

Language learning, audiovisual translation and accessibility

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

Today higher education (HE) faces new challenges, such as incorporating consideration of diversity and inclusion into its operations. Such challenges, many of which are part of strategic institutional plans, offer teachers an opportunity to introduce new practices in the classroom. This pedagogical project introduces language students to the task of audio description (AD) –that is, making visual content available to blind and visually impaired people by verbal means. AD therefore allows blind or partially blind people to access the visual images at theatre plays, television programmes, films, works of art, etc.

This pedagogical project was first implemented in the School of Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies at Dublin City University in 2018/2019. The idea, originally, was to integrate accessibility in the curriculum of final year foreign language (FL) learners, some of whom are also translation trainees, and use it as a tool to enhance the students' communicative awareness as well as boosting a more comprehensive set of skills. In consecutive years, the development of this project has also allowed students to advance their role as mediators while improving communication in the FL. For that purpose, the team of teachers developed a framework for evaluating the learning that might derive from such an activity in the context of FL study, and then use this framework to evaluate a sequence of the proposed AD tasks undertaken with Irish learners of Spanish. The tasks provided opportunities for the students to reflect on the communication needs of blind and partially blind people and to understand how these could be addressed effectively in AD. During the pedagogic intervention, which can be adapted to future projects, students work on a number of tasks playing various roles as they progress: they research the presence of AD in Irish television and discuss its (in)visibility, they act either as a blind person or non-blind person while practising AD in both the L1 (English) and the FL (Spanish), and, they then produce an AD in the FL and record the final version emulating a professional exercise.

The pedagogic approach is inherently multidisciplinary and aimed to help learners become self-reflecting agents and mediators in their L1 and FL.

THE VALUE AND THE IMPACT OF THIS PROJECT

The value of the project is threefold as the language learner: (a) becomes familiar with the challenges involved in the communication process between communities with different communication needs; (b) learns how to promote tolerance through communication in delicate situations when working in groups to agree on the script; (c) makes an approach to AD quality standards and implements them through inter- and interlingual tasks in the L1 and the FL.

This proposal is distinctive in that learners become reflecting agents, and intra- and interlinguistic mediators. It is transformative as learners become aware of the communicating needs of different communities while generating a pluricultural space which has the potential to translate needs into action in our society and to co-constructing meaning.

This project is a collaboration between DCU and the NCBI (National Council for the Blind in Ireland). One of their members participates in the first session whether they interact with the students in their exploration of AD.

This project is also aligned with strategic plans promoted in HE:

1. Providing a transformative student experience: this project is particularly innovative in that it involves the active participation of the blind community, with whom DCU students interact and look for a common space for communication. This is relevant in Ireland, where AD rates on television are very low (5% - 11% in RTÉ1 and RTÉ2) according to RTÉ (2023) and BAI (2019). One preliminary hypothesis of this project is that Irish students

are probably not sensitised to the importance of AD. Through this task learners will discover the potential of audiovisual translation in our society.

2. Develop international collaborations: the co-participation of DCU (Ireland) and UJI (Spain) on this specific project entails a curricular replication between international partners, strengthening links.

3. Nurture creativity and culture among university students: learners gain agency through mediating tasks; they engage in socio-cultural activities by (re)creating processes of communication and cooperation between blind and non-blind communities, defusing tensions in communication and ensuring effective solutions through task-based-learning activities. Learners will offer solutions using innovative technological tools which will help them explore the possibilities that arise at the intersections of the creative arts and technological innovation while enhancing their engagement.

4. Pursue active engagement with local communities: this project fosters awareness on the blind community's communicating challenges. The NCBI takes active part, which translates into the engagement of DCU students with other communities -in fact, this is the first time many students have direct contact with the blind.

The project also focuses on Universal Design Learning.

* Please see Appendix for further information.

Podcast - SALIS

In this episode of the Edge of Discovery Podcast, we chat with Dr Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez, Assistant Professor at the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies in Dublin City University, and Dr Gloria Torralba, Associate Professor at the Department of Pedagogy and Didactics of Social Sciences, Language and Literature in Universitat Jaume I (Castelló de la Plana, Spain). Lucía and Gloria speak about their research and practice relating to Audiovisual translation and accessibility.

PODCAST: <https://www.podbean.com/ep/pb-x3j58-1406650>



Recording in studio

Illustration of audio description using video clips

The audio only of the video clips below are used by Lucia and Gloria to illustrate the concept of audio description in their classrooms. Have a **listen** to this trailer without audio description. **Listen only!** Don't look at the visuals.

TRAILER: <https://youtu.be/S1x76DoACB8>

Now listen to this clip with audio description. You'll probably have a totally different experience!

TRAILER: https://youtu.be/O7j4_aP8dWA

Peer reviewed research publication: Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez & Gloria Torralba (2022) New landscapes in higher education: audio description as a multilayered task in FL teaching, *The Language Learning Journal*, DOI: [10.1080/09571736.2022.2158209](https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2158209).

Further information on the project on the DCU website: [Audiovisual translation and accessibility \(SALIS\)](#).