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VISP, an enjoyable app to enhance idiomaticity in English

Bio data

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Your current research

In the never-ending quest of finding learning methods that adapt to the changing profiles and needs of our evolving society, in 2010 we started working on a project that we called *ARDELE* (acronym for “*Audiodescripción como Recurso Didáctico en la Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera*”). The project aims to explore the pedagogical benefits and limitations of the use of audio description (AD) techniques within the Foreign Languages (FL) classroom. Initially, AD was created to make audiovisual products (films, documentaries, theatre, opera, etc.) accessible to blind and visually-impaired people, turning the images into speech (Benecke, 2004). However, it soon proved to be also beneficial to elderly people, children, immigrants and students of translation or of FL (Snyder, 2005; Clouet, 2005; Cambeiro and Quereda 2007, Martínez Martínez, 2012). In this project, we work on the hypothesis that due to the time constraints of audio describing visual events and settings (confined to the spans between dialogues and sounds, or the pauses in monologues), accuracy, idiomaticity and fluency are essential, so carrying out AD-based tasks can be useful to enhance lexical and phraseological competence in the FL classroom, or to improve communicative competences in general, for that matter (Ibáñez & Vermeulen 2013, 2014, in press a, b). The project started at the Department of Applied Language Studies at Ghent University (Belgium), with Dutch-speaking Belgian students who study Spanish, but from 2012, it has been widened to include Spanish students who study English, not only in a formal setting (the classroom), but also in the field of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), within the research project SO-CALL-ME¹ from the UNED-based group ATLAS (Applying Technology to

¹ SO-CALL-ME stands for Social Ontology-Based Cognitively Augmented Language Learning Mobile Environment), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (ref. FFI2011-29829).

LLanguageS²). That is when the application named *VISP* (VIdeos for SPeaking) was conceived.

Task design & language learning and teaching

In line with the ARDELE project, we created the mobile application (hereinafter *app*) *VISP* following the method of task-based language learning and teaching. As a large number of publications have shown (Long 1985, Nunan 1989, Willis 1996, Ellis 2003, Littlewood 2004), the concept of *task* is of paramount importance for obtaining successful learning outcomes. A task is a communicative activity, defined by Breen (1987: 23) as follows: "...any structured language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure, and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task". Therefore, it is a structured work plan that aims to achieve a specific learning objective. Based on Bachmann (1990), Ellis (2003) delimits the authenticity of a task as follows: A pedagogical task is situationally authentic if it matches a situation found in the real world, and it is interactionally authentic if it results in patterns of interaction similar to those found in the real world. **The AD task we propose in VISP corresponds to an activity that professional translators carry out. The foreign language is used as a medium for increasing the knowledge of a specialized field such as that of audio-visual translation, and more specifically, of AD, and is also used as a goal in itself, since the ultimate aim of the task is for students to learn specific vocabulary and to develop strategies so that they can be precise in what they say.**

The Information and Communication Technologies have revolutionized the field of language learning over the last few decades (Gitsaki and Taylor 2000, Hernández Mercedes 2008, etc.), especially within certain methods, such as task-based learning. Following Hernández Mercedes (2008), this is because they comply with the basic requirements that Willis (1996) proposes for a task to be effective in promoting language learning: exposure, use and motivation. The app proposed in this study includes several steps: introduction, instructions, practice, and reflection. *VISP* lists these four steps on its home page: there are four buttons - in numerical order - so that users are guided into a sequenced task. **These tasks are authentic, in the sense that they emulate the real duties of an audio describer: users have to audio describe a clip of 30 seconds from the movie *Moulin Rouge* by following certain guidelines (given under the "Instructions" button), once they have been briefly introduced into the world of AD (once they click on the button "Introduction") and seen an example of a real audio-described clip (five seconds of the movie *Memoirs of a Geisha*). The task is brief and combines images, sounds, and text.** Its usefulness lies in the fact that students have to prepare and carry out a task (first a written draft, then a recording while watching the clip) that emulates the action of audio describing a film for a blind audience, thus acquiring the language of a medium to reach a goal, the goal that any professional translator doing an AD would have, namely to help the visually-impaired audience to have access to that film. The use of films in the classroom has been proven to be motivating by numerous works, and the results of our questionnaire at the end show that our app is enjoyable to use too, not only because of the social role that audio description fulfils, but also because it simultaneously combines images, sounds and text.

Short paper

1. Introduction.

In this work we present some of the pre-results obtained from a future comparative case study that will involve two groups of users: one group of Belgian students, and another

² <http://atlas.uned.es/>

one of Spanish Erasmus students, both of them learners of English as an FL at B2-level, according to the CEFRL 2001. These two groups were selected to test the first version of VISP at the Department of Applied Language Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of Ghent University (Belgium) during the year course of 2014-2015. Our aim is to observe the similarities and differences in their learning results at both an oral and written level, as well as in relation to their motivation about the use of VISP. Based on the results, we also present some proposals for improvement and future research.

2. State of the art: the pedagogical aspects of MALL.

A needs-analysis undertaken by ATLAS research group members (Martín Monje et al., 2014) has highlighted the need to develop pedagogically and linguistically solid language learning activities (for learning English) for mobile devices. So, in order to meet the wishes of the 'on-demand' generation (Caudron, 2011), who want instant access to everything, everywhere, all the time, as well as to promote learners' autonomy in line with the principles of life-long learning, in 2014 we decided to take the AD-based tasks of the ARDELE (*Audiodescripción como Recurso Didáctico en la Enseñanza de Lenguas Extranjeras*) project out of the classroom and implement them in the ubiquitous learning environment of mobile devices (Jones & H. Jo, 2004; Kukulska Hulme, 2013; Stockwell & Hubbard, 2013). The benefits of this approach are evident: it allows the learner to move away from the desktop or laptop in a formal educational setting in order to adapt to the new context of a society that is constantly on the move. Moreover, it not only increases mobility, but also flexibility, since the learners can access their materials and communicate with their coaches and their peers, if need be, anytime and anywhere.

The evaluation of some of the vast number of existing FL learning-related apps, undertaken by the ATLAS research group members (Pareja-Lora et al., 2013, Martín Monje et. al 2014), has revealed that however attractive, the apps often are not pedagogically sound. That is why we decided to follow the principles of the consolidated and successful communicative approach to language teaching, and within it, the task-based learning and teaching method (TBLT), to design a MALL app called VISP (Videos for Speaking). TBLT focuses on the use of authentic material. In the case of VISP, it is a short clip of an American film, *Moulin Rouge*, where users are asked to complete a meaningful task (Ellis, 2003), namely to create an AD in order to enhance the accessibility of audiovisual material, as is required in the current job market.

2. Objectives

As for language-learning outcomes, our focus lies on helping users improve their lexical and phraseological competences, following and implementing the lexical approach of Lewis (1997), who revealed that the process of achieving proficiency in an FL requires much more than the acquisition of isolated vocabulary and grammar rules. An FL learner needs, above all, guidance for acceptable word combinations and how and when to use them (Wray, 2002; Boers et al., 2006; Durrant & Schmitt, 2013). By integrating AD into the mobile app that we present here, *VISP*, we hope to help advanced students of English (possessing already B1 level, according to the CEFR 2001) to improve those competences that are more difficult to develop at certain levels, such as the fluent use of idiomatic expressions and collocations. *VISP* also seeks to foster language awareness by reflecting on how the use of certain expressions can affect the recipient. Therefore, *VISP* is conceived following these principles: on the one hand, flexibility and mobility, and on the other, a task-based teaching method with special focus on the lexical approach.

3. Description of the task in *VISP*.

As for the steps to follow, the app consists of a four-phased learning task: 1) An introduction, where users are first given some information about AD, specifying goals (the aim of creating an AD) and skills needed (by way of guidelines of good practice). They are also directed to a short online preliminary questionnaire, where they are required to provide basic personal data, and a short test, where they are tested on lexical and phraseological items that will later on be necessary to perform the AD-based task.

Here, they are introduced to the actual world of AD by means of a sample (a short clip of the film *Memoires of a Geisha*); 2) Instructions. In this step, users have access to some succinct guidelines based on ICT 2002 (Independent Television Commission); 3) Practice. After the first warming-up steps, they reach the actual task: they watch a very short clip of a film (31 seconds of the film *Moulin Rouge*) as many times as they want. That is the clip that they have to audio-describe. When they feel ready (possibly after drafting a small written AD script), they are required to record an oral AD about this clip (that is, they can record their voice while they are playing the clip). They can watch their task and listen to their performance as many times as they want. Once they are satisfied with the result, they can proceed to the last step: 4) Finish. When they have reached this stage, they can send their recording by clicking on a button that says "send". Their audio-clip is then uploaded to an account. This recording is also kept in the user's email in the section of "sent emails", because the app is connected to the user's e-mail service. In this last step, users can access a final questionnaire and test by clicking the relevant button: "To assess, and reflect upon, your performance and gain more information on how to audio-describe, please click here". This questionnaire at the end also includes a clip with the official AD retrieved from the DVD. Also, the students are required to complete a test at the end, which contains formal and functional task-related questions, as well as the official AD, so that they can assess their own performance by comparing both versions, namely their own one and the original one performed by a native speaker. One whole session of practice with VISP takes about 30 minutes, but users may decide to spend more or less time on the tasks, depending on their own rhythm and motivation. Thus, the users perform a meaningful and useful task, based on authentic material, a clip taken from a real film. The fact that the ultimate aim of audio description is to make the clip accessible to blind or visually impaired gives people a sense of satisfaction, which is also reflected in the questionnaire at the end.

4. Instruments to collect data.

With regard to data collection for the purposes of our research on how VISP can be effective to motivate and support users in their learning process, we will analyse the data obtained from the questionnaires before and after the task, as well as the recordings made by the users. These recordings will shed light on many different aspects: orally, we can examine the users' fluency and pronunciation, and linguistically, we can assess the users' accuracy through their use of specific vocabulary and collocations. Overall, their performance as audio describers can be useful to evaluate their communicative abilities, too.

5. Some provisional conclusions and steps for further development.

The practice and answers given by the users in the questionnaire at the end reveal some shortcomings of our app. Based on the quality guide drafted by Fernández-Pampillón et al. (2012), from a technical point of view (format, usability, accessibility, visibility and compatibility), the users pointed out that the size of the clip's image (the display of the clip in a mobile phone) is rather small. They also mentioned the inconvenience that it is only available on Android smartphones, and that it requires an Internet connection, which is not always available. Also, the presence of background noise makes it difficult to record and listen in some conditions (outdoor settings, crowded indoor settings). From a pedagogical point of view (cognitive value and pedagogical coherence, content quality, capacity to generate learning, interactivity and adaptability and motivation), they indicated that they would like to record their AD several times before sending it to the coaches, giving them the chance to select the best version. At this point of development, VISP only allows for recording over the previous version, and the only way they can keep all the versions is by sending them, which is, in fact, not practical for us or the users. In future, we will also promote collaborative learning by including the option of sending the recordings to a wiki or social network, such as a Facebook or Google Plus community, instead of sending it in an e-mail to the coaches only.

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