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# Training the trainer

## The art of audio describing in language lessons

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Audio description (AD) is a mode of audiovisual translation (AVT) used for making video content accessible to blind and visually impaired viewers. Didactic AD refers to an active practice where the language learner inserts a narration into the original soundtrack of a clip to describe information transmitted visually, thus converting images into words. AD is often portrayed as an artistic practice due to the creative nature of translating visual elements into a linguistic code whilst the learner becomes a social agent that mediates between the clip and others, using aural discourse to interpret what can be seen including semiotic signs and images. This article will explore key professional guidelines for audio describing, the type of language used, and what areas need to be considered when planning an AD lesson. Taking into consideration the new descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and how communicative approaches have evolved over the last couple of decades, this article will also discuss methodological approaches for an AD effective usage. A sample AD lesson taken from the TRADILEX project will be commented on whilst providing practical recommendations to new users of this AVT mode.

**Keywords:** audio description, audiovisual translation, foreign language education, teacher training, mediation


### 1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered a revolution in the way we interact due to the isolation that occurred over long periods of lockdown. As a result, there is no doubt that all modes of AVT and the media accessibility (MA) setting have been highly stimulated by these recent events. This is the exact time that the ongoing MA claim “media for all” has promptly switched into “media is all”, at least for the periods of confinement that we have experienced. This situation has brought to

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the fore the urgent need for making content accessible, especially since much of the aging and vulnerable population has been shielding, either in their homes or public institutions such as care homes. This is something that is speeding up procedures involved not only in translation and mediation, but also in localisation, marketisation and transcreation practices. With the advances in technology, one could foresee a further move into multisensorial compositions (art exhibitions, fashion shows, documentaries, etc.). Elements that can be perceived by different senses, such as music, vibrations, wind, scent, textures, taste, etc. are blended together. This combination of sensorial components can be considered an accessible practice in itself, but the addition of AD or Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH) could challenge and further develop the level of accessibility of such creations. Within this context, the practice of making audiovisual products more accessible is also starting to have powerful implications for the Foreign Language Education (FLE) context, as these modalities are increasingly being used in teaching. With such a sudden media revolution, all research produced on the impact of AVT on language learners' knowledge and skills can only be perceived as a solid foundation of what is about to come.

After considering three main qualities of AD as an artistic practice and reflecting on the state of the art of this AVT mode in FLE, this article will discuss methodological considerations and provide practical ideas and recommendations on how to benefit from using AD in language learning.

## 2. The art of audio describing

This article is based on three key considerations that support the value of didactic AD in FLE, especially in the context of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Action-oriented Approach (AoA).

1. AD is seen as a creative practice in which learners develop strategies whilst playing with words and using a specific linguistic typology that allows the translation of images into oral discourse. Through this practice, L2 learners can learn to overcome the temporal constraints that occur on screen.
2. AD is viewed as an intersemiotic practice, images are converted into words without necessarily translating from a native language (L1) into a foreign language (FL/L2) but going from an image-concept into an L2 linguistic code.
3. AD is considered a mediation practice since the learner acquires the role of a social agent when mediating between the clip and a visually impaired audience. Therefore, the audiodescriber translates the images and semiotics signs of the clip through a recorded narrative in the form of an aural discourse. This

view can clearly be linked to the AoA, a term which was first introduced in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001) embedding various theoretical concepts, which can be closely related to previous communicative approaches. However, one could highlight the most divergent factor that distances these approaches, that is the idea of social agency whereby “AoA views users and learners of a language as *social agents*, i.e., members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action” (Council of Europe 2001, 9).

The combination of these perceptions of the AD practice comprises what this article defines as “the art of audio describing” in FLE. Some of these premises have been explored in isolation by professional experts in AD (Salway 2007; Snyder 2008; Fryer 2016) but they have not yet been studied within the language learning context.

## 2.1 AD as a creative practice

Snyder (2008, 935) coined “the visual made verbal”, a self-explanatory expression that states how images get converted into words in AD. His description of this practice is as follows:

AD makes the visual images of theatre, media and visual art accessible for people who are blind or have low vision. Using words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative (via the use of similes or comparisons), describers convey the visual image that is either inaccessible or only partially accessible to a significant segment of the population. (Snyder 2014, 12)

Snyder’s definition includes the type of language required for AD practice, which involves an artistic approach based on challenging linguistic precision, and the need for imaginative and accurate lexical elements to convey images that are not accessible to certain viewers in the form of a visual oral discourse. Thus, he refers to AD as “a kind of literary art form in itself” (2008, 192). Furthermore, Schaeffer-Lacroix’s (2020, 5) assertion reflects on the importance of finding the right words to fulfil the needs of this specific audience which adds one more artistic need to translate the semiotic content of a clip: “[a]n audio describer must strive to be brief, precise, and to show empathy towards visually impaired people”.

AD is applicable to productions broadcast on television or recorded in any medium (movies, series, documentaries, etc.), films in movie theatres, live shows (theatre, concerts, etc.), monuments (churches, palaces, etc.), museums and exhibitions, as well as natural areas and thematic spaces (natural parks, theme parks,

etc.). In live plays, an audio describer often inserts their voice during the parts of the performance where there is no dialogue. However, FLE practice tends to be based on fictional video clips, giving priority to filmed work, as research in didactic AD, including the TRADILEX project (see Section 5.2), have shown a preference for using video clips instead of live shows as the former are more easily available on the net. In AV media, AD is inserted in between the dialogue of the characters and the original soundtrack. In both cases – in which AD is inserted in between the dialogue of the characters and the original soundtrack – additional and explanatory information about actions, facial expressions and scenery is transmitted verbally with an approximate speech rate of 180 words per minute, whilst the insertion of the narration into the clip is achieved by using video editing software (see Section 5.1).

## 2.2 AD as an intersemiotic practice

According to Salway (2007), the interconnections between images and words have received scholarly attention for centuries and AD practice combines them by using verbal oral discourse. Furthermore, the author points out that AD “provides a novel, tangible and important scenario for exploring these relationships, and it presents immediate and stimulating challenges for research and audiovisual translation” (150).

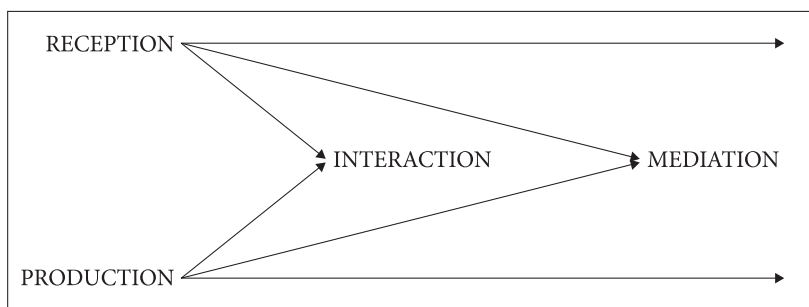
Therefore, the task of converting images into words, without necessarily translating from a native language (L1) into a FL/L2 but moving from an image-concept into an L2 linguistic code, constitutes a real challenge for a language learner, which can produce impressive results in terms of lexical competence (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2013; Schaeffer-Lacroix 2020), speaking skills (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Talaván and Lertola 2016; Navarrete 2018, 2020) and written production (Calduch and Talaván 2018; Talaván, Lertola, and Ibáñez 2022).

As pointed out by Fryer (2016, 3), “[u]nlike subtitling, dubbing or voice-over, AD does not come with a pre-existing text that needs translating from one language to another”. She quotes Braun’s (2008, 2) perception of this practice as an “intersemiotic, intermodal or cross-modal translation or mediation” whilst referring to Jakobson (1959), who coined the term “intersemiotic” to describe modes of translation where the entire information does not come from the translated channel but from other sources. Fryer also explains that “modal” in this context suggests additional modes of meaning such as spoken utterances, written messages, music or sound effects. Finally, she indicates that this term also refers to sensory modes where one sense (i.e., vision) is translated into another sense (i.e., audition). This is possibly one more reason why this AVT mode is particularly useful

for language learners. As students convert a visual concept into the verbal mode without a need for mediation with their L1, they have to create their own scripts from scratch and record them with their own voices. In this way, not only written and oral production skills, but also creative competence, are boosted. Thus, by reformulating messages, learners have to overtake time constraints in order to produce relevant language, although, unlike dubbing, lip-synch does not imply a key challenge for this practice. From this point of view, one could conclude that AD tasks are easier to complete than dubbing ones.

### 2.3 AD as a mediation practice

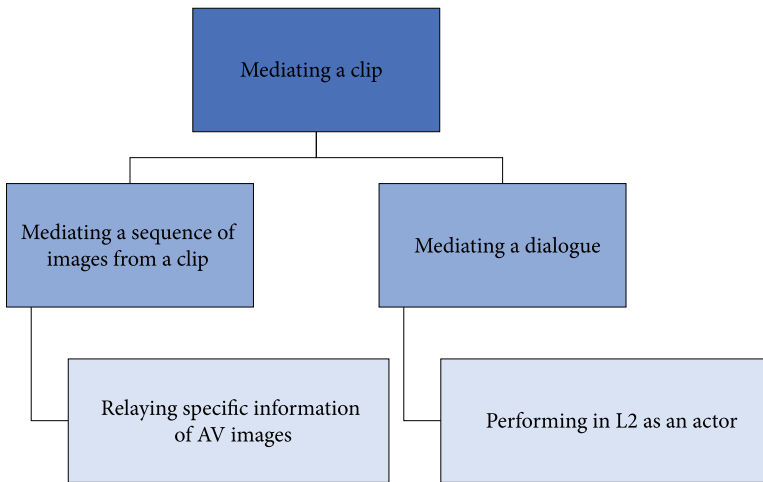
In this article, AD is primarily viewed as a mediation practice, since the learner acquires a social agency role when mediating between the clip and others, using an aural discourse to interpret what can be seen, which includes semiotic signs and images. This theoretical stance has been supported by the CEFR Companion Volume published in 2018 and updated in 2020 (Council of Europe 2018, 2020). Although mediation was already marginally included in the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001), in the first and second editions of the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2018, 2020), this area of interaction has become of paramount importance. The new descriptors aim to foster the development of mediation activities, learning strategies as well as plurilingual and pluricultural competences. Thus, the CEFR Companion Volume has brought about the incorporation of mediation descriptors as its main strategic axis whilst the four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) have been replaced by the linguistic modes of reception, production, interaction and mediation. This key role of mediation in FLE is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** “The relationship between reception, production, interaction and mediation” (Council of Europe 2018, 32)

As pointed out by Piccardo and North (2019), the Council of Europe, which aims at making a more democratic society, has considered the current existing migration flows and social interactions among cultures and peoples, and has applied this social context to the FLE setting. This new approach results in reconceptualising language learning around the idea of social agency where the language learner has evolved into a social agent when mediating with others. Recent views on FLE advocate for AoA, and this is how the CEFR descriptive scheme has converted it into practice (Piccardo and North 2019). Navarrete (2020) attempted to define potential departures from previous communicative trends by looking at the type of syllabus used by each approach. However, to distinctly define the barriers among these approaches is a challenging issue, as they share many aspects. One key difference for the most recent approach is the pivotal recognition of mediation practices (the AoA), a further variable is the idea of moving a step forward, from perceiving a task as a mere communicative purpose to viewing it as a coherently scaffolded real-life project.

With the incorporation of sign languages, the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2018) has made additional efforts to depart from elitism and focus on inclusion in its educational views. This adjustment supports a proposal that aims at promoting the idea that all AVT modes, but in particular AD and SDH, may become appropriate candidates to be included in a new edition of the CEFR Companion Volume. Although SDH and AD are mediation practices that aim to make AV products accessible to people with either auditive or visual impairments, these accessibility modes have not yet been explicitly included in the latest edition of the CEFR Companion Volume. Although these social and mediation perspectives align clearly with the CEFR's most recent evolution of FLE views, the major focus of this article is on AD practice. As the CEFR stands with its current descriptive scheme, it has been a straightforward action to incorporate a new category that accounts more visibly for this mediation practice, as seen in Figure 1, whilst illustrative descriptors have been rewritten accordingly, as a suggestion to support AD practice in FLE. This new interest in these accessibility modes has brought about the creation of new categories and their descriptors as seen in Figure 2, such as for AD practice (Navarrete 2020; Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano 2022). Although dubbing might not be strictly considered an accessibility mode, it is worth mentioning that its descriptors have also been created (Bolaños García-Escribano and Navarrete 2022).



**Figure 2.** Mediating a clip and its categories (Bolaños García-Escribano and Navarrete 2022, 108)

Table 1 comprises a proposal concerning descriptors for the top and bottom level of the CEFR which could easily be added to the Framework. One can find the complete list of descriptors in Navarrete (2020), as due to space restrictions only most differing categories are discussed in this paper. Up until now, none of these descriptors have yet been tested: therefore, this is an area that should be developed in the future to confirm their adequate design. AD practice relies on both writing and non-spontaneous speaking skills, since learners will need to first write the narration that will be recorded afterwards. This is why descriptors for categories already included in the Framework have been selected and rewritten by the author of this article in such a way that they will work for AD practice. These descriptors have been adapted from two different subcategories called “Relaying specific information in writing” (Council of Europe 2018, 108), and “Relaying specific information in speech” (Council of Europe 2018, 107–108), which are included in the “Mediating a text” label. The resulting category is called by the author: “Mediating a sequence of images from a clip.”

**Table 1.** Sample descriptors for AD practice (Navarrete 2020, 69–70)

CEFR	
Levels	Illustrative descriptors for AD practice
C2	Can audio describe (in Language B) relevant visual elements of a video clip to visually impaired viewers, using sophisticated vocabulary and minimalistic structures (when needed) for the narration to be in synchrony with the images of the clip (following near professional standards).



Table 1. (continued)

CEFR	
Levels	Illustrative descriptors for AD practice
A1/ Pre- A1	Can audio describe (in Language B) relevant visual elements of a video clip to visually impaired viewers, using basic words and structures that do not require much reorganisation for the narration to be in synchrony with the images of the clip. Can audio describe (in Language B) specific, relevant points contained in predictable information about times and places, short and simple texts, labels and notices and on basic situations appearing in a video clip whilst keeping the synchrony with its images and using short sentences.

The corresponding descriptors for each of the two categories used have been organised in the same way as the initial ones from a scale of Pre-A1 to C1, but with the addition of a proficiency level C2, which differs from the lower scale (C1) in that near-professional standards in AD are expected. The newly designed AD scale of levels (from Pre-A1 to C2) varies from using basic words and simple structures that do not require much reorganising (for the lower levels), to advanced structures and usage of sophisticated words that can adapt to all sorts of reformulation (for the higher levels). The scale is organised in this manner to keep the narration in synchrony with the images as this is a major characteristic of the AD mode. For more proficient levels (C1 and C2), learners will need to have acquired in-depth lexical and grammatical knowledge, as to allow the synthesis and summarising techniques needed for AD practice.

### 3. Empirical studies on didactic AD

As outlined in Section 2, recent studies (i.e., Navarrete 2020; Bolaños García-Escribano and Navarrete 2022) have focussed on aligning didactic AVT with the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020) and exploring a methodological rationale that supports the usage of this practice in FLE. This new approach has meant a switch in the lines of investigation, since before this development, researchers' interest was either on the potential enhancement of a particular skill or on the integration of several linguistic skills or competences in language learners, as shown in Table 2 below. It is important to note that all the studies included in the table, except for Herrero and Escobar's (2018) study, were carried out with undergraduate students at different European universities whose levels of proficiency cited are based on the CEFR.

**Table 2.** Experimental studies in didactic AD

Authors	Date	Features examined	Subjects	Language	Level
Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen	2013	Lexical competence	52	Sp	B2
Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen	2014	Integrated skills	30	Sp	B1
Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen	2015a	Speaking skills Videos for Speaking (VISP)	16	En	B1
Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen	2015b	Speaking skills (VISP)	10	En	B1
Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen	2015c	Speaking skills (VISP)	12	En	B1
Cenni and Izzo	2016	AD potential	20	It	B2
Talaván and Lertola	2016	Speaking skills	30	En	B1
Navarrete	2018	Speaking skills	6	Sp	B1-B2
Calduch and Talaván	2018	Writing skills	15	Sp	B1-B2
Herrero and Escobar	2018	Critical thinking	n/s	Sp	B1-B2
Schaeffer-Lacroix	2020	Morphology	6	Ge	B1
Navarrete	2020	Speaking skills	132	Sp	A2-B2
Talaván, Lertola and Ibáñez	2022	Written production and translation skills	25	En	B2

Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen (2013) reported an increase in lexical and phraseological acquisition with native speakers of Dutch learning Spanish at a B2 level of proficiency, who embarked on audio describing a series of clips. In a later study, the same authors (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2014) registered an improvement of the four skills in learners with a B1 language level. This study was based on a collaborative task to audio describe a Spanish film clip among two groups of students. The first group was composed of Spanish speakers studying AVT from English into Spanish, and the second of Dutch speakers studying Spanish. Following these studies, the authors (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015a, 2015b, 2015c) developed a mobile assisted language learning application, Videos for Speaking (VISP), containing short clips that had to be audio described in Spanish by their students. The experiments aimed at promoting both accuracy and fluency in learners' oral discourse. Their results were encouraging and set the bases for future projects in the area.

Cenni and Izzo's (2016) study aimed at assessing the potential of AD in teaching Italian as a FL at Ghent University, Belgium. This was a collaborative

medium-scale project involving 20 B2-level students; findings revealed that learners' grammatical and lexical competence had improved following AD practice.

Talaván and Lertola (2016) carried out a quasi-experimental study involving students of English as a FL for Tourism at a B1 level of language proficiency. The results of their work clearly demonstrated the potential of AD tasks based on the improvement of oral production skills in distance FLE environments, since the experiment was carried out in the National University of Distance Education (UNED), which uses its own platform for content and forums. However, students used the ClipFlair (2011–2014) software, which was created by members of the ClipFlair team. This project (Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Revoicing and Captioning Clips) was funded by the European Union, which involved a network of academic institutions. Researchers devised a platform that contains 400 AVT activities in total covering 15 languages, tested them and reported lessons learnt from their experiments.

Herrero and Escobar's (2018) study combined AD practice with film literacy. It consisted of two case studies with secondary school learners of Spanish with a B1-B2 level of proficiency, a project taking place in the UK. The authors believed that these disciplines should be incorporated into the language curriculum and suggested a pedagogical model of practice. They advocated for developing intercultural, linguistic and film literacy competences through AD practice. Their model was based on raising awareness, analysing and reflecting on the different aspects of the clip, and the usage of AD tasks to foster a creative language usage.

Navarrete (2018) explored the usage of AD tasks with students of Spanish (B1-B2 proficiency level), at Imperial College London. In this small-scale study based on action research principles, the author examined the potential enhancement of oral performance, looking at the fluency, pronunciation and intonation features, as well as vocabulary and grammar skills, which have a direct effect on fluency.

Calduch and Talaván's (2018) qualitative study was also based on action research principles. The authors examined the potential enhancement of writing skills and lexical precision in 15 students of Spanish at B1-B2 level in the UK. The results were encouraging since students found the tasks motivating, they improved their writing skills and lexical and grammar accuracy, as well as lexical recall and even oral skills in terms of fluency, pronunciation and intonation (although this was not the primary focus of the study). As pointed out by Lertola (2019), these results match the outcomes of previous studies (Ibáñez Moreno and Vermeulen 2015a; Talaván and Lertola 2016; Navarrete 2018).

It is also worth mentioning the small-scale study by Schaeffer-Lacroix (2020), as she seems to be to date the only researcher to date who has designed tasks based on corpus linguistics exploration. As the scholar remarks, “[m]orphological fea-

tures have not yet received much attention from AD researchers” (7). The course involved a series of tasks that aimed at helping students to have a better understanding of the role of German word endings. The results were encouraging but inconclusive due to the limited number of participants that completed the study.

Navarrete’s (2020) large-scale study was based on action research principles as it was carried out over a period of three cycles where the learning outcomes of each cycle helped to improve the design of the subsequent ones. This study demonstrated the improvement of oral production skills (fluency, pronunciation and intonation) in learners with the active usage of AD tasks.

Talaván, Lertola, and Ibáñez (2022) aimed at assessing the didactic potential of AD combined with SDH. Their study was carried out with 25 students of English Studies in a Spanish university. They worked collaboratively to provide accessibility to short films. The results showed evidence of improvement both in written production and in general translation skills.

Along these lines, studies (Navarrete 2020; Bolaños García-Escribano and Navarrete 2022; Navarrete and Bolaños García-Escribano 2022) have also focussed on providing a methodological framework for didactic AD that is aligned to the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020). In order to accomplish this objective, the authors created the subcategories of mediating a sequence of images and mediating a dialogue for AD and dubbing practice as seen in Table 1, in addition to illustrative descriptors for mediating a clip. These labels can be seen in the aforementioned Figure 2.

#### 4. General professional AD guidelines

This section introduces professional AD guidelines, but it is important to point out that language learners do not need to strictly apply them as long as they have been given an overview of the most relevant ones. Task briefs and in-class assessment should help students’ understanding of when and how they can deviate from them.

Every country within Europe, the USA and Australia follows slightly different AD standards. Generally speaking, these coincide in most of their recommendations and guidelines with regard to their starting points, synchronisation, target users and other issues. In order to audio describe any piece of work, a series of premises need to take place, such as the existence of message spaces where to insert information bubbles of audio described material. These need to be added at the right time and in the correct place maintaining a synchrony with the images appearing on screen. Moreover, content has to be carefully balanced so that the visually impaired listener is not overloaded by information. Thus, the script must

take into account the plot first, followed by the provision of the relevant visual information of the setting. The language of the original work and the AD must match, targeting their particular audience, using a fluent and simple style and adjectives that are precise and lexically appropriate, whilst avoiding cacophonies or incorrect language for the context in which this occurs. In addition, information should be self-contained, comprising a document that makes sense on its own, which responds to the 'when,' 'where,' 'who' and 'what' of each situation described when relevant to the story being told. It is important to bear in mind that the describer needs to be objective, keeping the rhythm, tone, suspense and tension of the original work, whilst the visuals must be respected without being censored or without removing excessive material due to the audio describer's personal beliefs. Conversely, the audience should not be patronised by descriptions of what is easily inferred. This practice needs to be done bearing in mind that events in the plot must not be revealed beforehand, nor must situations of dramatic tension, suspense or mystery be disturbed. Therefore, audio describers are required to find a precise balance about what, when, who and how to say it, in order to respond to general contextual questions about key visuals from film settings.

## 5. Methodological considerations for AD practice

When planning to integrate any AVT lessons either in a sequence or in isolation, the teacher needs to consider a number of factors, listed in Figure 3. We will take an AD task as an example, however this approach might also be applicable to any other AVT mode. The first factor is the student profile, age, interests, expected language level, needs and challenges. The second factor is the curriculum of the course programme and how lessons can be integrated, which comprises what should be learnt before and after the AD lessons. The third factor is how adequate the AD practice might be for students' needs, and the fourth factor, how the task should be integrated within the programme of the course as a whole. The fifth factor comprises lexical, grammatical and cultural items that might be used in a sequence, and how to scaffold tasks that support their acquisition for successful completion of the AD task. When having the option of using other AVT modes (subtitling, SDH, dubbing, free commentary, etc.), it is essential to decide which one would work better with what is expected to be learn, such as what skills and strategies need to be developed. Once all these teaching-related reflexions have been brought into line, the teacher is in a position to select a video that is stimulating, adequate for the age and interests of the students, and comprising verbal and visual elements that help with the learning stages of the lesson plan in a coherent manner.



**Figure 3.** Factors to consider when planning an AVT lesson

Last but not least, assessment is possibly the most difficult area of this learning procedure. Assessment needs to be carefully aligned to what is intended to be learnt and how it can be tested, providing a result that measures the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, culture, mediation skills (including the modes of production, reception and interaction) as well as the development of strategies that supports students’ learning. Learners might be assessed by the successful completion of the task, whilst using a rubric that evaluates aspects such as: lexical accuracy, grammatical precision, creativity and reformulation techniques, fluency, pronunciation and intonation and synchrony and technological mastery. In any case, in face-to-face environments, it is key to devote a final stage of a lesson to discussing the tasks that have been submitted, so that the whole group can contribute to providing as well as receiving feedback. An exemplary rubric can be observed in Table 3, which includes the features that can be assessed and possible values for each one.

**Table 3.** Rubric for assessing AD practice

Features	Poor (0–5)	Satisfactory (6–10)	Good (15)	Excellent (20)
Lexical accuracy				
Grammatical precision				
Creativity and reformulation techniques				
Fluency pronunciation and intonation				
Synchrony and technological mastery				

The points given to each value will depend on the numeral system that is used in each given institution, but for this rubric we have considered a punctuation of a total of 100 points. This can be used for both formative (non-formally evaluated) and summative (formally-evaluated) assessment. The former refers to a type of assessment that carries no grade whereas the latter has an impact on in the student's final results. One should emphasise the idea that this rubric can be adapted to different learning environments, and other values, such as the dramatization of the audio describer, could be added.

### 5.1 Typology of AD tasks and practical recommendations

Didactic AD practice aims at developing a real-life project which is based on a clip that needs to be audio described in the L2, where the clip:

- a. Is adapted from an L1 AD;
- b. Is generally in the L2 (but it could contain no spoken or written language);
- c. Is not given, it needs to be created.

Although this type of practice can take place in any of the three types of tasks outlined, it might be worth creating different projects, where tasks are completed in the above order. One of the main advantages of adapting an AD from L1 into learners' L2 is that students would be able to infer general professional guidelines from the clip they are working with. Thus, they would reflect on what needs to be described and discuss basic guidelines on how to do it. In addition, they would learn how their L2 might differ from their L1 in terms of its specific limitations within this context. For instance, students would easily discover (when working initially with English ADs to be adapted into Spanish, for instance) that there would be additional space constraints when going into their L2. They would learn that translations tend to be up to a third longer in Spanish than in English, that is usually about a 30% expansion in Spanish, therefore a 300-word document in English will typically be 350 or 400 words in Spanish (Transfluent 2015, online). Therefore, their recordings would have to be equally long in both languages, but the resulting adaptations would tend to have less content than their counterparts in English. It is also highly recommended to start analysing a clip with an AD in the language they are learning to ensure familiarity with language appropriateness, relevant verbal tenses, typical adverbs used, word order, etc. In addition, summarising and rephrasing chunks of language items are key aspects to learn, that is, how to convey messages in the most efficient way possible whilst using the minimum number of words. The emphasis on this particular technique would ideally increase further the levels of proficiency in the L2 that the language learner is working with.

Once learners are familiar with AD techniques in both languages and have completed one or two AD tasks in their target language, a clip with no AD could be provided. It is best to start with a short clip (1–2 minutes long) that does not include dialogue, with visual elements which are not excessively rich, as this might be overwhelming for the describers. A cooking recipe might be worth exploring for a first task with no previous AD. This can be followed by three to five tasks (2–4 minutes long) covering a variety of syllabus-related topics, such as lexical fields, grammar-related issues, communicative purposes, etc.

The final step should be to brief students on how to create their own short film (3–5 minute long), where they are free to tell their own story, and then audio describe it. This type of task is the most creative one, and team members have to play a range of roles needed for the creation of the video (director, script/copy writer, camera operator, actor, audio describer, proof-reader, post-editor, etc.). Ideally, they should be in charge of most aspects involved in the whole production, and they should revise each other's work. For this task, they would need to write a script with its audio described narration, consider scenery, prompts, clothing, etc. For each individual role, students would have to organise themselves, decide on who does each piece of work, and discuss possible outcomes to allow for the safe submission of their final product.

Depending on the size of the course and number of lessons devoted to this practice, students could complete some of their AD in class or at home. It is not compulsory for students to be physically near each other as they could record their narration parts online and join them utilising user-friendly software such as Audio Joiner (123Apps; <https://audio-joiner.com/>) or Audacity (The Audacity Team; <https://www.audacityteam.org/>). Yet, it would be preferable to dedicate time in the lessons to introducing the new clips, discussing potential difficulties, lexical fields, time constraints, relevant image content to be described, etc. Also, there should be time devoted to providing constructive feedback by all parties once the tasks have been completed. This would not only involve fluency, grammar and vocabulary aspects, but also relevant feedback on how to improve the pronunciation of problematic sounds, intelligibility of the learners and intonation. Finally, the synchrony between the AD narration and images should be included in class discussion. Students should be encouraged to self-assess their work and to evaluate their partners' tasks.

## 5.2 A TRADILEX lesson plan sample: *The Right Way*

The TRADILEX project (2020–2023) is funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation to study the scope and validity of the usage of AVT tools to develop communicative competence in a FL. The project involves the design



and piloting of subtitling and revoicing lessons plans for students of English in an online format. It is based on adult education targeting university language centres and further-educations institutions across Spain. As the English teachers are not members of TRADILEX and they might not have had previous contact with AVT, the project provides instruction and guidance to the tutors involved in delivering lessons. Therefore, it offers hands-on workshops, a MOOC course on AVT, user friendly guides and other supporting resources. Lessons plans are aimed at B1-B2 levels, which include six lessons for each AVT mode offered (subtitling, SDH, dubbing, voice over and AD) and encompasses a total of 30 lessons per proficiency level.

In order to illustrate how lesson plans can be structured in language courses, we will be discussing a one-hour sample lesson which was designed by several members of the project including the author of this article. The lesson is targeted at adult students of English, as described in the previous paragraph, but in this case their level of proficiency will be B1 (CEFR). The lesson plan contains a two-minute short film called *The Right Way* (Zobak 2016), which explores the relationship between a mother and her daughter and what should be the right way to live in opposition to what the reality might be. The clip shows how a mother attempts to teach her daughter a healthy way of living, including eating nutritious food, avoiding watching TV, practising violin and chess playing. However, the reality is that as soon as the mother puts her daughter to bed, the mother goes into a hidden room where she eats cakes, drinks beer and listens to loud music.

Table 4 summarises the typical stages of TRADILEX lesson plans. This basic structure can be followed in any AVT course either on an online or face-to-face format or as a one-off real-life project. The key idea is to plan lesson scaffolding tasks in a coherent manner as will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Table 4.** Stages for a TRADILEX AVT lesson plan

Stage	Time/ (min)	Description	Objective
Warm-up	10	Discussing topic areas or plot covered in the clip Introducing lexical and grammatical items, and intercultural knowledge Anticipating video content (plot, characters and action points)	To acquire a general knowledge of the context in which the clip is situated To practise new lexical and grammatical items needed to understand the clip in the next stage and to prepare for the AVT task
Viewing of the clip	10	Viewing the clip (at least twice)	To focus on the messages conveyed by spoken discourse and by visual elements

Table 4. (continued)

Stage	Time/ (min)	Description	Objective
			To anticipate problems for completing the AVT task Finding about temporal constrains
AVT task	30	Completing the AVT individually or in small groups using the software selected	To develop linguistic written and/or spoken skills and any other skills in an integrated manner
Written production tasks	10	Discussing relevant topics related to the content of the clip Carrying out role-plays or writing tasks to further practice the linguistic and intercultural elements contained in the clip	To complement the linguistic and intercultural content of the clip by working additional production tasks that will develop all L2 skills

Once that the video has been selected following a coherent rationale, the best starting point is for the teacher to create one's own AD to focus on the grammatical and lexical items that would be needed for the AVT task. This step will also help to confirm that the video selected is adequate for the learners' needs. A sample AD for the chosen task is found below:

New York film academy presents. A woman is shown stirring a saucepan with a spoon. 'THE RIGHT WAY'. She drops the spoon, smiles and leans in for a smell, leans back and looks happy. Her daughter is at the back. She turns and takes a plate and serves her daughter broccoli carrots and peas. She pretends to place food on a fork and looks happy as she eats it. Her daughter looks at food and sighs. The girl walks past and smiles at the TV remote as her mother comes behind her with a violin. She shakes her head and gives her daughter the violin. She looks down and shoots herself in the head with her fingers. She's happily playing with Lego with her violin next to her, her mum approaches, passing her a chess board. She falls back and faints. Her mother gasps. Her mum shuts the door as her daughter sleeps. She goes and pushes a book, and a door opens from the wall, she pulls a cheeky face. She's sitting eating donuts with a TV remote, beer and loud techno music as she smiles.

The warm-up stage of the lesson contains an activity where students need to decide, out of a list, what are the phrases that express likes, dislikes or are neutral. In addition, they need to translate them into their L1 (in this case Spanish). As this is the first AD lesson for the TRADILEX course, it is key to familiarise learners with basic professional guidelines in AD. Thus, a text that covers these areas

is given to students for them to respond to short multiple-choice questions, such as what should be described, what should be the verbal tenses used and what pronouns should refer to whom. This is to ensure that they have understood the text and have gained awareness of how to carry out an AD. The main objective of this stage is both to familiarise learners with expressions that will be needed for the main task of the lesson and with basic tools for AD practice in general.

In the second stage of the lesson, that is the viewing of the clip, half of the video has been audio described in English. Students need to infer basic guidelines on AD (also presented in the AD text of the first stage) by responding to a multiple-choice task where they are asked similar questions to those in the previous task, but this time the responses are applied to the clip they are working with. Questions are formulated in such a way that learners will need to respond to what is described, what are the verbal tenses used, what pronouns refer to and what has yet to be described. In the third stage of the lesson, students need to complete their AD task by audio describing the second half of the video (1-minute long) using some of the expressions learnt in previous tasks. Final notes on key AD professional guidelines are provided to assist their work, aiming at lexical accuracy and richness, grammatical precision, reduction and creativity. The final stage consists of a short production task (80–100 words) about what learners liked or disliked when they were children. All lexical items and grammar structures acquired from previous tasks will be recycled for this final one. The lesson concludes with a final written task on a cultural point. In this case, students are provided with a short text and a graphic on parenting models, where they need to reflect on the most common ones in their countries. This final activity does not need to be present in every AD task planned by a teacher.

## 6. Practical and operational aspects aimed at language trainers

A way to introduce learners to AD usage is by making them aware of the limitations faced by visually impaired viewers, thus focusing on what they might be missing in order to gain as much enjoyment or fulfilment from a video as someone who does not suffer from this particular constrain. This can be done by allowing students to either just watch or just listen to a clip, and then, they can exchange information about what was registered or missing by each type of spectator. A session of up to an hour reconstructing the clip, and reflecting about the learning outcomes, would be an adequate first task for a course that opts for including AD practice.

It is essential that all tasks are well aligned to the syllabus of the course in terms of grammar, lexical fields and communicative purposes. This alignment

will encourage task submission, especially when tasks are ‘relatively optional’, or they are only intended for formative assessment. Likewise, the level of difficulty should be appropriate, as learners need to feel that they are carrying out challenging tasks, which should not be so complex that they might reduce levels of confidence and increase learners’ frustration. Although basic professional guidelines would be implicitly covered in the course, it is not strictly necessary to follow them. This is done by making students reflect upon key AD principles (i.e., usage of cataphoric and anaphoric pronouns) whilst AD samples will be provided to allow students to infer them. An example for distracting from professional guidelines is when the syllabus of the course includes a revision of past tenses, and AD practice proves to be an efficient way to reinforce this: e.g., a clip could be audio described using these tenses instead of the present, which is the typical tense used in AD. This practice will aim at students recalling a scene that they might have seen in the past at the cinema.

A good quality video with an attractive topic should be selected. For instance, it is important to work with a clip that resonates with the students, matching their profiles, ages and interests. Such clips should last from 1 to 4 minutes because a great deal of content could be included when audio describing a short clip. As Talaván (2006) points out, the clip needs to be self-contained, i.e., it should be understood without having seen the rest of the film or series it belongs to, as to make sense by itself without any further explanation or contextual reference. Especially when first becoming familiar with AD practice, it is recommended to start with clips that do not have much dialogue to facilitate the editing of the video clip.

Technology should not be an obstacle for task completion. Different degrees of sophistication can be suggested. For example, allowing students to record their AD narrations on their mobile devices is technologically less challenging than video editing. However, when using this method teachers need to ensure that narrations are synchronised with the images of the clips. On the contrary, video editing would involve introducing a new soundtrack (with the corresponding AD incorporated) within the video file. Nowadays, this can be achieved with many free and user-friendly programs such as Screencastify (a plug-in for Google), Windows Movie Maker (for Windows) or iMovie (for IOS), although the latter is not free. Unless one is working with young learners, teaching technology in class is not necessary, especially in institutions where booking a lab might be problematic, and the course does not allow much time to be devoted to AD practice in general. A way to avoid technological problems is ensuring that at least one team member feels confident with troubleshooting potential issues. This would release pressure from the teacher if students do not feel in complete control of the IT systems. Learners are given the possibility of using programs they are famil-

iar with or those that can be explored easily. A problem resulting from video files (unlike audio files) is that they can create large file sizes, however some Virtual Learning Environment platforms, such as Moodle or Blackboard, are becoming more flexible with upload capacity. Students can share their files via shared folders providing links to programs such as Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, etc. Usually, when using clips that are non-Creative Commons, video editing is not allowed, which means that if clips have not been uploaded privately, a platform such as YouTube would automatically remove them. For this reason, it would be necessary to upload clips in “private” mode in order to avoid possible copyright limitations.

AD is a creative practice that students enjoy and it is an effective way to learn a language. The recommendations included in this article aim to encourage language practitioners to bring AD to their lessons. However, these are not set in stone and as such, teachers are invited to explore new modes for best practice and report back on lessons learnt to our community of AVT in FLE’s practitioners.

## 7. Conclusions

This article has valued AD practice for its artistic nature as the language learner needs to find the right word, use precise grammar and reformulate language chunks to overcome temporal limitations. In addition, the language learner becomes a social agent that interacts between the video clip and its visually impaired audience in order to convert intersemiotic content into a linguistic code. There is unanimous agreement on the potential of AD in FLE: while earlier lines of investigation were based on empirical findings that measured the impact of AD in language skills, more recent research has focussed on how AVT can be integrated in the context of AoA and the CEFR. For instance, new categories and their corresponding descriptors have been created, but as these have not been validated yet, this is an area that needs to be developed in the future to confirm an adequate design of such new descriptors. This article has aimed at providing trainers with the necessary tools for designing real-life AD projects for language lessons whilst providing methodological recommendations. To this purpose, it has discussed relevant areas of teaching and learning that need to be considered when planning lessons, such as the importance of having a good understanding of student profile for video selection, and for integrating a lesson to the curriculum. Furthermore, it is essential to align the objectives of the lesson to the assessment procedure whilst structuring lessons and scaffolding preparatory tasks in a coherent manner that aims at grammatical and lexical adequacy.

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