



# DELIVERABLE D3.1

State of the art on Intercomprehension

WP3



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## Abstract

The deliverable contains a bibliography drawing the State of the art on Intercomprehension, on plurilingualism, on translanguaging and it reports a list of PhD and Master thesis, followed by EU projects on Intercomprehension.

The references have been used to set up a starting point from where UNITA can start building new research, good practices, and give a solid contribution to both the theoretical and practical development of plurilingual education and multilingualism.

The document was compiled under the guidance of UNITO, to facilitate alignment between partners on knowledge of resources and competences on IC. Following this phase, the IC teaching has been consolidated and partners have become more aware of the existing tools.

After sharing grounding references and the mapping of previous and existing IC projects, WP3 has started working on good practices to be shared both internally and externally to UNITA. A UNITA framework and syllabuses for IC teaching courses to different targets is also being discussed.

This deliverable also contains a list of activities launched by WP3 from month 1 until month 4.

The activities have been proposed by each partner of the consortium and are freely available to the students of any university involved in UNITA.

## Summary

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## 1. Bibliography and state of the art on IC

With the aim of aligning the competences in the field of intercomprehension of all Alliance partners, the state of the art on the topic was defined and shared. This constituted a strategic element for the implementation and strengthening of expertise and skills in the field.

Although intercomprehension (IC) studies are a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back to the last 20 years of the last century, the amount of research carried out in this short period of time highlights a breadth of ways in which intercomprehension can be perceived and its many applications.

Three representative studies in this regard are those of Melo and Santos (2008), Jamet (2010) and Bovino and Garbarino (2022) because, although they do not cite all the definitions of the term proposed so far, they offer an overview of the various authors' positions on the attempts to define the concept of intercomprehension.

One of the definitions that reflects the line of thought defining IC as “plurality” is that of Santos and Andrade (2007:6) according to whom intercomprehension is:

*processo de interação (em presença ou à distância, síncrona ou em diferido) entre sujeitos, ou entre um sujeito e um dado verbal concreto, no qual os participantes, conscientes (e confiantes) das suas capacidades para lidar com dados verbais desconhecidos, co-constroem sentidos, chegam a um entendimento, através do recurso ao seu repertório linguístico-comunicativo, discursivo e aquisicional, concretizado pela actualização, em situação, de uma Competência Plurilingue que, por sua vez, se alimenta do ocorrido nessa mesma interação*

The second line of thought (focalization) can be distinguished into:

- Intercomprehension as an innate competence (in this subcategory the authors include the definition of Capucho (2004):

*the process of developing the ability to co-construct meaning in the context of the encounter of different languages and to make pragmatic use of this in a concrete communicative situation*

- Intercomprehension as a competence that can be taught and developed by learners (one example of a proposed definition is that of Escudé (2007: 46):

*l'intercompréhension est une compétence décisive à bâtir et à transmettre pour l'Europe et les européens de demain*

- Intercomprehension as a set of specific competences that must be developed in multilingual contact situations Doyé (2007: 489)

*The teaching of intercomprehension is of necessity individualised; for the preconditions vary from learner to learner. [...] The acquisition of intercomprehension competence lends itself to being organised as a self-directed process.*

These results highlight the different perspectives of intercomprehension, which start precisely from the various definitions one attempts to give to the concept, but, just as Melo and Santos, none of them is absolute nor does it preclude the use of more than one definition at a time.

In her study *L'intercompréhension: de la définition d'un concept à la délimitation d'un champ de recherche ou vice versa?* Jamet (2010) returns to the question, including in the research not only the definitions of scholars but also those of dictionaries. As Jamet points out, the concept of intercomprehension is present in many specialist dictionaries and a few general dictionaries, but none of them fully satisfies the need for a complete and concrete definition.

The work of Bonvino and Garbarino (2022) complements a study by Melo-Pfeifer (2018) in which the concepts used by various authors in the fields of applied linguistics and glottodidactics were analyzed.

In his study *Tensions épistémologiques en intercompréhension* (2013), Ollivier, after reviewing some of the definitions of the term intercomprehension, highlights the need to distinguish those that conceive IC in its receptive dimension and those that conceive it in its interactive dimension. This statement constitutes the first step towards an attempt to categorise intercomprehension through its dimensions. The results of this analysis show that the definitions that emphasise interactional competence over receptive competence are significantly higher than receptive competence, but Ollivier points out that these definitions, as also argued by Melo and Santos (2008), can be revised because the teaching approach linked to the development of reception strategies based on translingual transfer can easily flow into work on the development of multilingual interaction skills.

With globalisation, especially in the 2000s, it has been possible to exploit technologies to do interactive intercomprehension not only in presence but also at a distance to the extent that the latter has also been used as a teaching practice, creating veritable platforms of interaction.

In works examining these new forms of interaction, including Garbarino and Leone (2020) and Garbarino and Bonvino (2022), we find a further classification of interaction types:

- Asynchronous Written Interaction (using forums, email or social media)
- Synchronous written interaction (chats and instant messages)
- Asynchronous Oral Interaction (using voice messages);
- Synchronous Oral Interaction (video calls and video chats).

## 1.1 IC as teaching practice

The concept of intercomprehension as a teaching practice became established at European level in the mid-1990s with the Galatea and Eurom projects. These projects focused exclusively on reception skills (written and oral). The Eurom5 project (Blanche Benveniste 1997), envisaged the development of competences for the multilingual receptive comprehension of texts pertaining to a specific text type (press articles, news articles, etc.) in the target languages of the project for a predominantly adult audience. The strengths that made this project one of the reference points for subsequent work are: the development of a specific methodology based on the reading strategies possessed by each speaker in his/her mother tongue (relying on inferences and neutralisation of obstacles in order to access meaning first and reflect on opacities later); and making it clear that knowing several Romance languages (starting from the language one already knows) is a goal that can be achieved easily and in a short time. The first volume produced by the project is Eurom4, later updated in Eurom5 (Bonvino et al. 2011).

The projects have in common that they use and attempt to teach intercomprehension by exploiting the zones of transparency and correspondences (phonetic and morpho-syntactic), but Eurom also introduces notions such as the use of inference or the right of approximation in translation.

The EuroCom project (1999) - another project focused on receptive skills - for which several manuals were published on the three major European language groups (EuroComRom, EuroComGerm, EuroComSlav, to which was added in 2011 a volume on English as a bridge language between the Romance languages), does not present itself as a manual with numbered lessons and planned with a progression, but proposes a unified strategy of access to meaning with deduction techniques that exploit linguistic proximity and kinship between languages trying to use learners' linguistic transference possibilities.

The method proposed within the InterRom project (2007) extends the range of meaning deduction strategies with the application of the tools of textual and rhetorical analysis: text typology, rhetorical organisation of argumentation, textual cohesion tools.

The aim is to ensure the availability of logical and semantic patterns of textual organisation useful for the construction of meaning in texts in four Romance languages. The 'limit' of these projects is that they are, for obvious reasons, anchored in the receptive dimension of intercomprehension.

The pioneer project for interactive intercomprehension was Galanet (Carrasco 2006). This platform makes it possible to organise training sessions with groups of participants located in different countries (in Europe and/or outside Europe).

There is thus a shift from scenarios conveyed by manuals (Eurom4.5; Galatea) to a type of task-based teaching (TBL, Task Based Learning). This opening also corresponds to a further expansion of strategies that are no longer based on purely linguistic aspects, such as intonation, scansion, rhythm

or prosody, but also extralinguistic aspects, such as gestures, mimicry and multimodality.

The Galanet and Galapro projects merged into the Miriadi project (Degache 2018) which made it possible to continue these distance learning activities, bringing together the content already present in the other platforms with new content and tools suitable for developing skills in intercomprehension.

## 1.2 UNITA and IC

A key element of the UNITA project is the attempt to leave the boundaries of the discipline open to all fields of study (with particular reference to Language for Specific Purposes and Academic communication), avoiding delimiting the field of action, so as to open up the acquisition of strategies by proposing differentiated teaching materials according to prior competences and by objectives. With regard to the preparation of teaching materials for the trainings proposed in UNITA, activities were created linked to different approaches, building on the strengths of the previous projects and attempting to propose a gradual progression in the acquisition of intercomprehension skills: from an initial approach to receptive intercomprehension along with asynchronous interactive intercomprehension to the final goal of intercommunication. The initial materials for the development of receptive IC competences were created on the model proposed by Eurom5, with the comprehension of written texts in several languages but, unlike the previously mentioned model, oral text comprehension activities were also included (with the support of monolingual and multilingual videos). Parallel to these activities, learners are called upon to interact on forums (on the Moodle platform), as on the Miriadi platform, initially to practice interactive IC through free conversation topics and later, using a Task-Based approach, to design the final group work together or comment on the work of other learners. For the preparation of the final work, learners are also called upon for synchronous interaction based on Teletandem interactions (e.g. IOTT), and they use platforms such as Zoom, Meet or Webex for interaction. Very often these interaction sessions are recorded for the learners to make them reflect on interaction and interproduction strategies.

As for assessment, REFIC would seem to be more appropriate for the assessment of learners with non-language training since its descriptors are more open to different scenarios, but for the appropriate assessment of learners from other training contexts (such as students from other grades of the school system) there is still much to be done.

Since the UNITA audience comes from totally different contexts, the aim is to elaborate descriptors to evaluate each type of learner by distinguishing the evaluation of learners with language training from that of learners with a completely different background. The IC PhD student, together with WP3 TF, is working on this matter. Therefore, a new issue of this deliverable will be presented at



the end of the project.

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## Projects

EVAL-IC <http://evalic.eu/>

EUROM 5 <https://www.eurom5.com/>

GALANET <http://galanet.eu/>

GALAPRO <http://www.galapro.eu/>

GALATEA <http://w3.u-grenoble3.fr/galatea/>

MIRIADI <https://www.miriadi.net/>

RENDITER <http://www.redinter.eu/>

## 2. Activities launched M1-M4

Right from M2 a PhD scholarship has been offered to a student who will develop research around IC throughout the project's life span. The core of the thesis is the development of a UNITA reference framework for evaluation of IC competences (starting from REFIC and EVAL-IC) in targets that have never been considered in research so far: students of foreign languages vs students of other subjects; university teachers; university staff.

A first review of the existing literature and a SWOT analysis of previous projects have been carried out, integrating the knowledge and skills of more expert partners with the others. This has been a formative experience for the many participants, as materials, approaches, experiences have been analyzed and will serve as a basis for further development.

The first IC training was delivered in the first semester 2020 at UNITO for students (63 participants). From that first teaching course, the training experiences have multiplied in different directions. This first experience showed the need to offer and consolidate targeted training in IC for teachers (under the guidance of Unito, which has experience in the field). Thus, a "training course for trainers" (50 hours, 42 participants) was organized by Unito and the associated partner UniRomaTre in spring/summer 2021; as result, all the institutions were able to start their own teaching courses and manage autonomously IC trainings. The syllabus developed is groundbreaking as it is the first of its kind and will be offered as a certified course (digital open badge) open to anyone interested to become an IC teacher, also outside the Alliance.

Moreover, UPPA and USMB also hired IC pedagogical engineers to support WP3 task force and deliver IC teaching courses. The Erasmus teaching courses have been set up and IC teaching courses are offered as COIL. In addition, teaching courses for academic and non-academic staff have been implemented.

The pre-mobility course for Erasmus students has been set as well in a COIL form, envisaging the collaboration of different teachers representing all the languages of the alliance, and a Language for Specific Purposes (Renewable Energy) module has been produced and has been first tested in summer 2021.