

Inclusive Audiovisual Strategies in Language Teaching for Students With Specific/Special Needs at the University of Ferrara: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract

The acquisition of Languages for Special Purposes (LSPs) presents distinct pedagogical and cognitive challenges, especially in higher and university education. LSP instruction requires specialised strategies to address the discourse complexity, the need for domain-specific terminology, and learners' diverse learning profiles. Recent studies emphasise the importance of targeted training for LSP educators and the integration of innovative, multimodal approaches that can adapt to the needs of students (Bocanegra-Valle and Lafford, 2025). This paper is part of the conceptual phase of the IN-CLA research project "Inclusive Didactics for English L2 through Audiovisual Technologies and Specialised Languages" at the University of Ferrara, which aims to investigate how inclusive and audiovisual strategies can support accessible acquisition of LSPs in L2. To address this aim, we qualitatively analysed asynchronous written interviews with language researchers/teachers working at the Humanities Department and a researcher from WonderLab, an agency involved in the BE.IN.UNIFE project that organises workshops for students with Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs). Responses were analysed through thematic analysis that identified recurrent themes concerning learners' barriers, inclusive pedagogical practices and the design of multimodal resources for accessible LSP learning. Results suggest that authentic materials, scaffolding and audiovisual resources can support accessible LSP acquisition, while accessibility, authenticity, adaptability and interactivity emerged as central criteria for the development of inclusive multimodal materials.

Keywords: Language teaching for special needs, Inclusive didactics, LSP, Audiovisual

materials, Qualitative interviews, Teachers' perceptions

1. Introduction (Note 1)

1.1 Contextualising the Study

The acquisition of Languages for Special Purposes (LSPs) in English as L2 presents different pedagogical and cognitive challenges, especially in higher and university education contexts. LSP teaching requires tailored approaches that rely on the complexity of discourse, the use of domain-specific terminology, and the varied learning profiles of students. Recent studies emphasise the importance of targeted training for LSP educators and the integration of innovative, multimodal approaches that can adapt to the needs of students (see Bocanegra-Valle and Lafford, 2025). This article is based on a project undertaken at the University of Ferrara, "IN_CLA: Inclusive Didactics for English L2 through Audiovisual Technologies and Specialised Languages" coordinated and organised by the Pro-Rectorate and the office for equal opportunities and special needs together with the Language Centre. The project intends to investigate how inclusive and audiovisual strategies can support accessible acquisition of LSPs in English L2. The project distinguishes between traditional LSP domains, such as medical and legal contents, and emerging LSP contexts in which we intend to include specialised discourses concerning tourism and hospitality, advertising, as well as gender and inclusion. These domains often require not only linguistic simplification but also a multimodal reframing in order to support learning accessibility for all students. At the moment of presenting these results, we are in the middle of the second-year activities of a three-year project, which we hope to develop further by including other languages taught in Ferrara: French, Spanish and German. This study involves interviews with language researchers/teachers working at the Humanities Department and a researcher from WonderLab, an agency that works within the project BE.IN.UNIFE. We think that their insights will support the pedagogical and multimodal background of the study (Mayer 2020; Zappaterra 2022). We are aware that at this stage the corpus is made of a limited number of interviews, but this first analysis intends to be functional and explorative for this research, while subsequent phases of the project may involve broader contexts.

1.2 Theoretical Background

Since the early 1960s, research into LSP has been largely shaped by English for Special Purposes (ESP). The growing role of English as an international language led to a rapid expansion in demand for higher education delivered in English at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in many fields. English became the key for mutual understanding and a specialised competence in a given domain. As a result, research in the teaching and learning of ESP has, in many respects, advanced further than research on the teaching of other languages for specialist fields such as business, science, tourism, advertising and technology. More than sixty years ago, when researchers first undertook a systematic investigation of the type of language required by scientists and students of science, quantitative lexicostatistical studies (Barber, 1962; Halliday *et al.*, 1964; Chambers, 1996) not only identified specialist terminology but also revealed the syntactic structures most frequently found in scientific prose, outlining lexical, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic characteristics of specialised

English. Many scholars have dealt with textual typologies and genres (Bhatia 1993, 2004; Bhatia & Gotti, 2006; Bondi, 1999; Cortese & Riley, 2002; Garzone *et al.*, 2016) and these studies have added a socio-rhetorical dimension to LSP research by including an analysis of social practices, textual structure and language use in different settings. LSP genres share communicative purposes, so they present recognisable features and specific structures. The first question that comes to our mind probably is “why is teaching specialised languages so important?”. In our case, the course for specific/special needs students who mainly have dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography, ADHD, is one common to all courses of the University of Ferrara—involving its thirteen departments—and its main objective is to support students in learning LSP English and prepare them for the final exam. Generally speaking, LSP course materials and goals are tailored to the learners’ specific needs; they focus on identifying linguistic skills and genres that are most relevant for learners and their language competence. General language learning and LSP therefore share core linguistic competences, but differ in the degree to which learning objectives and materials are shaped by domain-specific communicative purposes and contexts. Specifically for English, studies on ESP have highlighted a learning-centred approach like, for example, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) who described their vision of ESP in the volume *English for Specific Purposes: A Learning-centred Approach* (1987) through the map of a tree in which the topmost branches of the tree show the level at which individual ESP courses occur. While Cook (2002) has pointed out the importance of language use beyond the classroom, that is, being able to communicate in the real world, Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed (2014) has offered a panoramic view of theories and development in the last thirty years of a learner focused approach, learners’ needs and the importance of designing a proper syllabus. It is clear that the acquisition of LSPs in English, or other languages, as L2 presents different pedagogical and cognitive challenges, especially in higher and university education contexts. LSP learning draws on the linguistic competences involved in general language learning and it introduces an additional domain-specific dimension, requiring learners to engage with specialised terminology, genres, registers and communicative practices. LSP instruction, therefore, requires specialised strategies to address the complexity of discourse, the need for domain-specific terminology, and learners’ diverse learning profiles. The importance of targeted training for LSP educators and the integration of innovative, multimodal approaches that can adapt to the needs of students should be recognised. Various studies—such as Howard and Brown (1997), Basturkmen (2010), or Papadima-Sophocleous *et al.* (2019)—have highlighted the challenges and objectives of training teachers who create courses in LSP.

Our decision to include LSP audiovisual and multimodal tools is based on the belief that these tools and materials can be very useful for students with learning disorders. The pedagogical use of television broadcasts, series, and films has been widespread since the early 1960s and has frequently been regarded as a particularly effective medium for conveying meaning (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). As early as 1961, Lottmann highlighted the benefits of employing filmstrips in the FL/L2 classroom and offered practical guidance on their pedagogical application. Similarly, Canning-Wilson and Wallace (2001) examined the practical implications of incorporating video materials into language teaching. Within the

Spanish context, the TRADILEX Project (2020–2023), formally titled *Traducción e Interpretación en el Proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje de Lenguas Extranjeras* (‘Translation and Interpretation in the Teaching–Learning Process of Foreign Languages’), represents an educational initiative that investigates the use of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as a pedagogical resource to support second language (L2) acquisition. The project explores how learners’ active involvement in AVT practices—such as subtitling, dubbing, and audio description—can foster the development of communicative competences. Its primary aim is to integrate these AVT-based activities into language curricula, offering students practical and creative opportunities to engage with the target language (Fernández Costales *et al.*, 2023; Plaza-Lara & Bobadilla-Pérez, 2024). Furthermore, subtitling is not only useful for FL learners from a strictly linguistic perspective. Subtitles, especially translated subtitles, directly manifest cultural differences and how cultures and languages constantly interact (Talaván Zanón & Tinedo Rodríguez, 2023). In the Italian context, the emphasis on the need to reconceptualise ESP through multimodal practices to enhance interactive learner engagement has been outlined by Plastina (2019).

1.3 Teaching English to Students With Specific/Special Needs

We believe that in a classroom particular attention should be paid to students with specific/special needs who can encounter difficulties in learning English due to their physical, health, or psychosocial challenges. Students may have different needs (Koster *et al.*, 2010; Boyle *et al.*, 2012; Meynert, 2014; Florian, 2019; Apriliyanti, 2023) and teaching them implies a planned and monitored arrangement of teaching procedures, the adaptation of classroom equipment and teaching materials, accessible settings, teacher training, and other interventions designed to assist learners with specific/special needs in achieving a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in study and in the professional sphere (Zigmond *et al.*, 2009; Moriña & Carballo, 2017).

The concept of Special Educational Needs (SEN) first emerged in the UK in 1978 with the publication of the *Warnock Report* which emphasised the importance of integrating students perceived as “different” through an inclusive approach grounded in shared educational goals for all learners, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities. The concept of SEN is also included in the *World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (2007) () and is defined as “[a]ny permanent or temporary developmental functioning difficulty related to education or learning, resulting from the interaction of various health factors and which requires special individualized education.”

The 2012 Ministerial Directive identifies several SEN categories, including children and young people whose temporary or permanent difficulties interfere with typical learning and require personalised support. Students with disabilities are defined by Italian law 104/1992: “Those with a physical, mental or sensory impairment, whether stabilised or progressive, which is the cause of difficulties relating to learning, relationships or work integration and is such that it leads to the person becoming socially disadvantaged or marginalized”. Students with specific developmental disorders such as learning disabilities, language disorders, and motor coordination difficulties, are defined under Italian Law 170/2010. Among these,

Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs) are neurobiological in origin and are not associated with cognitive impairment. Despite this, SLDs can make the learning process particularly complex and challenging. A well-known example is dyslexia, due to which students experience difficulties recognising letters, combining syllables, and identifying words, often hindering their ability to comprehend written texts. Other disorders include dysgraphia (difficulties in writing), dyscalculia (difficulties with calculations, counting, and organising numbers in columns and sequences), and dysorthography (severe difficulties in the application of spelling rules).

Students may also experience difficulties in paying continuous attention, following instructions and completing tasks, as well as difficulty with concepts related to time management and work organisation. To support these students, it is necessary to create vital and compensatory tools that can enhance comprehension, memory, and organisation, for example, by structuring information into visual, non-linear formats, using nodes, images, colours, and shapes. Such tools assist in reducing cognitive load, allowing students to visualise relationships between concepts. Adjustments to standard teaching methods are deemed necessary to support the students concerned, with the aim of fostering the child's development and building on their strengths. One example is the implementation of compensatory measures and accommodations through assistive tools such as recording devices, calculators, smart pens, and applications for on-screen text reading and dictation. Analog tools can also be effective, including tables, charts, and concept maps that support the comprehension of more complex texts. When necessary, additional time may be granted for completing assignments, the volume of assigned homework may be reduced, and oral assessments may be used as an alternative to written tests. Keeping in mind the need for inclusive didactics and the necessity to be able to create a classroom environment focused on learners, the issue of teacher training becomes central for a design of the course, the choice of assessment and the teaching strategies (Lindsay, 2003; Fuller *et al.*, 2004; Ferreira, 2025).

1.4 Inclusive Didactics at the University of Ferrara

Universities provide a range of support services and are governed by legislation that protects the rights of people with disabilities, with many institutions formally committing to the principles of inclusive education. Higher education faces the challenge of developing inclusive educational processes that support the learning and participation of all students, while also fostering a sense of belonging (Polat 2011; Hardy & Woodcock 2014; Moriña 2017; Haug 2017). Over the last five years, the Vice Rector for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Tamara Zappaterra together with the office dedicated to these actions have undertaken a significant amount of work to build a well-organised structure at the University of Ferrara for students with specific/special needs. The designated institutional website (Note 2) shows how important is to follow two main and complementary pathways: one dedicated to students, offering them documents, slides and videos which illustrate how to ask for compensatory measures and how to use them; and another directed at teaching staff, emphasising the actions that can be taken to deliver more inclusive courses. The office has organised a course intended to inform researchers and lecturers/teachers about how to help students to have equal access to materials and assessment procedures. A specific project

which connects this office to the Language Centre (Note 3) is BE.IN.UNIFE (BENessere INclusion e a UNIFE) (Note 4), a service to promote students' well-being and academic inclusion, offered by the University of Ferrara. The project aims to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, supporting a positive and productive academic experience. The initiative offers innovative tools and programs, supported by a team specialised in various areas of learning. The resources provided include tools for study management and organisation, in-depth seminars to further develop knowledge, and personalised courses designed to meet the specific needs of each student, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of learning. The project is designed to accompany students with specific/special needs throughout their academic journey by providing continuous support and access to the appropriate resources. Students can find seven video lessons dedicated to emotional education and the development of emotional intelligence as a transversal (transferable) skill. The English language workshop for students with SLDs coordinated by the Language Centre and offered by WonderLab, an external agency collaborating with the University (Note 5) aims to enhance their language skills using interactive materials and digital technologies. The course, available online, is based on all four linguistic skills (writing, listening, reading and speaking) to boost and strengthen students' competences. This course is a starting point for the teaching of languages at the Language Centre (Spanish, German, and French) introducing LSP lessons with innovative and adaptive techniques to create engaging learning experiences focused on visual and auditory methods (multimodal teaching strategies, including visuals, maps, graphics), hands-on activities and auditory supports. Teachers need to be aware of the importance of building up a corpus of materials accessible to all students with the main goal to build a supportive, strengths-focused classroom environment (also online).

1.5 Research Questions

Drawing on Sanderson *et al.* (2022), the study adopts a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with academic and technological 'actors', analysed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, conceptual tensions, and design criteria for inclusive audiovisual LSP materials. To guide the exploratory and qualitative study, our research questions are:

1. How can audiovisual strategies and inclusive pedagogical principles be integrated to facilitate L2 acquisition of LSPs among different learners?
2. What design criteria emerge from the dialogue between theoretical perspectives and technological practices in the creation of accessible LSP materials?

The answers to our research questions and the qualitative analysis of the interviews will contribute to a deeper understanding of how LSP and audiovisual resources can be effectively integrated for future applications, while also keeping in mind a possible synergy with other centres and colleagues of the European Colours Alliance.

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach to understand the thoughts, attitudes and expectations of selected faculty members of the Humanities Department at the University of

Ferrara. Since the aim of our study is to investigate how inclusive and audiovisual strategies can support accessible acquisition of LSPs in L2 acquisition, we invited all our language teachers to participate, as well as a member of WonderLab, an Italian company that collaborates with our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office and has organised the English online course for students with SDL and disabilities at our university for the academic years 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.

2.1 Participants

For this case study, a purposive sample was used, comprising eight participants: seven teaching staff of the four languages at the Humanities Department (English, Spanish, German and French in BA and MA of Languages courses), plus the external collaborator from WonderLab (Note 6) for a total of eight interviewees. Due to the explorative nature of this study and the small purposive sample, results are not intended to be generalisable but to provide a basis for future studies. To allow sufficient time for reflection, participants were given 20 days to respond to the asynchronous written interview. The six open-ended questions were designed to follow a logical progression from problems to solutions, from present to future.

2.2 Interview Questions

In order to learn from participants how audiovisual strategies and inclusive principles can work together for Language for LSP learning in terms of L2 acquisition, we should start by identifying the difficulties of learning languages and comparing language and LSP learning. Therefore, the first question is: *(1) In your experience, what are the main difficulties that students encounter when learning a language? Are these difficulties the same in the context of LSP learning?* This way, the interviewee is seen as an observer-analyst of learners' difficulties. With this question we obtain initial information about the teachers' position towards the linguistic, cognitive and affective barriers learners may feel. It is an initial framing of LSP teaching and learning complexity. Moreover, the comparison was intended to distinguish difficulties associated with L2 learning more generally from challenges specifically related to specialised terminology, genres, registers and domain-based communicative practices.

The second question, which is solution-oriented, aims to understand the participants' perspective on inclusive teaching and accessible learning: *(2) Which inclusive strategies do you find most effective for addressing these challenges and difficulties in order to promote accessible learning for the different students' profile?* In this case, the interviewee is seen as a 'problem-solver' or a pedagogical decision-maker. We formulated this second question as a transition from the identified difficulties to the real experiences that the teachers report through the answer to the third question, which is: *(3) Have you ever worked with students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders? If so, please briefly describe this experience, ensuring that no sensitive or personal data are disclosed.* The third question gathers concrete experiences, treating the interviewee as a practitioner of strategies. This question may allow a shift towards the 'expectation' ground. Our fourth question is about the relation between audiovisual modes and LSP teaching: *(4) In your view, how can audiovisual*

and multimodal tools (i.e., videos, audio materials, e-learning platforms, educational games) contribute to making LSP learning more effective and inclusive? Participants, positioned as evaluators of pedagogical resources, were invited to share their thoughts about the effectiveness of audiovisual tools in LSP inclusive learning. By further examining the role of functional multimodality, the fifth question asked was: (5) *In your view, which principles should guide the design of inclusive audiovisual and multimodal materials for language and LSP learning?* This design-oriented question positions the interviewee as a “designer” operating within a broader institutional discourse and opens the discussion towards future perspectives, which constitute the focus of the final question: (6) *How will inclusive strategies and audiovisual/multimodal resources transform the teaching and learning of languages/LSP in the future?* In other words, we set to learn from our participants, seen as professionals oriented to change, their real expectations and ideal alignment with inclusion and multimodality in language and LSP teaching. Overall, this ideal path goes from what participants draw on (i.e., experiences and practices) to what they evaluate as strategic for an inclusive and multimodal teaching and learning.

2.3 Research Design

Similarly to McCammon *et al.* (2012), participants responded to an e-mail questionnaire. We opted for this technique since e-mail surveying is a form of electronic ‘interviewing’ that allows “a greater depth of response when the [participant] has the ability to think through a substantive response” (Gaiser & Schreiner, 2009, p. 48). We asked our participants six questions to which they replied in Italian; we, then, translated the texts into English for their analysis. We created one Word file per question (altogether six documents) and collected all the participants’ answers.

The written data was imported to QDA Miner Lite (Note 7), a qualitative data analysis software. After several readings and reviews, we divided each text into smaller units and double-coded them. Each of our emergent codes is “a researcher-generated construct that symbolises and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes” (Saldaña, 2013, p.4). From the codes, we proceeded with the themes by which we identified patterns and interpretations which are illustrated in the results section.

3. Results

We conducted a qualitative data analysis based on systematic coding (Saldaña 2013, 2021) and thematic analysis focusing on teachers’ knowledge and attitudes. An initial set of eight exploratory themes, which were based on the coded texts, was identified during early stages of analysis. Through iterative reviews, these themes were refined and conceptually integrated into three overarching themes that highlighted data patterns.

3.1 Analysis Procedure

Initial codes were grouped into four main themes: Attitudes towards learners and learning barriers, Inclusive practices and the classroom, Institutional policies and exam assessment, Multimodality/technology, LSP specificity and future.

During the second review, we redefined the four themes while focusing on sub-themes concerning, for instance, the affective impact of language leaning (under the provisional theme “Attitudes towards learners and learning barriers”), inclusive pedagogy and personalisation (under the provisional theme “Attitudes towards inclusion and pedagogical improvement”), responsibility towards policies and problems (under the provisional theme “Attitudes towards policies and institutional mediation”), multimodality as confidence-driver and LSP as reflective pedagogical ground (under the provisional theme “Attitudes towards multimodality, LSP-specificity, and design”).

After the third round, we finally set three main themes with sub-themes. The next sections will describe the three main themes and their sub-themes together with quotations from the asynchronous written interviews.

3.2 Three Themes

We identified three final themes as (1) “Attitudes towards students, participation, and learning barriers”, (2) “Attitudes towards inclusive fulfilment in practice”, and (3) “Attitudes towards multimodal and accessible LSP design across present and future practices”.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1 Theme 1: Attitudes Towards Students, Participation, and Learning Barriers

Participants agreed that students, who are learning languages, experience negative feelings such as anxiety, frustration, and fear, especially when it comes to speaking. Learner affect seems to be the first obstacle to active participation both for language and LSP language learning. Moreover, LSP teaching may sometimes intensify this sense of vulnerability. If anxiety negatively affects participation, and participation can be considered a crucial part of inclusion, then anxiety can influence inclusion, at least “intra-peers”. Therefore, inclusion is context-dependent and when teachers support learners, then affective barriers can be reduced.

4.1.1 Theme 1a: Affective Negative Feelings as Learning Barriers

When interviewees described the main difficulties that students face when learning languages, they associated difficulty with emotions, like in the following excerpts:

1. *Fighting the shame of speaking a language poorly. Frustration and anxiety about wanting to speak well immediately.*
2. *According to my experience, the main difficulties first involve managing language anxiety and the fear of speaking in a language that one does not fully master.*
3. *[...] as well as the affective ones (i.e., lack of confidence in one’s expressive abilities, fear or embarrassment at speaking the language publicly).*
4. *In addition, especially in large classes, one of the major difficulties is the anxiety associated with speaking. This feeling makes students less inclined to take opportunities to speak and practice the language.*
5. *In addition, there are emotional aspects, such as communication anxiety or fear of*

making mistakes, which inhibit oral and written production.

4.1.2 Theme 1b: LSP Content Specificity

The responses show both continuity and differentiation between general language learning and LSP learning. On the one hand, some participants observed that difficulties in language learning are the same as in LSP learning, and on the other hand, others observed that LSP may involve rather demanding learning processes. In addition, within language learning, the difficulties refer to grammatical structures, vocabulary and interference from the mother tongue. Within LSP learning, instead, the specialised vocabulary, the specific communication and text type are the main challenges.

6. *The main difficulties concern the grammatical and syntactic structures of the target language (in my case, German), and more specifically the use of cases, nominal inflection, and constituent order within the sentence.*
7. *The main difficulties that students encounter when learning languages concern complex grammatical structures and the comprehension of authentic texts. Moreover, Italian-speaking students often struggle with Spanish due to the proximity between the two languages: lexical and syntactic similarity often leads to interference, for example, in the verb system.*
8. *As for LSP, the difficulties are very similar to the previous ones, added to the lack of real contexts in which to practice.*
9. *When we move to LSP, these difficulties become even more evident because learners must also acquire specialised vocabulary and the conventions of the discourse of a specific field. [...] Therefore, while some basic difficulties remain the same, LSP learning requires greater attention to pragmatics, contextualisation, and metalinguistic awareness.*
10. *In LSP learning, these difficulties may increase, since the language is no longer just a tool for “general” communication but is used within a specific domain. Students must learn not only basic grammar and vocabulary but also acquire specialised terminology and communicative formulas typical of the field, and become used to using the language as a tool within more specific text genres.*
11. *When we move to learning LSP, some difficulties remain, but new ones arise. The main challenge concerns specialised vocabulary, which is often very complex, technical, and linked to a specific professional or academic field. In addition to vocabulary, students must learn how to recognise and produce texts with structures and conventions specific to that field (i.e., scientific papers, technical manuals, or contracts). Another important element is the appropriate use of communicative registers, which in academic and professional contexts require clarity, correctness and rigour.*

Taken together, these responses suggest that participants do not perceive LSP as a separate form of language learning, but as an additional layer of linguistic and communication

specialisation. General L2 difficulties remain relevant, whereas LSP introduces domain-specific demands related to terminology, genre conventions, register and professional or academic communicative practices.

4.2 Theme 2: Attitudes Towards Inclusive Fulfilment in Practice

Participants' responses indicate that the inclusive element is produced by the mediation between teachers' agency, university policies and classroom constraints. All teachers reported experiences working with students with Specific Learning Disorders. What emerges from the analysis is that inclusion is perceived as fragmented but also characterised by pedagogical flexibility rather than "standard accommodation". In other words, it is context-based.

4.2.1 Theme 2a: Strategies and Assessment

When describing the different strategies to favour an inclusive environment, participants at times referred to practices grounded in what may be described as basic common-sense pedagogical approaches:

- 12. I generally try to involve all participants by triggering their basic knowledge and cultural background.*
- 13. I give them time to speak and try to integrate their participation with that of the rest of the group.*
- 14. In general, keeping an open dialogue with students was the most important aspect. We worked together to find the most effective solutions.*

In other occasions, participants used more technical terminology and specific activities, such as differentiation, provision of authentic material through different formats and channels:

- 15. I believe that the strategies that reduce cognitive load and increase motivation are crucial, for example: scaffolding pedagogy, which gradually guides students towards more complex skills [...].*
- 16. With the right class size number, organising group activities based on cooperative learning can also enhance diversity and promote collaboration."*
- 17. I found providing materials with highly readable sources, simplified texts, and concept maps helpful.*
- 18. [...] differentiation of paths and assignments, so that each student can work according to their own pace and cognitive style; value to prior multilingual knowledge, which connects language and self-esteem; task-based learning approach that focuses on real and authentic communicative situations.*
- 19. [...] differentiate teaching activities. I try to provide different types of materials (i.e., written texts, videos, images, PowerPoint presentations, online games).*
- 20. [...] cooperative activities of small heterogeneous groups [of students]; using different channels (text, audio and video); using authentic materials and*

communication tasks that give value [strengthen] the previous competences.

21. *The teacher also applied the personalised assessment, giving value to the individual progress rather than comparing with single standards.*

4.2.2 Theme 2b: Professional and Institutional Responsibility

When asked to describe concrete situations involving students with SLD or disabilities, some interviewees explicitly referred to the Office for Inclusion or the tutoring activity:

22. *I followed the instructions provided by the university Inclusion Office.*

23. *For exams, I follow the compensatory instruments from the University Inclusion Office's policies. (i.e., additional time, concept maps).*

24. *People with SLD were also supported by a tutor with whom they met regularly. They met online and in small groups, where it was possible to carry out more targeted activities.*

In other cases, the professional capital, defined as “what you know and can do individually, with whom you know it and do it collectively, and how long you have known it and done it deliberately gotten better at doing it over time” (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012, p. 102), varied according to the participants’ personal voices and attitudes. For instance, there were participants more inclined to technology, as in the case of the first two examples, or participants less optimistic about the teaching-institution relation (i.e., see third quotation):

25. *Digital technology can be useful. It is a dynamic tool that can be adapted to the student's specific needs.*

26. *The possibility to integrate digital speech synthesis and automatic dictation tools had a positive impact.*

27. *This transformation would require targeted structural investments. University often lacks the technological tools to successfully use these resources.*

4.2.3 Theme 2c: Challenges

In addition to reliance on “external actors” such as the university Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office, some participants’ attitudes also highlighted that operational guidance is challenged by various organisational factors:

28. *Although not always possible due to the huge number of students in the classroom and the diversity of their needs.*

29. *Unfortunately, with very large classes (more than 100 students), it is difficult to carry out ad hoc activities.*

30. *Another crucial issue is the gap between “textbook language” and real language.*

31. *Teacher resistance to change, particularly among those who adhere to traditional methods and less open to new teaching modalities, present another challenge.*

32. *In some cases, I had to clarify that a concept map is not the same as having the book photocopied, but it needs personal and functional reworking of content. Other times, I had to explain that a concept map cannot be the same as list of 20–30 verb conjugations, or long lists of words.*

We should admit that classroom constraints and “conditional willingness” are two concerns that are common among teachers, despite what they teach (see Chen *et al.*, 2018, p.93). The conditional willingness describes participants’ readiness to adopt or implement inclusive practices under certain circumstances, such as their usefulness, a clear need for specific inclusive activities or infrastructure availability.

4.3 Theme 3: Attitudes Towards Multimodal and Accessible LSP Design Across Present and Future Practices

This theme focuses on how multimodality and LSP teaching can work together to enhance inclusive teaching, with particular attention to students with SLD. The overall design is a combination of inclusive principles, authenticity of communicative materials and situations, and participation. Technology is seen as a driver of individual needs but in the shared space of learning environment.

4.3.1 Theme 3a: Multimodal and Audiovisual Tools Between Experience and Authenticity

According to participants, multimodal and audiovisual tools are primarily valued for their affective and experiential features, rather than for their technological novelty. Therefore, technology, even when basic, can reduce the gap between abstract teaching and real language use contexts.

33. *Audiovisual and/or multimodal tools are so dynamic that they can adapt to the specific needs of learners with SLD. In particular, I like that they can reduce anxiety and move the focus from [simply] studying the language per se to losing oneself in the language as a means of communication. Setting the class in an informal context.*
34. *The tools mentioned above probably capture attention and encourage participation more because they are able to simulate real-life situations, something that is not perceived in a teaching environment.*
35. *The integration of educational games and simulations can increase motivation and lower the affective filter, creating a more relaxed and accessible environment.*
36. *Authentic videos are essential for exposing learners to the actual language, with its variations, accents, gestures, and contexts of use.*
37. *Audiovisual and multimodal tools are an excellent way to make teaching more inclusive because they activate different sensory channels and favour more dynamic learning.*

Benefits such as reduces anxiety, increased participation and activation of different sensory channels, are relevant to language learning more generally. Their specific relevance to LSP emerges when audiovisual and multimodal materials provide access to specialised discourse,

professional contexts and communicative specific situations.

4.3.2 Theme 3b: Accessing Authentic Discourse Through LSP and Multimodality

In subtheme 1b “LSP content specificity”, we observed that LSP learning difficulties can be similar or different if compared to general language learning. Although teachers did not share a single definition of LSP learning, what can be inferred is that LSP learning can be considered context-driven and dependent on how much authentic materials are available. The issue is ‘study differently’, rather than ‘study more’.

38. *Audiovisual and multimodal tools can play a crucial role in making LSPs more effective and inclusive because they can integrate different communication channels and adapt more effectively to students’ cognitive styles. [...] The use of videos, for instance, allows specialised languages to be observed in real and authentic contexts.*
39. *Videos, podcasts, interviews with experts in the field, or authentic materials taken from real professional contexts can be used to introduce students to situations in which these languages are used effectively.*
40. *In LSPs, they are particularly useful because they can mimic specialised communication environments (i.e., a conference, a negotiation, a medical or legal context) to which students would otherwise have little direct access.*

4.3.3 Theme 3c: Future Shape of Language and LSP Learning Through Inclusion and Multimodality

Participants’ views on the future show careful attitudes. Contrary to our expectations, artificial intelligence is just mentioned in a neutral manner, not praising nor blaming it. What emerges clearly, instead, is the integration of traditional pedagogical approaches with innovative methods that favour realistic and inclusive contexts for everyone. In other words, it seems that language teaching and learning will be challenged by people, more than technology.

41. *This is happening, but we need to understand how they [inclusive strategies and audiovisual tools] will cope with the overwhelming impact of generative artificial intelligence.*
42. *I think that audiovisual, multimodal and AI-based resources will become increasingly important in the next years, but I am not able to predict the extent to which they will transform language teaching and learning.*
43. *In the future, I imagine language teaching that no longer clearly distinguishes between “general” and “specific purposes” but rather intertwines both dimensions in realistic and inclusive learning contexts.*
44. *Integrating traditional approaches with innovative methodologies can certainly enhance student learning by addressing diverse profiles and needs.*
45. *More equitable and motivating language learning for every student.*

46. *I believe the future is moving toward increasingly personalised, interactive, and immersive forms of teaching, where technology adapts learning paths to individual needs.*

47. *They will facilitate a shift from uniform to truly personalised approaches, adapting materials and activities to students' diverse needs, paces, and cognitive styles.*

In line with our background premises about LSP teaching and multimodal approaches suitable for learners' diverse needs (e.g., Bocanegra-Valle and Lafford 2025), participants described inclusion as a pedagogical task that requires expertise, flexibility, institutional support and adaptability. In addition, their emphasis on affective barriers, especially language anxiety related to speaking L2, highlights the importance of learners' participation as a condition for inclusive didactics.

The analysis also reflects LSP literature on domain-specific terminology, discourse and genre conventions (e.g., Bhatia 1993, 2004) while presenting LSP in continuity with general language learning and beyond. Participants described difficulties as both continuous with general language and intensified by specialised vocabulary, specific formulas and communicative features of LSP. A key finding emerging from the data is that accessibility in LSP learning is closely linked to the possibility of "studying differently" rather than "studying more": scaffolding and exposure to authentic discourse are crucial for reducing negative feelings when learning L2. Within this framework, audiovisual and multimodal tools are valued primarily for their pedagogical values such as reducing anxiety, increasing engagement, and simulating real specialised communications, rather than for their technological novelty.

The design criteria that emerged (e.g., accessibility, authenticity, modularity, interactivity, adaptability) is a practical bridge between theoretical principles of inclusion and technological practices. Similarly, participants' attitudes towards institutional discourse both represented by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Office and class size management underline that the implementation of accessible multimodal materials is linked to organisational conditions and teacher training (see Fuller *et al.*, 2004; Papadima-Sophocleus *et al.*, 2019).

As for future directions, participants' predictions are characterised by cautious but coherent opinions, in which language and LSP learning are increasingly shaped by flexible and participatory learning spaces, a stronger integration of traditional and innovative pedagogy, and technology as a driver for individual needs.

Although the study is limited by its small purposive sample and its focus on a single department, it is explorative and provides an initial qualitative framework for the subsequent phases of the project; it will allow us, as a community, to refine the pedagogical design and evaluate how multimodality and LSP can support and enhance L2 learning with a special focus on students with SLD. The study is a premise for building further collaboration with our other departments, and Italian and non-Italian universities which may want to share best practices in language teaching for students with specific/special needs incorporating inclusive

audiovisual strategies.

To conclude, the final themes that emerged addressed our research questions by demonstrating that all aspects are interconnected. On the one hand, in the integration of multimodal and audiovisual tools and inclusive pedagogy we should consider the learners' affective dimension and needs, differentiation and authentic LSP materials and situations. On the other hand, design criteria for accessible LSP materials emerge as a mediated process that is not only technical but mostly pedagogical.

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Notes

Note 1. Although the final design of the paper is the outcome of the close collaboration between the authors, for academic purposes Eleonora Federici is responsible for §1, while Valentina Di Francesco for § 2, 3 and 4.

Note 2. <https://www.unife.it/it/ed>

Note 3. https://www.unife.it/en/cla/il-centro-linguistico-di-ateneo-en?set_language=en

Note 4. <https://www.unife.it/it/studiare/supporto/beinunife>

Note 5. <https://www.wonderlab.it/>

Note 6. We are excluded from the study.

Note 7. QDA Miner Lite by Provalis Research:
<https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/>

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