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## Rethinking Accessibility through ADAT: Challenging the Taboo on Deafness in Foreign Language Education

### ABSTRACT

A persistent fear of the ‘diverse’, combined with scarce intercultural awareness, has long reinforced entrenched socio-cultural taboos that have impacted the social and cognitive development of marginalized, non-mainstream communities, such as the Deaf. This tension has been at the core of a fierce debate over the supposed supremacy of the oral method as opposed to manualism (Hutchison 2007), with major implications for minoritized deaf learners. In light of the latest technological innovations and the growing emphasis on inclusive teaching methods, this article aims to propose the application of Accessible Didactic Audiovisual Translation (ADAT) and – more specifically – of DIDAT (Deaf-Inclusive DAT) for teaching English in a mixed classroom environment with a focus on written comprehension and production. An experimental lesson plan based on didactic keyword captioning is proposed to introduce learners to subtitling, followed by the preliminary results from the submissions of 20 deaf and hearing B1-level students at an Italian university.

KEYWORDS: Deaf-related taboos; audism; manualism; inclusive method; DIDAT.

## **1. Confronting the Double Taboo around Deafness**

The concept of a ‘double-sided’ taboo surrounding deafness brings to light a nuanced system of social, cultural, and personal pressures that shape Deaf experiences in a predominantly hearing world. By ‘double-sided’, I refer to a sort of two-layered stigma that has been operating both externally – through social attitudes and institutional practices – and internally, as Deaf individuals have navigated identity pressures to conform to hearing norms.

Any discussion about the taboos on deafness, and any considerations about the challenges faced by Deaf individuals in educational and social contexts, must start from the premise that these taboos are not inherent in deafness but are socially constructed, maintained by power dynamics that devalue Deaf identity and enforce conformity to hearing norms. One side of this double-sided taboo is the dimension of audism – a pervasive ideology that frames hearing as the normative standard. As defined by Humphries (1977), audism is the belief that one’s worth is linked to the ability to hear or mimic hearing behaviors. This bias is embedded in social institutions, from medical practices to educational systems, where D/deaf individuals are routinely marginalized, ‘corrected’, or merely ‘accommodated’ rather than valued for their distinct cultural and linguistic identities. In this context, the hearing-centric approach is far from neutral, as it actively reinforces the perception of deafness as a deficit and casts D/deaf people as “deviants” from the normative ideal (Bauman and Murray 2014).

However, what makes the taboo around deafness particularly insidious is its ‘internal’ dimension: a subtle but pervasive pressure for D/deaf individuals to conform to hearing norms, even at the expense of their cultural and linguistic identities. This internalized pressure reflects what Lane (1992) describes as the “mask of benevolence”, where hearing educators and policymakers, under the guise of goodwill, promote a paternalistic form of assimilation. Such “benevolence” demands that D/deaf individuals suppress aspects of their identity to fit hearing society’s expectations, often prioritizing speech and lip-reading over sign language. This trend stretches back to before the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf, held in Milan in 1880: despite the

establishment of the first school for teaching ‘deaf-mute’ students by sign language, founded in Paris in 1760 by L’abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée (1712-1789), other European countries openly championed oralism – in Germany, Samuel Heinicke founded a school for deaf pupils and fiercely opposed the French teaching methodology (Hutchison 2007). The resolutions passed by the 1880 Congress would affect the Deaf community for a long time in positing the absolute superiority of the oral method in DHH (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) education and banning the simultaneous use of sign languages (ibid.). A similar debate also raged in the US, where oralists maintained that signing contributed to the isolation and discrimination of deaf people, and consequently promoted oralism as a means of emancipation, whereas numerous deaf leaders accused oralists themselves of oppression<sup>1</sup>. Lane contends that this assimilationist stance not only undermines D/deaf autonomy, but also enforces a cultural erasure which prevents D/deaf individuals from fully expressing their identity. As a result, the internalized dimension of this taboo complicates identity formation, leaving D/deaf people caught between social biases on the one hand, and the pressure to align with hearing norms on the other.

Problematizing this double-sided taboo calls for a critical examination of the institutional biases and power structures that uphold hearing norms as the default standard. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) advocates for linguistic human rights, arguing that sign languages and Deaf ways of knowing deserve equal recognition and protection on par with spoken languages. From this perspective, expecting D/deaf individuals to conform to hearing norms both belittles their linguistic identity and limits their right to live fully within their cultural identity. Kusters *et al.* (2017) further highlight that forced assimilation can lead to a form of “self-audism”, where Deaf individuals internalize the stigma against their identity, often feeling compelled to suppress Deaf cultural markers to gain acceptance – especially since deafness, as an invisible disability, easily lends itself to ‘passing’. This dynamic, of course, reinforces social power imbalances, requiring D/deaf individuals to ‘pass’ as hearing, thus creating a persistent tension between authenticity and social acceptance. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [Oral Education as Emancipation | Gallaudet University](#) (9 November 2024).

dismantling this ‘double-sided’ taboo implies reimagining inclusion beyond mere accommodation, striving to embrace deafness as a legitimate cultural identity, one equal to hearing norms. This shift depends on a joint commitment from both Deaf and hearing communities to develop inclusive and accessible frameworks that honor the diversity of D/deaf experiences, in order to create a space where D/deaf people can live without the burden of audism and forced assimilation.

In this context, Accessible Didactic Audiovisual Translation (ADAT) and its sub-branch DIDAT (Deaf-Accessible DAT), which in its turn is the hypernym of Deaf-Inclusive Didactic Subtitling (DIDS), present promising pathways to creating equitable and engaging language-learning environments for DHH students. Mainstream education, particularly in foreign language instruction, presents barriers that go beyond simple access to information; auditory-based methods in language learning systematically exclude DHH students, intensifying their sense of marginalization and reinforces the conviction that inability to hear is a taboo. Given that most foreign language curricula – in an era in which the urge to communicate rules supreme among teaching methods – emphasize listening and speaking skills, DHH students are very often limited in their participation, a fact that reinforces the biases in favor of hearing norms.

What follows aims to outline the limitations of traditional foreign language education for DHH students, positioning ADAT as both a pedagogical tool and a cultural intervention that directly challenges the double-sided taboo around deafness. Drawing on Lane’s perspective, which recognizes deafness as a valid cultural and linguistic identity rather than a disability, ADAT and DIDS empower DHH students to engage fully in language learning without being sidelined by hearing-centered approaches. Through accessible, visually oriented subtitling exercises, ADAT and DIDS facilitate an inclusive learning environment that respects Deaf epistemologies, fostering engagement and cross-cultural understanding. This approach also introduces hearing students to Deaf culture and its linguistic diversity, bridging the gap between Deaf and hearing students and promoting a more integrated classroom experience in mixed scenarios.

## **2. Theoretical framework: ADAT and DIDAT**

In recent years, Foreign Language Education (FLE) has undergone a dynamic transformation, driven by the adoption of new teaching strategies and a heightened understanding of learners' varied needs. Among the approaches, Audiovisual Translation (AVT) has proven highly effective, offering a means to facilitate language learning while fostering inclusivity in educational settings. The integration of AVT into FLE has sparked considerable interest, with notable research by Talaván Zanón (2013; 2019; 2023) showcasing the positive impact of active subtitling practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Together with contributions from other scholars – Hornero-Corisco and Gonzalez Vera (2020) and Bianchi (2015), to name a few – these findings have laid the foundation for what is now known as Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT), a specialized approach to foreign language teaching that supports learning in several key ways, as posited by Talaván *et al.* (2023, 55-63):

- Boosting Motivation: DAT engages learners emotionally, which is essential for sustaining interest and motivation in language learning.
- Promoting Independent Learning: By actively involving students in the process, DAT encourages a sense of ownership over their learning journey.
- Fostering Cognitive Development: DAT promotes a balance between higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) – such as critical analysis, evaluation, and creative thinking – and lower-order thinking skills (LOTS), including memorization, comprehension, and application, as conceptualized by Bloom (1956).
- Encouraging Social Interaction and Collaboration: Through group work and pair activities, DAT fosters communication skills and helps students progress from their current skill level to higher potential abilities, within Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).
- Enhancing Literacy, Cultural Awareness, and Mediation Skills: DAT aims to deepen students' language proficiency, cultural understanding, and ability to mediate across linguistic contexts.

- Providing Structured Learning Opportunities: DAT employs scaffolding techniques, such as activating prior knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary, and organizing interactive tasks like “show and tell” exercises, which guide students and support language acquisition.

This growing body of research positions DAT as a valuable resource in foreign language education, with the potential to reimagine traditional teaching methods through multimedia-based translation tasks. However, despite these acknowledged benefits, there is a significant gap in research about the application of AVT in inclusive language teaching, especially for Deaf and hard of hearing students. This gap is significant given the specific challenges they face in learning foreign languages, such as limited access to auditory input and the need for visually-oriented materials. Addressing this gap conforms with the broader goals of equity, accessibility, and inclusion championed by global initiatives: the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – defined in 2015 for 2030 – include as the fourth goal to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”<sup>2</sup>. In particular,

By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

‘Special’ students like deaf and hard of hearing students

need to use foreign languages just like their hearing peers if they want to enjoy the same benefits of the technical advancements and globalization of our times, yet they cannot take part in the same foreign language (FL) education: the approaches, methods and materials developed are inadequate, and teachers trained to teach hearing learners are ill-equipped. (Domagała-Zyśk and Kontra 2016, 1)

Recent advancements in DAT prove great promise, particularly because of the engaging nature of audiovisual content, which allows students to adapt or creatively rephrase material in the very same source language. Unfortunately, as noted earlier, Accessible DAT (ADAT) still remains unexplored, and Deaf-Inclusive Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DIDAT) has yet to be given the

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#) (15 February 2024).

attention it deserves. Hence, the objective of this study is to fill this gap in current research by investigating the efficacy of subtitling as a tool for inclusive language teaching in mixed classroom environments.

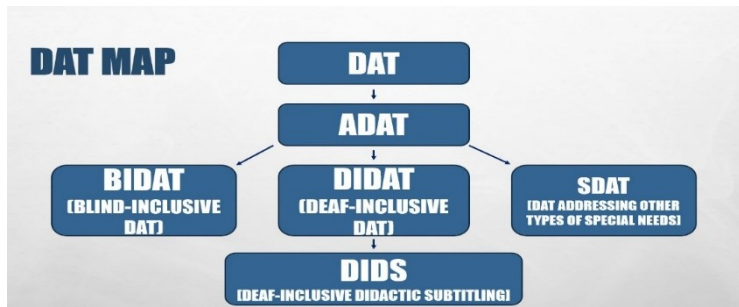


Figure 1. *A map of DAT. Source: author.*

### 3. Deaf-inclusive EFL teaching

The evolution of teaching methods has shifted radically from the once-dominant Medical Model (Kormos 2017), a ‘deficit approach’ where difference and disability were seen as conditions needing segregation rather than inclusion, achieved through separate schooling. The ensuing Social Model

reframed disability in terms of social and environmental barriers [...], difficulties are attributed not to the individual learner but to a mismatch between their way of working, the physical environment, the design of the curriculum and materials, and most importantly, the attitudes of the educational community. The goal here is to direct every effort towards altering the learning environment and adapting teaching to suit the learners, rather than expecting individuals to fit into their environment. (ibid., 9)

The later Interactional Model introduced an even more nuanced perspective on the learning difficulties experienced by disabled learners, as they are conceived as the result of an interaction (hence, the name of the model) between individual and environmental factors, in terms of the barriers experienced by each learner. The model brought about increasing “awareness of the importance of recognizing and understanding the individual differences



of learners, and not ascribing their difficulties only to external factors” (ibid.). As a result, by rejecting a one-size-fits-all approach to disability, the Interactional Model acknowledges the need for adaptive and responsive teaching practices.

Building on the above bases, the ‘Inclusive Model’ which I am going to develop aims at total inclusivity, keeping in mind the interplay of both internal and external factors – as posited by the Interactional Model. Practical applications include, as an instance, computer-based lesson plans (henceforth, LPs), which can be accessed in any place and context, and at any time, and which are designed in a way to overcome acoustic barriers or any hindrance to full auditory accessibility, and, as importantly, which are focused on deaf-related issues, in order to raise intercultural awareness on the topic and help dispel the fear of the D/deaf. Promoting and developing interculturality plays a pivotal role in breaking down deep-seated stereotypes, which are profoundly culture-related taboos<sup>3</sup>. My ongoing research project, currently in its pilot phase, aims to create a physical, emotional and cognitive environment that is fully accessible to DHH learners, where English as a foreign language (EFL) can be taught in a truly inclusive setting that respects and accommodates individual needs. By ‘inclusive’, I mean a teaching model and a situational context in which all students are valued and which respects

the fact that people are different, that each individual experiences learning in their own way, and that everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses. Underpinning inclusion is the principle of equity, which in education means ensuring that each learner is provided with what they need; in other words, every learner gets the accommodation or differentiation they need in order to succeed. (Kormos 2017, 10)

When it comes to an ‘invisible’ taboo such as deafness, inclusion also needs to entail careful consideration of the learning environment. Seating arrangement, for instance, is very important for facilitating interaction with

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<sup>3</sup> Fisher *et al.* (2019) delve into less usual taboos among the deaf which are specific to the nature of the oppression the deaf community experiences: for example, when “a non-fluent signer from outside deaf communities uses bits of signing for self-promotion and profit” (ibid., 144); correcting a deaf person’s pronunciation of a word they have voiced as well as breaking eye contact can also be taboo (ibid., 149); finally, taboos also exist within deaf communities and they largely involve hierarchies (ibid., 153).

DHH students. Ideally, classrooms should allow seating in a semicircle, so that all students could see each other's faces and the entire signed space. This spatial arrangement of the classroom promotes social interaction, and encourages peer-to-peer engagement as well as collaborative learning. Further specific strategies for complete inclusion when teaching in a mixed classroom environment are listed below<sup>4</sup>:

- to start with, DHH students should sit at the front, so that teachers' face and lips are perfectly visible – for this reason, good lighting is paramount;
- while speaking, teachers should face students, not the board behind or beside them;
- they should speak clearly, emphasize keywords, repeat and rephrase, if necessary;
- they should also provide written handouts and show captioned or interpreted videos;
- reducing background noise is crucial, too, especially for students using a hearing aid.

In addition to this, a crucial aspect of inclusivity worth considering is the need to ensure and maximize accessible content to all learners (Kormos 2017, 25): for DHH learners, adapted materials are recommended, meaning that the content should be simplified and re-arranged by decreasing the amount of information per page; alternatively, in an inclusive classroom environment with hearing and DHH students, additional time should be allocated to each activity in order to accommodate slower reading speeds. As posited by Sedlářková (2016), DHH students are poor in reading comprehension, a skill gap which can negatively impact their academic and career success. This is especially true for deaf learners born to hearing parents, who find themselves in a 'non-language' environment, limiting their exposure to comprehensible language input from an early age and hindering overall cognitive development. As a

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<sup>4</sup> Source: [7 Teaching Strategies to Empower Deaf Students | Deaf Unity](#) (26 October 2024).

consequence, proficiency in reading skills should be one of the main aims of foreign language teaching to DHH.

A further goal of ELT to DHH students is to nurture their motivation, a process which demands considerable effort on the part of students with special needs. Among the captivating tools and methodologies, we can mention the use of audiovisual products. As assumed by Podlewska (2021), film is an inclusive medium that allows learners to engage with real-life topics – thus, filling the gap between the classroom environment and the real world; consequently, using film in language education has several benefits, such as “greater inclusiveness, increased motivation and willingness to perform in- and out-of-class activities, exposure to authentic language” (ibid., 54). Donaghy (2015) reckons how the use of moving images is

very effective at reaching and empowering children with learning disabilities [*and this*] increases even more when learners are actively involved in making their own moving image texts. Learners are usually highly enthusiastic, and prepared to put in a huge amount of time and effort when working on a moving image project because it is their own and it has a tangible result. (ibid., 16)

Enthusiasm, motivation, the possibility to deal with real-life deaf-related topics in a dynamic and practical way, the chance to work individually, setting one’s own pace, and developing one’s own digital skills in parallel with the enhancement of students’ meta-linguistic competence as well as both productive and receptive language skills, are among the key factors which prompted me to devise deaf-inclusive lesson plans, to be carried out anywhere and at any time and submitted via Google forms. Perhaps most importantly, DHH students are free to choose whether to communicate via either verbalization or live chats.

#### **4. A Deaf-Inclusive Lesson Plan (LP) on *The Sound of Metal* (2020)**

As previously discussed, DAT has countless benefits to foreign language acquisition; among them, flexibility contributes to decrease the level of stress or pressure that some students may experience in a crowded classroom environment and to increase motivation (Talaván *et al.* 2023). It is

recommended, however, to support students through their initial encounters with DAT-based lesson plans, until they reach a sufficient level of independence to navigate the materials confidently.

The table below shows the model of a deaf-inclusive LP, divided into three main parts<sup>5</sup>. The pre-DAT task is allotted 15 minutes, while the post-DAT task is allotted 10 minutes, as most of the time is to be devoted to the DAT task proper (35 minutes). The entry level is B1: based on this, as outlined by the CEFR<sup>6</sup> (Common European Framework of Reference) for languages, students are expected to be able to write texts on topics with which they are familiar or of personal interest – such as deaf-related issues – and to describe experiences and impressions, in a simple but coherent way. With regard to receptive skills, they can understand texts that consist mainly of high-frequency language related to everyday life or work, and the description of events and feelings in personal letters. In this specific case, the tasks assigned are comparatively easier, as this LP is meant to serve as a first approach for non-trained B1-level respondents to AVT and subtitling.

| DURATION | PHASE   | DESCRIPTION  | AIM  |
|----------|---|--|--|
| 15 MIN   | <b>Warm-up</b><br>Introduction to subtitling and accessibility criteria | Reading comprehension of a written text followed by a short videoclip. | One open and five multiple-choice questions aiming to check students' comprehension. |
| 35 MIN   | <b>Didactic subtitling</b><br>Re-production task                        | Keyword captioning (fill in the gaps of already provided subtitles).   | To work on vocabulary retention and allow for a first approach to subtitling.        |
| 10 MIN   | <b>Post DAT</b><br>Reflection task<br>(written production)              | Composition on the deaf-related topics covered in the videoclip.       | To promote inter-cultural awareness and foster reflection on taboos and identity.    |

Table 1. LP *"Introducing Subtitling: The Sound of Metal (2020)"*

<sup>5</sup> It is available at <https://forms.gle/FDscPAF7ytLMSf6i6>.

<sup>6</sup> Source: Common European Framework of Reference for Language skills | [Europass](https://www.cerl.eu/) (26 October 2024).

#### 4.1 Warm-up Phase (15 minutes)

Speaking and listening activities are not feasible in mixed hearing and DHH classes: although some students might have partial hearing or be post-lingually deaf, which means they have become deaf after the language-acquisition stage, others might be trained enough in oral speech production, a common tendency especially in the past, when some teaching approaches meant to “close the gap between deaf and hearing learners [by] fostering the integration of hearing impaired people into the majority society (Domagała-Zyśk and Kontra 2016, 2). In light of this, and since my main aim is to produce lesson plans accessible to all forms/types of deafness, never compelling any DHH students to forced verbalization as in oralist approaches, I have based my LPs on reading and writing tasks only.

At this stage, students are introduced to subtitling as an AVT sub-branch and to the basic concepts and criteria for offering a good accessibility service and, above all, the fundamental criteria<sup>7</sup> for high-quality subtitles. The initial task requires respondents to provide their own synthesis or re-elaboration of an extract from a textbook on subtitling, thus fostering written production in L2 in which both language rephrasing and content consistency are rewarded. The ensuing task includes 5 multiple-choice questions based on a short videoclip which provides precious tips and guidelines for creating correct and accessible subtitles, with detailed and practical examples on such crucial issues as line breaks, sound effects, numbers, capitalization, and so on.

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<sup>7</sup> They are mostly inspired by the “Code of good subtitling practice” developed by Mary Carroll and Jan Ivarsson and endorsed by the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation in Berlin on 17 October 1998.

|   |
|---|
| <p>Question 1</p> <p>We had a bottle of / wine, and then we went home.<br/>We had a bottle of wine, / and then we went home / to sleep.<br/>We had a bottle of wine, / and then we went home.</p> <p>Question 2</p> <p>She is forty years old. / She was born in the '80s.<br/>She is 40 years old. / She was born in the '80s.</p> <p>Question 3</p> <p>This is absolutely weird.<br/>This is ABSOLUTELY weird</p> <p>Question 4</p> <p>when he got home, / he found the dog on the couch.<br/>When he got home, / he found the dog on the couch.</p> <p>Question 5</p> <p>Dave woke up at half past five.<br/>Dave woke uo at 5:30.<br/>Dave woke up at 5:30.</p> |
|---|

Table 2. *Warm-up, task 2: Which one is correct?*

The questions are based on these very same tips and ask respondents to select the correct alternative among different subtitle options. This is meant to help visualize the fundamental criteria listed above and reinforce visual imprint, which is paramount especially for DHH learners. At the end of the lesson plan, once the form has been submitted, respondents are given their total score and have access to the correct answers.

#### 4.2 Didactic Subtitling Phase – Didactic Keyword Captioning (35 minutes)

The videoclip selected for the core task of this lesson plan is taken from a movie entitled *The Sound of Metal* and released in 2020: it is the story of Ruben, a drummer who slowly loses his hearing and is doomed to complete deafness. As the plot unfolds, the main character struggles to cope with his life being upset by this discovery, but finally accepts to embrace his new identity as a member of a Deaf community where addicts are rehabbed and children are taught ASL. He learns sign language himself and starts feeling part of the community. However, the urge to resume his past life leads him to do “the deed”, a euphemism for cochlear implant surgery, often considered a refusal of deafness and a betrayal towards one’s own community and nature. The videoclip shows Ruben as he goes back to the community, run by Joe, and brings the man the unwelcome news. The slow-paced scene allows viewers to fully enjoy the inner struggle experienced by Ruben and the pain in Joe’s eyes and voice when he is compelled to beg him to pack up and leave for the sake of the whole community, who believe in deafness as a value, not as a handicap to fix. At this time, Ruben is still on the edge between deafness acceptance and disability refusal, pressured by the need to get back into mainstream hearing society. He finally yielded to the “deed”, which signals his violation of Deaf trust, and for this reason he has to leave.

The type of subtitling task assigned in this specific LP is among those recommended for AVT beginners and/or for lower levels of proficiency (Talaván 2020), e.g., A1 to B2 levels, and is meant to enhance vocabulary and spelling – whereas more creative activities, such as creative subtitling, are best suited for B1 to C2 levels of foreign language proficiency. Didactic keyword captions simulate a fill-in-the-gaps exercise, although the gaps happen to appear within ready-made and segmented subtitles (Talaván *et al.* 2023). By resuming and re-watching the video again and again, they will be able to complete the task without having to deal with technical issues implied in managing specific software.

In this phase, the video should be played twice, at least (*ibid.*), to make students acquainted with the key events within the scene. Self-contained scenes

– no longer than 3 minutes – are recommended because students’ comprehension does not depend on previous scenes and the level of concentration required remains manageable (Hornero Corisco and Gonzales-Vera 2020, 63), although some background information should be provided in order to achieve full comprehension; for this reason, I offered some insights into the movie’s plot, main characters, and prior events. This specific video is around 6 minutes long, but the scene pace is slow and features a short dialogue, which can be accessed both by selecting subtitles on the clip itself and by reading them below the videoclip within the same section of the form.

Ensuing questions provide subtitles which miss one or more words, generally among the vocabulary that is fundamental to grasp the meaning of the scene, including key verbs and nouns such as “trust”, “belief”, “handicap”, “fix”, “deed”, etc. In this way, respondents will get to focus on more information-dense elements of the source text, while still being exposed to copious carriers of orality and also taboo language, which abound in Ruben’s speech more than in Joe’s.



|   |
|---|
| <p>1. Ruben: I did the _____.</p> <p>Joe: The _____?</p> <p>[NB: The same word is repeated in both lines, so you must provide only one word.<br/>A hint: Ruben is referring to the surgery]</p> <p>2. Joe: I wonder, uh /</p> <p>all these mornings<br/>you've been sitting in my study /<br/>sitting /<br/>have you had any moments of _____?</p> <p>3. Joe: But ... /</p> <p>I see you've made your _____, right?</p> <p>4. Joe: As you know, /</p> <p>everybody here shares in the _____<br/>that being deaf is not _____, /<br/>not something to _____.</p> <p>[NB: You must provide three different words separated by a comma]</p> <p>5. Joe: And my house</p> <p>is a house built on that belief /<br/>and built on _____.</p> <p>6. Joe: When that trust is _____,</p> <p>things happen.</p> <p>7. Joe: I'm gonna have to ask you</p> <p>to _____ your bags today /<br/>and find another _____ to be, Ruben.</p> <p>[NB: You must provide two different words separated by a comma]</p> |
|---|

Table 3. *Subtitling task – keyword captioning: Fill in the gap*

#### *4.3 Post-DAT Phase (10 minutes)*

This stage is devoted to post-DAT reflection. Once the clip has been watched several times, before and during the above task completion, and the content and dynamics have been thoroughly acquired, respondents have the chance to elaborate their own viewpoints and opinions on the topic of discussion and put themselves into both characters' shoes, share their pain, and feel for them. Some DHH students may find this task an opportunity to express – even in plain words – how difficult and painstaking the struggle between the DHH and hearing identities might be, meaning they can draw from their own personal, first-hand experiences. This might serve as an additional motivation factor for them. As for hearing students, presumably not acquainted with such issues that are crucial for the Deaf community, this LP might turn out to be a moment of epiphany, of enlightenment.

Now take some minutes for reflection and type down your thoughts and observations on the main topics of the videoclip, more precisely on cochlear implant as a refusal of or betrayal to the Deaf identity and also on Ruben's internal struggle between his old hearing self and his new Deaf identity.

[Write around 100 words]

Table 4. *POST-DAT task: written production*

This final task may also be turned into an oral production task, which would make the LP a more complete one, thus allowing respondents to enhance all four main abilities. Students may record their own voice on their mobile phone and upload the recording in a proper section within the LP. Due to the inclusive aim of ADAT, however, this oral task may be carried out only by hearing students and oralist DHH learners who are willing to communicate in English.

## 5. Assessment criteria

The WARM-UP phase is aimed at promoting both students' L2 written production and reading comprehension. Its additional goal is also to allow respondents to get acquainted with subtitling and the main criteria for producing accessible subtitling. The open-ended question shall be worth up to 5 points:

- 1 point for accuracy, spelling, and grammar;
- 1 point for consistency with the question – thus, testifying for comprehension of the source language;
- 1 point for content originality and personal re-elaboration – meaning respondents shall rephrase the source text's sentence structures, syntax, and word choice;
- 1 point for task completion or, in other words, for complying with word count (no fewer than 100 words);
- 1 point for synthesis ability, meaning respondents are able to provide thorough replies from the context viewpoint.

Each entry – whether accuracy, spelling, and grammar or content originality and personal re-elaboration – can be graded on a flexible scale, allowing evaluators to assign half-points if needed. DHH students should be graded while taking into account the onset of deafness – as pre-lingual deafness might result in less advanced skills in written language production, also in terms of spelling accuracy –, their overall level of literacy and educational background.

Each of the 5 multiple-choice questions shall be graded 1 point. Thus, the total amount for this task shall be 10 points. This task should account for 1/3 of the total score for the lesson, which is 30 points.

As for the DAT phase proper, inspiration has been drawn from Appendix 3.1 of *Didactic Audiovisual Translation and Foreign Language Education* (Talaván *et al.* 2023, 97) to evaluate each reply:

- 0.5 points shall be awarded to spelling accuracy – still keeping in mind that DHH students generally display a higher rate of spelling mistakes, compared to hearing students;
- 0.5 points shall be awarded if respondents provide the correct missing word or an equally feasible one.

This task is worth 10 points, the same as the previous and the following sections included in the LP. As for the subsequent phase, the post-DAT section shall be awarded 10 points. Each of the following criteria shall account for 5 points:

|  | 1 pt.     | 2 pt.             | 3 pt. | 4 pt.     | 5 pt.     |
|--|-----------|-------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Accuracy, grammar, syntax/sentence structure | Very poor | Almost sufficient | Good  | Very good | Excellent |
| Content originality                          | Very poor | Almost sufficient | Good  | Very good | Excellent |

Table 5. *Post-DS assessment rubric*

Accuracy in grammar and spelling is just as important as fluency, sentence structure, and content originality. At this point, students should have their own perspective and opinions, and be able to put them down into a well-structured, grammatically correct, and inter-culturally accurate way. They should also reference the previously-taken lesson plan word count: written responses counting between 50 and 100 words shall be decreased by 1 point; those counting 0-50 words shall be decreased by 2 points.

## **6. Results and observations**

As already said, the LP was submitted by 20 BA first-year – both DHH and hearing – students who are being trained to become LIS translators and interpreters in an Italian university. Their entrance level is B1. This LP was

devised as a first encounter with subtitling, which they were going to delve into in more detail in the ensuing lessons.

The overall average score was 18.2, with scores fluctuating from 8 out of 30 to 28.5/30, signaling that the entry level is – as expected – not homogeneous. Spelling accuracy has proved more difficult for DHH students, as anticipated; for this reason, only a 0.5 penalty was awarded in such cases. The warm-up section average score was 3.4 out of 5 for task 1 and 4.25 out of 5 for task 2: replies to task 1 generally did not comply with the mandatory word count, while some of them totally lacked re-elaboration. The core activity scored only 4.65 out of 10, and one can only infer why: some students must have clearly misunderstood the task’s instructions, resulting in replies totally non-consistent with or absent in the original dialogue; some others lost interest in the lesson and/or got distracted, and ended up submitting the form without completing the final task – as was the case with respondents #10, 14, and 18, two of whom happen to be deaf. During a post-LP discussion, held in both English and LIS, students reported that the POST-DAT task proved the most difficult, which is the reason why 5 of them did not carry out the task, adding to 1 student who did not manage to submit the form within the allotted 60 minutes. The average score for this final task was 3.73 out of 10, with scores fluctuating from 0 to 9.5, and with a couple of noteworthy replies, one apparently copied from a film review website<sup>8</sup> – which praised the movie but totally ignored the question’s main topic – and the other one presumably generated by AI, dealing with deafness and deaf identity from a more general viewpoint and only slightly touching upon the issue of cochlear implant, using a formal style and complex phrases which are not plausible in a B1 level. Around 50% of replies were inaccurate, both in terms of spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and lacked content originality. Finally, around 60% of respondents did not provide a 100-word reply, which resulted in a 1- or even 2-point decrease.

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<sup>8</sup> [Sound of Metal movie review & film summary \(2020\) | Roger Ebert](#) (16 November 2024).

| <b>Task type</b>      | <b>Maximum score</b> | <b>Average score</b> | <b>Score range</b> | <b>Key observations</b>                   |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| <b>Warm-up Task 1</b> | 5                    | 3.4                  | 0-9.5              | Word count issues, lack of re-elaboration |
| <b>Warm-up Task 2</b> | 5                    | 4.25                 | 1-5                | Strong performance overall                |
| <b>DAT</b>            | 10                   | 4.65                 | 1-10               | Instruction comprehension issues          |
| <b>Post-DAT</b>       | 10                   | 3.73                 | 0-9.5              | Mixed results, completion challenges      |
| <b>Total</b>          | 30                   | 18.2                 | 8-28.5             | Variable levels                           |

Table 6. *Overview of students' performances*

All things considered, the LP achieved its original objectives in that all of the students managed to access the contents and carry out the tasks without any barrier whatsoever. The overall impression was positive, as they felt strongly motivated by the empowering captioning task and even more so when they realized that they would be working with audiovisual products and, most importantly, that the grading process would take into account and partially ignore spelling inaccuracies, verb government mistakes, and post-nominal adjective positioning more typically – but not exclusively – found in DHH learners of English. The timing allotted to each task was sufficient for 95% of them, with only one exception. The post-LP discussion allowed hearing and oralist students to verbalize their thoughts and reinforce their oral production skills, while signing in LIS, in order to stay within the safe borders of inclusivity and discuss a fairly debated topic, i.e., deaf identity embracing and/or escaping.

## **7. Conclusions**

Deep-rooted socio-cultural taboos resulting from fear of diversity and limited intercultural awareness continue to significantly affect the social and cognitive development of marginalized, non-mainstream communities, such as the Deaf. This impact has been most evident in the historical tension between oralism and manualism, most notably crystallized in the 1880 Milan Congress's declaration of speech superiority and the following ban of sign languages in education. As a result, these decisions have influenced deaf education for generations and created lasting barriers to true inclusion.

In this perspective, the present study has proposed an experimental application of DIDAT for teaching English in a mixed classroom environment by means of a lesson plan, which should be considered as a preliminary attempt to use DIDS in a mixed class, as previous research has mainly focused on classes of either only hearing students or deaf students. In the name of inclusivity and accessibility, therefore, it was necessary to adjust some of the activities/tasks in order to make them feasible for any Deaf student, such as:

- by leaving out mandatory oral comprehension and production tasks,
- adjusting the tasks' pace to accommodate slower reading speed,
- selecting deaf-related video clips as DAT tasks, and
- selecting audiovisual input whose visual component is totally predominant whereas the acoustic component is irrelevant – which means that they can be watched in a sound off mode;
- last, but not least, providing original subtitles.

Although preliminary, the results of this pilot implementation are encouraging. DIDAT effectively bridges the educational divide while promoting intercultural understanding. Moreover, when approaching deaf-related content through subtitling activities, students not only developed their language skills, but also engaged in meaningful discussions about deaf identity and culture.

This combination of language development and cultural awareness suggests a promising direction for inclusive education.

Nevertheless, several challenges emerged during implementation: variable completion rates and engagement levels suggest the need for refined task design and clearer instructions. As shown above, some students struggled with time management and task comprehension, indicating that successful implementation requires careful scaffolding and consistent support.

Of course, this method needs continued experimentation and refinement. Further research should examine the long-term impacts of DIDAT implementation, explore the possibilities of technological integration, and investigate how these approaches shape identity formation in mixed learning environments. In addition, testing this methodology across different levels of proficiency and educational contexts would clarify its broader potential. Through well-designed implementation and (inter)cultural awareness, approaches like DIDAT can help create truly inclusive learning environments while challenging persistent taboos around deafness in education.

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