

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):

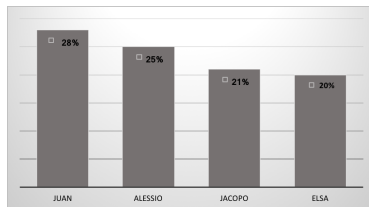
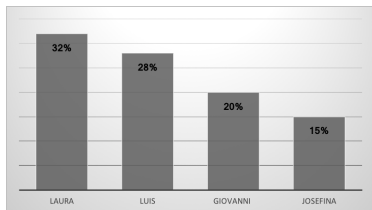


Figure: Rate of IC discourse in the oral production of family members

► Mutually unintelligible languages (Russian-Italian):

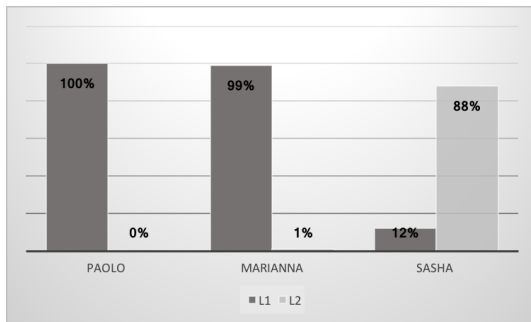


Figure: Rate of L1 and L2 discourse in the oral production of family members

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 cadì 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 dise se cadì 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? <i>And why you did not give me money?</i>
it.	Alessio :	perché tu sei piccolino because you're little
es./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 <i>no you're a traveller I am the Captain of the boat</i>
es./it.	Juan:	no tú no eres el Capitán de la nave <i>No you're not the Captain of the boat</i>

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)

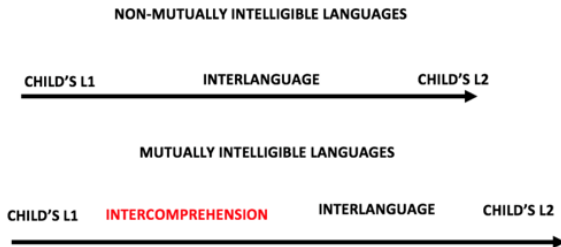


Figure 2: Intercomprehension as temporary stage of language learning

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
- es. 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

Fiorentino, A. (2017a). Strategies for language maintenance in transnational adoption: which role for the parents? *Journal of Home Language Research (JHLR)*, (2), 5-22.

Fiorentino, A., Castagne, E. (2017b). Médiation linguistique et inclusion : le cas des familles adoptives. *Synergies Chili*, (13), 39-54.

Fiorentino, A. (2018). The complementary nature of linguistic mediation in transnational adoption mobility. Accepted for publication in *Language Problems Language Planning*, (42/3), 305-320.

Thanks for you attention.