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Audio description and plurilingual competence: new allies in language learning?

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ABSTRACT

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) and its companion volumes (Council of Europe, 2018, 2020) highlight the development of plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC) as one of the main objectives of language teaching and learning. Within this context, the plurilingual approach in education has placed translation in a prominent situation, with authors such as Cummins (2007) observing how it promotes not only the acquisition of foreign languages (FL) and the consolidation of L1s, but also biliteracy development and identity affirmation. Within translation, audiovisual translation (AVT) has proven to be particularly effective in language learning (cf. Lertola, 2019). The polysemiotic nature of audiovisual texts incorporates elements that require the activation of specific forms of mediation that cannot always be found in general translation. This article sets out to reflect on the influence that linguistic and semiotic transfer in AVT can exert on PPC (Baños, Marzà, & Torralba, 2021), drawing on the results of a quasi-experimental research undertaken within the PluriTAV project (Martínez-Sierra, 2021). This specific study aimed to assess the development of PPC through audio description (AD) in Spanish undergraduates studying English Philology, who were organised into an experimental and a control group, with only the former using AD as a didactic tool. Although results do not reveal a statistically significant improvement in PPC acquisition, they enable hypotheses to be formulated that can then be tested in further research. In addition, the experimental group showed some progress in the development of specific plurilingual and pluricultural skills, which suggests that the use of AD in the FL classroom can improve learners' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire.

Keywords: Audiovisual translation, audio description, plurilingual and pluricultural competence, PPC, language learning, PluriTAV.

RESUMEN

El MCER (Consejo de Europa, 2001) y sus volúmenes complementarios, *Companion Volume with new descriptors* (Consejo de Europa, 2018, 2020), destacan el desarrollo de la competencia plurilingüe y pluricultural (CPP) como uno de los principales objetivos de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de lenguas. En este contexto, la presencia del enfoque plurilingüe en la educación ha situado a la traducción en una posición destacada. Así, autores como Cummins (2007) subrayan su papel no solo en la adquisición de lenguas extranjeras (LE) y la consolidación de las L1, sino también en el desarrollo de la biliteracidad y la afirmación de la identidad. Dentro del campo de la traducción, la traducción audiovisual (TAV) ha demostrado ser especialmente eficaz en la adquisición de lenguas (cf. Lertola, 2019). La naturaleza polisemiótica de los textos audiovisuales incorpora elementos que requieren la activación de formas específicas de mediación que no siempre se encuentran en la traducción general. En este artículo se reflexiona sobre la influencia que puede ejercer la transferencia lingüística y semiótica propia de la TAV sobre la CPP (Baños, Marzà y Torralba, 2021), a partir de los resultados de una investigación cuasiexperimental llevada a cabo dentro del proyecto PluriTAV (Martínez-Sierra, 2021). Este estudio específico tenía como objetivo evaluar el desarrollo de la CPP mediante la audiodescripción (AD) en estudiantes de filología inglesa divididos en un grupo experimental y otro de control, donde solo el primero utilizó la AD

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como herramienta didáctica. Aunque los resultados no revelan una mejora estadísticamente significativa en la adquisición de la CPP, permiten formular hipótesis que cabría contrastar en futuras investigaciones. Además, el grupo experimental mostró ciertos progresos en el desarrollo de algunas habilidades plurilingües y pluriculturales específicas, lo que sugiere que el uso de la AD en el aula de LE puede enriquecer el repertorio plurilingüe y pluricultural del estudiantado.

Palabras clave: Traducción audiovisual, audiodescripción, competencia plurilingüe y pluricultural, CPP, aprendizaje de lenguas, PluriTAV.

1. Introduction

Over recent decades, plurilingualism and multilingualism have become key staples in language teaching and learning. As this article will discuss, this has been clearly reflected in the frameworks designed to serve as benchmarks and standardise essential aspects of foreign language learning (FLL) (i.e., CEFR), as well as in the scholarly literature on this subject. Within this context, the plurilingual approach has placed translation in a prominent situation, with authors such as Cummins (2007) observing how it promotes not only the acquisition of foreign languages (FL) and the consolidation of L1s, but also biliteracy development and identity affirmation. Within translation, audiovisual translation (AVT) has received significant attention from scholars over the past few years with research highlighting the benefits of its implementation when teaching a foreign language (cf. Lertola, 2019).

Exploring the benefits of using AVT in the teaching of a foreign language was one of the aims of the research project PluriTAV (<http://citrans.uv.es/pluritav/>), funded by the Spanish Government and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) from 2017 to 2019. In particular, the project consisted of developing a set of activities or didactic sequences (DS) (Dolz-Mestre & Schneuwly, 1998) involving the use of active AVT (cf. Talaván 2010) to enhance not only linguistic skills but also plurilingual and pluricultural competence (PPC) in the language classroom. By focusing on the latter, the project attempted to address a research gap, as studies on PPC acquisition are still scarce and none have hitherto been carried out on AVT in FLL. To this end, the project also involved testing the effectiveness of the DSs created as far as the acquisition of linguistic skills and PPC was concerned. This was achieved through the study of control and experimental groups in a multilingual Higher Education context, in which students' L1 was either Spanish or Catalan, and English was the FL of study. Students' command of English varied from B2 to C1 (for further information, see Martínez Sierra, 2021).

Although different AVT modes were studied in PluriTAV, this article will focus only on the design and testing of a DS focused on audio description (AD). This decision was influenced not only by the role of the authors of this article in the project (they were in charge of the design of this specific DS), but also by the fact that the benefits of using AD in FLL have only recently been explored in scholarly research. This is discussed in the first section, where an overview of plurilingual approaches and AD in the FL classroom is provided in order to contextualise the study undertaken and to clarify the theoretical framework underpinning it. The article will also detail the methodology followed, paying particular attention to the design of both the DS and the instruments used to measure its effectiveness (i.e., the plurilingual test and the rubric). While the results of the study will focus on instances where it appears that the use of AD can result in an improvement of plurilingual and pluricultural skills, one of the main aims of this article is to reflect on the lessons learned during the research undertaken within the PluriTAV project and how these can inform future research on the impact of AVT in PPC acquisition.

2. Plurilingual approaches and audio description in the foreign language classroom

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001: 43) stresses the importance of plurilingual and pluricultural competence, foregrounding that learning a second or foreign language and culture does not simply involve acquiring “two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating”, but rather becoming plurilingual and developing interculturality. The following definition by Coste et al. (2009: 11), clearly emphasises the specificity and complexity of this competence:

Plurilingual and pluricultural competence refers to the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and to take part in intercultural interaction, where a person, viewed as a social actor has proficiency, of varying degrees, in several languages and experience of several cultures. This is not seen as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but rather as the existence of a complex or even composite competence on which the social actor may draw.

Some instruments have been developed recently to assist practitioners in the application of such a complex concept, as is the case with the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (FREPA) (Candelier et al., 2012). Supported by the Council of Europe, this framework bridged some of the gaps in the CEFR as far as PPC was concerned, as no specific descriptors to operationalise the notion of plurilingual and pluricultural education were included in the latter. As such, FREPA provides a very sophisticated and exhaustive framework organised around competences and descriptors. These are further classified into the knowledge, skills and attitudes that could be developed by using pluralistic or multilingual approaches to language teaching and learning. The publication of the CEFR *Companion Volume* (CV) in 2018 (Council of Europe, 2018) complemented FREPA further as regards PPC, with descriptors specifically drafted to cover (or address) mediation language activities. In addition, the new version of the CV (Council of Europe, 2020), published only two years later, does include specific descriptor scales for PPC. Drawing on the FREPA framework, these descriptors are developed around the notions of plurilingual comprehension, as well as of plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire, and specify what should be expected from language learners in these areas for each reference level (Council of Europe, 2020: 123). The gradual evolution of this competence in the frameworks designed by the Council of Europe reveals its complexity and the challenges its integration in existing curricula entails. Likewise, the importance placed on multi/plurilingualism in general, and PPC in particular, in the above-mentioned documents reveals a shift in language education towards these notions to the extent that some authors refer to the Plurilingual Turn:

The Plurilingual Turn underlines a holistic, connected view of knowledge acquisition that fosters interaction between languages and cultures, contrary to teaching plurilingual/cultural speakers in artificial monolingual/cultural contexts (González Davies, 2015: 338).

This holistic view, already discussed in Cummins' (1979) seminal work, is at the core of a range of plurilingual approaches to language learning that have evolved over the past few decades. The label “plurilingual approaches” encompasses a wide range of complementary theoretical frameworks and didactic approaches which embrace a more complex and holistic understanding of linguistic processes in plurilinguals (Herdina & Jessner, 2002). Candelier et al. (2012: 6) refer to these educational approaches as “pluralistic”, and have defined them as “didactic approaches which use teaching/learning activities involving several (i.e., more than one) varieties of languages or cultures”. Authors might use different terms to refer to these approaches, all of which revolve around plurilingualism. For instance, Hufeisen and Neuner (2004) refer to “integrated language learning”, while Celic and Seltzer (2012) use the term “a translanguaging pedagogy”. Within this paradigm, a growing number of scholars have explicitly explored the use of translation as a pedagogical approach (Cummins, 2007; de Pietro, 2014), an area that has witnessed a renewed interest over the past few years, as well as a surge of research activity.

The huge potential of translation in language learning has been acknowledged by many scholars over the past few years (Cook, 2010; Laviosa, 2014) with some authors even arguing the existence of a “translation turn” in language pedagogy (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2021). According to Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez (2021: 84) the emphasis placed on translation as a real-world communicative activity is one of the key factors that have contributed to the popularity of translation in language learning. Indeed, the integration of realistic activities involving some form of mediation in the language classroom can be done in many ways and encompass different types of translation. Among these, AVT has proven to be particularly popular, with many scholars discussing and demonstrating the effectiveness of this form of translation for language learning (see Lertola, 2019 for an up-to-date overview of studies involving a wide range of AVT types).

Despite the surge of research activity in AVT and language learning, attested by the publication of this monograph, many under-explored areas remain. One such is the development of PPC when integrating AVT in the language classroom, an aspect that has only recently been addressed in research projects such as PluriTAV. This was achieved through the development of DSs, understood as linguistic projects in which students aim to produce an oral, written or multimodal text that belongs to a specific genre, with an explicit communicative aim. Within PluriTAV, each DS comprises several workshops that tackle different skills, knowledge and attitudes from FREPA, where AVT activities are implemented in varied ways. DSs in PluriTAV were organised according to the main AVT mode applied, including dubbing, subtitling, free commentary and AD. The use of the latter in the FL classroom, which is the focus of this paper, can also be considered to be an area needing further research, given that the majority of the studies in this field has been carried out using subtitling and, to a lesser extent, dubbing. Nevertheless, as discussed in the following section, this AVT mode has received relevant scholarly attention over the last decade that has highlighted how beneficial and versatile its use in FLL can be.

2.1. Audio description in the foreign language classroom

Fryer (2016: 1) defines audio description as “a verbal commentary providing visual information for those unable to perceive it themselves”, thus helping blind and partially sighted people access audiovisual media and plays, as well as enjoy museums, sports, sightseeing tours, etc. Although what should be included in this verbal commentary and how this should be done is a somewhat complex matter, an AD script will usually provide information about actions, as well as about the position and appearance of people, places and things in an audiovisual text. Given that descriptions ought to be fitted around the existing soundtrack of an audiovisual text, AD is also subjected to constraints, as is the case with other AVT modes. In this regard, AD is nowadays recognised as a constituent part of AVT (*ibid.*: 2) and has thus also been explored, albeit only relatively recently, in studies on the use of this type of translation in the FL classroom.

The research carried out so far in this field concurs that using activities involving the creation of an AD script by students not only increases their motivation but can also improve a wide range of linguistic skills. The focus has so far mainly been placed on production skills, both written (when students are asked to produce the AD script) and oral (when they are also asked to voice and record it). For example, in one of the first experimental studies carried out on this topic, Ibañez Moreno and Vermeulen (2013) concluded that AD tasks promote lexical and phraseological competence as they allow students to understand the importance of choosing the most accurate lexical items and expressions to describe what is happening on screen. In a similar vein, Calduch and Talaván (2018) explore how AD can be used when teaching Spanish as a FL to promote stylistic richness, with a focus on vocabulary acquisition, lexical accuracy and syntactic maturity. The authors highlight that the constant rewriting needed when working on an AD script allows for a more accurate and thoughtful lexical selection and

use of appropriate syntax by students (*ibid.*: 177). In addition, they conclude that these tasks promote lexical acquisition as well as oral skills, including fluency and pronunciation.

As regards the impact of AD on the latter, Navarrete (2020) has recently undertaken an in-depth study of the effectiveness of active AD tasks on oral production skills, focused on students' perceptions and performance as far as fluency, pronunciation and intonation are concerned when learning Spanish as a FL. In addition to concluding that students find AD practice engaging and useful, the experiment undertaken shows that AD enhances oral production skills (fluency, pronunciation and intonation) in spontaneous speech (*ibid.*: 273). Another key contribution of Navarrete's study (*ibid.*: 69-70) regards her proposal to include AD as a mediation activity within the CEFR/CV. Given the emphasis placed on the latest versions of the CV on inclusiveness/accessibility and mediation, Navarrete contends that incorporating a new category that accounts more visibly for AD as mediation practice is straightforward and thus provides a list of illustrative descriptors to support its usage in a FLL setting.

While some authors have also acknowledged that the use of AD in the language classroom could enhance cultural and intercultural competences (Herrero & Escobar, 2018: 40), no studies have so far paid attention to how this AVT mode can improve PPC in particular. This is one of the gaps bridged by the PluriTAV project, aimed at investigating the usefulness of AVT for the acquisition of PPC in the FL classroom. As will be discussed below, whether they involve the active or passive use of AD, AD-related tasks can be very useful to address a wide range of skills aimed at improving learners' plurilingual and pluricultural repertoire.

3. Methodology

The DS discussed in this article was integrated in the first year of the undergraduate degree in English Philology at the Universitat de València. Students were divided into two groups: the experimental group (EG, 30 subjects), who worked on the AD DS when learning about festivities, and the control group (CG, 20 subjects), who followed the standard textbook (Brook-Hart, 2015), which did not include any audiovisual tasks, for this same topic. The majority of students had either Spanish or Catalan as L1. The discussion below will explain the design of the DS and will provide examples of how the topic was addressed in both the EG and CG. The pre- and post-tests designed for the assessment of PPC acquisition in both groups will also be detailed.

3.1. Planning teaching materials with a plurilingual perspective

To ensure comparability, the AD DS (Martínez-Sierra, Marzá-Ibañez, & Torralba-Miralles, n.d.), was designed drawing on the objectives identified in the festivities section of the textbook, as well as on the activities and material it included (e.g., fill-in the gaps, speaking in pairs, use of English, etc.). It was divided into three 90-minute workshops, setting up a set of audiovisual tasks that would help students develop the same skills as those addressed in the textbook while leading to the final task: to audio describe a clip.

Once the DS had been designed, PluriTAV researchers identified which plurilingual and pluricultural descriptors from FREPA were targeted in both groups. FREPA was chosen due to its exhaustivity in describing PPC and also given that the first version of the CV had not yet been published at the time. Nevertheless, clear links can be established between the DS and the mediation skills / activities / strategies proposed in this and subsequent versions of the CV. This is shown in the following section, where two examples revealing how the DS and textbook worked on specific pluricultural and plurilingual competences are provided.

3.1.1. Sample activity 1. Use of different resources in order to facilitate communication

DS task: Audio describing a clip from the film *Coco* where a festivity celebration takes place.

Book task: In pairs, speaking and expressing ideas about different cultural topics (clothes, food, music).

Mediation skills	FREPA descriptors
Mediation strategies	K 3.4 Knows that there exists language means to facilitate communication (e.g., simplification, reformulation, etc.)
Strategies to explain a new concept	
▶ Adapting language	S 6.1.1 Can reformulate (e.g., by simplifying the structure of the utterance, by varying the vocabulary or by making an effort to pronounce more clearly)

Table 1. Mediation skills and FREPA descriptors relating to the use of different resources in order to facilitate communication.

In this type of activity, the main goal is to make communication possible in different contexts. The CG, working in pairs, was given some instructions and prompts to discuss. While expressing their ideas, students were encouraged to consciously adapt their language to find points in common with their peers. After having learnt AD's basic rules, the EG's task was to create and record an AD script to make a clip accessible for blind and visually-impaired people.

As argued in the CV (Council of Europe, 2020: 117), making oneself understood requires not only linguistic competence, but also the management of linguistic resources that clarify meaning and facilitate understanding. Paraphrasing, simplification and the use of synonyms or similes are some of these resources. All these features are reflected in FREPA descriptors *K 3.4 Knows that there exists language means to facilitate communication (e.g., simplification, reformulation, etc.)* and *S 6.1.1 Can reformulate (e.g., by simplifying the structure of the utterance, by varying the vocabulary or by making an effort to pronounce more clearly)*. The latter refers not only to vocabulary control but also to phonological control, therefore focusing on oral communication, which is central to the activities proposed.

While carrying out these tasks, students in the EG were aware of the need to comply with spatio-temporal constraints in AD and to adapt their language to suit their specific audience. Likewise, in the CG they were reminded of the importance of simplifying and reformulating their ideas in order to share them and reach an agreement. Both tasks involved condensing, reformulating and catering to the interlocutor's needs, and therefore working on the descriptors and skills in Table 1.

3.1.2. Sample activity 2. Explaining festivities to someone with the same or different cultural background

DS task: In pairs, describing scenes of typical Spanish festivities students are familiar with, where no dialogues are provided

Textbook task: In pairs, talking about a festival in students' town or country

Mediation skills	FREPA descriptors
Mediation activities	K 3.3 Knows that one must adapt one's own communicative repertoire to the social and cultural context within which communication is taking place
Mediating communication	S 6.3 Can communicate while taking sociolinguistic or sociocultural differences into account
▶ Facilitating pluricultural space	S 4.1 Can construct explanations meant for a foreign interlocutor about a feature of one's own culture / meant for an interlocutor from one's own culture about a feature of another culture
▶ Acting as intermediary in informal situations (with friends and colleagues)	
Mediation strategies	
Strategies to explain a new concept	
▶ Linking to previous knowledge	

Table 2. Mediation skills and FREPA descriptors related to explaining situations with different cultural backgrounds.

In these sample activities students were asked to talk about Spanish festivities in pairs. While the CG's participants were free to talk about any festivity celebrated in their hometown, celebrations to be described by the EG were included in a video without dialogues provided by the teacher. This video included promotional clips from Spanish organisations (e.g., local authorities and travel agencies) and had a musical soundtrack but no dialogue. In both cases, students were generally familiar with the festivities discussed and shared the sociocultural context in which the materials had been created. In the EG, students worked in pairs and played different roles: describing the video or pretending to be a blind person who has to rely on their peer's explanations.

Mediation skills were evident in these cases where students adopted a cultural mediator's role, facilitating a pluricultural space. Mediation strategies are also needed in these activities since students might explain ideas or concepts their interlocutors cannot access (because they are unfamiliar with them or because they are acting as blind viewers) by making comparisons or describing how they relate to something the recipient already knows (Council of Europe, 2020: 118). Besides, when describing a festivity in the EG activity, the student acts as an intermediary and although this role might not necessarily take place in "informal situations (with friends and colleagues)" (ibid.: 2020: 115), it recreates a social service that makes content accessible for blind and visually-impaired audiences.

As for the FREPA descriptors, when describing and sharing elements that are part of their own culture, students know that their explanations should take into account possible gaps in their interlocutors' knowledge (*S 4.1 Can construct explanations meant for a foreign interlocutor about a feature of one's own culture / meant for an interlocutor from one's own culture about a feature of another culture*). They should therefore adapt their communicative skills (*K 3.3 Knows that one must adapt one's own communicative repertoire to the social and cultural context within which communication is taking place*) and make understanding possible (*S 6.3 Can communicate while taking sociolinguistic or sociocultural differences into account*).

3.2. Assessing plurilingual and pluricultural competence acquisition

A specific test and rubric to assess PPC acquisition were designed. Given the scarcity of research on multilingual education's assessment and the challenge that this involves (Dendrinis, 2019) the first issue to be decided was which FREPA descriptors to assess in the test, which will be henceforth referred to as TAPPC (Test for the Assessment of Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competence). A selection process was carried out in order to delimit those descriptors, out of more than 500, that could be clearly addressed through translation in general, and through AVT in particular (see Marzà et al., 2021: 140, for the final selection; and Baños et al., 2021, for a

detailed discussion on the selection process). The focus was on knowledge and skills, i.e., whether students “knew” or “could do” specific tasks related to the chosen FREPA descriptors.

The TAPPC is a summative test that was used as a pre- and post-test implemented before and after the students had worked on a specific DS. It can also be considered a plurilingual assessment tool according to Gorter and Cenoz (2017), since it includes texts written in different languages and can be implemented in multilingual contexts, with subjects resorting to their different linguistic repertoires and looking at strategies that deploy cross-linguistic resources.

A total of 16 questions were created to cater to all AVT types. The AD version of the test applied 11 of these questions, organised in seven different sections. Nine out of the 11 questions will be analysed in the following section leaving aside those of a more linguistic nature (i.e., word recognition and translation tasks designed to trigger plurilingual reflections in other related tasks), since the focus of the present article is on PPC and not on the acquisition of specific abilities in English. Each of the questions included in the TAPPC (for a detailed review see Marzà et al., 2021: 150) was linked to FREPA descriptors. For instance, in question 7 students are asked to explain a festivity to people who are familiar with the source culture of the celebration and to people who do not belong to the same culture (and may/may not be familiar with it). For example, they were asked to explain Thanksgiving to someone from the US and also to someone from Spain, and a Christian funeral to a Hindu person and to someone from Spain. When doing so, students had to deploy descriptive resources such as explanations, specific terminology and explicit references. The objective was to assess if they could successfully perform a mediation task, that is, providing different and suitable pairs of descriptions depending on the receiver’s sociocultural and sociolinguistic background (descriptor S 6.3).

The TAPPC rubric was implemented by one single tester to ensure coherent scoring with the purpose of gauging how well FREPA plurilingual descriptors had been tackled by students. The ultimate aim of the rubric was to establish a detailed comparison between the results obtained in the pre-test vs. the post-test, which will be the focus of the section below.

4. Results of the study

As stated at the beginning of this article, the project that encompasses this research is a preliminary approach to a vast and widely unexplored field of which the analysis of data collected through the TAPPC provides but a first glimpse. Although results are not statistically significant, they are relevant in terms of the methodological and conceptual discussion within translation and education studies regarding plurilingual education. One of the main outcomes is that the results do not follow a single trend and are rather diverse. While some data point to the usefulness of AD for the promotion of PPC, the experimental and control groups behave similarly in other cases. In addition, some results suggest methodological or conceptual shortcomings. In all cases, a critical analysis raises relevant questions that require further theoretical and applied research if they are to be answered, an issue that will be discussed in the final section.

Two questions in the TAPPC aimed to test the participants’ knowledge and use of strategies to facilitate communication². One of these questions tried to elicit students’ metalinguistic knowledge about their use of linguistic features or elements to facilitate communication in their own language with someone who is not fluent

² Expressed in descriptors K 3.4 Knows that there exists language means to facilitate communication (e.g., simplification, reformulation, etc.) and S 6.1.1 Can reformulate (e.g., by simplifying the structure of the utterance, by varying the vocabulary or by making an effort to pronounce more clearly).

in it, without resorting to gestures or images. As shown in Table 3, in the pre-test, 62% of the EG participants showed knowledge of at least one group of resources among the following groups: speech-related strategies such as intonation or pace; external resources and tools such as dictionaries or smartphones; metalinguistic rephrasing by means of synonyms, paraphrases, etc.; or linguistic adaptation to the listener. In the post-test, this number rose to 80%. As for the CG, all students already described strategies belonging to at least one group in the pre-test, and results remained almost identical in the post-test.

	Experimental group			Control group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
no resources	38%	21%	-17%	0%	6%	+6%
1 group of resources	41%	59%	+18%	81%	75%	-6%
2 groups	15%	21%	+6%	19%	19%	-
3 groups	6%	0%	-6%	0%	0%	-
all groups	0%	0%	-	0%	0%	-

Table 3. Eliciting strategies to facilitate communication.

Since the 18% increase in the EG cannot be compared to the CG due to the latter group's high scores in the pre-test, complementing this information with the results of another TAPPC question could reinforce the understanding of this skill (i.e., facilitating communication). When asked to condense a statement in order to demonstrate their ability to comply with a specific communicative situation requiring a shorter utterance (such as time constraints of an AD or space constraints of subtitles), only a small percentage of EG students improved in their adaptation to a specified length (a rise of 4% from pre- to post-test results). However, CG students were less focused on adapting to the specified communicative situation in the post-test, since there was a 6% decrease in the number of students who complied with space constraints. In terms of strategies used to adapt the original phrasing, there was a slightly higher increase (from 70% to 78%) in EG students who resorted to resources such as modifying lexicon, syntax or using abbreviations. The CG did not improve in this area, although their initial score was, again, higher (88%).

The results above thus show that the EG scored slightly higher in the post-test as regards the use of resources to adapt language for communicative reasons, which, together with the results of the first question, suggests that the use of AD in class could have helped to activate this particular knowledge and skill in the students. This increase did not occur in the CG; however, the high numbers in the CG pre-test suggest that the skills and knowledge assessed may already be acquired at this stage of the students' process of learning languages. This is a phenomenon that will be discussed further later (see Table 9 and Conclusions).

Moving on to the type of results that show a similar behaviour in both groups, one test activity required the students to produce two different explanations of four cultural phenomena, aimed at potential recipients who belonged, in one case, to the same culture of the phenomenon and, in the other case, to a different culture³. As shown in Table 4, the results for both the control and experimental groups revealed an increase in the students who adapted their explanations to the recipient by using either explicitations or descriptions, specific terminology or explicit references.

³ This activity aimed at exploring descriptor S 6.3 Can communicate while taking sociolinguistic or sociocultural differences into account.

Experimental Group			Control Group		
Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
74%	88%	+14%	86%	96%	+10%

Table 4. Descriptions adapted to the recipient's cultural background.

These results suggest that both the use of AD and traditional textbook activities can be of use in increasing students' ability to adjust to intercultural communication. However, it must be noted that the main topic of both the AD DS and the textbook unit was, in fact, culture and traditions. A similar experiment using a different topic might shed some light on whether the medium (AD sequence vs. textbook) could affect the results as much as content does (culture, in this case).

Two tasks were aimed at determining students' perception regarding contrastive linguistics⁴. In a more general question, both groups were asked whether they believed there to be differences between or both similarities and differences between English and Spanish. A high awareness towards descriptor K 6 (see footnote 4) was already present in the pre-test, as shown in Table 5.

	Experimental Group			Control Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
≠	15%	17%	+3%	6%	0%	-6%
≠ & =	85%	83%	-3%	94%	100%	+6%

Table 5. Perceived notion of English and Spanish as having only differences or also similarities.

A more nuanced set of questions was designed to delve further into this knowledge. Students were asked to express their agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale towards statements regarding more specific subdescriptors stemming from the general K 6⁵. The sentences included stated that languages deal very similarly with emphasis, formality treatments, intonation and rhythm, pauses or turn-taking. Results were not so clear-cut in these cases. The only aspect that reached similar percentages to the previous question was the inherent tempo: in the pre-test, 75% of students in both groups believed that not all languages have a similar tempo; this number increased to 82% (CG) and 83% (EG) in the post-test. For the remaining factors (see Table 6), the results of the pre-test revealed that less than half of the students in both groups believed that not all languages share these characteristics (44%), i.e., more than half believed that characteristics are common across languages. Post-test results suggest that some students seemed to start realising that languages do not function exactly the same, since there was a decrease of 14% (CG) and 8% (EG) in the agreement towards these statements. However, this shift was only reflected in a slightly increased awareness of differences among languages in the EG (+3%). It would seem, then, that both the AD sequence and the textbook unit managed to raise a doubt in a limited number of students, since the "neither agree nor disagree" section increased in both groups, but could not fully shift their perception.

⁴ The general descriptor being evaluated was K 6. Knows that there are similarities and differences between languages and linguistic variations.

⁵ Such as K 6.5.3 Knows that different languages may resemble each other or may vary in their prosody (e.g., rhythm, accentuation, intonation, etc.); K 6.10.1 Knows that there are differences in the verbal or non-verbal ways in which feelings are expressed in different languages, or K 6.10.3 Knows that the rules of conversation (relating to the way one addresses others) may vary from one language to another (e.g., Who may take the initiative? Who may speak to whom? Who is addressed in a formal manner or in familiar terms as in *vous/ tu* in French?).

	Experimental Group			Control Group		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Not all languages similar	44%	46%	+3%	44%	41%	-3%
All languages similar	32%	24%	-8%	37%	23%	-14%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	30%	+6%	20%	36%	+16%

Table 6. Perceived notion of resemblances and differences among languages (inherent tempo not included).

The ability to engage in contrastive linguistics was also evaluated on a textual level. Students were asked to read texts in languages they presumably did not know, such as Danish, Swedish or Dutch, and to guess the topic and the communicative situation first, and then state which clues helped them work it out⁶. In terms of recognising the genre of the texts, the CG showed no changes between the pre- and post-tests, with 91% being able to recognise either the topic or the communicative situation. The EG, on the other hand, showed a decrease of 9% in the students who were able to guess either of these two aspects (from 85% to 76%). Furthermore, when asked to elicit the strategies that helped them recognise the genres, neither the AD sequence nor the textbook activity seemed to foster the students' use of contrastive skills to compare different discourse types (see Table 7), or at least their awareness thereof. The number of students who named formal characteristics of the specific discourse types or genres, such as the structure, was very similar in all cases.

Experimental Group			Control Group		
Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
22%	21%	-1%	50%	44%	-6%

Table 7. Eliciting formal textual aspects when comparing discourse types.

These results raise several questions. On the one hand, initial scores are quite high in terms of genre recognition; on the other hand, the AD sequence seems to slightly decrease the students' activation of this skill. A possible explanation for this phenomenon could be that the AD DS focused mainly on one textual genre, audio description, whereas the textbook unit showcased several different genres, such as interviews or magazine articles. Finally, explicit knowledge and activation of the comparison among discourse types is not as high as their ability to recognise genres. This may suggest that reflecting on how the formal aspects of a given discourse type or a given genre may be transferred among languages could be an appropriate multilingual objective for B2 students, but AD does not seem to exploit this skill.

A further task focusing on contrastive linguistics was conceived to gather information on the students' ability to recognize their own use of lexical proximity to guess the meaning of unknown words⁷. They were presented with a list of words that appeared in the DS or unit and had to explain how they guessed the meaning of unknown words. However, the question had a methodological flaw that affected the results: since the list was the same in the pre- and post- test, the number of words that they had to guess was lower in the post-test and, therefore, the number of students using lexical proximity was naturally lower. Nevertheless, the ability to perceive lexical proximity can also be assessed via the textual genre task (see Table 7), since lexical proximity was one of the clues that students recognised as being helpful in guessing the topic of the texts. As Table 8 shows, both groups slightly improved their ability to recognise lexical proximity as a tool to approach texts in a foreign language, but again, the use of AD does not seem to be essential.

⁶ This task was conceived to assess the acquisition of descriptor S 3.9.1 Can compare discourse types in different languages.

⁷ S 3.4 Can perceive lexical proximity.

Experimental Group			Control Group		
Pre-test	Post-test	Difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
62%	66%	+4%	59%	66%	+7%

Table 8. Eliciting lexical proximity when comparing discourse types.

Finally, the results presented throughout this section reveal a pattern, shown in Table 9, where participant students exhibit a high initial competence of several of the descriptors addressed in the AD experiment.

Descriptor under evaluation	EG pre-test result	CG pre-test results
K 3.4 Knows that there exists language means to facilitate communication	62%	100%
S 6.1.1 Can reformulate	70%	88%
S 6.3 Can communicate while taking sociolinguistic or sociocultural differences into account	74%	86%
K 6 Knows that there are similarities and differences between languages and linguistic variations	85%	94%
S 3.9.1 Can compare discourse types in different languages	85%	91%

Table 9. Descriptors with initial high scores.

The PluriTAV research project took FREPA as the epistemological basis for the design of sequences, tests and rubrics, and this framework, although very thorough in the enumeration of plurilingual skills and knowledge, does not place descriptors along proficiency levels. These results suggest that the descriptors shown in Table 9 are below the proficiency level of the participant students, especially those in the CG. As discussed in the conclusions, this fact has important consequences in terms of research design and knowledge transfer.

5. Conclusions

As stated in the first section of this paper, the Plurilingual Turn in language education is conceptually well-established, but it is still being developed in terms of practical application. As far as research is concerned, the complexity of its core concept, PPC, requires its many facets to be analysed in detail, sometimes calling for a fragmentation of otherwise highly interconnected notions. Hence, a selection of descriptors from FREPA was established for the PluriTAV project to operationalise PPC for a quasi-experimental study focusing on AVT in the language classroom. Within this framework, this paper has specifically explored the imbrications between PPC and AD in FL for plurilingual university students. This first general exploration has started to untangle a complex net that will now require further research to confirm the three main hypotheses that can be drawn from the data presented in the previous section.

The first hypothesis is that AD could contribute to enhancing the acquisition of some descriptors that conform PPC, specifically the knowledge and skills related to adapting and facilitating communication. In order to confirm this hypothesis, a larger cohort of students should be recruited for a similar study. Moreover, since PluriTAV explored several AVT types, results for the same descriptors obtained from the experiments with dubbing and subtitling will be aggregated to the data presented in this paper at a later stage, which will help to confirm whether these plurilingual abilities can benefit from general use of AVT in the classroom.

The second hypothesis is that the use of AD in the language classroom may not be essential but neither does it seem to be detrimental to the development of other descriptors, such as the adaptation of an utterance to the recipient's cultural background, the analysis of resemblances and differences among languages, or the

exploitation of lexical proximity. Even though these results should again be confirmed with a higher number of participants and could be contrasted with other AVT types, it could be argued that AD can safely be introduced in the language classroom, since its use yields positive results in other aspects of language learning (see section 2.2) and does not hinder the development of PPC.

The final hypothesis is that the use of AVT in the classroom will produce better results if several AVT types are combined. Results for the AD study suggest that focusing on one single genre could be problematic for the activation of knowledge and skills related to the recognition of textual genres. This idea concurs with one of the fundamental notions of language teaching and learning, according to which students must be confronted with varied texts that correspond to different registers, contexts, channels, etc. (Dolz-Mestre & Schneuwly, 1998; Fons Esteve, 1999). PluriTAV draws from these academic sources and advocates for an integral incorporation of all AVT types into the teaching of a FL, thus allowing students to benefit from the specific contributions that each AVT type provides to the different language activities (production, reception, interaction and mediation) and PPC.

Additionally, the shortcomings of this study have triggered relevant methodological reflections that can enrich the discussion on research about plurilingual approaches to language learning and AVT. Firstly, the use of FREPA as a source for the analysis of PPC may have provoked an unwelcome dispersion in the results. When PluriTAV started in 2017, FREPA was the only operationalised description of PPC and therefore the only option available. In the meantime, two CVs have been published, adding descriptors for mediation, but only the latter version (2020) includes descriptors for PPC. The 2020 CV presents only a fraction of the over 500 descriptors that can be found in FREPA, which gives an idea of how unwieldy the previous framework was. Working on FREPA has given the research team a thorough insight into this framework and, even though it is highly informative of the complexity of PPC and probably necessary for its conceptualisation, it is too large and intricate to be used efficiently in educational planning or research. In this sense, working with the CV, selecting a smaller number of descriptors as the focus of research and adapting them to the specific context where they are used, as suggested by Navarrete (2020), would probably yield more robust results.

A second methodological reflection is the need to combine quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. PluriTAV was conceived as a quantitative, quasi-experimental study due to the scarcity of such proposals (see Marzà et al., 2021), but a qualitative analysis of students' and teachers' experience with this approach would have generated complementary information. Finally, the results shown in Table 9 suggest that some descriptors were already achieved before the implementation of the project, especially by the CG students. FREPA did not establish how the descriptors may differ across proficiency levels, and little empirical research to test the adequacy of these descriptors has been carried out (Riu, 2019; Stathopoulou, 2015), which may have affected the selection of descriptors for the participant students' level. This hurdle could be overcome in future studies by using the 2020 CV, which does specify how descriptors can vary across proficiency levels. However, a first glance at some descriptors that could be associated with the ones presented in this study suggests that the 2020 CV proposal might also need empirical confirmation of how appropriate its levels are. As shown in table 10, the 2020 CV descriptors that could be considered equivalent to some of the FREPA descriptors in table 9 are classified in levels from B1 to B2+. Given that B2 was the level that participant students should achieve by the end of the course, it is worth noting that more than 70% had already achieved all these descriptors in the pre-test.

FREPA descriptor	Possible equivalent 2020 CV descriptor	Level in 2020 CV
S 6.1.1 Can reformulate	Can simplify a source text by excluding non-relevant or repetitive information and taking into consideration the intended audience	B2+
S 6.3 Can communicate while taking sociolinguistic or sociocultural differences into account	Can explain features of their own culture to members of another culture or explain features of the other culture to members of their own culture	B1
S 3.9.1 Can compare discourse types in different languages	Can use their knowledge of contrasting genre conventions and textual patterns in languages in their plurilingual repertoire in order to support comprehension	B2

Table 10. Possible 2020 CV equivalent descriptors and their level.

Working with non-graded descriptors can therefore impact on research and teacher planning. The linguistic level of the students in the control and experimental groups of this study was the same, but their plurilingual competence was not, so the descriptors presented in Table 9 may not have been appropriate for assessing their improvement in terms of plurilingual and intercultural competence. Research in PPC would greatly benefit from empirical studies to test the adequacy of the proficiency levels for PPC proposed by the 2020 CV. However, such studies should also consider the linguistic background of students, since the fact that this study was conducted in a bilingual region may have affected the student's initial PPC levels: could a bilingual upbringing predispose students to a higher level of PPC than expected by the 2020 CV?

This last question reinforces the importance of adopting a multilingual approach when planning research related to language learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015), which is precisely PluriTAV's main aim and, we advocate, should be incorporated in any research combining AVT and language learning. The three hypotheses that have been formulated and the methodological reflections that conclude this paper can lead this discussion and open necessary avenues of research to develop a better understanding of the relations between PPC, language learning and AVT.

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