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Audiovisual Translation as a Didactic Tool to Enhance Foreign Language Speaking Skills: Introduction

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Abstract

This current thematic section explores the growing field of didactic audiovisual translation (DAT) and its impact on foreign language (FL) learning, particularly in enhancing FL speaking skills. In the last twenty years, several European-funded projects and independent researchers, have delved into the use of audiovisual translation modes such as subtitling, voice-over, dubbing, and audio description in FL education. The present thematic section gathers six studies that focus on the use of DAT to improve speaking skills, an area often underexplored. The contributions of various scholars examine the effectiveness of different DAT modalities (dubbing, audio description, free commentary, voice-over and respeaking) in enhancing speaking skills, including pronunciation, intonation, and pragmatic training, in a variety of FL such as English, Spanish, and Italian.

Key words: didactic audiovisual translation (DAT), speaking skills, dubbing, audio description, free commentary, voice-over, respeaking.

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The field of didactic audiovisual translation (DAT) has grown considerably in the last twenty years. This is due to researchers and practitioners' shared effort to look at how the active task of captioning and revoicing videos among foreign language (FL) learners could benefit their linguistic and intercultural skills (Lertola, 2019; Talaván et al., 2024).

The potential of DAT in FL settings has been acknowledged by several European institutions which have funded research-led projects, such as LeViS (Learning via Subtitling), a Socrates/Lingua project (2006-2008) that developed a specific subtitling editor designed to be used by FL teachers and students (Romero et al., 2011; Sokoli, 2006; Sokoli et al., 2011); ClipFlair (Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Revoicing and Captioning of Clips), a Lifelong Learning Programme project (2011-2014) with a consortium of ten universities which created an online platform to design and use FL learning activities through captioning and revoicing (Baños & Sokoli, 2015; Sokoli, 2018); PluriTAV (2017-2019), that looked into the effectiveness of DAT to acquire and develop the plurilingual and pluricultural competence (Baños et al., 2021). Most recently, the TRADILEX project (Audiovisual Translation as a Didactic Resource in Foreign Language Education), an I+D+i project (2020-2023) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation aimed to determine the degree of improvement in the FL learning classroom after including the pedagogical use of five main AVT modes: subtitling, voice-over, dubbing, audio description (AD) and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), as didactic tools (Talaván & Lertola, 2022).

The present thematic section has gathered studies that researched the advantage of a variety of DAT modalities to enhance FL speaking skills, in particular, an area scarcely investigated. Speaking does not only play a key role in daily situations but also when it comes to formal means of assessment. By using DAT modes actively, students can develop their speaking skills autonomously by role-playing real-life situations (acknowledging that there is not always time in the classroom to practice individual oral skills) (Sánchez-Requena, 2018). The originality of this proposal lies in (1) the inclusion of a multimodal DAT approach in one thematic section focused on enhancing speaking skills using dubbing, AD, voice-over, free commentary and respeaking and (2) the variety of FL gathered in one, thematic section: English, Spanish and Italian. Sharing a common theme, each of the authors, from early career to well-established scholars, contribute to the field by narrowing the gap in the existing literature:

Buil Beltrán starts with a review of the theoretical framework in DAT to contextualise the reader and focuses on the use of intralingual dubbing to demonstrate its benefit in improving speaking skills over traditional approaches.

Baeyens continues to provide evidence for the use of intralingual dubbing as an innovative, motivating and useful tool to improve oral skills. He used a mixed-approach method, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data to reveal the impact of intralingual dubbing on EFL learners' oral skills: pronunciation and intonation.

Sánchez-Requena & Navarrete acknowledge the gap between research findings and speaking teaching resources. To this end, they compare the similarities and differences in results from two action research studies, one that employed intralingual dubbing and the other one that used AD.

Nicora presents an experimental study on the use of free commentary as a reinforcement activity to enhance learners' intonation skills in Italian as a FL language using the innovative incorporation of prosodic-pragmatic training.

Lertola presents a pre-experimental study assessing the benefits of using intralingual voice-over tasks of educational science videos to enhance speaking skills. The pre-experimental study involved 24 English for Specific Purposes (ESP) postgraduate students of Biology in a blended learning modality over five weeks.

Belenguer-Cortés introduces the possibility of pioneering the use of respeaking in the FL classroom with a proposal that emphasises its uniqueness and advantages with a focus on the technique of shadowing.

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