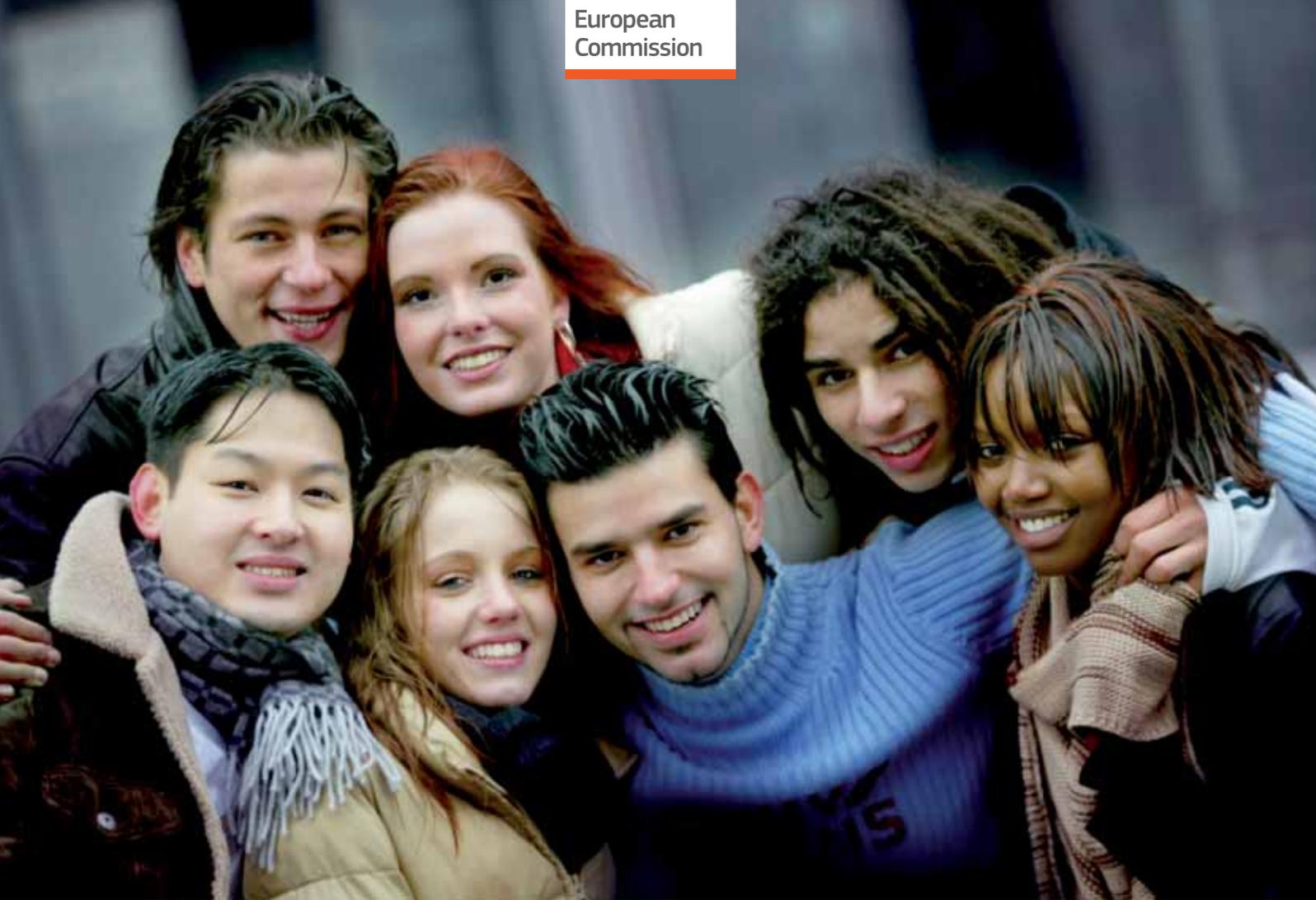




European
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Studies on translation and multilingualism

Intercomprehension

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012

Manuscript completed in January 2012

ISBN 978-92-79-24804-7

doi:10.2782/63143

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Printed in Belgium

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Intercomprehension

Exploring its usefulness for DGT, the Commission and the EU

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why a study on intercomprehension?

Intercomprehension is a relatively new field in linguistic research, which has focused mainly on the usefulness of intercomprehension in language teaching. The present study aims at broadening this scope. The study does not pretend to be academic, but to describe how intercomprehension is used in organisations, companies and society at large, and look into how the European Commission could benefit from intercomprehension.

Intercomprehension refers to a relationship between languages in which speakers of different but related languages can readily understand each other without intentional study or extraordinary effort. It is a form of communication in which each person uses his/her own language and understands that of the other(s).

Intercomprehension is used in society, education and the business world. Since its precondition is the existence of more languages, the same as for translation, it seems logical to explore to what extent translation can benefit from intercomprehension. The study aims to examine the potential of intercomprehension for:

a) **Society and the European citizens**

How mutually intelligible are certain languages? The present study deals with questions of democracy and linguistic diversity and the importance of intercomprehension for transparency, European integration and cohesion between Member States and people. It looks into how it is being or can be used in private companies. The impact of intercomprehension on education and language learning is of particular relevance and a significant part of the study will be dedicated to this.

b) **Multilingualism within the European institutions**

This part deals in particular with the role of intercomprehension in the work of the European Commission, the relevance of intercomprehension in terms of the quality of translation and what impact it may have on the work flow and recruitment, bearing in mind Council Regulation 1/58.¹ The implications for translator training and profile will also be examined.

Due to the ongoing economic crisis in Europe, the European Commission and the other institutions are facing more severe budgetary constraints. The Commission adopted a proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020 in July 2011. It defines the budgetary means for all policies and programmes at European level until 2020 and will be decisive in shaping the EU in the coming years. It sets out measures that will also have an impact on the Directorate-General for Translation, which will have to make substantial savings.

The 2010 EU Budget Review calls for a 'rigorous search for increased efficiency and performance in administrative resources' and explicitly mentions 'the costs of working in 23 languages'.² Furthermore, it advocates more *intelligent spending* and more synergies between the EU Institutions in the area of translation. In this context, DGT is committed to considering ways of saving costs.

One reason for this study is therefore to see if the Commission can use intercomprehension to reduce translation costs, while maintaining a functioning

¹ Regulation determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community, OJ B 17, 6.10.1958, 385, as amended.

² See [COM\(2010\) 700](#), 19.

multilingual translation service and fully respecting the EU's language regime. Could intercomprehension help enhance the efficiency of translation in the European Union? The current translation regime faces further challenges with up-coming enlargements and the ever-growing burden of documents that have to be translated.

The current translation regime at the European Commission is under scrutiny by Member States and other stakeholders: some maintain that not enough is translated, while others claim that translation and interpretation are too expensive. Another aim is therefore to look into whether intercomprehension can reduce the number of language versions for certain categories of documents and how this could be achieved.

Intercomprehension is also in line with the political priorities of the European Union and European integration. The 2005 European Commission communication *A new framework strategy for multilingualism*³ reaffirmed the value of linguistic diversity and stressed the need for a broader policy to promote multilingualism. The 2008 European Commission communication *Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment*⁴ stresses that passive language knowledge and intercomprehension should be explored. It states that:

The value of passive language knowledge should be further explored, and appropriate language learning methods enhanced to allow understanding and basic communication across different languages.

The Council of Europe and the European Parliament have repeated the need to value passive knowledge and understanding of languages similar to one's own (Doyé 2005). The 'Maalouf report', *A Rewarding Challenge*⁵, distinguishes between a 'language of international communication' and a 'personal adoptive language'. It recommends that language learning should lead to two separate decisions: one based on the broadest communication needs and the other based on various personal motives linked to family background, professional interest, emotional ties, intellectual curiosity, etc. The adoptive language includes the written word and passive knowledge, and helps to develop intercultural, multilingual competence for non-linguists. If the European Commission wants to promote multilingualism in the Member States, it has to set the example. Both scholars and politicians agree that intercomprehension is a valuable tool for multilingualism, diversification and flexibility (Doyé 2005).

Intercomprehension plays a role in people's daily lives in society: it is important in language learning, news gathering and information sharing, and in commercial contacts. This study will describe the role and the advantages of intercomprehension in these areas, as well its limitations.

Intercomprehension can improve the results of language teaching, especially when it comes to reading and listening comprehension. This is theoretically plausible and has already brought convincing results (Gagné 1975). Professor Peter Doyé notes that one of the most remarkable and challenging ideas in the field of plurilingual education is intercomprehension (Doyé 2005, 60). Competences such as reading and listening comprehension were already highlighted in the EU White Paper *Education and Training — Teaching and Learning — Towards the Learning Society* (November 1995).

Intercomprehension is also crucial in newsgathering. Plurilingual reading comprehension is an indispensable skill for picking up new findings from abroad, especially when they

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/doc/com596_en.pdf.

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/languages/pdf/comm2008_en.pdf.

⁵ *A Rewarding Challenge, How the Multiplicity of Languages could strengthen Europe*, Proposals from the Group of Intellectuals for Intercultural Dialogue set up at the initiative of the European Commission Brussels 2008, page 11, http://ec.europa.eu/education/languages/archive/doc/maalouf/report_en.pdf.

originate from non-English speaking countries (Meissner 2004, 209). José Manuel Vez underlines the fact that intercomprehension works particularly well in specific domains that have an international vocabulary, such as press articles on foreign policy, current affairs and topics that are common in European mass media (Vez 2004, 433).

Finally, intercomprehension is vital in commercial contacts. It facilitates international trade, and can promote tourism and help consumer relations. The proportion of English language sites on the internet has been decreasing since 2003, which means that the main product information is increasingly being given in the language of the country concerned. This gives a competitive advantage to companies that have staff with a reading knowledge of languages other than English (Klein 2004, 17-18). Engineers, scientists, technicians and economists benefit from being able to understand texts in languages they have not studied, without having to resort to time-consuming translations (Vez 2004, 432).

1.2. Defining intercomprehension

Intercomprehension refers to a relationship between languages in which speakers of different but related languages can readily understand each other without intentional study or extraordinary effort (Vez 2004, 432, Capucho & Lungu 2005). It is a form of communication in which each person uses his/her own language and understands that of the other(s) (Pinho & Andrade, 2009).

Intercomprehension exists in differing degrees between many related and/or geographically close languages. It is a day-to-day practice in multilingual societies and has become a pedagogical and political tool with vast possibilities for communication between peoples of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Blanche-Benveniste 2008, Grin 2009). The aim is not always to fully understand a text or utterances but to get the gist of a text or communication (Vez 2004, 433).

Intercomprehension is generally characterised by the fact that an individual has two or more foreign languages at his or her disposal in addition to his or her mother tongue (Meissner, 31). Professor Georges Lüdi points out that a broad range of multilingual repertoires is available to the multilingual speaker, as opposed to the monolingual speaker (Rehbein, ten Tije, Verschik 2010, 12; Lüdi, 2007). The analysis of the Dylan project also shows that the use of multilingual repertoires serves as a resource for the construction, transmission and use of knowledge (The Dylan Project Booklet 2011, 17). In receptive-passive multilingualism (also referred to as *lingua receptiva* or intercomprehension) the interlocutors make alternating use of their diverse linguistic repertoires (Rehbein, ten Tije, Verschik 2010, 12).

Most individuals have to invest considerable time and effort in mastering a language other than their mother tongue. However, some related languages are so similar in terms of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation that speakers of one language can understand the other language without prior instructions. This type of intercomprehension, which is referred to with terms such as 'semicomcommunication' (Haugen 1966) or 'receptive multilingualism' (Braunmüller & Zeevaert 2001), has many advantages. For instance, the Max Planck institute for Educational Research found out that German students of Spanish with some knowledge of French learn their second Romance language significantly more quickly than those whose reference language is Latin (Stern & Haag 2000). Studies of the growth of competence in bilingual children also show the fundamental role of interlanguage processing and interlingual comparison (Meissner 2004, 33). If two languages are not too distant from each other, the process sometimes shows similar activities, which can be observed in the field of acquisition of a third or fourth language (Meissner 2004, 33; Voorwinde 1981; Wenzel 2000).

Intercomprehension between languages can be asymmetric, with speakers of one understanding more of the other language than speakers of the other understand the first. For instance, many Portuguese can easily understand Spaniards who, on the other hand, find it more difficult to understand Portuguese.

According to some definitions, two or more languages that demonstrate a sufficiently high degree of intercomprehension should not be considered two distinct languages but, in fact, multiple varieties of the same language. Conversely, it is sometimes the case that different varieties of what are considered the same language (according to popular conception or political stance) are *not*, in fact, always mutually intelligible in practice.

Franz-Joseph Meissner stresses that inference phenomena are relatively well known all over the world. Often African and Asian students regularly use the European language they already know — mostly English or French — when approaching a new European target language (Meissner 2004, 33). For the same reason, international learning arrangements for German, French or Italian as foreign languages often refer to English as an intermediate language to facilitate the acquisition of these languages (Hufeisen 1993).

Apart from receptive intercomprehension which does not rely on intentional study described above, intercomprehension works between languages that have been studied and learned by the speakers. Intercomprehension can be both *inherent* and *acquired*. The former relies on language features that are available to interlocutors prior to any language learning, whereas the latter requires some acquired knowledge and thus allows for constellations between less related languages. The distinction between inherent and acquired receptive multilingualism can be compared to a dichotomy of languages that are mutually intelligible and those that are not (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010; Zeevaert 2010).

Another important factor is awareness. Braunmüller (2007) underlines that speakers' awareness of the mutual intelligibility of languages plays an important role. Speakers of languages that are mutually intelligible, for instance Spanish and Italian, have to be made aware of it. Anne Ribbert and Jan ten Thije also underline that language users arguably have to be familiar with the phenomenon of receptive multilingualism itself in order to adequately use it (Ribbert and ten Thije 2007, 78).

The third factor is ideological. Attitudes can either enhance or block comprehension between communities and languages that are mutually intelligible (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010). Examples of attitudes that promote intercomprehension can be found between the Scandinavian languages in Nordic cooperation, whereas intercomprehension is sometimes hampered by the attitudes of the speakers of the languages of the Western Balkans. Negative attitudes can block comprehension in one direction whereas the other is still active (Irvine & Gal, 2009). The more equally the two groups are represented in terms of number and status, the more probable it is that intercomprehension is used (Ribbert and ten Thije 2007, 77). For instance, ten Thije and Robbert observe that ever more students are studying Dutch in Germany whereas German is becoming less popular in the Netherlands. The languages are being considered as more equal in status, which increases the chances of intercomprehension being used.

A fourth factor relates to experience or the institutional language policy (Beerkens 2009), explicit personal agreement of social actors or a shared communication experience (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010; Ribbert & ten Thije 2007), for instance language practices at work places. Haugen has constructed the concept of semi-communication on the premise that interlocutors depend highly on their experience, meaning that speakers have to learn to understand the language of the other (Haugen). Also the degree of cooperation between colleagues at work places, for instance, determines whether intercomprehension is used or not. Colleagues who know each other well, know what languages they can

make themselves understood in (Ribbert and ten Thije 2007, 77; Koole and ten Thije 1994).

Closely linked to this are context and situation. Language competences are determined in the course of practical activities that are linked to specific sociocultural contexts and to particular forms of action and interaction (Georges Lüdi 2007, 166).

One can also be trained in intercomprehension. The aim of the training is to improve the understanding of mutually intelligible languages. Often training is necessary for intercomprehension to work. This aspect will be addressed in a separate chapter on intercomprehension and language teaching/learning below.⁶

1.3. The historical background

Linguistic constellations in the 19th century evolved into monolingual societies through nation state formation. On the contrary the Middle Ages were characterised by various kinds of multilingual constellations, including intercomprehension or what Jan ten Thije defines as receptive multilingualism (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010).

Professor Horst G. Klein mentions in *FAQ zur romanischen Interkomprehension* that, as early as the 16th century, the Jews in the translation schools in Spain's imperial capital Toledo were exploiting the advantages of intercomprehension when reading and writing texts in the Semitic Hebrew and Arabic languages.

Today's Arabic is an excellent example of intercomprehension between the different variants in, for example, the Lebanon, Egypt and Morocco. During the last decade, Turkey has been trying to sell its cultural and commercial products to countries such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, benefiting from the fact that the Turkic languages are mutually understood (Klein 2004).

The first academic discovery of this phenomenon dates back to 1952, when Voegelin and Harris reported on the intelligibility among American Indian dialects due to their close genetic relationship. The Indians possessed inherent comprehension from another dialect that made a certain degree of understanding possible. (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010).

An example of literary intercomprehension is that of Chinese characters which are understood in all parts of China, despite the often very different regional dialects. The Chinese characters are also understood by the Japanese, despite the fact that the languages are very different. (While Chinese and Japanese people can understand either language in its written form, this is not the case for spoken Chinese or Japanese).

According to linguists, there are many languages in Africa that belong to separate language families but are mutually intelligible to their speakers (Klein 2009). For example Keshi Prah, a Ghanaian sociolinguist working in one of Cape Town's universities in South Africa, has established that intercomprehension is used between several families of African languages which cross the continent from east to west. Surveys carried out in Mali on the Dogon language have identified a standard way of speaking that has a 70% degree of intercomprehension with the region's eight other dialects. Yet it is generally accepted that villagers from two neighbouring villages in this zone are unable to understand one another, since their languages are so different (Olabiya Babalola Joseph Yai 2008).

⁶ An example of acquired intercomprehension is the Swiss model, where politicians and civil servants use their mother tongue (either German, French or Italian) in federal meetings in the capital Bern.

More recently, the Warsaw Pact (1955-1991) had nine official languages but Russian was often used as a lingua franca and understood by the speakers of the other Slavic languages. Intercomprehension of the Nordic languages is used in meetings of the Nordic Council, where the delegates speak either Danish, Norwegian or Swedish in its plenary and committee sessions and are understood by the other delegates without interpretation.

1.4. Intercomprehension today

At the end of the 20th century, with the development of new theories on foreign language learning, such as the concept of partial competences, intercomprehension gave hope that learners could develop at least some understanding of the languages belonging to the same family.

Intercomprehension has therefore become established as an approach in quite a number of European countries and regions. For a long time, linguists have been interested in the question of how similarities between related languages are recognised and processed. In the last few years, researchers in language education have begun to explore the ways of promoting intercomprehension through the development of translinguistic methods (Meissner and Reinfried 1998). Intercomprehension gained momentum in the 1990s, attracting the attention of linguists, educationalists and politicians and being explored in language education more intensively (Pinho & Andrade 2009; Capucho, Martins, Degache, & Tost 2007; Doyé, 2005). Research and education projects developed since then have contributed to the expansion of its application, scope and meaning (Pinho & Andrade 2009).

According to Pinho and Andrade, the concept of intercomprehension has been through several shifts. Firstly from an intralinguistic perspective, intercomprehension was perceived as a capacity to understand speakers of a language (its dialects and varieties). It then moved to an interlinguistic perspective applicable to language families and associated with receptive (written and/or oral) multilingual capacities (Pinho & Andrade 2009) before progressing to plurilingual interaction, the place where the collaborative action towards intercomprehension takes place. Finally, in recent years, an attempt has been made to extend and associate intercomprehension with a broader capacity dealing with verbal language across language families (Degache & Melo 2008). However, most of the projects on intercomprehension still concern languages within one family, in most of the cases within the Romance language group.

According to Melo and Santos (2008), the pedagogical character of intercomprehension and its interconnectedness with the domain of multi-/plurilingualism and language awareness are pertinent to all authors and projects focused on intercomprehension.

The concept of intercomprehension has been under intense discussion for more than 20 years. Nearly all of the research on intercomprehension has been conducted in European project teams, which have studied the concept and its use in the process of language learning. Most of the research is linked to education and has been done within language families and in project form. The language constellations that have been studied so far are the European languages families, such as Romance (Jensen 1989; Conti & Grin, 2008), Germanic (Haugen 1981, Braunmüller, 2007, Zeevaert, 2004) Slavic (Nabelkova, 2008), Finno-Ugric (Vershik), Turkic (Rehbein, Herkenrath & Karakoc, 2009), Indo-Iranian and Semitic, as well as some languages which are in close contact with them (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010).

The academic research on intercomprehension has mainly been confined to projects, the most important of which are mentioned below.

The *GalaNet* and *GalaPro* projects have established didactic concepts that integrate intercomprehension into general language teaching (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010).

- *GalaTea* which started in 1991 and finished in 1999, promoted the development of intercomprehension among speakers of the Romance languages (Capucho & Lungu 2005)
- *GalaPro* (2008-2010) offers training on intercomprehension to teacher trainers. The project delivers online courses for teachers based on GalaNet platforms to enable collaboration in multilingual educational settings (French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese).

EuroComRom (Eurocomprehension in Romance languages) is the biggest and most developed of all the projects. The EuroCom project develops language-specific strategies that target receptive competences within the Romance languages (Bahtina & ten Thije 2010). The EuroComRom method uses the close relationship of the Romance languages to promote reading comprehension among students who have learnt only one of these languages and wish to understand the others. EuroCom has broadened its scope to include the Germanic and Slavic language groups as well.

The benefits of the EuroCom concept apply to three, mutually supporting levels: language policy, language teaching and linguistics. Language policy influences the teaching concepts (teaching receptive competence via interlingual transfer bases) while its implementation requires research into intercomprehension (i.e. linguistic research into how the relationship between languages in the same group can be exploited) (Klein, Meissner and Zybatow 2011).

Other projects that see intercomprehension as a necessary complement to the language teaching provided in schools are the following:

- *The Chain stories* project creates chains of stories that are written collaboratively by children using their mother tongue and their understanding of the languages of other countries. The languages are Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Italian and French (Capucho & Lungu 2008).
- *IGLO (Intercomprehension in Germanic Languages Online)* aims to promote cross-linguistic understanding among seven Germanic languages by focusing on their similarities and differences. The goal is a web-based programme showing the relationships among the seven languages with the purpose of facilitating comprehension of more than one of them at a time (Doyé 2005).
- *Intercomprehension in Slavic Languages* is based on the hypothesis that learners who know one Slavic language can easily widen their linguistic horizon by a systematic transfer of their knowledge to other languages of the Slavic family (Doyé 2005).

The languages have to be from the same language family for people to benefit from the relatedness of their mother tongue to neighbouring languages.

There are other projects, which principally examine cases of languages across borders and therefore emphasise the role of non-linguistic factors in their research (Doyé 2005).

- In the *EU+1 (European Awareness and intercomprehension)* project, intercomprehension is seen not only as the linguistic transfer between languages of the same family, but as a framework for a general interpretative process, which underlines all communicative strategy (Capucho 2002).

- The *ILTE (Intercomprehension in Language Teacher Education)* project aims to prepare teachers for the task of helping their students to transfer knowledge and skills from one language to another. The language proximity factor is important, but they also look to include non-Indo-European languages (Doyé 2005).
- *Intercom* (2007-2009) is another project involving languages from different families. It aims to develop reading skills in German, Portuguese, Bulgarian and Greek at A2 level (Capucho & Lungu)
- *REDINTER (Rede Europeia de Intercompreensão)* (2008-2011) is a thematic network which aims to develop intercomprehension and related practices, identify existing materials and experience and publish a report with recommendations.

The EU-sponsored Dylan project stresses that mixing languages enhances creativity and innovative thinking. The Dylan booklet mentions 'multilanguaging' and gives the example of a manager, responsible for chairing a meeting attended by ten totally new people, who said: '*so you bring them together, and you find a language, and it is a mixture between German and English, in a way we found our own Esperanto ...*'.

The Dylan project underlines the importance of receptive language skills and understanding. It points out that language skills can be looked at differently, as described in the booklet: '*What some people condemn as "lack of mastery in any language" is praised by others as a down-to-earth solution in practical situations*'.

Regarding 'multilanguaging', the Dylan project admits that it has its short-comings and does not cover all situations in which people do not share the same language because of, for example, the risk of misunderstandings. Therefore, multilanguaging cannot replace professional interpretation and the crucial work of translators as mediators between people and institutions speaking different languages.

The Scandinavian languages, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, are examples of languages which are so closely related that they are mutually intelligible. In the past, a number of studies were carried out in order to get a precise picture of the actual level of understanding between speakers of these languages (e.g. Bø 1978; Börestam 1987).

The three West Germanic languages, Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans, form another group of languages that are so closely related that a high level of mutual intelligibility can be expected. However, in contrast to the Scandinavian languages, semicommunication is not the usual manner of communication between the speakers of these languages. Speakers of Dutch are generally not interested in Frisian, whereas all Frisians are bilingual. Afrikaans can be understood on the basis of Dutch, at least to a certain extent.

There is currently no Europe-wide project covering the Scandinavian and the West Germanic languages, but they are the topic of exhaustive research carried out by Charlotte Gooskens and her team at the Department of Scandinavian Studies of the University of Groningen.

2. Intercomprehension in language teaching

José Manuel Vez, Professor of Language Education at the University of Santiago de Compostela, summarises the methodology of intercomprehension as 'discovering and anticipating'. He argues that it can start with guessing, which later turns into understanding (Vez 2004, 433).

Intercomprehension has a very solid psychological foundation. It rests on the interplay of people's knowledge of language and their ability to exploit previously acquired knowledge. Human beings possess general interpretative skills that allow them to comprehend messages. Normally, these messages are encoded in linguistic systems that the individual has learnt. But the interpretative process is basically the same when they are encoded in 'unfamiliar' systems. For the purpose of intercomprehension, any knowledge in any area that helps interpret the signs of languages one has not studied can be exploited (Doyé 2005, 10).

Developing intercomprehension skills entails the construction of partial reception competences (Capucho & Oliveira 2005). In other words, intercomprehension does not imply learning a foreign language, but rather the acquisition of receptive strategies, in order to co-construct a meaning from clues provided by different sources. Since contact with a foreign language is based on receptive competence, intercomprehension strategies should, therefore, be quicker to acquire and less 'intimidating' to use than producing discourse in a foreign language (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 214).

In modern educational systems, language learning has had the objective of making the individual capable of oral and written linguistic production, striving for 'perfect bilingualism' (D. Coste, D. Moore et G. Zarate 1997, 33).

Jean René Ladmiraal accepts that the 'direct teaching' method, in giving priority to the spoken word and to linguistic immersion, aims to introduce students to a foreign culture, but he laments the fact that it tends to reinforce general cultural trends in favour of the English language (Ladmiraal 1994, 38-39). The direct teaching method does not allow transversal paths because it views languages as closed, complete systems that live in isolation, a vision inherited from the structuralist world view of the 1960s and 1970s. It also bears the mark of modern European heritage which would prefer to see language boundaries coinciding with the borders. (C. Blanche-Benveniste 2008, 34).

The use of intercomprehension in language teaching acknowledges the fact that languages do not exist in isolation, but that there are links between languages that facilitate language learning. Naturally, translation is an important instrument in applying intercomprehension in language learning.

Based on the fact that most learners possess considerable resources of useable knowledge that can be exploited, Peter Doyé stresses that the teacher's task is: to make their pupils aware of this knowledge and to enable them to use this knowledge by developing the appropriate strategies.

Suzanne Burtley and Cathy Pophrey at London Metropolitan University describe intercomprehension as an approach to educating future language teachers. It aims to develop knowledge and understanding of what language is and how it works (Burtley & Pophrey 2004, 248).

The central methodological hypothesis is that all learners using the intercomprehension method have some knowledge in various categories at their disposal, which they can

exploit, and that teachers can help them develop the strategies to use this knowledge for understanding new texts (Doyé 2005, 10-13). According to Doyé, these categories are:

General knowledge

A person's general knowledge of the world, their general encyclopaedic knowledge, determines his or her understanding. Intercomprehension builds on a person's encyclopaedic knowledge of the world to achieve comprehension of actual documents (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 216).

Cultural knowledge

According to the Intercomprehension in Language Teacher Education (ILTE) report (ILTE report, 6), language and culture are inseparable aspects of language learning; language is not only structures and words but is also culture and communication.

Burley and Pomphrey state that intercomprehension varies with the social, cultural and political context in which language teacher education takes place (Burley & Pomphrey 2003, 247). When listening to a discussion or reading a text, the learners might find sentences referring to facts or to events in a particular culture. Learners make use of their knowledge of other cultures and/or the relationship of these cultures to their own. They recognise certain place names or personal names and infer that the text deals with an event in a specific culture. The knowledge they use might be stereotypical and contain false generalisations, but even if it is stereotypical it may be helpful for a first rough orientation, according to Doyé (Doyé 2005, 14-15). This includes socio-cultural knowledge about the universe of reference, i.e. knowledge of the world (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 216).

Situational knowledge

Every text is embedded in a situation. The persons who produce it, when it occurs, where it is used, etc., give many indications about its contents. Just like oral discourse, written texts tend to depend on contextual elements. They all give clues which the readers or listeners can use for a basic understanding of the text. This dimension includes knowledge about genres (Doyé 2005, 15, Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 214). But it also includes the ability to adapt to new situations. Transfer of knowledge of a genre and what it conveys is an intercomprehension strategy (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 214-215).

Behavioural knowledge

Familiarity with the behaviour of one's own culture and also how it interacts with other cultures entails recognising non-verbal signs and interpreting them on the basis of previously acquired behavioural knowledge.

Pragmatic knowledge

Pragmatic knowledge is closest to situational knowledge, for quite often the situation in which a text appears gives clues to the purpose it serves (Doyé 2005, 63).

Graphic knowledge

On the basis of previously encountered writing systems, the learners make assumptions about the writing system used in a given text (Doyé 2005, 63).

Phonological knowledge

On the basis of previously learnt sound systems, listeners make inferences in order to discover the meaning of spoken languages (Doyé 2005, 64).

Grammatical knowledge

On the basis of previously encountered grammatical systems, learners make assumptions about the grammatical structures used in a given text. If these appear familiar, learners can, with some justification, assume that the grammatical structures used correspond to some degree to the structures of previously acquired languages (Doyé 2005, 64).

Meissner has introduced the concept of a 'hypothetical grammar', by which he means the set of hypotheses through which learners attempt to structure features of texts of unknown languages based on their previous grammatical knowledge. This hypothetical, or spontaneous grammar as Meissner calls it, is a kind of interlanguage (Meissner 2003, 40).

Lexical knowledge

Two kinds of prior lexical knowledge can be applied by learners who approach a new language: their international vocabulary and the vocabulary they possess because the languages they have learnt so far are closely related to the language they wish to comprehend. There are three language families in Europe whose coherence can be exploited: Romance, Germanic and Slavic.

All official languages in the European Union except Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian and Maltese belong to the Indo-European group and therefore possess common structures and vocabulary. On average, an adult European has 4000 easily recognisable words at their disposal. These international words are similar in most European languages. The authors of the Seven Sieves (meaning seven steps), William J. McCann, Horst G. Klein, Tilbert D. Stegmann, which forms an essential part of the EuroComRom project,, have examined the benefits offered by the close interrelationship between the Romance languages, which we describe in the following section. We find it a good illustration of how intercomprehension and optimised deduction can enhance language learning.

2.1. Intercomprehension in learning Romance languages

Most research on intercomprehension and language teaching is concentrated on the Romance language family. The EuroComRom project, and its aim of optimised deduction, is an example of how intercomprehension can work between the Romance languages. **Horst G. Klein** gives an example of how intercomprehension works within the major European language groups the EuroComRom project.

The aim of the EuroCom strategy is to facilitate European multilingualism in a realistic way, with less rather than more learning effort and without making excessive demands in terms of competence (by recognising the value of partial linguistic competence for purposes of communication). EuroCom should be understood as a necessary complement to the language teaching provided in schools. Most European schools provide many of their students — with varying degrees of success — with competence in *one* language (usually English), and some even offer a second (French, German, Spanish), but without reaching a situation which reflects the linguistic variety of Europe that might lead to some kind of pan-European competence. As well as acting as a complement to conventional language teaching, EuroCom hopes to encourage a reform of the system, to make language learning much easier.

The EuroCom project stresses that no foreign language is totally unknown territory and that conventional language teaching presents learners with the 'demotivating' impression that they are starting 'the language from square one without any previous knowledge whatsoever'. EuroCom, on the other hand, strives to show learners all the things that they can deduce from a simple text in the new language. EuroCom enables learners (according to the website <http://www.eurocomresearch.net>) to recognise structural elements they already know in the unknown language, e.g. in lexical material and in terms of sounds, morphology, word-formation and syntax. The aim of EuroCom is *optimised deduction*. This technique enables learners to make use of what they already know and make deductions in an efficient way. The principle is simple: to be able to make deductions that help in the recognition of elements of a text and to communicate effectively at a rudimentary level is an achievement in itself. The language learning method of EuroCom is divided into seven steps, called the *Seven Sieves*.

The *First Sieve* extracts *international words* from a text. Since this vocabulary is derived largely from Latin and present in most modern European languages, it benefits learners of the Romance languages. Adults normally have about 5 000 of these easily recognisable words in their vocabulary.

The *Second Sieve* makes use of vocabulary that is common to the Romance language family, the *pan-Romance Vocabulary*. It shows how one Romance language can open doors to the others.

The *Third Sieve* uses lexical relationships between the languages by turning to the recognition of *sound correspondences*, so that learners can recognise the relationships between the words and therefore their meaning. For instance, if the French word *nuit* corresponds to the Spanish word *noche* and the Italian word *notte*, then logically the Spanish word *leche* and the Italian word *latte* should correspond to the French *lait*.

The *Fourth Sieve* is about *spelling and pronunciation*. The Romance languages generally use the same letters for writing the same sounds. However, some spelling solutions are different and can hinder the recognition of the relationships between words and meanings. Learners only have to concentrate on a few specific phenomena. Some of the conventions of pronunciation are also demonstrated and used to point out the relationships between words, as words which are written differently may well sound quite similar.

The example from EuroComRom below shows how links can be used between the pronunciation of the bridging language(s), or a source language and their graphic realisation in related languages.

The spelling of the French *campagne* corresponds to an intercomprehensive Eurolexeme, and not just in the Romance countries. The aim of this example is to help learners grasp the graphic correspondence of the n-sound in the Romance languages (Klein, Meissner & Zybatow, 2011).

Gn <i>signore, vigna,</i> ≈ <i>Campagna</i>	Gn	fr. <i>seigneur, vigne, campagne</i>
	Ny	cat. <i>senyor, vinya, campanya</i>
	Nh	port. <i>senhor, vinha, campanha</i>
	ne , ni	rom. <i>senior, vi*e?, campanie</i>
	Ñ	s <i>señor, viña, campaña</i>

The rules enable pan-Romanistic characteristics to be deduced even in words which are less internationally well known than *campagne*, and also to relate groups of words to each other, such as:

It. vigna, Sp. viña, and Port. vinha.

Another example shows how somebody can apply intercomprehension, A person reading a Portuguese text and encountering a word starting with *ch-* [ʃh] should be able to spot a link with *three* Romance groups of consonants, namely [kl], [pl] and [fl]. In the Portuguese examples *chave* [Latin: *clavem*], *cheio* [Latin: *plenum*] and *chama* [Latin: *flamma*], the initial grapheme *ch-* has three different historical initial forms and therefore different correspondences:

ch-[s] <i>chave, chamar</i>	Cl	fr. <i>clef (clé), [ac]clamer</i>
	chi	it. <i>chiave, chiamare</i>
	Cl	cat. <i>clau, clamara</i>
	che	rom. <i>cheie, a chema</i>
	ll	sp. <i>llave, llamar</i>

ch-[s] <i>cheio, chãõ</i>	Pl	fr. <i>plein, plan</i>
	pi	it. <i>pieno, piano</i>
	Pl	cat. <i>ple, pla</i>
	Pl	rom. <i>plin, plan</i>
	ll	sp. <i>lleno, llano</i>

ch-[s] <i>Chama</i>	≈	Fl fr. <i>Flamme</i> Fi it. <i>fiamma</i> Fl cat. <i>Flama</i> Fl rom. <i>fl-</i> [<i>flaut, fluviu</i>] ll sp. <i>Llama</i>
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Often all that needs to be done is to bring pronunciation and written conventions into congruence with each other, such as in the case of the following Romanian words: **meci**, **chec**, **șnițel**, **gheizerul**. Only by knowing that *-ci* is a writing convention for [-tsh], *ch-* for [k], *gh-* for [g], *ț* for [ts] and *ș* for [sh] can a person grasp the congruences with: **match**, **cake**, **schnitzel** and **the geyser**.

The *Fifth Sieve* teaches pan-Romance syntactic structures. It makes use of the fact that there are nine basic sentence types which are structurally identical in all Romance languages. It shows how syntactic knowledge of one Romance language helps in learning the others, for instance in working out the position of article, noun, adjective, verb, conjunction, etc. The word order can also be easily understood.

The *Sixth Sieve* concentrates on morphosyntactic elements and helps learners recognise different ways different grammatical elements have developed in the Romance languages. For instance, how to recognise the first person plural of Romance verbs. This makes the grammatical structure of the text easy to recognise.

Finally the *Seventh Sieve* lists prefixes and suffixes and enables the learner to work out the meaning of compound words by separating prefixes and suffixes from the root words. One only has to remember a relatively small number of Greek and Latin prefixes and suffixes to be able to decipher a large number of words.

At the end of this process, learners will have become aware of what a large store of familiar knowledge they already had, or has become available through this productive method. And this is the case for, not just for one language, but for all Romance languages. EuroCom's point is that 'we do not have to move doggedly from one language on to the next and then the next, but rather use one set of principles to open the door to *all* related languages'. The EuroCom authors certainly have a point when they stress that 'limiting your multilingual ambitions would only be a waste of all the advantages gained from the system'.

Test results of EuroComRom

EuroCom courses in Frankfurt have carried out studies on 12 groups of participants, each containing 100–140 students (including 5% aged over 60). The success of teaching and learning was examined using written tests completed by the students at the end of each semester. The tests usually comprised four texts, two of which were in the Ibero-Romance languages (Galician, Portuguese, Catalan or Spanish), one in Romanian, and one in a French or Italian (sometimes in a related language such as Franco-Creole, Sardinian or Italian). In contrast to language courses with *one* target language, the aim of these tests was not to deliver an accurate translation of the text. Instead, 'gaps' were acceptable if they could be filled with an invented word, as long as the sense and the meaning of the entire text were rendered.

Franz-Joseph Meissner provides another methodological description of intercomprehension. Meissner refers to studies with plurilingual German students who were given written and spoken texts of a more or less 'intercomprehensive' Romance language they had never formally learnt. Meissner argues that his team's studies can serve as a model of an adult's plurilingual processing as well as plurilingual acquisition. The target languages in the study were Italian, Portuguese or Spanish. The subjects who tried to decode these idioms were plurilingual.

Some of the results

Firstly, all students who had operational procedural knowledge in one Romance language, referred to it when trying to decode the 'unknown' target language. On the other hand, students who only had some knowledge of English and Latin referred to German or English when listening; Latin was weakly activated when reading.

Secondly, Meissner's test proves that subjects with operational and solid knowledge in one Romance language achieved significantly better results when decoding the target language than those who could only refer to German, English or sometimes Latin. Whereas English turned out to be relatively helpful in the lexical field, it did not facilitate the identification of the fundamental morphemic and syntactical structures of the Romance target language.

Meissner concludes that an Iberian language is activated most frequently when trying to understand another Iberian tongue. Southern Romance languages offer more evidence of interlingual transfer than is the case between French and Spanish or French and Italian. At the same time, students who only had procedural knowledge in English and Spanish (apart from their German mother tongue) had great difficulty understanding spoken or even written French. Thirdly, phonetic features of French make listening comprehension difficult, particularly in relation to its liaison phenomenon.

Conclusions

Intercomprehension is becoming more common as a language teaching method. Intercomprehension in language learning is about guessing, discovering tendencies, decoding and anticipating. Knowledge of other languages helps, but so does general, cultural, situational and behavioural knowledge. In intercomprehension, all kinds of previous knowledge is used to make deductions, thus aiding understanding.

Research shows that it is easier to learn a language from the same language family. When students already know one language in a family, it is easier to learn others of the same family. Knowing two languages of one family makes it easier to understand a third.

3. Advantages of intercomprehension in society

3.1. Intercomprehension in everyday life

Intercomprehension is part of everyday life in many European countries and regions. Miquel Strubell i Trueta, professor and director of humanities at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, points out that in many multilingual regions, such as Catalonia and Galicia, intercomprehension is used daily on the street, in shops and in restaurants. Esteve Clua, professor in languages and teaching intercomprehension at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, confirms that this is the case for instance in Barcelona, but to his knowledge no research has been carried out to date in this field. A practical example of how this kind of intercomprehension works in Barcelona is when a client in a restaurant or bar speaks with the waiter in Catalan. The waiter who might come from another part of Spain or from Latin America answers in Spanish. The conversation takes place in two languages simultaneously. It works because the languages are closely related and mutually intelligible. And it works naturally. One could argue that in these circumstances intercomprehension is simply a fact of life.

Dr Alex Riemersma, Lecturer in Frisian and Multilingualism in Education at the Mercator Multilingualism Research Center and Fryske Akademy, confirms that intercomprehension is similarly used in the province of Friesland in the northern Netherlands. Apart from the shops and restaurants already mentioned, Riemersma mentions the example of banks and post offices where intercomprehension has become the rule rather than the exception. Customers are encouraged to speak Frisian, but often the clerk does not know Frisian and therefore answers in Dutch. Riemersma emphasises the role intercomprehension plays in the media in Friesland, where it comes into play particularly frequently on the regional radio station *Omrop Fryslân*. During interviews, journalists ask questions in Frisian and those interviewed often answer in Dutch. The listeners understand both languages and do not mind that two different languages are used in the same interview. *Omrop Fryslân* also hosts talk shows where the participants speak both languages. Meetings of the regional and local authorities are also held in both languages, with everyone speaking their mother tongue. The minutes are then drafted in either Dutch or Frisian, but never translated. The language of the minutes depends on the mother tongue of the chair and the secretary of the meeting.

In fact, the same approach is used in the internal meetings of the Commission, where the languages used are usually English and French and the minutes are drafted in one of these languages.

Chantal Almaskati describes in her Master's thesis at the Université de Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle how intercomprehension works in Valle d'Aosta. Italian and French are the region's official languages and are used for the regional government's acts and laws. Italian is much more widely spoken in everyday life, whereas French is used more in the countryside. The languages are close enough to be mutually intelligible with a little exposure to the other language. The French spoken is a regional dialect called Valdôtain (locally, *patois*). It is spoken as the native tongue and as the second language by 68 000 residents, about 58 % of the population, according to a poll carried out by the Fondation Émile Chanoux in 2002. Regional studies show that many people are bilingual, or if not fully bilingual at least passively bilingual, so that they understand both languages (Website of the regional government of Valle d'Aosta: http://www.regione.vda.it/default_i.asp). Intercomprehension mainly occurs in the capital Aosta and above all in the private sector, since civil servants in the regional and local administration have to be bilingual and able to attend the citizens in French and Italian. On the other hand, in the private sector in the city of Aosta, many people are

only able to speak one of the two languages, in most cases only Italian. However, everyone has receptive skills in both languages. Therefore, situations similar to those in Catalonia and Friesland are common with the customer speaking French and the shopkeeper or waiter answering in Italian. Intercomprehension is useful since it allows both parties to use the language they know best.

However, it cannot be stressed enough that intercomprehension or receptive multilingualism in the above mentioned regions depends completely on the good will and the willingness of the speakers of the different languages to understand each other.

3.2. Institutionalised intercomprehension

3.2.1. Nordic Cooperation and the Nordic Council

The Scandinavian languages — Danish, Norwegian and Swedish — are mutually intelligible. In most interScandinavian situations Scandinavians use their mother tongue and are understood by Scandinavians from other countries. The use of intercomprehension is more widespread in Scandinavia than, for instance, in Romance and Slavic language areas, even though the linguistic overlaps are comparable to those in Scandinavia. This is partly due to attitudes or cultural and political factors (Zeevaert and ten Thije 2007).

The official Nordic languages are Danish in Denmark, Finnish and Swedish in Finland, Faroese in the Faroe Islands, Greenlandic in Greenland, Icelandic in Iceland, Norwegian in Norway and Swedish in Sweden. In the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish territories there is an adjoining area of Sami culture and language.

In Finland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland, it is compulsory to learn one of the Scandinavian languages in school (Website of the Nordic Council <http://www.norden.org/en>).

Nearly 80 per cent of Nordic residents have Danish, Norwegian or Swedish as their mother tongue. The languages have developed from a common Nordic language, but have moved away from each other during the past 1 000 years. However, it is still perfectly possible for Danish, Norwegian and Swedish speakers to understand each other.

A survey carried out between 2003 and 2005 by Lars-Olof Delsing and Katrina Lundin Åkesson is the most recent analysis of the intercomprehension of Scandinavian languages. The new study was considered necessary due to marked societal changes, such as internationalisation and globalisation in the Nordic countries since the 1970s. Changes in the school system has clearly supported the importance of English, and EU membership has diminished the importance of Nordic cooperation. Delsing tested 1 200 pupils from Denmark, Norway and Sweden on their knowledge of the other Scandinavian languages and English. This was complemented with testing the parents in order to find out differences in language comprehension between generations. The results indicate that the level of intercomprehension is decreasing, especially in Denmark and Sweden and especially among young people. In other words Nordic residents have increasing difficulty in understanding each other (Delsing & Åkesson 2005).

Another study by Madeline Lutjeharms suggests that, in some cases of oral communication between speakers of Danish and Swedish, so much processing is needed in order to understand the other party that one does not have the capacity to fully absorb the content (Zeevaert and ten Thije, 2007). Maintaining the Nordic language community requires constant development to strengthen language comprehension. Politicians are aware of this, and the Nordic countries are working together to improve language comprehension (Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005).

The Nordic Council uses the three Continental Scandinavian Languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) as its official working languages; however it publishes material in Finnish, Icelandic and English, as well. Reports and minutes of meetings are only published in one of the three Scandinavian languages. For instance, a report may only be available in Danish but its recommendations are still valid in all Nordic countries (Website of the Nordic Council <http://www.norden.org/en>).

The Nordic countries have also coordinated efforts in research and development so as to ensure that the Nordic languages remain at the forefront of information technology (Phillipson 2003, 88).

In 2006, the Nordic ministers of education adopted a Nordic declaration on Language Policy. The ministers agreed that the languages, which are essential to society, should remain so and that they must be strong and alive. Nordic cooperation will continue to be conducted in the Scandinavian languages in the future.

Cooperation on languages in the Nordic countries has resulted in advantages for Nordic residents, such as the right to use their own language when dealing with the authorities in other Nordic countries.

The Expert Group Nordic Language Council has been set up to promote the use of and intercomprehension between the Scandinavian languages. It focuses on consultancy, especially in regard to an improved language understanding for children and young people (Delsing & Lundin Åkesson 2005; Nordic Council website).

3.2.2. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

The two official languages of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) are English and French, and all staff and judges must speak at least one of these languages. In addition, all accused have a right to use their native language in court. The ICTY uses intercomprehension in the sense that it puts the three mutually intelligible languages Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian into the same translation and interpretation cluster. The accused before the Tribunal can thus speak Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS), Albanian or Macedonian.⁷ As a consequence, all court proceedings are held in at least three, and sometimes four, languages while the majority of its written documents are translated into between two to five languages. But the written documents are never translated between Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian and only translated into one of the three from a third language.

All the Tribunal's basic legal documents, such as the rules of procedure, indictments and judgments, are translated into English, French and one of the three Bosnian, Croatian or Serbian, and where appropriate, into Albanian and Macedonian. In addition, documents tendered as evidence at trial are translated into one of the official languages.

At the Tribunal, the Conference and Language Service Section (CLSS) is responsible for all translation and interpretation. The example of ICTY shows that both oral and written intercomprehension works well between the languages Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian.

3.2.3. Intercomprehension in the Dutch-German border area

Dutch and German are closely related, but they are not always immediately mutually intelligible. Even though the linguistic distance is no greater than between Danish and Swedish, intercomprehension is an almost unknown phenomenon between speakers of the two languages. The shared history between Germany and the Netherlands has influenced language contact and use (Goossens 2006), and differences and conflicts have hindered language contact to a certain extent. Receptive multilingualism is relatively

⁷ See <http://www.icty.org/sid/165>.

unknown in the Dutch-German constellation, and there has not been much research on it yet (Beerkens 2009, 35).

The Dutch researcher Roos Beerkens points out that the common practice that has evolved over the years in Scandinavia of using intercomprehension between the languages is only now beginning to develop in the Dutch-German constellation. The reason for this is the ambivalent relation between Germany and the Netherlands and, above all two World Wars in the 20th Century.

However, relations have improved since then and the two countries are now important economic and social partners in the European Union. Germany is the biggest trading partner of the Netherlands, whereas the Netherlands is the second biggest German trading partner after France. In fact, the only trade relation in the world stronger than the Dutch-German one is that between the US and Canada.

It has long been the case that more Dutch people learned German than Germans learned Dutch. This is logical, considering the differences in size of the countries. The Netherlands is a smaller country, heavily dependent on foreign trade. When Dutchmen went to Germany they tended to use German.

Beerkens notices that more recently a change has been observed, and since the 1960s Dutch has become more popular at German universities. From the early 1970s, Dutch was taught in German schools and since then the number of Germans speaking Dutch has increased rapidly. In the last few decades German competences in the Netherlands have decreased. Dutch is thus getting increasingly popular among German high school and university students whereas German is losing its position in the Netherlands (Beerkens 2009, 39-40). Despite this, more Dutch people speak German than the other way round (Eurobarometer 2006).

Recently there has been an increase in research on intercomprehension, or receptive multilingualism, between Dutch and German. Beerkens refers to Möller (2007) and Ház (2005), who claim that Dutch and German to a certain extent can be called mutually intelligible languages. Möller has calculated the number of cognates between Dutch and German. (*Cognates are words that have a common etymological origin. For example, cognates in the Germanic languages are the words night (English), Nacht (German), nacht (Dutch) natt (Swedish, Norwegian), nat (Danish)*). Cognates are important regarding the level of mutual intelligibility between the two languages. 22% of the cognates are identical in both languages.

Möller concludes that by far the majority of Dutch vocabulary is accessible to German readers, if they are familiar with a set of sound correspondences (Möller 2007, 302, Beerkens 2009, 48). In 2005, Ház tested German and Dutch students, who had little or no pre-knowledge of the neighbour language on their reading and listening comprehension. The conclusion was that both German and Dutch students scored high, which shows that the languages are mutually intelligible. Möller claims that phonological differences is the most difficult thing for Germans learning Dutch. Beerkens concludes that research results by Möller (2007), Gooskens (2009), Berthele (2009) and Wenzel (2007) show that Dutch and German are mutually intelligible to a certain degree, but he the research does not reveal how receptive multilingualism or intercomprehension work in practice (Beerkens 2009, 48-49).

Beerkens states that English is commonly used as a lingua franca between German and Dutch speakers, but another communication mode is the use of dialect. An advantage over English is that those who speak a dialect usually speak it as their mother tongue. A disadvantage is that the number of speakers of dialects is decreasing and can no longer be used for formal communication. In a border area however, a dialect can be an option since the dialects on both sides of the border are mutually intelligible to a certain extent.

This can also be seen as intercomprehension since the dialects are not the same, but mutually intelligible. On the other hand, Hinskens (2005, 1993), who Beerkens refers to, shows that the standard Dutch and German languages are used a lot more than dialects in the border area and that dialects are limited to the private sphere with family, friends and neighbours (Beerkens 2009, 51-54).

The Goethe Institute in Amsterdam is another example of how intercomprehension works in practice. German and Dutch colleagues there have worked closely over a period of time during which they have developed certain patterns in their internal communication. Employees speak either German or Dutch, or use intercomprehension, with each person speaking his own mother tongue. English as a lingua franca is not used. All kinds of code switching can be detected (Ribbert and ten Thije 2007, 79). **Code-switching** is the concurrent use of more than one language, or language variety, in conversation. Multilingual people who speak more than one language sometimes use elements of multiple languages in conversing with each other. Thus, code-switching is the use of more than one linguistic variety. Carol Myers-Scotton defines code-switching as '*...the selection by bilinguals or multilinguals of forms from an embedded variety (or varieties) in utterances of a matrix variety during the same conversation.*'

Speakers practice code-switching when each of them is fluent in two or more languages. Code-switching is thus different from borrowing, pidgins and creoles, loan translation and language transfer. **Code-mixing** is related to code-switching, but the usage of the terms *code-switching* and *code-mixing* varies. Some scholars use either term to denote the same practice, while others apply *code-mixing* to denote the formal linguistic properties of said language-contact phenomena, and *code-switching* to denote the actual, spoken usages by multilingual persons.

3.2.4. The Swiss model

The Swiss model of intercomprehension describes intercomprehension based on intentional study. The Swiss model provides an excellent example of how receptive language knowledge or intercomprehension work. It is characterised by a demand for linguistic peace.

The Swiss model covers four models:

- 1) The Swiss model: Speakers use their own language and expect others to understand them.
- 2) The Biel/Bienne model (bilingual model): In this bilingual city, intercomprehension is used as described in the three examples in chapter 4.1.
- 3) The default model: This is a monolingual model in which the language of the territory is spoken by everyone.
- 4) Lingua franca (English).

Switzerland has four official languages: German, French, Italian and Rhaeto-Romansch plus an increasing number of migrant languages. However, the territorial principle limits usage to only one of the official languages in each of the cantons except for a few overlap areas such as Bienne, Fribourg or the federal capital Bern. Switzerland thus resembles a mosaic made up of largely monolingual regions in which other national languages enjoy more or less the same status as English. English is also increasingly being taught as a foreign language at school and at work.

Since the whole population has acquired a second national language, cross-linguistic encounters should be possible for nearly everybody, at least between the German- and the French-speaking Swiss. However, learning a second national language and communicating along the 'Swiss model' is being challenged by English as an international lingua franca. There are voices advocating intercommunity communication in English in

Switzerland (Lüdi 2007, 159-166). In recent years however, language policy has been directed at supporting receptive multilingualism by means of teaching a second national language in primary school with the emphasis on the importance of receptive competences (Zeevaert and ten Thije 2007).

Code-switching is becoming more and more common. As elsewhere, speakers in Switzerland profit from their entire repertoires using their respective first languages and other support languages. Lüdi looks into whether a monolingual model (the exclusive use of English) or the Swiss model of receptive bilingualism (everyone speaking his/her own language and understanding the other's) prevail in real life (Lüdi 2007, 168).

Lüdi gives examples of authentic cross-linguistic communication at work in Switzerland and proposes that in face-to-face interactions speakers profit from all the communicative resources they share. Based on the data obtained in a monolingual French-speaking and a monolingual German-speaking bank, Lüdi argues that rather than choosing the Swiss model or the lingua franca, English, a mixture could be used. This entails accommodating the other language when a communicative problem appears, language mixing and asking linguistically more skilled people to translate.

Lüdi states that even if the general accepted communicative maxim is that 'everyone speaks his/her language', this is sometimes combined with or replaced by other techniques, such as some German speakers accommodating French speakers by choosing to speak French from the beginning. In the same vein, German speakers tend not to use their dialect but make an effort to speak standard German. Bilingual colleagues may be asked to translate and very often the utterances in either language are not pure but mixed. Lüdi gives an example of a meeting between German- and French-speaking Swiss where English (the lingua franca) is used a fair amount in the meeting but is in no way the dominant choice. Instead many 'plurilingual techniques are employed'. He concludes that the Swiss model might entail a higher acceptance of 'mixed' speech than in other countries and that participants' plurilingual abilities are activated *in situ* and generally not determined in advance, but self-organised and negotiated among the participants. The participants in the discussion put together all their possibilities which are constantly reconfigured (Lüdi 2007, 170-173).

4. Advantages of intercomprehension in the private sector

Advantages of intercomprehension in newsgathering. Below is an example of how intercomprehension is used in selecting news stories from different countries by news agencies and news TV channels, such as CNN, Euronews and BBC World.

Ms Marit Ingves, Head of the Nordic Public Service Broadcasters in Brussels, confirms that intercomprehension is always used between the colleagues of the Nordic Public Broadcasters. Each person speaks in his or her mother tongue: either Danish, Norwegian or Swedish (the Finns speak Swedish) and this is understood by the other nationalities. Ingves says that adaptation and adjustment are crucial for everyone to understand. Difficult words and phrases, as well as known false friends, are avoided and overhead slides are used to support presentations at meetings. Ingves underlines that English as a lingua franca is never used except for external meetings with participants who do not understand Danish, Norwegian or Swedish. Ingves stresses however, that intercomprehension between the Scandinavian languages is above all used in an informal context.

Advantages of intercomprehension in tourism and transport. Many tour operators such as Thompson, Spies/Tjäreborg and Thomas Cook have common tour guides and service for package tour tourists from Scandinavia. Since the languages are mutually intelligible a guide speaking one Scandinavian language can serve clients from all three Scandinavian countries.

Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS) is an airline using intercomprehension on all its flights. In practice it means that the cabin staff can speak either Swedish, Danish or Norwegian during flights between any Scandinavian destinations since the languages are mutually intelligible. The random use of Swedish, Norwegian or Danish also works because there are no political obstacles for using one or the other. Ms Ulla Börestam, university lecturer in Scandinavian languages at Uppsala University in Sweden says that a jargon, commonly known as 'SASperanto', is used among the cabin crew on SAS flights. SASperanto is a general adaptation of a person's vocabulary and pronunciation towards the other Scandinavian languages used at SAS. This means that everyone speaks in their mother tongue (Danish, Norwegian or Swedish) mixing in words of the other languages to make themselves more easily understood by colleagues with other mother tongues.

Birgitta Angård Arvesen, Head of Cabin Crew at SAS, confirms the existence of 'SASperanto'. In earlier times especially, when cabin crews were fixed and the same persons worked together on flights, intercomprehension was always used. For instance, in a crew with Danish, Norwegian and Swedish cabin crew, everyone spoke his/her mother tongue, which was understood by the others. The length of cooperation and experience of the receptive language skills of the colleague was crucial (as stated by Ribbert and ten Thije).

Angård Arvesen underlines that intercomprehension between the Scandinavian languages is used in the SAS administration where everyone speaks their mother tongue and all internal documents, such as minutes of meetings and e-mail correspondence, are written in either Norwegian, Danish or Swedish. The SAS staff are free to write in any of the Scandinavian languages since the communications can be understood by all. The Vice President of Cabin Crew, Johan Holmgren, agrees that the three Scandinavian languages are used equally and also have an equal status officially in the company.

Jakob Bruntse, who previously worked in the SAS headquarters in Frösundavik (outside Stockholm), has done a Master's thesis on the use of languages at SAS. In particular,

Bruntse looked into the communication between Danes and Swedes at SAS. He observed what ten Thije, Bahtina and Ribbert noticed in their research, namely that comprehension between Danes and Swedes improves over time, with experience (Bruntse 2004, 11).

Swedes working for SAS find it hard understanding Danes when they speak, whereas reading comprehension is easier. Danes seemed to understand spoken Swedish better than the other way round. Also, the Norwegians at SAS understand Swedish better than the Swedes understand spoken Norwegian. Bruntse explains that this is partly due to the fact that Swedes are less exposed to Danish and Norwegian audiovisual media than the other way round. Swedish media is more widespread in Denmark and Norway whereas Norwegian and Danish TV and radio are only available in very limited areas in Sweden. Another reason is that the Danish and Norwegian capitals, Copenhagen and Oslo, are situated close to the Swedish border with cross-border contacts. The Swedish capital Stockholm, on the other hand, is geographically far away from both Denmark and Norway. This is also confirmed in studies that show that Swedes living further away from the Danish border find it harder understanding spoken Danish.

Research by Ulla Börestam Uhlmann shows that the Danes are the most difficult to understand in Scandinavian interaction, particularly by the Swedes. According to Bruntse's thesis, Danes seem to understand Swedish better than the other way round. Bruntse gives three reasons for this: (1) exposure as already mentioned, (2) the peculiar sounds in the Danish pronunciation (which some Swedes characterise as guttural) and (3) Swedish 'big brother' attitudes (Bruntse 2004, 11-17).

We noted in chapter 1.2 that political will can either enhance or block intercomprehension, and this is true for the use of intercomprehension at SAS as well. One of the most common perceptions in SAS is that it is firmly connected to Scandinavia and the Scandinavian way of thinking. SAS as a company is based on the idea of a Scandinavian community (Bruntse 2004, 21). The motto of one of SAS' first managing directors, Henning Throne-Holst, was *Scandinavism*, and '*SAS is the most important example that Scandinavism works*'. SAS claims that the term Scandinavia was relatively unknown until the company started flying around the world with 'Scandinavian' painted on the sides of its airplanes (Bruntse 2004, 23). Being Scandinavian gives an added value to the company.

SAS does not have a corporate language. However, at the time Jakob Bruntse worked for SAS, rumours circulated and many believed that the corporate language was Norwegian. Reasons for this would have been that Norwegian is the language most Scandinavians understand, lying somewhere in between Danish and Swedish. Others thought that Norwegian was the corporate language out of a compromise, since Sweden got the headquarters and Kastrup outside Copenhagen is its major hub. Other reasons given were that a yearbook was previously published in English and Norwegian and the information on the back of the tickets was also printed in these two languages.

SAS have never taken any official decision on language use or what languages the staff should communicate in, except that all internal communication between the pilots in the cockpit should be in English, according to international rules established by IATA. However, the leadership has, on several occasions, said that 'activities should be carried out in a Scandinavian way' (Bruntse 2004, 33-34).

In practice, the Scandinavian languages dominate and speaking English is seen as contrary to the 'in-house culture'. Speaking English can be seen as deviant, almost as communicating 'we don't belong to the same group'. English is only used with non-Scandinavians and sometimes in written communication, for instance on the intranet. To a certain extent, among SAS staff in Denmark, Swedish is associated with the headquarters in Stockholm, but the fact that everyone uses his or her Scandinavian

mother tongue is generally accepted and has above all a symbolic value (Bruntse 2004, 36-40).

How then does the internal communication at SAS work? Bruntse mentions three main language strategies: (1) speak one's mother tongue with modifications, (2) adapt to the language of one's interlocutor and finally (3) use SASperanto.

The first strategy is to speak one's mother tongue, but not to speak too fast, try to articulate well, use common Scandinavian terms and consciously avoid using false friends. The second strategy is to systematically 'borrow' from the other language, adapting one's own language to that of the receiver. This in practice means adapting the pronunciation and using words from the other language, e.g. a Dane using Swedish words or hybrid words that the speaker assumes will be easier for the listener to understand for the listener. Bruntse mentions that when Danes speak Swedish, they express numbers, in particular, in Swedish, since they assume that Swedes might have difficulties with Danish numbers. Bruntse points out that Danish colleagues working in Stockholm almost automatically adapt their language towards Swedish.

If this adaptation is quite marked, it turns into SASperanto. Because the Scandinavian languages are mutually intelligible and so similar, it might sometimes be hard to distinguish between situations when a person adapts his language and when complete code-shifting occurs. Since both Danes and Swedes only accept almost perfect Danish or Swedish respectively as being their language, anything in between is seen as SASperanto.

The use of SASperanto is seen as both good and bad. On the negative side Bruntse notes that this mixed language is regarded as ugly and non-aesthetic. The most common reason for using SASperanto is to make oneself understood. Many SAS employees interviewed by Bruntse said that it just happened like this (Bruntse 2004, 67-82). Language use at SAS has also received some criticism; Robert Phillipson, Research Professor at Copenhagen Business School, points out that a vast amount of information on SAS internet sites is available only in English, with only a limited amount in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. For some services, including booking by internet, proficiency in English is in fact required, which discriminates against some Scandinavians. In internal affairs of the company, the three Scandinavian languages are widely used, in speech and in writing and English only occasionally. Phillipson states that the brand slogan, or 'strapline' (in advertising), '*It's Scandinavian*' needs to be in English on CNN or in the Financial Times. Within Scandinavia, '*It's Scandinavian*' apparently means using both English and Scandinavian languages, according to Phillipson (Phillipson 2003, 87-88).

Spanair on the contrary feels obliged to (apart from English) use both Spanish and Catalan in their external communication, despite the fact that the languages are mutually intelligible. Spanish is understood by all Catalan passengers and Catalan is understood by most Spanish passengers, but for political reasons and since Spanair is concerned to provide the service to both language groups in their language, it prefers to make all announcements on board in both Romance languages and English, whereas SAS just makes announcements in one Scandinavian language and English regardless of destination. All Spanair press releases and communication with the public are done in all three languages.

José Luís González, responsible for internal communication at Spanair, confirms that Spanish is used in internal written communication to the staff, such as newsletters, staff information e-mails, etc. The reason is that the majority of Spanair employees work outside Catalonia, in other parts of Spain. Spanish is used as a corporate language for internal communication since it is considered the language that everyone understands (Interview and e-mail correspondence with José Luís González).

However, a corporate language does not mean that no other languages are used. People do actually use other languages (DYLAN Project Booklet 2011, 11). The Dylan project booklet stresses that many organisations, even officially monolingual English ones, choose to communicate with their employees in a range of languages, which they are free to select. They do so to enhance the quality of work and to strengthen people's emotional involvement with the organisations (DYLAN Project Booklet 2011, 12).

This is also the practice at Spanair, where employees are encouraged to use Spanish and Catalan as they wish for interpersonal communication. González points out that at the Spanair headquarters in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat most of the staff use their mother tongue, i.e. either Spanish or Catalan, since both languages are understood by everyone. Also at internal meetings everyone speaks in either Spanish or Catalan; no interpretation is needed since the languages are mutually intelligible. There is no norm, nor are there written rules for internal communication at Spanair. The staff are free to use Spanish and Catalan as they choose. González estimates the ratio of Spanish Catalan used at the Spanair headquarters is 60-40 in favour of Spanish.

At Spanair language use differs from that at SAS is that at Spanair there is no adaptation of the languages. Whereas Danes try to adapt their pronunciation and vocabulary to enable Swedes to understand, at Spanair the staff speak either Catalan or Spanish. No adaptation takes place, nor is there any kind of 'mixed language' similar to SASperanto. Almost all the staff at the Spanair headquarters are completely bilingual, which makes intercomprehension between Spanish and Catalan work well.

This illustrates that any benefit to be derived from intercomprehension depends on the political will to apply it.

5. The role of intercomprehension for European integration

The European Union pursues the fundamental objectives of social cohesion by promoting the concept of a composite social identity that respects cultural diversity in establishing 'Europeanness'. Plurilingualism and intercomprehension are specific aims of the process (Santos Alves and Mendes 2006, 211). European identity and citizenship first require the acknowledgement of the diversity of the different national/ethnic and linguistic/cultural identities in creating a supra-national identity, which defines a sense of European belonging, while at the same time being aware of and valuing the diverse national, sociocultural, linguistic and other identifications, which constitute this shared community (Santos Alves and Mendes 2006, 212). Alves and Mendes claim that, as citizenship status moves beyond assumptions of belonging based on a national community, with its imagined unity of language and culture, multiple and complex notions of belonging emerge.

Ludger Zeevaert and Jan ten Thije state that multilingualism is a social phenomenon deeply embedded in European language history and does not necessarily require near-native language competency. English as lingua franca is not the only solution for interlingual communication in Europe (Zeevaert and ten Thije 2007).

The Charter of Fundamental Rights, which entered into force with the Lisbon Treaty, mentions non-discrimination as one of the fundamental principles the Union is based on. Its Article 21 states that any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation is prohibited. The importance of multilingualism is recognised in Article 22 of the Charter, which says that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity.

Together with Regulation 1/58 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community and the recognition of the rights of EU citizens to use their mother tongue⁸ in exchanges with the EU institutions, the Treaty strikes a balance between an individual's rights not to be discriminated against on the basis of language and his/her active rights as a citizen (see Part Two of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Articles 18 to 25). This is welcome at a time when citizens are exerting their rights to active citizenship on the internet, a fact that EU institutions have taken onboard.

Diversity education, including linguistic diversity, as part of EU citizenship, does not mean that all EU citizens have to be linguists or competent users of foreign languages. Awareness of diversity as a part of European identity can, on the other hand, be fostered by education involving intercultural exchange where varying degrees of linguistic competence are enhanced: school education, family background, personal experience, informal learning, etc. Intercomprehension is an apt instrument for such policy because it empowers individuals who interact as peers, and does not limit exchange to the demonstration of purely linguistic competence. Intercomprehension encourages an equal relationship between languages and culture, and as such combines equality with efficiency.

Alves and Mendes argue that the pluralist citizenship the Union strives for cannot survive on the basis of its legal and political status alone; it requires social and cultural integration to take root. Pluralist citizenship is about acknowledging and appreciating linguistic and cultural diversity. Alves and Mendes underline that in this respect intercomprehension is essential for preserving Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity.

⁸ Also under Articles 21-2 d) TEU and 24-3 TFEU.

Michele Gazzola points out in his article 'La gestione del multilinguismo nell'Unione europea' that the question of languages in Europe cannot be limited to a simple cost estimate of translation and interpretation, but involves deeper aspects such as cultural diversity (Gazzola 2006, 21).

Plurilingual and pluricultural competences are defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as complex and composite competences, which allow individuals to participate as social agents in intercultural communicative interactions (Council of Europe 2001, 168). Beacco and Byram distinguish between 'plurilingualism as a competence' and being aware of and acknowledging plurilingualism ('plurilingualism as a value'), i.e. valuing all languages equally. This distinction emphasises the acceptance of the plurality of speakers and their diverse linguistic competences. Furthermore, it means that the European Union cannot function in one or two languages, but should aim to use as many languages as possible in its daily work. Intercomprehension could be a tool to reach this aim.

Alves and Mendes conclude that language users can therefore be defined as social intermediaries or social agents with the capacity to overcome barriers and construct bridges and boundaries in plurilingual and pluricultural contexts. By rejecting monolingualism, they resist linguistic and cultural ethnocentrism and homogeneity (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 213).

5.1. Multilingualism becomes a reality thanks to intercomprehension

Some 500 years ago, Latin was the dominant language in sectors such as education, religion, government, and commerce in large parts of Europe. Languages that replaced Latin in the 16th century, in official contexts too, such as French, German and Italian, are still used in many countries, but are facing increased competition from English, which has become today's lingua franca (Capucho & Lungu). Originally taught as a 'foreign language', as opposed to the mother tongue, English has developed as a vehicular language between non-native speakers ('globish').

Nevertheless, today it is becoming increasingly difficult to manage all the information available in any sector without being able to understand English. The general acceptance of a lingua franca has also been criticised, and disadvantages such as the danger of linguistic imperialism and depreciation of the mother tongue cannot be ignored. Robert Phillipson warns that *'the dominance of English in contemporary Europe can constitute linguistic imperialism if other languages are disadvantaged, and are being learned or used in subtractive ways. This is one of the worries in commerce, science, culture, and the media in continental Europe, with domain loss as a symptom of linguistic imperialism'*.

For some, English as an international language in a polycentric world has changed status: '[Basic English] is not just a reduced form of 'full-blown' English but a language in its own right, and thus comparable with parallel efforts such as Jespersen's Novial [...] or of course Esperanto [...]' (B. Seidlhofer 2002, 275)⁹ (Ogen C. K and I.A. Richards 1923). According to the theory of the 'three circles' (Kachru 1985, 12).¹⁰ The norms of English are increasingly defined by the members of the third circle, ie about 75% of the whole who are speakers for whom English is neither their mother tongue nor a second language

⁹ Barbara Seidlhofer, idem.

¹⁰The first circle is composed of native speakers, the second circle ('Outer Circle') of speakers with English as a second or 'pidgin' language (by reference to the standards set by native speakers in the inner circle), and the third circle ('Expanding Circle') of speakers of English as a 'lingua franca'.

as found in the former colonies, but a mere tool for international communication. The spectacular development of international (basic) English as a tongue without territory would simultaneously lead to a split from the mother tongue spoken by the native speakers. English as a mother tongue would lose its prominence as a norm and reference for foreign speakers.

Work on intercomprehension calls for new thinking about the conditions for communication and exchange in a polycentric world. Intercomprehension invites respect for all languages and the empowerment of speakers of less spoken languages. In this respect it contributes to the preservation of linguistic diversity and, thus, cultural wealth (Santos Alves & Mendes 2006, 213). Intercomprehension is also crucial to linguistic justice and language equality. It contributes to the equal treatment of speakers of different languages (Van Parijs 2002, Grin 2008, 101).

Robert Phillipson argues that multilingualism appears to have become an EU mantra, but the concept is used in various senses and can obscure the extent to which EU multilingualism can serve to confirm monolingualism (Phillipson 2003, 129). He claims that symptoms of frustration are linked to underlying causal factors. One underlying factor is the one-sided focus on costs that tends not to be counterbalanced by awareness of the importance of the language services for ensuring multilingual access to EU documents and communication.

Another factor Phillipson mentions is more directly linked to intercomprehension and the use of all languages. He stresses the implications of the way English is becoming the dominant language of draft texts and how English is constantly being marked as Europe's lingua franca. EU practices dovetail with the way globalisation results in English being used in many non-EU fora, particularly in the corporate world, science, the media and foreign relations, according to Phillipson. The Dylan Project Booklet also deals with internal languages in the European institutions and bodies, and stresses that a 'multilingual climate' should be created in which internal communication is an extension of external communication rather than separate from it.

Phillipson speaks of an in-house hierarchy of languages, with French the dominant language previously, now being substituted by the hegemony of English. This is due to pragmatic constraints, such as time and efficiency and based on the assumption that linguistic hierarchies are normal and natural (Phillipson 2003, 135-136).

Phillipson points out that structural and ideological factors all contribute to an acceptance of the inevitability of English expanding, resulting in inequality between English speakers and the rest (Phillipson 2003, 136).

Other scholars, such as the Dutch essayist and sociologist, Abram de Swaan, and the Belgian economist and philosopher Philippe Van Parijs do not share Phillipson's view. They both separate the communicative aspect of language from issues of culture and power, and both reach the conclusion that English is inevitable as a lingua franca and an instrument for fostering democracy and progress, which would actually be hampered by artificially sustained multilingualism.

Starting from the premise that Europe's unification process is justified only if it manages to create a stronger European democracy, Van Parijs regards a common language as mandatory for the process of European integration. In order for integration to become a reality, we must be able to communicate. Everyone should be able to communicate in a fair and egalitarian way. 'It is essential that the EU should adopt a single lingua franca over and above existing national and regional languages', according to Van Parijs. When it comes to choosing the lingua franca, Van Parijs claims that English is the only adequate tool because the past decades have witnessed such a convergence toward it as the second language of choice that any other alternative would be unjustified (Lingua

Franca: Chimera or Reality? 2011, 35-37). The values identifying a culture, can be expressed through any language which appears adequate. Adopting a language for intercultural communication, in this case English, does not mean adopting the values expressed through that language, according to Van Parijs. Van Parijs justifies the use of English because the risks of multilingualism are even more serious: an ever increasing brain-drain toward English-speaking countries. He goes even further, arguing that the asymmetry between English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries, between English monolingual and multilingual entities, is a fact which must be taken into account, instead of clinging to abstract ideas, as the EU's language policy is considered to do. According to de Swaan and Van Parijs, multilingualism results in time-consuming and expensive translations (Lingua Franca: Chimera or Reality? 2011, 37-38).

The Dylan Project Booklet recommends taking account of a particular kind of relationship between a lingua franca and multilingualism, and a coherent conception of the notion of multilingualism (Dylan Project Booklet 2011, 18).

According to Phillipson, none of the EU institutions has commissioned studies to assess, for instance, how changed procedures of principles for language use could involve adjusting the existing language rights within the framework based on explicit criteria for equitable communication. He concludes that *'we need a vision of how supranational policies could reflect the complexity of the new supranational structure, scenarios that would be something different from national monolingualism plus interpretation and translation'* (Phillipson 2003, 137-138). This study looks into such scenarios.

Intercomprehension takes away the privilege of native speakers dominating languages. By allowing more people to use their mother tongue, the supremacy of particular languages is broken. In the European institutions intercomprehension could challenge the linguistic oligarchy of the three procedural languages. Intercomprehension could contribute to making multilingualism easier, more acceptable, and consequently more realistic than the anarchy of the current regime. Using intercomprehension would mean that all 23 languages are not only official but also used all the time. In order for multilingualism to become a reality in Europe, alternative language regimes would have to be discussed; one could be based on intercomprehension.

Grin even suggests that intercomprehension could also be seen in the light of human rights (Grin, 2008). Phillipson reasons along the same lines: respect for linguistic human rights involves ensuring that linguistic minorities enjoy the rights that majority groups take for granted for themselves (Phillipson 2003, 152). Grin claims that the principle that speakers of different languages are treated equally is certainly not the current practice of the European Union, since the vast majority of citizens are denied certain rights due to the language usage (Grin 2008, 106).

Victor Ginsburgh and Schlomo Weber agree when commenting on the language regime of the European Parliament. They claim that it seems politically unavoidable that full multilingualism will prevail in meetings of the European Parliament, since *'if the Parliament does not recognise their language, it is less likely that citizens will recognise it as being their Parliament'*. They also stress that English can by no means be the unique working language and that the European Union must find a way to balance its idealism and pragmatism on the language issue (Ginsburg & Weber 2005, 284-285). Finding this balance is also a challenge for the Dylan project, which reflects on the *'efficiency'* and *'fairness'* of different language policies (The Dylan Project Booklet 2011, 25-27).

Conclusions

Intercomprehension certainly means using more languages than just one lingua franca, which nowadays tends to be English. Intercomprehension could contribute to making multilingualism more of a reality in the European Union.

More people could work in their mother tongue meaning that the 23 languages would not only be official but also used in the daily activities of the European institutions.

However, to insist too much on multilingualism and people's right to work in their mother tongue using intercomprehension sometimes hampers the EU's core business being carried out effectively. Using a lingua franca (provided that everyone speaks it) often leads to less misunderstandings and time-consuming explanations. A lingua franca should be seen as a mere communication tool that facilitates communication between people with different mother tongues.

We suggest a practical open-minded approach to both intercomprehension and the use of a lingua franca for internal communication. The most efficient way of communicating within the EU institutions would be a combination of both approaches, using them randomly depending on previous experience of the language use that a certain situation requires.

5.2. Can intercomprehension make translation and interpretation more cost-effective?

As mentioned above, intercomprehension plays a role in facilitating communication between individuals and organisations. The European Union is a complex organisation where many different cultures and languages are represented. It is therefore not unreasonable to reflect on the question of whether or to what extent passive understanding of languages from the same family facilitate the everyday work of the institutions of the European Union.

In practice, the Commission works mainly in English, French and to some degree German. Moreover, the Commission does receive documents in every official EU language, such as reports from Member States, national legislation implementing community legislation, correspondence from Member States or companies and letters from individuals. The right to correspond with the EU in an official EU language of one's choice is enshrined in the Treaty and in Regulation 1/58. It is up to the EU institutions to deal with this in the most efficient way possible, while making use of and promoting multilingualism within its institutions.

5.2.1. Intercomprehension and translation – Theory

Whereas translation practice was used in older language teaching methods (on a par with the written word and grammar which is a metalanguage), translation has been radically dismissed in language learning in recent decades, as it is supposed to generate interference between languages. Patrick Chardenet describes this as an 'academic apartheid' whose watchdogs are territoriality and the ideal of linguistic purity:

'les compétences non représentées dans les offres curriculaires ne sont pas valorisées, non plus que les échanges entre locuteurs; et le travail sur plusieurs langues est tout juste admis dans le cas du linguiste qui en fait un simple corpus d'observations.' (*S'Entendre entre langues voisines*, 2008: 154)

François Grin, in his article *Intercompréhension, efficacité et équité*, proposes that speakers of different mother tongues that belong to the same language group could

easily develop receptive competences in the other languages of the same group, without necessarily acquiring productive competences (*S'entendre entre langues voisines: vers l'intercompréhension* edited by V.Conti and F.Grin).

Though it is common, everyday practice, multilingual or interlinguistic comprehension (the capacity of speakers of different mother tongues to use their receptive competences so as to understand each other) (Grin 2008, 18) has a little known, widely underused potential, including in the institutions. Situated midway between basic, international English and the ideal of bilingualism, intercomprehension provides an alternative model from the point of view of language dynamics in today's world; at the same time, it ensures that the speaker's identity is preserved. In times when exchanges over the internet are constantly increasing, it may be time to rethink the place of written communication in society and challenge the predominance of the spoken word.

We noted earlier in this study that intercomprehension works between languages that are closely related and from the same language group, such as Romance, Germanic, Slavic, etc. The assumption is therefore that translation would not have to be provided between the languages of the same group, since they are more or less mutually intelligible.

In order to save translation and interpretation costs, François Grin proposes a system of language clusters that would reduce the number of translation and interpretation combinations in the European Union. It's worthwhile pointing out that such a system would be limited to the translation of internal documents or, in the case of interpretation, to internal meetings.

External documents, including legislation and communications with citizens, would still be translated (or interpreted in the case of meetings) into the 23 official languages of the European Union. For the purpose of internal communication within the EU institutions, Grin proposes two versions of intercomprehension: A 'strong' version, which encompasses all languages of a language family, even languages that are not immediately intelligible, such as Swedish and German. The same goes for the Romance group where languages such as French and Romanian are not mutually understandable. In the 'weak' version, the different clusters only encompass languages that are mutually intelligible, though some study of the other language in the group is often required.

Therefore the 'weak' intercomprehension version that Grin presents seems more realistic and more feasible to examine in our study. In this weak version, Grin divides the 23 official languages of the European Union into 12 clusters as follows:

1. Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese
2. Romanian
3. German, English and Dutch
4. Danish and Swedish
5. Polish, Czech and Slovak
6. Bulgarian and Slovene
7. Latvian and Lithuanian
8. Irish
9. Greek
10. Estonian and Finnish
11. Hungarian
12. Maltese

Grin assumes that the languages within a group are mutually intelligible and that no translation within each group is needed. Translation between all of the 23 official languages in the European Union gives 506 language combinations. Should the translations at the institutions be limited to translating between the 12 clusters, the number of language pairs would be limited to 253, a reduction of 50 %.

In a scenario where the Members of the European Parliament and the civil servants of the EU institutions received training in intercomprehension, neither translation nor interpretation between languages of the same group would be needed anymore. For example, a document in Swedish would not have to be translated into Danish, a speech in Italian would not have to be interpreted into Spanish. This would guarantee multilingualism within the European institutions and at the same time reduce the number of translation and interpretation combinations (Grin 2008, 86-94).

However, intercomprehension does not come automatically and for the language clusters system to work, MEPs and civil servants would have to be trained in intercomprehension. Grin suggests that a total of 35 000 persons are employed in the institutions and about 3 500 join the institutions every year. This would mean that 3 500 would have to be trained in intercomprehension each year.

Based on research on the cost of teaching foreign languages, Grin estimates that the cost involved for a person to reach receptive competence in a closely related language (such as German or Dutch for English native speakers, Bulgarian for Slovene speakers, or French, Italian and Portuguese for Spanish speakers) would be around 3 000 euros.

This of course varies, depending on how far removed the person's mother tongue is from the languages he is being trained in. It also depends on how many languages the person would have to learn. In some of the clusters there are several languages, whereas other clusters contain only two (the speakers of a group with only one language would not have to learn any other language). Training 3 500 persons a year would entail a cost of 10.5 million euros per year.

Grin emphasises that using the clusters, which means fewer translation and interpretation combinations, would save the European Union around 2 606 million euros a year. Savings would be roughly 250% bigger than the cost of training civil servants in intercomprehension. This figure is however highly inflated as Grin does not take into account that most documents for internal use are not translated, nor is interpretation provided at most internal meetings. Consequently any savings made using this model would be considerably smaller.

To the economic gains Grin also adds a political aspect, stressing that intercomprehension would guarantee that the institutions would work in most official languages and not just in the three biggest languages (see chapter 5.1).

Grin concludes that from a financial point of view at least, the financial gains from multilingualism are undeniable (Grin 2008, 94-95). However, more exact calculations would have to be made, taking into account factors such as oral or written intercomprehension and the context. Oral intercomprehension is normally more difficult than written intercomprehension. Phonology plays a role; some languages are simply more easily understood than others and accents influence comprehension.

Written intercomprehension has greater potential than oral intercomprehension, where the prospects are more limited. Grin stresses the need for more exact figures, but maintains that the savings intercomprehension can bring to translation and interpretation are considerable.

The annual cost of translation and interpretation at the European institutions is about 1.1 billion euros. Grin points out that even if we confine the savings made through intercomprehension to a mere 275 million euros, this still amounts to considerable savings for the Member States. Intercomprehension is already very much practised in the daily work of the European Commission, with staff alternating between code-switching and code-mixing (Grin 2008, 98-100, 102).

While Grin's ideas sound interesting in theory, the cluster approach would not yield major benefits in practice, since the Commission translates either from English or (increasingly less) from French into the other official languages or, from one of the other languages into English or French. This is because the Commission's internal communication takes place in English or French. This practice makes it unnecessary to resort to intercomprehension. This will be explained in more detail later in this study.

5.2.2. Intercomprehension and translation in the European Commission – Practice

This section looks into the question of whether and how intercomprehension could contribute to the efficiency of the Commission's translation operations.

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) disposes of a wealth of linguistic knowledge, so at first sight it would seem that intercomprehension does not have much to add. Still, it is worthwhile to consider the possibilities intercomprehension has to offer.

In order to assess whether intercomprehension could be a tool to be used in DGT, it is necessary to give a short description of how DGT works.

A multilingual organisation like the EU needs high quality translation and relies on professional linguists to keep it running smoothly. The role of the language services in the various EU institutions and bodies is to support and strengthen multilingual communication in Europe and to help Europeans understand EU policies.

All official EU languages enjoy equal status. This means that EU citizens in the 27 Member States can use any of them to communicate with the European institutions, which helps to make the Union more open and more effective. In addition, the EU institutions ensure that citizens have access to legislative proposals and adopted legislation in the 23 official languages.

Not everything is translated into every official language; this would not be efficient, nor feasible even. At the Commission, the only documents produced in all 23 official languages are pieces of legislation and policy documents of major public importance – accounting for about a third of DGT's workload. Furthermore, information material and – as much as possible – websites are translated.

Other documents (e.g. correspondence with national authorities and individual citizens, reports, internal papers) are translated only into the languages needed in each case. Internal documents are all written in (and sometimes translated into) English, French or German. Similarly, incoming documents – which may be drafted in any language – are translated into a language in which they can generally be understood within the Commission.

DGT uses different translation methods:

1. The traditional method: an in-house translator whose principal language is the target language required translates the document into his/her main language ('mother tongue'), often with the help of electronic translation tools.

2. The external method: the translation is done by a freelance translator. The Commission can grant access to some of its electronic tools and translation memories to external translators to improve consistency and productivity.
3. The two-way method: an in-house translator whose principal language is the source language of a document (the one in which the original was written) and who has an excellent knowledge of the target language translates the document out of his or her language.
4. The relay method: an in-house translator translates a document into a relay language, usually English or French, known by another translator who then puts it into the requested target language. This method is used for uncommon language combinations such as from Estonian into Greek.
5. The three-way method: an in-house translator translates from and into languages neither of which is his or her principal language; for example, an Italian translator puts an Arabic text into English.

DGT makes use of the language knowledge available among its staff to cover even the more 'exotic' language combinations (e.g. Greek into Estonian), which in any case do not occur frequently.

In addition, intercomprehension is already part of translators' day-to-day work; for example, a Dutch translator who has studied Spanish and Portuguese will in all likelihood be able to consult the Italian and Swedish versions of the text he/she is translating, without ever having studied these languages. An *ad hoc* survey was conducted on 8 June 2011 among four language departments (Swedish, Finnish, Spanish and Portuguese). Three translators in each of these departments answered a brief questionnaire. The summary conclusions are as follows:

1. When you translate, do you usually check the wording used in other languages already available in Tradesk?

The vast majority said YES.

2. If yes, which language(s) do you check? (23 possibilities, rank by order of preference to one or several)

The translators questioned would usually check versions in languages unrelated to the language of the original. If the original was not in English, then English would be used for reference purposes. Practices vary widely — some translators would check language versions in related languages, others a broad selection of related and unrelated languages (depending on his/her linguistic competences).

Translators would normally be looking for differences (in structure, in terminology) from the language of the original. Comparing language versions can also follow a logic of substance (checking the Bulgarian version of a document on Bulgaria). The language departments give feedback on the original which is normally published in the *Note*.

3. Does your preference change depending on the type of documents? yes/no (circle the right reply)

One Swedish translator declared he would use German as a preference for legal documents. The translators surveyed found that, for the sake of comparison, the type of document was as significant as the original language.

4. When you compare languages, which are the reason(s) for doing this:

- to see how other translators have dealt with problematic concepts and what terminological solution they have chosen;

- to see how other translators have interpreted a sentence with problematic syntax;
- to see how other translators have interpreted a text which seems to include a mistake.

Swedish translators clearly indicated that the order of the comparison will be the text first, then the sentence and last, concepts and terminology.

5. When looking for a second opinion, do you first consult

- the contact person mentioned in the *fiche de travail* (job sheet)?
- a thematic/policy specialist in the Commission?
- a thematic/policy specialist in your country?
- a linguistic expert in the original language?
- a colleague from your own department?
- a colleague from another language department?
- a lawyer linguist?

You may indicate 2 or 3 options, ranking them from 1 (always), 2 (often) 3 (sometimes), 4 (seldom), 5 (never).

Translators usually look for in-house advice first. They will also use the resources available in the institution (contact person, administrator in charge of the file), when looking for feedback on the original. Sometimes new terms will require consulting a thematic or policy specialist in the country.

6. If/when you consult the author/requesting Unit, are you looking for linguistic or thematic advice?

- Linguistic
- Thematic
- both

The general tendency was to expect a thematic opinion from the author in charge of policy, though the linguistic dimension might also be discussed.

According to this succinct survey, the translator effectively uses his/her linguistic competences and activates them in the process of translating. The translator uses a variety of strategies that he/she adapts depending on the original language. Normally diverse language versions across language families are compared as much as related languages are. The approach to problems varies, but a group of translators had clearly chosen a global approach, i.e. start from the text rather than look for a one-off solution. Trust in the availability of in-house knowledge appeared to be good, though Spanish and Portuguese translators seemed more aware of, or more willing to call upon, resources available in the institution. All would take an orderly approach in seeking a relevant opinion.

5.2.2.1. Translation of incoming documents

DGT's current policy, in line with its client-oriented approach, is to accept as many translation requests as possible, including for incoming documents (i.e. reports/requests coming in from Member States, correspondence with citizens, etc. — see table below). In

doing so, DGT goes beyond the Translation Strategy currently in force, which categorises the documents to be translated and sets limits on their number and length.¹¹

Letters from individuals or articles are not usually translated by the English or French language department, but by the department of the source language. For example, a letter from a Latvian citizen will be translated into English/French by the Latvian language department, so as to ease somewhat the burden of the English or French language departments.

An obvious area where intercomprehension could – and perhaps already does – play a role is that of incoming documents, most of which are translated into English. The following categories can be distinguished:¹²

Category of incoming document	Pages translated by DGT (2010)	Pages translated by the English language department (2010)
1.2.1 Opinion of a national parliament	56	27
2.9.1 National legislation implementing Community legislation (Correspondence tables and/or summary)	15 040	13 767
2.9.2 Incoming correspondence from a Member State or a company	139 083	119 753
2.9.3 Report or request from a Member State presented in accordance with the Community legislation	11 773	10 455
2.12.2 Correspondence with citizens (individuals): incoming letters	8 817	2 328
TOTAL	174 769	146 330

Translation of incoming documents represents about 9% of DGT's total production. Almost 84% of all incoming documents are translated by the English language department, which has to cover all official EU languages (and a range of non-EU languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Japanese, Russian, etc.). This puts a considerable burden on the English language department.

The most common source languages are German, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Polish and Dutch, with over 8 000 pages translated from each into English in 2010. Translation from the other languages, except Maltese (29 pages) and French (2 524 pages) ranges between 3 000 and 7 000 pages.

In addition to full translation, DGT provides written or oral summaries for about 3% of the incoming documents.

For DGT's internal working methods in this context, intercomprehension is not the most obvious way of easing the burden on the English language department, since DGT has the language knowledge available to use reverse translation (i.e. a Polish translator translating an incoming document into English).

But what about intercomprehension in the other departments of the European Commission?

The European Commission departments are the first point of entry of documents from authorities, companies or citizens from the Member States.

¹¹ See SEC(2006) 1489 final.

¹² Categorisation according to StatSuivi.

Where possible, intercomprehension is used, as it is natural for someone who has the necessary linguistic knowledge to try and understand a text even if it is written in a language that he/she did not study. As with the above example of a Dutch translator who has learned Spanish and Portuguese, and therefore would in all likelihood be able to understand a letter written in Italian, the same applies to a policy officer in one of the Commission's departments.

The logical way of working, in order of preference, is to give a text in a given language to:

- 1) a native speaker of that language in the unit concerned;
- 2) a colleague in the unit concerned or outside the unit with a thorough knowledge of that language;
- 3) a colleague who can understand the text through intercomprehension.

However, this way of working applies only when a rough understanding of the incoming document is needed. In such cases it could also be argued that machine translation not only gives a result that is often almost as good as intercomprehension, but delivers it faster.

Quite often, though, even if the incoming document is drafted in somebody's mother tongue, the department requires a full translation into English (or French), because the policy officer concerned has to use that document for writing another one in either English or French.

In light of the above, the impact or benefit of intercomprehension in this area seems limited.

5.2.2.2. Training for translators

There seems to be agreement among experts such as Grin that it is easier to acquire a passive knowledge of a language belonging to the same language group. Similarly, if someone knows one or more languages of a particular language group, it will be relatively easy for this person to acquire a passive knowledge of an additional language of that group.

For example, it is not unreasonable to assume that a Dutch translator with a good knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese is more likely to quickly acquire a passive knowledge of Italian than a Dutch translator with a good knowledge of German and Swedish. The same is valid for the Slavic languages.

At first sight, it could therefore make some sense to encourage DGT's translating staff to take language courses for languages that either belong to the same language group as their native tongue, or to the group of languages of which they already have a good knowledge.

However, there is a difference between using intercomprehension to understand the rough meaning of a language and the language knowledge required to be able to provide a high-quality translation.

To use the above example: even with prior knowledge of Spanish and Portuguese, it would still take considerable effort and training before the Dutch translator would be operational in translating from Italian. The current Commission language courses organised for translators only, last two years (four hours a week). Given the low volume of translation from Italian into Dutch, it is questionable whether such training results in

the most efficient use of resources (and whether intercomprehension can really yield the cost savings suggested by Grin).

For the English (and to a lesser extent for the French) department, using intercomprehension for quick language training makes more sense.

This has in fact been recognised by the English Department, which, faced with a sharp increase in demand for translations from Italian, launched a pilot project aiming to produce 10 operational translators from Italian to English after nine months of classes. The focus lies on achieving reading fluency and on building up a sound knowledge of Italian grammar. This focus is similar to that of the special courses for translators, but the duration is much shorter — lessons last for two hours per week for nine months, spread over one calendar year. The course is designed for all FR-EN or ES-EN translators.

Six English translators (one with level 3 Italian, two that have started level 1 and three with no prior knowledge of Italian) are participating in this pilot. Even though the pilot project is not yet finished, the preliminary results are very encouraging and all six participants are likely to be operational by the end of the course. This shows how intercomprehension can bring efficiency gains that have a direct impact on DGT's operations.

After an evaluation of the pilot project, the next step could be to organise this type of course for PL-EN, CS-EN and SK-EN translators. Moreover, DGT could, *mutatis mutandis*, 'export' this format to other DGs, not for translation purposes, but to enable DGs to deal more efficiently with incoming correspondence in languages other than French or English. This would not necessarily reduce translation demand, but would contribute to a smooth processing of incoming documents by the Commission.

5.2.2.3. Machine translation and intercomprehension

Another area where intercomprehension might play a role is machine translation (MT). In order to assess what role intercomprehension could play in machine translation, it is necessary to provide a short overview of the types of machine translation and the latest trends in this field.

The following types of machine translation can be distinguished:

- rule-based machine translation (RBMT)
- statistical machine translation (SMT)
- hybrid machine translation (HMT).

The current trend in machine translation is toward statistical MT systems. Contrary to rule-based MT, which requires dictionaries and rules to be created manually for each direction of a language pair, statistical MT relies on the availability of large corpora of aligned texts of sufficient quality. Systems based on SMT can efficiently exploit the huge and high-quality linguistic assets of the Commission (existing translations, terminology, etc.) and produce results of sufficient quality to be used either raw, for information, by Commission departments or as a useful additional input by DGT translators to produce documents of publishable quality.¹³

Rule-based Machine Translation

Rule-based machine translation is based on dictionaries and rules which have to be created manually for each direction of a language pair. This is a slow and very labour-

¹³ See the study commissioned by DGT: *New ECMT Business Case: market research* (2010), p. 12.

intensive process. The high cost of developing and maintaining a rule-based system in relation to the low-quality outcome would justify a change to a more efficient and cost-effective statistical system.¹⁴

In a rule-based machine translation system, the original text is first analysed morphologically and syntactically in order to obtain a new syntactic version or *representation*. This representation is then refined to a more abstract level, putting emphasis on the parts relevant for translation and ignoring the rest. The transfer process then converts this final representation (still in the original language) to a representation of the same level of abstraction in the target language. These two representations are referred to as 'intermediate' representations. From the target language representation, the stages are then applied in reverse to produce a text in the target language.

Statistical Machine Translation

Statistical machine translation is based on statistical models whose parameters are derived from the analysis of bilingual text corpora. This is nowadays by far the most widely used machine translation method. The idea is that a document is translated according to the probability or chance that a word or a sentence in the source language (for example, English) translates into a certain word or alternatively a sentence in the target language (for example, German). For instance, the German word *Bank* can mean bank or bench in English. But in 75% of the cases it means 'bank', so the machine chooses 'bank'.

The machine answers questions such as: how often have I seen a sentence starting with the word 'the'? And answers it itself, for instance *Very often*.

The statistical translation models were initially word based, but significant advances have been made and now most statistical systems are phrase-based models. Generally there is a better use of resources in statistical than in rule-based machine translation. Statistical machine translation systems are not tailored to any specific pair of languages. Rule-based translation systems require the manual development of linguistic rules, which is time-consuming and can be expensive, and which cannot be used on other languages.

Hybrid Machine Translation

Hybrid Machine Translation combines the advantages of statistical and rule-based translation methods. There are two different approaches:

- Rules post-processed by statistics: Translations are performed using an engine based on rules. Statistics are then used in an attempt to adjust/correct the output from the rules engine.
- Statistics guided by rules: Rules are used to pre-process data in an attempt to better guide the statistical engine. Rules are also used to post-process the statistical output to perform functions such as normalisation. This approach is more effective, has more flexibility and controls the translation better.

The current project run by DGT is called MT@EC, which at the first stage is based on DGT's internal data (Euramis translation memories). At a later stage it is envisaged to examine other sources.¹⁵

The approach followed is to create language pairs 'EN into all EU languages' and then to continue with 'all languages into EN'.

¹⁴ See Report on Machine Translation.

¹⁵ DGT Information Update No 1, February 2011.

In addition, there are 18 operational language pairs of ECMT,¹⁶ for which the first engines are under preparation. The operational language pairs are the following:

Operational pairs		
EN	▶	NL, FR, DE, EL, IT, PT, ES
FR	▶	NL, EN, DE, IT, PT, ES
ES, DE	▶	EN, FR
EL	▶	FR

The Euromatrix project, an EU sponsored project (2006-2009), whose aim was to create a major push in machine translation technology by applying the most advanced MT technologies systematically to all pairs of EU languages, tested how well statistical machine translation scored in translations between 22 of the 23 EU official languages (not Irish). The best results were obtained when translating from and into English because it has the largest amount of data fed into the machine.

Languages that are similar and close to each other linguistically scored well, such as German and Dutch, Swedish and Danish. The Romance languages French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese also obtained high scores when translated with a statistical machine from one to the other. Translations with Finnish, Estonian or Hungarian as the target language scored poorly, as did translations from the Germanic and Romance into the Slavic languages, such as Czech or Polish.

From the above it becomes apparent that intercomprehension does play some role in the development of machine translation. However, for DGT's purposes, due to the fact that about 90% of the originals are drafted in English or French, the importance of intercomprehension is less obvious.

5.2.2.4. Terminology and intercomprehension

Part of the terminology work done in DGT consists of defining concepts. This requires consulting a number of sources, some of which can be in a language other than the language for which the terminologist is defining the term. For example, it is perfectly plausible that a Polish terminologist discovers a term and background material in Czech which is equivalent to the Polish term he is working on. Here intercomprehension is obviously a factor.

Further analysis of the terminology work done in DGT is merited to see if training terminologists in languages close to their own mother tongue would yield efficiency gains.

5.2.2.5. Testing intercomprehension in DGT

In this section we propose two pilot projects to test, in real working situations, what benefit intercomprehension could have for DGT's day-to-day operations.

Hypothesis:

¹⁶ European Commission Machine Translation.

For languages that are very close in structure, grammar and syntax, it is tempting to assume that efficiency gains can be made in these cases. For example for Spanish and Portuguese; Czech and Slovak and Swedish and Danish.

The idea is to set up the following pilot project (\pm 3-6 months) in each of the three language pairs above:

1. Translator of language A translates a text X from EN or FR into his language.
2. Translator of language B translates a text Y from EN or FR into his language.
3. When the translations are ready, translator of language A takes text Y translated into language B and 'localises' it into his own language A.
4. The translator of language B takes text X and 'localises' it into his own language B.
5. The translations are revised against the original (English or French) to ensure their accuracy.

After having done a number of translations in this way, the translators should indicate whether or not this way of working is faster than translating straight from the source language.

If this is the case, then it is probably due to the fact that the languages concerned have similar sentence structures, which can be applied, rather than because of easier understanding (since translators' skills in English and French are good enough). If indeed time can be saved by working in the way described above, a case could be made for organising translation work differently. This would imply more coordination effort between language departments (deciding who translates which text, etc.), but if the overall efficiency gain is substantial enough, it would still be worth implementing.

Another way of using intercomprehension in translation would be to use DGT's language knowledge to ensure multilingual concordance, which in the EU context of multilingual lawmaking is of great importance, but not easy to realise because of time constraints.

In theory, and if sufficient resources were available, DGT could create a pool of translators, who between them would cover all 23 languages and who would check important legislative documents for discrepancies and correct these. Such an exercise could not only rely on the translators' working language, but also on their understanding of other languages through intercomprehension. The feasibility of such an approach will be the object of a separate study on multilingual concordance.

A second pilot project concerns the quality control and evaluation of incoming freelance translations.

DGT is responsible for the quality of translations, regardless of whether they are outsourced or translated internally. In order to assess the quality of the work, the evaluator needs to carefully review a sample of the text: 10 % of a text, with a minimum of 2 pages and a maximum of 10 pages per document.¹⁷ Currently this quality control and evaluation of translations provided by freelance translators is done by the respective language departments. For instance, a translation into English is evaluated by the English Department, and a text in Polish by the Polish department, etc.

The pilot project would look into whether 10-15 translators making use of their passive language knowledge and intercomprehension could evaluate incoming freelance translations. The pilot project would be limited to the three main language families, the

¹⁷ Source: document on quality control on the website of DGT S.2.

Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages. One group of translators would deal with translations into the languages of the Romance family, another with translations into Germanic languages and a third with incoming translations in Slavic languages. Making use of intercomprehension and passive languages skills, they would check whether the work of the freelance translators complies with the contractual obligations in the tender specifications and then either accept or reject it.

For example, a translator knowing Czech would, apart from translations into Czech, also evaluate incoming translations into Polish and Slovak. Someone knowing Spanish would evaluate the translations produced by freelancers in Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian.

Computer support, i.e. use of adequate quality assurance software, is crucial and the pilot project would be limited to less important documents and documents that are easier to translate.

Before starting the pilot project, testing is needed to establish whether someone can carry out the quality control and evaluation of a translation in a language that is mutually intelligible, but that he or she has not studied.

The pilot project might allow an estimate to be made of how long it would take to carry out the quality control and evaluations of the 25 000 documents or 530 000 pages¹⁸ that are outsourced. The pilot project also aims to identify bottlenecks in the process of evaluating freelance translations.

5.2.2.6. *Intercomprehension and future enlargements*

A pilot project as described above is also interesting in view of the upcoming accession of Croatia, and the possible future accession of Serbia and Montenegro and perhaps also of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This means that the Commission has to be prepared to add four new official EU languages, namely Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin. If indeed the political decision is that these enlargements entail the introduction of four new languages, the Official Journal (OJ) of the EU will have to be published in all of them, i.e. four OJs.

Since those languages are mutually intelligible, thought should be given to organising translation into these languages in a more efficient way, without touching on the foundations of Regulation 1/58 and the equal authenticity of the EU's official languages.

Intercomprehension can be a useful resource in the transition years leading up to a country becoming part of the EU, by making the most of linguistic relatedness in a region. Slovenia for example took part in the technical and bilateral assistance to the **Western Balkans countries'** linguistic preparations for EU membership. Translation of the *acquis* had been available to the Western Balkans candidate countries since 2004 at least, as published in the Official Journal. In addition, Slovenia participated in three twinning projects also dealing with the legal linguistic preparations for accession in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (2004-2010). These projects entailed assistance to their translation coordination units in setting up the work processes, terminology databases, etc. In the framework of these projects, the Slovenians passed on to them their primary legislation in Translators Work Bench form plus glossaries:

http://www.svrez.gov.si/en/areas_of_work/coordination_of_european_affairs/language_issues/eu_language_regime/

¹⁸ Figures for 2011.

Linguistic preparations for EU membership are also a regular subject of bilateral discussions with other countries from this region which are very interested in the Slovenian experience in this field. It seems that the Czechs and Slovaks cooperated in this way before accession and shared a database containing unrevised translations. This well-established tradition lives on, as in May 2010 in Zagreb the Croatian Prime Minister made an official donation to her Serbian counterpart of Croatian translations of the European Union legislation as a pledge of good cooperation, friendship between the two countries and support to Serbia's efforts to join the EU. http://www.vlada.hr/en/naslovnica/novosti_i_najave/2010/svibanj/predsjednica_vlade_kosor_urucila_predsjedniku_vlade_republike_srbije_cvetkovicu_hrvatski_prijevod_pravne_stecevine_eu_a

What has been achieved in preparing countries for EU membership could spur on new thinking on mutual linguistic support in the transition years leading up to, and following, accession.

Given the similarity between the languages, a workflow system could be established based on 'cross-fertilisation' between the various language versions: for example, a Croatian translator translates a text into Croatian and the Bosnian, Montenegrin and Serbian translators 'localise' the message linguistically by adapting the terminology, spelling, etc. to their language variety, so as to create four concordant language versions.

Such an approach would enable the Commission to ensure equal treatment of all languages (publication in the OJ etc.). The Commission must fulfil its legal obligations as regards translation and do so according to the principle of sound management, i.e. approach the matter from a cost and benefits angle. How it does this, is an internal management matter.

Moreover, this practice is not without precedent; when Austria joined the EU arrangements were made to take account of some differences between 'Austrian' German and 'German' German (*Protocol 10 to the Accession Treaty – 31 Austrian terms...*).

It must be noted, though, that such an approach is not entirely without risk. Similarity between languages means that language versions will be open to comparison. Any lack of concordance is more easily exposed. This could put the legal certainty in doubt and create problems for the courts as we could be confronted with cases of 'translation shopping' for the language version that an individual or company considers to be the most beneficial for its purposes.

6. Conclusions

All official languages in the European Union except Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian and Maltese belong to the Indo-European group of languages and therefore possess common structures and vocabulary. Intercomprehension is an effective language learning method, based on a person's ability to exploit previously acquired knowledge, especially knowledge in another language of the same linguistic family. Intercomprehension starts with recognising words, guessing, discovering and anticipating. As the learner becomes aware of tendencies and systems, it turns into deduction. Knowledge in any area that helps interpret the signs of languages one has not studied can be exploited. Everyone has interpretative skills that help them understand messages. Intercomprehension does not imply learning a foreign language, but rather the acquisition of receptive strategies, in order to co-construct a meaning from clues provided by different sources. It's about making people aware of this knowledge and enabling them to use this knowledge by developing the appropriate strategies.

In many parts of Europe, such as Catalonia, Galicia, Friesland and Valle d'Aosta, intercomprehension is used in everyday life. Intercomprehension takes place without people thinking about it or making a conscious choice to use it. In a conversation two people speaking different languages understand each other; this happens at workplaces, in shops, banks and restaurants. It also takes place at local council meetings, radio talk shows, interviews, sports and cultural events. In other words it can happen in almost any situation or activity. It is a practical way of communicating and fair in the sense that each person uses his or her mother tongue and no-one is obliged to change language. It is important however that the speakers are aware of the fact that intercomprehension works. They can also be trained in intercomprehension through practical experience. Being exposed to a language similar to their own promotes understanding, for instance, watching TV in the other language. Training also facilitates intercomprehension, for instance by doing a course in the other language. Last but not least, ideological factors play an important role. Attitudes to the other language can either block or enhance intercomprehension. Intercomprehension tends to work best between languages that are equal in size and/or status.

Intercomprehension is used widely in the private sector. News agencies and broadcasters use it regularly in their news gathering, in order to understand languages no-one in the office has studied. For example, a person who speaks a Slavic language tries to decode and explain the content of pieces of news in other Slavic languages and a person speaking Hindi makes a rough translation of incoming news in Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali or other related languages he understands. At the Nordic Public Service Broadcaster, intercomprehension is used regularly in internal communication. At Spanair, intercomprehension is also used for internal communication so that everyone speaks his or her mother tongue, either Spanish or Catalan. Intercomprehension is also used very much at Scandinavian Airlines System (SAS), where the staff are encouraged to speak their mother tongue (either Danish, Norwegian or Swedish). In order to make themselves better understood, employees at SAS try to speak slowly, articulate clearly and borrow words from the other languages. When this adaptation becomes marked, it gives rise to a new jargon, which has been labelled SASperanto, a mix of the three Scandinavian languages. SAS is also a good example of how ideology affects intercomprehension. Using the Scandinavian languages is part of the company's image. SAS is perceived as an intrinsic part of Scandinavia and 'Scandinavian thinking'. SAS as a company is based on the idea of a Scandinavian community — 'Scandinavian' is an added value for the company. In the day-to-day routine, speaking English is seen as contrary to the 'culture of the house'. It can be seen as deviant, almost as communicating the message 'we don't belong to the same group'. English is only used with non-Scandinavians and sometimes in written communication, for instance on the intranet.

Intercomprehension is also a common phenomenon in translation; DGT's translators use it in their daily work when they compare language versions of a text they are translating. However, the impact or benefit of intercomprehension in translation seems limited, since machine translation and reverse translation already fulfil the role intercomprehension could play.

That said, it might be worth setting up a test to explore the potential of intercomprehension as a way to enhance efficiency. The results of such a test would also be interesting in the context of the upcoming accession of Croatia and the possible future accession of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro.

Three areas where intercomprehension could play a bigger role are **multilingual concordance** (creating a pool of translators covering all 23 languages, which could check legal texts for discrepancies), **external translation** (evaluating translated text from freelance translators) and **training of translators** (teaching translators — in the English and French departments — a language that is closely related to one or more languages that the translator already knows).

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ISBN 978-92-79-24804-7



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