

VISP 2.0: methodological considerations for the design and implementation of an audio-description based app to improve oral skills

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Abstract. In this paper the methodological steps taken in the conception of a new mobile application (app) are introduced. This app, called VISP (Videos for Speaking), is easily accessible and manageable, and is aimed at helping students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to improve their idiomaticity in their oral production. In order to do so, the app invites the user to make the Audio-Description (AD) of a clip, as part of a communicative task. This paper gives an account of the processes followed after creating and testing VISP, until arriving at the conception of its second version, VISP 2.0. This was accomplished by carrying out several empirical tests to evaluate the app and the learning outcomes it contributes to achieve. The data obtained to date have led to the proposal of some pedagogical guidelines that can be applied to a Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) app in order to make it enjoyable and, above all, effective.

Keywords: language learning, audio-description, speaking, MALL.

1. Introduction

Keeping in mind the idea of making audiovisual products accessible to visually impaired people, from the 1970s some films began to be audio-described. This means that, taking the gaps between dialogues, visual information is described orally. Interesting studies (Bourne & Jiménez Hurtado, 2007, for instance) have

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shown the pedagogical benefits of this new mode of audiovisual translation, called audio-description (AD).

Additionally, in recent years AD has been applied in the face-to-face foreign language (FL) classroom (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2014), as well as in CALL (Talaván & Lertola, 2013) to improve students' competences, with positive results. In order to contribute to this new line of research, we have implemented AD as a tool to promote oral production skills with mobile devices (android operating systems). We designed a MALL application named VISP (VIDEOS for SPEAKING), which invites users with a B1 level of English (CEFR, 2001) to audio-describe a short film clip. The main aim of this app is to improve their idiomaticity (fluency, vocabulary, phraseological competence).

In this paper we outline the methodological steps which led to the creation of the second version of VISP, once the first version had been tested with Spanish and Belgian (Dutch speaking) EFL students at Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) –VISP 1.1 – and at Ghent University (Belgium) –VISP 1.2. Taking into account the data obtained from the pre-questionnaire, the recordings and the post-questionnaire, we address the shortcomings of VISP 1 at different levels, which have been solved in VISP 2.0.

2. Method

2.1. Methodological preliminaries

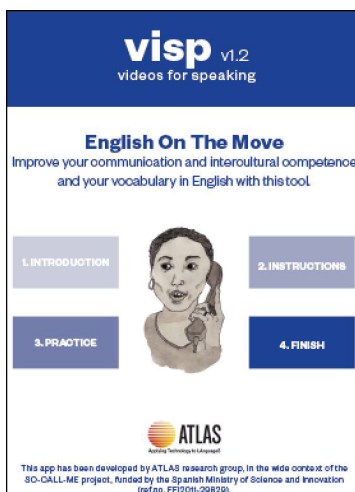
VISP is conceived as a MALL app to be used ubiquitously in order to enhance the oral competences of EFL students. It has been designed in the framework of the communicative approach to language teaching and learning and follows the CEFR (2001) levels. Even if ubiquitous learning environments have increased and new technologies have been developed to adapt to the new learning styles, we believe that there are fewer chances for the average user, in this context, to practice oral production. In this sense, AD has proved to be a useful tool to promote oral skills in the FL classroom (Ibáñez Moreno, & Vermeulen, 2014), but it had not yet been tested in MALL. Therefore, VISP is the first AD-based MALL-app.

Within the philosophy of the communicative approach there are several methods and techniques. In this application we use the task-based approach, in the sense that VISP consists of communicative tasks whose goal is to achieve a specific learning objective (Ellis, 2003).

2.2. Conception of VISP

VISP has four screens, as seen in [Figure 1](#) below.

Figure 1. Home screen of VISP



The first button, *Introduction*, includes a five-second sample of an AD, extracted from *Memoirs of a Geisha*, as a warming-up listening task. At the bottom of the *Introduction* page there is also a link to a pre-questionnaire, where users can complete a short test, which includes language content that will appear on the AD task and therefore on the AD script. The second button is the *Instructions* screen. The next step is the *Practice* screen, where the main task is found. There, users find 30-second-clips that they have to AD. Users can watch the clips as many times as they want, by clicking on Play and Rewind, until they feel ready to record their own AD (by clicking on Record). Once users are satisfied with their AD they go to the Finish screen. There they send their recording to an e-mail account. This screen also includes a self-evaluation section in the form of a post-questionnaire where they can watch the original clip with the oral AD, as well as the written original AD script, and compare their own AD to it.

3. Discussion

By now, a total of 22 students have tried the app: 12 Spanish students and 10 Belgian students. Two of the Spanish students were UNED students following a CALL course on English for Tourism, and the other 10 were on an Erasmus stay

at Ghent University (Belgium). All participants had a B1 level of English (in terms of the CEFR). They all performed the main and essential part of the task, that is, the creation of the AD, and sent their recordings. As for the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaires, all Spanish students filled them in, whereas only two of the Belgian students took the time to complete them. The Spanish students also left some comments and (positively) rated the app.

The analysis of the transcriptions, in terms of accuracy, illustrated a significant difference between the groups: the two UNED Spanish students and the 10 Belgian students performed slightly more accurately than the 10 Spanish Erasmus students. When it came to self-evaluating their description of actions, however, the Spanish Erasmus students felt remarkably positive about how they had described what the character does. However, there is a discrepancy between these students' perception of what they say they described and the way they described it. In terms of the students' attitudes towards the app, measured through the questionnaires, the results show that all the Spanish students were more open and positive towards VISP than their Belgian counterparts. Also, the Spanish students rated VISP more positively, while the two Belgian students were more critical.

4. Conclusions

In the light of all the results described, in VISP 2 we observed the need to implement several changes. As regards the attitudinal contents, even if thanks to the post-questionnaires users can make the AD task a really effective one and assess whether their learning goals have been achieved, not all users like questionnaires and are so open for them. The Belgian users, who come from a more individualistic society (in pragmatic terms, as in [Goethals & Depreitere, 2009](#)), did not complete them. Therefore, our future work is in the line of giving alternative options to those users who do not find questionnaires attractive, and of designing the questionnaires in a different way so that they can also capture the attention of all users. As for procedural contents, in VISP 2.0 the post-questionnaire has been designed so as to more accurately assess the users' performance. That way, they will be able to analyse their own results in a more realistic way.

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