Revista Letras Raras

ISSN: 2317-2347 - v. 12, n. 2 (2023)

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Creativity and Language Learning through Digital Narratives, Didactic Audiovisual Translation and 'The Sims' / Creatividad y aprendizaje de lenguas a través de narrativas digitales, traducción audiovisual didáctica y Los Sims

Antonio-Jesús Tinedo-Rodríguez*

Researcher at EIDUNED and at the Department of Foreign Philologies and their Linguistics at UNED. Part of the TRADIT research group at the National University of Distance Education (UNED) in Madrid, Spain, and the SEJ-551 group at the University of Córdoba (UCO), having as fiels of interest SLA, Didactic Audiovisual Translation, and Translation Studies.



https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8023-3212

Received: 13 aug. 2023. Approved: 18 aug. 2023.

How to cite this article:

TINEDO-RODRÍGUEZ, Antonio-Jesús. Creativity and Language Learning through Digital Narratives, Didactic Audiovisual Translation and 'The Sims'. *Revista Letras Raras*. Campina Grande, v. 12, n. 2, p. 40-59, aug. 2023. Doi: 10.5281/zenodo.8299800.

ABSTRACT

In a digitalized world where multimodality is part of daily routine, it is of great interest to explore the didactic possibilities of digital narratives. In this regard, based on a student-centred paradigm, this pedagogical proposal has been designed with the aim of enabling students to create their own digital narratives in a second/foreign language (L2/FL) by combining two Didactic Audiovisual Translation modes: subtitling and dubbing. To create the audiovisual materials, it is proposed that students make use of the video game "The Sims" due to its availability and its potential to simulate real-life situations. It is expected that the motivation derived from producing their own audiovisual materials, combined with exposure to the L2/FL, will enable students to acquire the language while fostering their creativity in virtual environments.

KEYWORDS: Educational technologies; Audiovisual Translation; Language teaching; Gamification; Video games.

RESUMEN

En un mundo digitalizado en el que la multimodalidad forma parte de la rutina diaria es de gran interés explorar las posibilidades didácticas de las narrativas digitales. En ese sentido, partiendo de un paradigma paidocéntrico, se ha diseñado una propuesta pedagógica que tiene como objetivo que el alumnado sea capaz de crear sus propias narrativas digitales en una L2/LE, aplicando la Traducción Audiovisual Didáctica (TAD) mediante técnicas de doblaje

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aitinedo@flog.uned.es

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ISSN: 2317-2347 - v. 12, n. 2 (2023)

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y subtitulado. De esta forma se pretende que se trabajen de forma integrada las destrezas lingüísticas en la L2/LE junto con las competencias digitales. Para crear los materiales audiovisuales se propone que el alumnado haga uso del videojuego Los Sims debido al hecho de que este juego es gratuito y que permite simular situaciones de la vida real. Se espera que la motivación causada por la producción de materiales audiovisuales propios, junto con la exposición a la L2/LE, permita que el alumnado adquiera la competencia lingüística a la vez que desarrolla su creatividad en entornos virtuales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Tecnologías educativas; Traducción Audiovisual; Enseñanza de lenguas; Gamificación; Videojuegos.

1 Introduction

The unprecedented technological growth witnessed in the last few decades has triggered an unparalleled transformation, primarily attributable to the rapid pace at which technologies are permeating the daily routines of certain societies. This tech-driven transition can be considered advantageous, as it has enhanced and democratized access to information, streamlined workflows, bridged distances among individuals, and has given rise to new ways communication. Furthermore, it has also resulted in unfavourable outcomes, such as the transference of socioeconomic disparities into the digital domain, commonly referred to as the digital gap. There are new challenges concerning security and privacy in virtual environments, unemployment due to the automation of workflows, and higher levels of technological dependence.

Within the realm of education, it is of great importance to explore the challenges and opportunities entwined with educational technologies (Sampedro-Requena 2015). In this regard, videogames are of great interest due to the fact that there is a tendency to perceive them in a negative way, and it is probably linked to biases and prejudices fostered and disseminated by society and mass media (Aranda 2017). However, although it may appear contradictory at first glance, recent research on the topic emphasises the significant role that video games have played in breaking down stigmas and prejudices associated with socially relevant issues such as racism (Burgess et al. 2011), social exclusion (Zyzik 2021) or peace education (Benatov, Berger & Tadmor 2021). To be more precise, despite potential societal biases and prejudices against video games, they exhibit a paramount potential to assume a subversive role against social prejudices and biases, as previously mentioned. Aranda (2017) emphasised the importance of exploring the educational potential of video games. In this regard, Sampedro-Requena and McMullin (2015) highlighted that they can constitute a crucial resource in the realm of inclusive education. Likewise, Sampedro-Requena et al. (2017) analysed the potential role of digital video games in teaching and

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learning processes through a quasi-experimental quantitative study. Their main conclusion was that these games reinforced knowledge, enhanced motivation, and contributed to the development of cognitive skills such as memory, comprehension, and problem-solving. Additionally, they could be effective in fostering psychomotor skills like visual acuity, perceptual discrimination, and spatial coordination. Besides, videogames are closely intertwined to culture, and VGL (Video Game Localisation, henceforth) requires a thorough understanding of the cultural systems involved (Mangiron 2016; 2021). When it comes to SLA studies, empirical studies proved videogames useful for enhancing vocabulary (Calvo-Ferrer 2017; 2021), specialised terminology (Calvo-Ferrer 2020), and for the development of digital literacy (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer 2022).

One of the essential features of video games is multimodality (Mangiron, 2018), which is of particular interest in language teaching due to the fact that it involves the transmission of information through different channels (visual, auditory, etc.). Therefore, it is worth exploring the VARK model due to the multimodality feature of videogames. In this model, "V" stands for visual and refers to students who learn better through graphical representations of information; "A" signifies auditory and is connected to a preference for hearing the information; the "R" represents reading and writing, referring to students who prefer information in textual format (printed or digital); and the "K" means kinaesthesia or a preference for learning through hands-on experience, practice, and movement (Amaniyan et al. 2020). As highlighted by Ogea-Pozo (2018), audiovisual texts exhibit a multimodal nature, and it is precisely this multimodality that makes them a resource of special interest for language learners and for translators' training. Learners acquire information through various integrated formats, which, according to the VARK model, widens the range of students who can benefit from such materials compared to opting for non-multimodal educational resources.

The use of multimodal products holds significant potential for language teaching for the very fact that the input (Krashen, 1989) is enriched, as aural information is complemented by visual information. The interaction between the channels involved provides learners with an enriched exposure to L2 from a pragmatic and intercultural perspective (Tinedo, 2022). In this regard, it is important to bear the comprehensible input hypothesis in mind, as this concept is equally valid when considering audiovisual texts (Di Carlo 1994). Consequently, planning to make use of audiovisual resources involves selecting appropriate materials according to the level of English of

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the students. If the level of these resources is higher than required, it may be a source of frustration; likewise, if the level of the materials is lower than needed, it can be demotivating for students.

In line with the previously discussed aspects, Didactic Audiovisual Translation (hereinafter, DAT) could be of a discipline of paramount importance when it comes to the educational implementation of video games, especially within the context of L2 instruction. DAT is a discipline which aims at exploring the impact of AVT-based tasks in which L2 learners actively engage as multimedia content creators (Talaván & Lertola, 2022). For this purpose, students are expected to create their own subtitles (or SDH), or to develop original scripts for dubbing, audio description (AD), or voice over, which they will subsequently record using their own voices. DAT modes can be classified into two major categories, namely captioning and revoicing (Chaume, 2012, 2013; Díaz-Cintas, 2001; Ogea-Pozo, 2020). In its origins, the use of Audiovisual Translation (henceforth, AVT) in language education had a passive nature, aiming to enhance reception skills through the use of subtitles (Talaván 2010; Vanderplank 1988; Díaz Cintas 1995). It is the rise of technologies that enables the average user to work with and edit audiovisual materials on personal computers. This is why, during the first three decades of the 21st century, numerous research projects and an extensive body of scientific literature emerged concerning the active use of didactic AVT, which is known nowadays as DAT. Studies on didactic subtitling (Incalcaterra McLoughlin & Lertola 2011; Lertola and Mariotti 2017; Plaza Lara & Fernández Costales 2022; Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón 2014a; 2014b; Talaván & Ávila-Cabrera 2021) provide empirical evidence demonstrating that this approach effectively fosters the development of pragmatic competence, intercultural competence, and the four main language skills (oral and written production, and oral and written reception) in an integrated way. Empirical data is also rich in the case of didactic dubbing (Talaván and Costal 2017; Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera, José Javier 2015; Sánchez-Requena 2020; 2016a), showcasing significant potential for developing oral production skills and phonetic aspects. Didactic voice-over is probably the least explored modality, though the study by Talaván and Rodríguez Arancón (2018) becomes essential as it illustrates the benefits of this approach in the development of oral production and reception. Not only does it foster fluency, but it also helps students improve their accuracy when it comes to the pronunciation of English vocals, and their qualities. Talaván (2021) and Ogea-Pozo (2022) delved into the use of didactic voice-over for DAT and didactics of AVT, respectively, establishing theoretical and practical foundations for the design of pedagogical proposals.

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Dubbing is probably one of the most popular AVT modes, and research on its didactic use in L2 education has proven useful in enhancing overall oral production skills (Sánchez-Requena 2018; Ávila-Cabrera 2022; Bolaños-García-Escribano & Navarrete 2022; Talaván & Costal 2017). Moreover, the use of didactic dubbing proved valuable in enhancing important elements of oral production skills such as fluency (Sánchez-Requena 2016b). The study by Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera (2015) is also of particular interest, revealing the potential arising from the combination of two DAT modes, in this case, dubbing and subtitling.

Didactic subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing (d-SDH) and didactic audio description (d-AD) constitute what is referred to as Didactic Audiovisual Accessibility (Talaván and Tinedo-Rodríguez 2023a)." The usefulness of didactic AD in language education has been widely studied (Vermeulen and Escobar-Álvarez 2021; Palion-Musiol 2019; Vermeulen and Ibáñez Moreno 2017; Navarrete 2018; Bausells-Espín 2022; Talaván and Lertola 2016). Besides, one of its remarkable accomplishments is the way in which it has fostered social awareness about media accessibility (Ogea-Pozo 2022). There are likely fewer studies on d-SDH, but the existing literature indicates its potential for fostering the development of social and cross-cutting topics, as well as integrated acquisition of language skills (Tinedo-Rodríguez and Frumuselu 2023) Likewise, Talaván et al. (2022) explored the combination of d-SDH and d-AD in language education with positive results.

The main objective of this pedagogical proposal is to explore the didactic potential of the combination of the videogame 'The Sims' with DAT for L2 learning. Maxis developed 'The Sims' videogame series, which is published by Electronic Arts. In 'The Sims', users can create a family, design a house, and simulate real-life scenarios across various dimensions including work, personal life, and family dynamics. In this regard, the game's connection to everyday life closely aligns with the contents and recommendations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (hereinafter, CEFR), as this document emphasizes the importance of equipping language learners with language tools to face diverse communicative situations that are part of daily routines, such as listening to advertisements, engaging in online forums, reading newspapers, discussing news, etc. 'The Sims' belongs to the simulation game genre and holds great potential for multimodal L2 learning. In this context, students assume the role of content 'prosumers', as the video game incorporates a feature allowing them to capture on-screen activities through a specific video recording tool. Studies exploring the didactic potential of 'The Sims' have particularly focused on vocabulary (Lorenset & Tumolo 2019; Ranalli 2008), as well as on the development of

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metacognitive skills (Tan, Supian, & Cheah 2022). Nevertheless, this proposal aims at introducing an educational concept that encourages students to harness their creativity to the fullest by crafting their own audiovisual narratives. Through the use of DAT, the aim is for students to acquire L2 in a contextualized manner.

2 Objectives

The main goal of this proposal is to explore the pedagogical potential of 'The Sims' in the language classroom through a structured approach, allowing L2 students to develop creativity and linguistic competences in an integrated manner. To reach that aim, the methodology section will detail a didactic plan aimed at incorporating this resource through the integration of DAT and gamification.

3 Teaching proposal

Firstly, students should download the videogame 'The Sims 4,' which is available for free on the Electronic Arts virtual platform. Expansion packs and other game versions do come with a cost; however, for this proposal, the base game suffices. Hence, our focus will be on exploring the possibilities offered by this version.

Initially, students are provided with a short text in the L2 adapted to their level. As in the following example, a text for a B2 level is presented (Table 1):

Table 1: Example of starting text for B2 level

Character A: Hey there! Have you seen the latest news about global warming?

Character B: What's wrong with it?

Character A: I am really worried about the way in which the temperature is increasing...

Character B: That sounds proper scary! We should do something about that, shouldn't we?

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Character A: You're right, mate. We need to cut down on our carbon footprint, use greener energy, and spread the word.

Character B: And how can we spread the word?

Character A: Spot on, mate! Do you have a tweeter account?

Character B: Indeed, and 9000 followers...

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The initial task involves reading of the text thoroughly. Taking that text as a departure point, students are expected to:

- a) Describe how they envision the physical appearance and emotional characteristics of the characters participating in the conversation in the L2.
- b) Design the character based on the description they have done. The videogame contains a specific tool for designing characters (as shown in Figure 1), and students should create their own Sims according to their description (physical appearance and emotional traits).



Figure 1: Creating a Sim

Source: Screenshot of 'The Sims 4' video game.

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According to Canales-Hernández (2022), this second task is closely related to mediation, as it involves an activity in which, starting from the text, students need to design a character. This process requires deep processing while simultaneously utilizing mediation strategies to transition from the textual to the multimodal realm. One of the most noteworthy aspects of 'The Sims 4' is its emphasis on emotions, prompting students to envision the personality traits and emotions that the characters they are creating will experience.

The third task involves elaborating a script based on the starting text (see Table 1). This can be a rewriting in another register (more formal, less formal), a similar script talking about a topic of social impact (gender, racism, inequalities, etc.), in which the roles of the interlocutors are reversed, or a creative rewriting of this one.

Table 2: Example of rewritten text in English

Character A: Have you read the recent news regarding global warming?

Character B: I am sorry, but I don't have much information on the topic...

Character A: Well, the temperature of our planet is dramatically increasing, and the consequences are frightening...

Character B: It's so important that we can't turn a blind eye. Let's take some action!

Character A: I was wondering whether you have a tweeter account?

Character B: Sure, and we both will be the *greenfluencers*!

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Once the students have worked on the original script, and have prepared a new script, it is time to do the different video recordings on the game. To achieve this, as shown in Figure 2, students must access the "capture options" menu and select "start/stop video." In this way, students are expected to record the interactions among the characters they had already designed. It is the fourth task.

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Figure 2: Time control interface



Source: Screenshot of 'The Sims 4' videogame.

To record the scenes, it is interesting for learners to make use of different interactions that the system put at their disposal. Their tasks consist of choosing a sequence of interactions that should be consistent with their script and record the screen. For example: "talk about interests, talk about world peace, tell a captivating story."

Tener una conversación profunda

Bromear sobre políticos

Contar chiste sobre el legado familiar

Contar historia cautivadora

Cotillear sobre drama familiar

Contar historia dramática

Figure 3: Sims' interactions

Source: Screenshot of 'The Sims 4' video game.

Once the video has been recorded, the fifth task consists of adapting the script again in terms of synchrony. In this way, mediation is part of the entire teaching proposal, and students are expected to deepen on the interaction between written and audiovisual texts. To record the voices

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(task 6), free software such as *Screencastify¹*, *Lightworks²* o *Loom³*. can be used. It is important for students to rehearse as many times as necessary and to use dictionaries such as the Cambridge Dictionary, which includes resources for pronunciation. Another interesting resource for working on pronunciation can be HowJSay, as it contains different varieties of English and different registers. This process of creative revoicing is part of DAT. Making the text fit with the characters' mouth movements is technically called "lip-syncing". From the SLA point of view, lip-syncing is very interesting because it requires students to rephrase and reformulate using all the linguistic resources they have at their disposal.

After revoicing the audiovisual product, learners should start the didactic subtitling phase which consists of creating their own subtitles. To do so, they are encouraged to use AEGISUB4. Creating subtitles involves challenges due to the time and spatial constraints that are inherent in this AVT mode. Although professional subtitling adheres to strict protocols to ensure the quality of audiovisual products because they are intended for the public (Díaz-Cintas, 2001; Ogea-Pozo, 2018, 2022), when it comes to DAT, for its didactic nature, certain flexibilities are introduced while retaining fundamental elements. This allows students to continue the process of reformulation and mediation with the text (Talaván & Lertola, 2022). It is crucial to underscore here that a task of audiovisual translation involves moving beyond mere translation. The interaction between image and text must be taken into consideration, synchronicity must be maintained, and the ultimate audiovisual product must exhibit narrative and multimodal coherence.

¹ It is a software that allows you to record the screen and is integrated into Google Chrome.

² It is a downloadable software with a free version that allows you to edit videos in a very similar way to how it would be done in professional environments.

³ It is a technological solution that allows you to record the screen.

⁴ It is a subtitles editor.

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Fig. 6st Space Burling Marc Against Algorithm View Burling March Against Algorithm View Burling

Figure 4: Subtitling the video.

Source: Screenshot from AEGISUB

Upon observing Figure 4, both the CPS count (characters per second = 21) and the CPL count (characters per line = 54) exceed established number of characters stablished in the subtitling protocols. Considering the didactic nature of this proposal, we will put forth a standard wherein the maximum number of CPS is set at 15, and the maximum number of CPL is restricted to 42. Should both parameters be exceeded, three options are available:

- Condensing the message: By preserving the essence while reducing the word count, a
 pedagogical perspective becomes crucial to elucidate the significance of condensation.
 Condensation involves conveying the same message with fewer words. To achieve this,
 students must apply their linguistic knowledge effectively.
- Segmenting the message: Dividing the lengthy line into two lines should be considered, mindful that such division cannot occur arbitrarily within the sentence. The rules of syntax must be respected; thus, segmentation cannot break a syntactic unit between the upper and lower lines. From an educational perspective, this approach is fundamental for engaging directly with the syntax of the L2.
- Combining segmentation and condensation: The most viable solution might involve a combination of segmentation and condensation to attain a readable subtitle. This approach

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allows for an integrated application of syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and translational skills.

Table 3: Example of subtitle adaptation

Source text	Subtitle
Have you caught wind of the recent news	Have you read the news on global warming?
regarding global warming?	

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the original text (CPS = 21, CPL = 54), the fundamental norms of didactic subtitling were not adhered to, whereas in the proposed subtitle (CPS = 13, CPL = 33), compliance with these norms is achieved. Although nuances may be lost within the intralingual translation process, the core message is preserved, and the students' linguistic mediation skills are put to the test.

In a broader context, following the framework proposed by Talaván and Lertola (2022), subtitles generated in a DAT-based didactic proposals should encompass the following features:

- Synchrony: They must appear and disappear at the appropriate moments.
- Duration: They should not exceed 6 seconds on screen, nor be displayed for less than a second.
- Appropriate CPS and CPL: While the didactic nature of the task allows for greater flexibility, the subtitles should still maintain suitable CPS and CPL.
- Orthotypographical accuracy: The produced text should be free from orthotypographical errors.

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Figure 5: Summary of the teaching proposal



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 5 presents an overview of the proposed intervention, but it is important to mention that it is flexible and that teachers may adapt it to their students' needs. In the beginning, students are given a text about social topics. They use this text to create another one that forms the basis for recording videos using 'The Sims.' This process involves creating their own Sims and settings, which will be essential for developing their own audiovisual product. Once they have recorded the videos, students should creatively revoice them in the L2, employing diverse linguistic strategies and putting their linguistic repertoire to the test in order to synchronize the script the video. The audiovisual product subsequently undergoes the subtitling phase, and it is of paramount importance that students adhere to provided didactic subtitling protocols, with particular focus on condensation and segmentation strategies. The final product is thus an original creation, featuring the students' voices, and harmonising language skills in an integrated way, combining them with the development of creative skills in digital environments. For the very case of advanced levels, an interesting alternative lies in revising the initial phase, offering students an excerpt from a novel, or prompting them to envision an original narrative and characters instead of starting from a pre-existing adapted text.

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4 Conclusions

DAT has an inherent transdisciplinary nature which is worth exploring deeply (Talaván & Tinedo-Rodríguez 2023). Besides, videogames show a considerable educational potential (Sampedro Requena et al. 2017; Sampedro Requena and McMullin 2015) that lies within their interactivity and multimodality (Belda-Medina & Calvo-Ferrer 2022; Mangiron 2016, 2021). The present didactic proposal aims to explore the symbiotic relationships between video games and DAT. Its purpose is to enable L2 students to harness their creativity while learning the language, by engaging in the creation of their own digital narratives on social issues which might be of their interest. This proposal also seeks to equip them with the skills to revoice and subtitle audiovisual products. Given that one of the significant challenges in L2 education is oral production, due to large student-to-teacher ratios, this kind of activity can be conducted at home to provide opportunities for controlled oral production outside the classroom (Ellis, 2005). The incorporation of the gamification, the opportunity for students to craft their own narratives, voice recording, and subtitle creation present challenges that necessitate an integrated approach to honing language skills in the pursuit of a final product. The use of video games generally motivates students (Calvo-Ferrer, 2017), and it is expected that the challenges associated with creating digital narratives through DAT will further enhance this motivation towards learning.

One of the most remarkable advantages of 'The Sims' is that 'The Sims 4' is available for free. While it lacks various expansion packs, it still serves as a comprehensive game that allows students to maximize their creativity by creating their own digital narratives in L2. One potential drawback is that, although the technical requirements for running the game are not very demanding, it is important to consider the potential relationship between the language and digital gaps (Huertas-Abril and Gómez-Parra, 2019).

From the perspective of DAT, this involves the combined use of subtitling and revoicing modalities, a method already proven effective in studies by Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera (2015). However, the difference here lies in students creating their own stories entirely, rather than working with provided clips. In essence, students are not mere prosumers, but rather creators of multimodal narratives.

In conclusion, this kind of proposal can provide students with motivation to engage in guided and controlled production in virtual environments. By harnessing the intersection of DAT

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with videogames, students may fully develop their creativity in virtual out-of-class environments. This approach facilitates active student engagement and empowerment in the learning process, providing opportunities for creative language content production. From a linguistic perspective, one of the key advantages is the emphasis on both input and production through multimodality, all starting from the level at which students feel comfortable.

CRediT

Reconocimientos: Al grupo de investigación Tradit, y especialmente a su IP, Noa Talaván, y a Pilar Rodríguez Arancón.

Fondos de investigación: Proyecto I+D+i TRADILEX (PID2019-107362GA-I00). State Research Agency (Agencia Estatal del Conocimiento, España) PID2019-107362GA-I00/AEI/10.13039/501100011033.

The author receives funding from FPI contracts of EIDUNED (National Distance Education University) [2022 – 2026].

Conflictos de intereses: El autor certifica que no tienen ningún interés comercial o asociativo que represente un conflicto de intereses en relación con el manuscrito.

Aprobación ética: No es necesario porque no implica investigación en seres humanos.

Contribuciones:

Conceptualización, Curaduría de datos, Análisis formal, Adquisición de fondos, Investigación, Metodología, Administración del proyecto, Recursos, Software, Supervisión, Validación, Visualización, Redacción - borrador original, Escritura - revisión y edición. TINEDO-Rodríguez, Antonio Jesús.

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