New perspectives on intercomprehension as a strategy for multilingual communication

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Outlook

- Current state of research on intercomprehension
- Researching intercomprehension: an emic-etic approach
- The practice of oral intercomprehension
- Outcomes and advancement in IC research
- Future perspectives
Current state of research on intercomprehension

- *Intercomprehension* (Ronjat, 1913; Blanche-Benveniste, 1997) occurs when people communicate with each other, each speaking his or her own language, while understanding the language of the other (Meulleman and Fiorentino, *The Mime Vademecum*, p.42);

- *Receptive multilingualism* (Braunmuller, 2007) and *Lingua Receptiva* (Rehbein, ten Thije, and Verschik, 2011): focus on the hearer’s competencies;
The practice of *intercomprehension* in our study may be considered as an interactive communication activity encompassing L1 production and L2 reception which is **collectively** and **spontaneously** undertaken by members of transnational adoptive families in the first months after adoption in order to achieve the specific objective of family bonding.
What is intercomprehension and what is it good for?
Who can benefit from training in receptive language skills?
How can IC be used in professional contexts?

What informal practice of IC tells us about its applications?
Researching intercomprehension: an emic-etic approach

Do participants report the use of intercomprehension?

- 12.5 hours of semi-structured interviews;
- 10 Italian families adopting to South-America, Russia and Ukraine;
- Children’s age (age of adoption): 4-8;
- Little knowledge of the language of the child;
- Interpretative content analysis;

(Fiorentino, 2017a; Fiorentino, 2018)
Do participants practice intercomprehension?

- 28h of non-participant observation;
- 3 Italian families adopting to Russia and Chile;
- Children’s ages: 6-8;
- Languages of origin of the children: Spanish, Russian;
- Little or no knowledge of the language of the interlocutor;
- Discourse analysis of family communication;

(Fiorentino, 2017b)
The practice of oral IC in adoptive families

- Mutually intelligible languages (Spanish-Italian):

Figure: Rate of IC discourse in the oral production of family members

Figure: Rate of IC discourse in the oral production of family members
Mutually unintelligible languages (Russian-Italian):

Figure: Rate of L1 and L2 discourse in the oral production of family members

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Outcomes and advancement in IC research (1)

Conditions conducive to IC in transnational families:

- Mutual intelligibility between languages;
- No specific linguistic advices provided;
- Routine practices settings;
- Preference for unmediated modes of communication;
Outcomes and advancement in IC research (2)

Oral intercomprehension between mutually intelligible languages arises according to:

- standard patterns where participants stick to their mother-tongue in interaction (traditional model of intercomprehension);
- hybrid patterns where participants resort to language contact phenomena like code-switching (hybrid model of intercomprehension);
es. Juan: la bajo yo no más así abajo así no más
I lower the stool like this low like this no more

it. Elsa: eh si
yes

es. Juan: así la voy a bajar uh casi me caigo
Like that I lower it uh I almost fell

it. Alessio: se cadi ti fai male rido
If you fall and you hurt yourself I laugh

es. Juan: que me caigo me caigo me caigo
I don't fall fall fall

it. Elsa: a Verona se dice se cadi e la mamma t'aveva avvertito te le ciapi anca
In Verona they say if you fall and your mum warned you you'll get a whipping

es. Juan: es fome estar en Italia
It's boring
es
Juan: y por qué a mí no me da plata?
And why you did not give me money?

it.
Alessio: perché tu sei piccolino
because you're little

c/s./it.
Juan: no soy piccolino
I am not little

es./it.
Jacopo: no tu eres un viajado- un viajador yo soy el Capitán de la nave
no you're a traveller I am the Captain of the boat

es./it.
Juan: no tú no eres el Capitán de la nave
No you're not the Captain of the boat
Main functions of code-switching in IC-like conversations:

▶ Drawing the interlocutor’s attention;
▶ Facilitate understanding by translation;
▶ Reaching agreement on the content of conversation;
Outcomes and advancement in IC research (3)

Figure 2: Intercomprehension as temporary stage of language learning
For adopted children:

- Intercomprehension represents a temporary stage of language learning which works on language intelligibility and preserves communicative efficiency;
- Communication by intercomprehension softens the transition to the new language ultimately avoiding conflicts caused by reactions of resistance or rejection of the target language;
es. Juan: y esta es mi tele te gano

this is my television I win

it. Alessio: parlagli in italiano "Jacopo per piacere mi dai un po"

talk to him in Italian "Jacopo please can you give me a little"

es. Juan: ah yo no sé en Italia

I don't know in Italy

it. Alessio: si tu sei bravo a parlare in italiano

but you are good in Italian

es. Juan: no importa

it doesn't matter

it. Alessio: ma sei capace

but you can

cs. Juan: no tengo ganas

I don't feel like
Future perspectives

▶ Further investigating the potential of intercomprehension in formal and informal environments of language acquisition requiring strong adaptation efforts (e.g. schools);
▶ Further exploring the impact of training on the spontaneous practice of intercomprehension;
▶ Further exploring the professional uses of IC;
Publications


Thanks for your attention.