

The Role of Intercomprehension Strategies in Multilingual Pedagogy

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Abstract. *This study explores the integration of intercomprehension strategies in the simultaneous teaching of German and French, two prominent languages in European multilingual contexts. Intercomprehension is a process where speakers of one language understand another related language without actively speaking it. It offers a promising path toward more efficient and inclusive language education. Drawing on recent developments in multilingual pedagogy, the research investigates how intercomprehension can foster metalinguistic awareness, cross-linguistic transfer, and learner autonomy. Through qualitative analysis of instructional design and teacher reflections, the study identifies practical methods for integrating intercomprehension into language classrooms and highlights its implications for curricular innovation.*

Key words: *intercomprehension, multilingualism, German and French, pedagogy, cross-linguistic transfer, language teaching.*

Introduction

In an era of increasing linguistic diversity and international mobility, the need for pedagogical approaches that leverage language proximity has become more urgent. Multilingual pedagogies that promote intercomprehension are gaining attention as a way to optimize cognitive resources and facilitate access to multiple languages without overburdening learners (Meißner, 2019). Intercomprehension is particularly relevant for the teaching of German and French, which, despite being from different language families, share numerous lexical and syntactic features due to centuries of contact and mutual influence (Degache & Garcia-Debanc, 2022).

While intercomprehension has been explored in Romance-language clusters (e.g., Spanish–Italian–French), little has been done to investigate its potential in German-French instruction. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how intercomprehension strategies can be integrated into the parallel teaching of these two languages to promote cross-linguistic awareness and pedagogical innovation.

Methodology

This qualitative study was designed as an exploratory reflection and instructional analysis. Materials were collected from a series of lesson plans, teaching observations, and reflective journals of an experienced instructor teaching German and French in parallel at the tertiary level. Lessons were designed to exploit linguistic similarities and contrasts, focusing on receptive skills (reading and listening), and encouraging learners to use prior knowledge from one language to interpret the other.

Results

The integration of intercomprehension activities revealed several pedagogical benefits. Learners showed increased awareness of language connections, often recognizing shared Latin roots or

common loanwords, such as *administration* (Fr) and *Administration* (Ger), or structural parallels in compound nouns and syntactic alignment.

The reflective journals indicated that learners were better able to “guess intelligently” and self-correct during comprehension tasks. Notably, the teacher observed that students developed greater confidence in tackling unfamiliar texts and expressed curiosity about language families and etymology, signaling a shift toward autonomous learning behavior.

In contrast, difficulties were noted when encountering “false friends” (*actuellement* in French vs. *aktuell* in German), which required explicit scaffolding. The instructor also noted that learners from monolingual backgrounds needed more support in developing meta-linguistic strategies than those with prior multilingual exposure.

Discussion

These findings support the broader argument that intercomprehension, when explicitly taught, can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool in multilingual classrooms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). By highlighting connections rather than isolating languages, instructors can promote cognitive flexibility, improve lexical retention, and reduce language learning anxiety.

This study suggests that integrating intercomprehension in German-French language education is not only feasible but pedagogically valuable. It aligns with European frameworks advocating plurilingual competence and fosters deeper learner engagement with linguistic diversity (Council of Europe, 2020). However, successful implementation requires intentional instructional design and teacher training in comparative linguistics.

Conclusion

This study underscores the untapped pedagogical potential of intercomprehension in the simultaneous teaching of German and French. By actively drawing learners’ attention to cross-linguistic similarities and differences, intercomprehension not only supports receptive skills but also fosters metalinguistic awareness and learner autonomy. The results suggest that even in language pairs from different families, such as German and French, intercomprehension can be meaningfully integrated into instruction with well-structured tasks and reflective scaffolding. For educators, this approach aligns with contemporary multilingual education goals and offers a practical strategy to enrich traditional language teaching methods. Future work should investigate learner outcomes longitudinally and examine how teacher training programs can incorporate intercomprehension methodology more systematically.

References

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