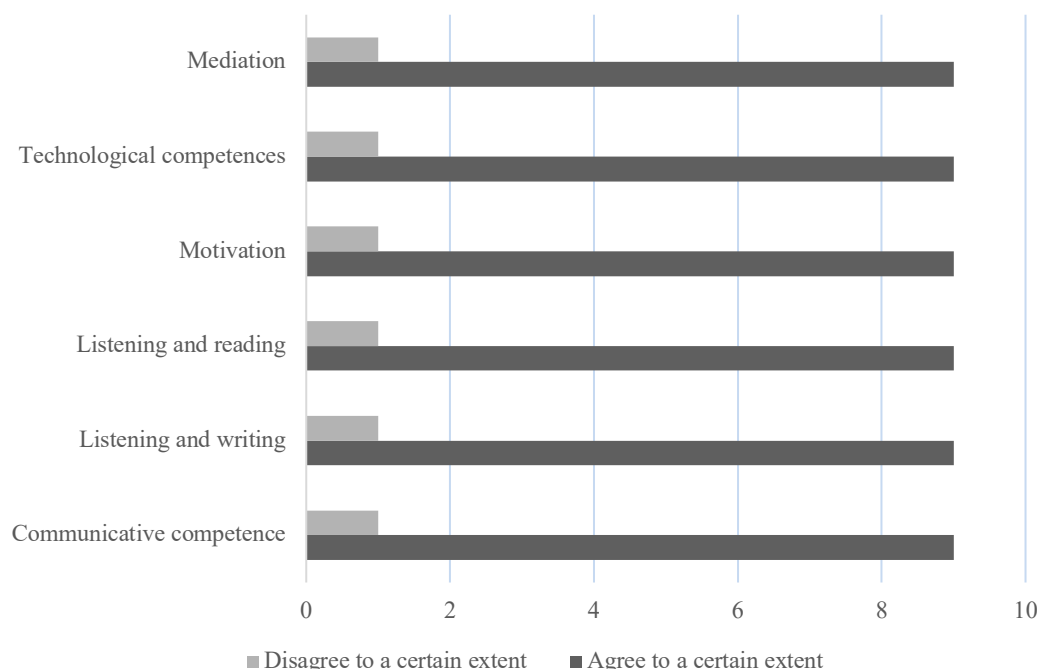

Figure 2. Agreement and disagreement of students with the item: Subtitling can contribute to the enhancement of the competencies listed in the figure.

4.2. ITIS and FITIS assessment: quantitative data

To check whether student's communicative competence and translation skills had been enhanced after the implementation of the subtitling sequence, quantitative data were collected using the ITIS and FITIS tests. For the sake of brevity, the results collected from the subtitling tasks included in the lessons will not be discussed in this paper (although they were also assessed to provide feedback to the students, and to gain an insight into different aspects that should be improved in the next stages of the project).

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of the ITIS and the FITIS (values were calculated on a 0–10 scale). The results obtained from the tests evidence a slight improvement in the students' average marks, with a difference between the two tests of +0.17 points. In both cases, the standard deviation is relatively low and consistent, which means that the marks are closer to the mean and the homogeneity of the sample is high.

	ITIS	FITIS	Difference
Average mark	7.67	7.84	+0.17
Standard deviation	0.48	0.45	

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the ITIS and FITIS.

Since the ITIS and FITIS tests were divided into two assessment scales –1) oral and written reception, and 2) oral and written production–, a closer look at the results obtained for each of them may help to understand the results in Table 5 and how the methodology applied may have impacted students' competencies. As the average marks show, see Table 6, an improvement was observed in all four skills except for reading. The overall trend suggests an enhancement of students' competencies and, even though the average mark obtained in the FITIS reception part would remain the same, positive progress can be observed. Furthermore, it should be noted that the results obtained in the production parts highlight an enhancement in the active production skills of the students, even if these are more difficult to acquire than passive skills, as stated by Laufer & Girsai (2008). Nonetheless, it should be pointed out that whereas the enhancement in writing skills may be explained by the use of active subtitling tasks, competencies in oral production are not practised during the AVT tasks completed in this didactic sequence, so the improvement in speaking skills could be due to the impact of the whole lesson plans or to external factors not related to the pilot study.

	Listening – ITIS	Listening – FITIS	Reading – ITIS	Reading – FITIS
Average mark	8.4	9.2 (+0.8)	9	8.2 (-0.8)
Standard deviation	1.17	0.79	1.33	1.48

	Speaking – ITIS	Speaking – FITIS	Writing – ITIS	Writing – FITIS
Average mark	6.6	6.88 (+0.28)	6.68	7.08 (+0.4)
Standard deviation	0.34	0.56	0.68	0.76

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the ITIS and FITIS.

A paired t-test was carried out to establish whether these data are statistically significant in terms of supporting the potential of subtitling for the development of communicative and translation competencies. After applying the Shapiro-Wilk test to contrast the normal distribution of the variables (a p-value of 0.17 for the ITIS and 0.16 for the FITIS), a paired t-test was undertaken. The p-value obtained from the t-test is 0.49, which means that the difference between the ITIS and FITIS cannot be considered to be significantly different.

Since the data obtained from descriptive statistics revealed differences between the reception and production parts of the ITIS and FITIS, a t-test was also carried out for each of these parts, once normal distribution of variables had been verified by means of the Shapiro-Wilk test. Table 7 confirms the conclusions drawn from Table 6. Whereas the data obtained from the reception tasks in the ITIS and FITIS are not statistically significant

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

25

(with a p-value of 1), those obtained from the production activities (with a p-value of 0.009, lower than the 0.05 significance level normally accepted) would evidence a possible correlation between the competence enhancement and the use of subtitling as a methodological tool, at least as far as production skills are concerned.

	ITIS and FITIS – Reception	ITIS and FITIS – Production
Mean difference (from ITIS to FITIS)	0	+34
p-value	1	0.009

Table 7. T-test results for ITIS and FITIS reception and production scales.

The results obtained from the statistical analysis presented thus enable us to conclude that an improvement of communicative and translation competencies can be observed. Although the small size of the sample prevents us from considering these data to be conclusive in confirming a correlation between the variables involved, the information retrieved from the final questionnaire may help to obtain a more complete picture of the potential positive effects of subtitling on students' competencies.

4.3. Final questionnaire

Very positive feedback was received on the process and the different elements of the methodological proposal: all the participants were satisfied with the material, tools and instructions included in the project, as well as with its duration. Their responses reveal that their participation in the project met their learning expectations, they would repeat it and they found the methodology used both interesting and motivating. The responses relating to subtitling tasks show that 90% were satisfied with the subtitles they had been able to create. Sixty per cent of the students stated that the subtitling tasks did not require too much effort, which complements the information provided in the initial questionnaire, as only 30% of the sample stated that they had previously carried out subtitling tasks. This could be an indication of the high quality of the materials and instructions provided during the project or to the inherently motivating nature of AVT for students at this stage of their learning process. Further evidence suggesting that students find this methodology motivating is that all of them answered positively when they were asked if they would like to continue learning languages using subtitling or other AVT modes.

The students' perception of their degree of improvement was addressed by a question in which they were asked to evaluate on a Likert scale (1 disagree and 6 agree) how subtitling has helped them to improve their competencies. As Table 8 shows, student perception was positive in general terms and the mean and median values reveal that there is a general agreement on the benefits of this methodology. Furthermore, although the standard deviation is higher for some items, the mode is 6 in eight of the eleven items analysed.

	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation
Communicative competence	5	5.50	6	1.16
Speaking	4	4.50	6	1.87
Writing	4.90	5	6	1.20
Listening	5.50	6	6	0.85
Reading	4.70	5	6	1.34
Mediation	5.60	6	6	0.70
Lexical competence	5.30	5	5	0.68
Grammar competence	5.30	5	5	0.68
Intercultural competence	5.30	5	5	0.68
Technological competence	5	5	4[2]	0.94
Creativity	5.10	5.50	6	1.10

Table 8. Answers to the item: Which competencies are improved with the use of subtitling?

The answers to this item have also been synthesised in Figure 3. Speaking and reading are the two competencies with a higher rate of disagreement regarding the potential of subtitling to improve their skills, which may make sense as students were mainly asked to write subtitles. However, it is striking that 20% of the students consider that they have not enhanced their writing skills, as this is one of the competencies most commonly activated during subtitling.
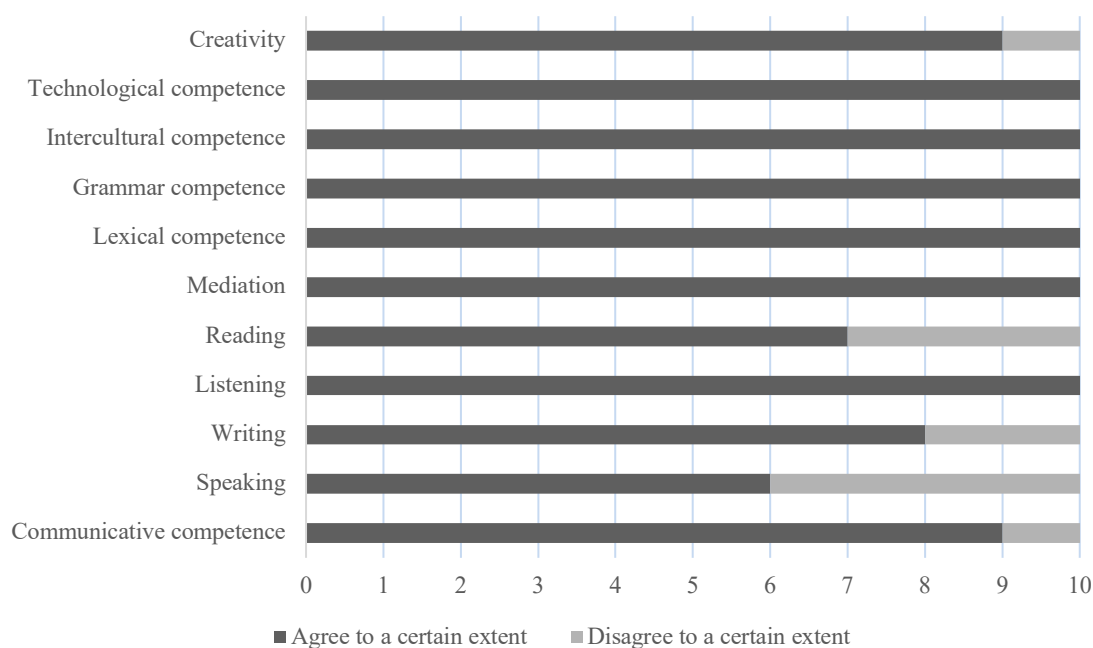

Figure 3. Agreement and disagreement of students with the item: Which competencies are improved with the use of subtitling?

5. Discussion

The subtitling didactic sequence piloted in this study adopts a mixed method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the questionnaires, the language tests and the rubrics. Our main objective is to present a validated model that can be used not only in the future implementation of the TRADILEX project

---

[2] Multiple modes exist for this variable (4 and 6). The value shown is the lowest.

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

27

but also by other researchers in the field of didactic AVT. Furthermore, the analysis of data in the previous section hints at the benefits of using subtitling in the language classroom.

As far as the data are concerned, the small size of the sample only allows us to draw preliminary conclusions. Nonetheless, there are signs of enhancement in students' competencies that could confirm a relationship between the variables of the study, in line with previous research in the field (Incalcaterra et al., 2018; Lertola, 2018; 2019b; Talaván, 2013, 2020).

Given the quantitative data reported from the ITIS and FITIS, the comparison of the two means and the t-test carried out, it could be stated that, although descriptive statistics show a slight improvement, this does not provide statistically significant evidence in support of enhancement in students' competencies. However, it should be taken into account that the small size of the sample may have directly impacted these results and may explain the differences observed between the reception and production parts of the ITIS and FITIS. Based on the t-test results for the production part, it could be stated that there seems to be a correlation between the competence enhancement in production skills and the use of active subtitling as a methodological tool. This finding may be explained by the fact that writing is the main competence activated when carrying out subtitling tasks. By contrast, reading skills are not practised as often when creating subtitles and, according to the results provided in the previous section, this competence has not been improved.

Leaving aside the statistical discussion, the improvement observed in the communicative and translation skills could be explained by the fact that subtitling tasks force students to apply certain strategies that could promote the development of these competencies. Apart from the linguistic knowledge triggered by any communicative activity, students find in subtitling tasks other challenges such as the need to condense the text, to be accurate to match image and text (which brings to light the intersemiotic nature of AVT), as well as to check subtitle length, segmentation and synchrony. Mediation, understood as "the language activity of rephrasing a text, orally or in writing, to make it comprehensible to speakers of other languages" (Couto-Cantero et al., 2021, p. 28), also plays an important role. When students are actively creating subtitles they are establishing bridges of communication to make an audiovisual text understandable or accessible (Talaván and Lertola, 2022).

When quantitative data are triangulated with the information retrieved from the questionnaires, very interesting conclusions can be drawn. First of all, subtitling has proved to be a motivating methodology that arouses the interest of students, as reported by Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera (2015) and Fernández-Costales (2021a). Results underline that students' satisfaction is high: according to the initial questionnaire, 90% of the participants expected subtitling to contribute to the enhancement of their competencies. Judging from the results of the final questionnaire, these expectations have been met, especially in those competencies not related to language, such as cultural, technological and creative skills. As far as language competencies are concerned, it is worth mentioning that, according to the initial questionnaire, the participants' level of self-confidence was higher for the reception than for the production skills. Following the final questionnaire, some students still show a lack of self-confidence regarding these production skills and 20% of the sample stated that their competencies in writing, the main competence practised with active subtitling, had not been improved. This finding should be taken with caution, and further studies should be carried out to assess the cumulative impact of the lesson plans and analyse why some students are still reluctant to acknowledge the improvement of their writing skills.

Finally, the competence of mediation also deserves special attention. Forty per cent of the participants acknowledged in the initial questionnaire that they were not familiar with this concept. However, they all stated in the final questionnaire that this competence had been improved after the didactic sequence. This could be due

to the fact that, along with writing, it is one of the main competencies activated when subtitling, which could provide evidence on the positive influence of this methodology on students' translation skills.

The data discussed in this section lead us to suggest that the enhancement of communicative competence and translation skills is not accidental. Although these are only the preliminary conclusions of a pilot study, the results provide evidence of improvements that make subtitling an interesting and motivating didactic instrument for the development of these competencies.

Regarding the research design and the validation of the research tools, Couto-Cantero et al. (2021) argue that any instrument designed for a scientific study such as TRADILEX has to be tested by a substantial number of participants in an initial pilot phase. The subtitling didactic sequence put into practice with this group of students comprised a complex array of tools that had only been separately validated by expert panels. However, they needed to be validated as a whole, while maintaining consistency with each other, to fulfil the project requirements. As far as the questionnaires, the language assessment tests and the rubrics are concerned, some aspects have been adjusted after the pilot test, such as the number and order of questions, the formulation of the exercise statements and ortho-typographical errors. Concerning the lesson plans, some format and procedural issues were detected and amended.

All in all, the implementation in a unique didactic sequence of the different research tools designed and developed for the TRADILEX project has allowed the model for pilot testing to be validated. As the analysis of results shows, this model favours triangulation not only of the methodological tools applied, but also of the data sources. The aim now is to replicate it in further stages of the project.

6. Final remarks

The current paper has presented the results of a pilot study of the TRADILEX project in which we tested the impact of several AVT lessons on the L2 learning process of undergraduates in Spain. The objective of the study was two-fold: on the one hand, we aimed to analyse the impact of AVT on the learning process of university students (specifically, concerning language competence and translation skills); on the other hand, the paper is intended to provide a model for conducting pilot tests in didactic AVT, as this dimension has so far been overlooked in specialised literature.

The results of our study confirm that didactic AVT does have an impact on several dimensions of language learning, as participants experience an enhancement of their communicative skills. This is no surprise, as our results concur with previous research analysing the impact of didactic AVT in formal settings (Incalcaterra et al., 2018; Talaván, 2020). Although a certain statistical significance was observed in our study, we believe the results could have been more statistically significant had the sample been larger and if the participants had worked with AVT activities over a longer period. Therefore, we consider that larger samples are needed for future research, and that it would also be worth analysing the cumulative effect of didactic AVT in longitudinal studies (observing, for instance, the impact of AVT throughout one or two courses). Furthermore, it should be noted that the pilot study presented was implemented in a translation course and not a language subject, and the possible relation with language syllabi has not been directly explored in the TRADILEX project. However, recent studies confirm didactic AVT may be integrated into language courses, and AVT tasks can be framed within the curriculum of Primary Education (Fernández-Costales, 2021a, 2021b). Captioning and revoicing activities can also be used in the bilingual education (CLIL) syllabi of non-language subjects, where students

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

29

learn curricular contents through the L2. In this sense, we believe prospective research would benefit from analysing the integration of AVT tasks in the language syllabus.

As for the second objective of the paper, we have presented a model to conduct pilot studies in the field of didactic AVT with a robust model using validated research tools (which included the perception questionnaires, the ITIS and FITIS assessment tests, and evaluation rubrics). We feel this structure may be followed in prospective studies in didactic AVT and this will lead to more robust and consistent results from studies conducted in diverse settings. The overarching aim of this model is to provide new methods and techniques that allow us to push the field of didactic AVT forward by conducting more solid and rigorous research.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

About the authors

Cristina Plaza-Lara is Assistant Professor in the Translation and Interpreting Department at the University of Malaga (Spain). She teaches German, specialised translation and translation tools. Her main lines of research merge fields such as translation training and new technologies, language teaching for translators or professional aspects in translation.

Alberto Fernández-Costales is Associate Professor in TESOL at the University of Oviedo (Spain). Among others, his research interests include Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English-Medium Instruction (EMI), language teaching methodology, and didactic audiovisual translation. He serves as an associate editor of two international journals: *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice*, published by Taylor and Francis, and *Porta Linguarum*, published by the University of Granada.

References

Alonso-Pérez, R., & Sánchez-Requena, A. (2018). Teaching foreign languages through audiovisual translation resources: Teachers' perspectives. *Applied Language Learning*, *28*(2), 1–24. http://shura.shu.ac.uk/18464/1/Alonso-Perez-TeachingForeign LanguagesThroughAVTranslation%28AM%29.pdf

Beltramello, A. (2019). *Making the most of multimedia learning: evaluating the impact of combined audiovisual translation tasks on the acquisition of L2 multiword expressions*. PhD thesis. National University of Ireland, Galway.

Borghetti, C. (2011). Intercultural learning through subtitling: The cultural studies approach. In L. Incalcaterra McLoughlin, M. Biscio, & M. À. Ní Mhainnín (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation subtitles and subtitling: Theory and practice* (pp. 111–137). Bern: Peter Lang.

30

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

Borghetti, C., & Lertola, J. (2014). Interlingual subtitling for intercultural language education: A case study. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *14*(4), 423–440. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2014.934380

Calduch, C., & Talaván, N. (2017). Traducción audiovisual y aprendizaje del español como L2: el uso de la audiodescripción. *Journal of Spanish Language Teaching*, *4*(2), 168–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/23247797.2017.1407173

Couto-Cantero, P., Sabaté-Carrové, M., & Gómez Pérez, M. C. (2021). Preliminary design of an Initial Test of Integrated Skills within TRADILEX: an ongoing project on the validity of audiovisual translation tools in teaching English. *Research in Education and Learning Innovation Archives*, *27*, 73. https://doi.org/10.7203/realia.27.20634

Danan, M. (2010). Dubbing projects for the language learner: a framework for integrating audiovisual translation into task-based instruction. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *23*(5), 441–456. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2010.522528

Díaz-Cintas, J. (2012). Los subtítulos y la subtitulación en la clase de lengua extranjera. *Abehache*, *2*(3), 95–104.

Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2021). *Subtitling: concepts and practices*. London: Routledge.

Fernández-Costales, A. (2021a). Audiovisual translation in primary education. Students' perceptions of the didactic possibilities of subtitling and dubbing in foreign language learning. *Meta, 66(*2), 280-300. https://doi.org/10.7202/1083179ar

Fernández-Costales, A. (2021b). Subtitling and dubbing as teaching resources in CLIL in Primary Education: The teachers' perspective. *Porta Linguarum*, *36*, 175–192. https://digibug.ugr.es/bitstream/handle/10481/69830/10_Alberto%20Fernandez.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Herrero, C., Sánchez-Requena, A., & Escobar, M. (2017). Una propuesta triple. Análisis fílmico, traducción audiovisual y enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. *InTRAlinea Special Issue: Building Bridges between Film Studies and Translation Studies*. http://www.intralinea.org/specials/article/2245

Ibáñez Moreno, A., & Vermeulen, A. (2017). Audio description for all: a literature review of its pedagogical values in foreign language teaching and learning. *Encuentro*, *26*, 52–68. https://ebuah.uah.es/dspace/bitstream/handle/10017/34980/audio_ibañez_encuentro_2017_N26.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Incalcaterra McLoughlin, L., Lertola, J., & Talaván, N. (2018). Audiovisual translation in applied linguistics: educational perspectives. *Special Issue of Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, *4*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1075/gest.8.3.02str

Laufer, B., & Girsai, N. (2008). Form-focused instruction in second language vocabulary learning: A case for contrastive analysis and translation. *Applied Linguistics*, *29*(4), 694–716.

Lertola, J. (2013). *Subtitling new media: audiovisual translation and second language vocabulary acquisition*. PhD thesis. National University of Ireland, Galway.

Lertola, J. (2018). From translation to audiovisual translation in foreign language learning. *Trans Revista de Traductología*, *22*(22), 185–202. https://doi.org/10.24310/TRANS.2018.v0i22.3217

Lertola, J. (2019a). *Audiovisual translation in the foreign language classroom: applications in the teaching of English and other foreign languages*. Research-Publishing.net.

Lertola, J. (2019b). Second language vocabulary learning through subtitling. *Revista Española de Lingüística Aplicada/Spanish Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *32*(2), 486–514. https://doi.org/10.1075/resla.17009.ler

Lertola, J., & Mariotti, C. (2017). Reverse dubbing and subtitling: Raising pragmatic awareness in Italian English as a second language (ESL) learners. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, *28*, 103–121.

Navarrete, M. (2018). The use of audio description in foreign language education. *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, *4*(1), 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*. PhD thesis. Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).

Price, K. (1983). Closed-captioned TV: An untapped resource. *MATESOL Newsletter*, *12*(1–8).

Sánchez-Requena, A. (2016). Audiovisual translation in teaching foreign languages: Contributions of revoicing to improve fluency and pronunciation in spontaneous conversations. *Porta Linguarum*, *26*, 9–21.

Sánchez-Requena, A. (2018). Intralingual dubbing as a tool for developing speaking skills. *Special issue of Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts. Audiovisual translation in applied linguistics: beyond case studies*, *4*(1), 102–128. https://doi.org/10.1075/ttmc.00006.san

Cristina Plaza-Lara and Alberto Fernández-Costales · Enhancing communicative competence and translation skills
through active subtitling: a model for pilot testing didactic Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

31

Sokoli, S. (2006). Learning via subtitling (LvS). A tool for the creation of foreign language learning activities based on film subtitling. In M. Carroll & H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (Eds.), *Copenhagen conference MuTra: Audiovisual. 1-5 May* (pp. 66–73). https://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2006_Proceedings/2006_Sokoli_Stravoula.pdf

Sokoli, S., Zabalbeascoa, P., & Fountana, M. (2011). Subtitling activities for foreign language learning: What learners and teachers think. In L. Incalcaterra McLoughlin, M. Biscio, & M. Á. Ní Mhainnín (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation. Subtitles and subtitling: theory and practice* (pp. 219–242). Bern: Peter Lang.

Talaván, N. (2006). Using subtitles to enhance foreign language learning. *Porta Linguarum*, *6*, 41–52. http://www.ugr.es/~portalin/articulos/PL_numero6/talavan.pdf

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

Talaván, N. (2013). *La subtitulación en el aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras*. Barcelona: Octaedro.

Talaván, N. (2019). Creative audiovisual translation applied to foreign language education: a preliminary approach. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, *2*(1), 53–74. https://www.jatjournal.org/index.php/jat/article/view/57

Talaván, N. (2020). The didactic value of AVT in foreign language education. In Ł. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation and media accessibility* (pp. 567–591). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Talaván, N., & Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2015). First insights into the combination of dubbing and subtitling as L2 didactic tools. In Y. Gambier, A. Caimi, & C. Mariotti (Eds.), *Subtitles and language learning* (pp. 149–172). Bern: Peter Lang.

Talaván, N., & Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2016). Collaborative networks to provide media accessibility: The potential of Subtitling. *Porta Linguarum*, *81*(Monográfico I), 125–138. http://www.ugr.es/~portalin/articulos/PL_monograph1_2016/art_10.pdf

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

Talaván, N., & Costal, T. (2017). iDub – The potential of intralingual dubbing in foreign language learning: How to assess the task. *Language Value*, *9*(1), 62–88. https://doi.org/10.6035/LanguageV.2017.9.4

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

Talaván, N., & Lertola, J. (2022). Audiovisual translation as a didactic resource in foreign language education. A methodological proposal. *Encuentro: revista de investigación e innovación en la clase de idiomas*, *30*, 23–39. Talaván, N., Lertola, J., & Costal, T. (2016). iCap: Intralingual captioning for writing and vocabulary enhancement. *Alicante Journal of English Studies*, *29*, 229–247.

Talaván, N., & Rodríguez-Arancón, P. (2018). Voice-over to improve oral production skills. In J. D. Sanderson & C. Botella-Tejera (Eds.), *Focusing on audiovisual translation research* (pp. 211–229). Valencia: Publicacions Universitat de Valencia.

Talaván, N., Rodríguez-Arancón, P., & Martín-Monje, E. (2015). The enhancement of speaking skills practice and assessment in an online environment. In M. L. Cancelas y Ouviña & S. Sánchez Rodríguez (Eds.), *Tendencias en educación y lingüística* (pp. 329–351). Madrid: Editorial GEU.

Torralba Miralles, G. (2016). *L'aprenentatge de llengües a través de la traducció audiovisual la subtitulació com a eina per a l'adquisició de lèxic en llengua estrangera*. PhD thesis. Universitat Jaume I.

Vanderplank, R. (1988). The value of teletext sub-titles in language learning. *ELT Journal*, *42*(4), 272–281. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/42.4.272

Williams, H., & Thorne, D. (2000). The value of teletext subtitling as a medium for language learning. *System*, *28*(2), 217–228. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(00)00008-7