

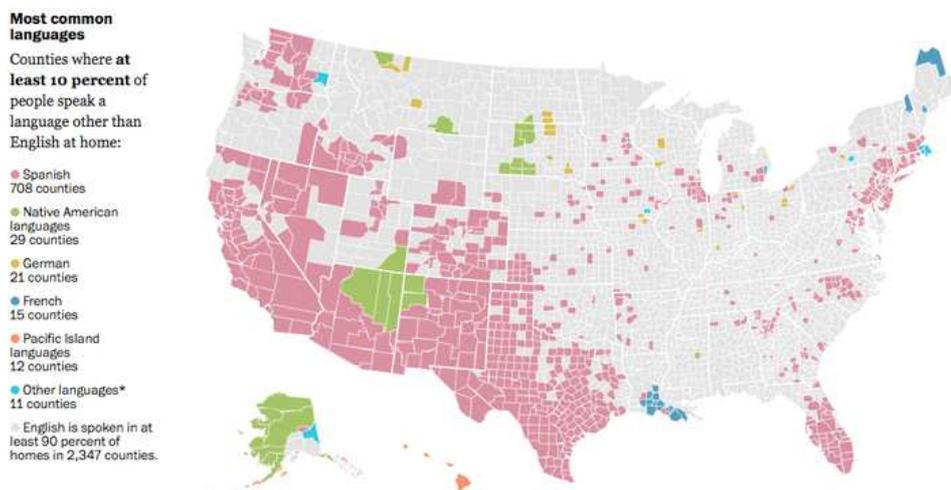
1- America is a multilingual country

The USA is a relatively new country, a land of hope and mass immigration. It has always been a multilingual country, where European languages especially have coexisted from the start. Because of that reality, the American identity is not defined by a single, original, historical language. Being American means subscribing to a common set of values while remaining what one is. Therefore being able to master the English language as a common language from the perspective of one's own native language, or to enter a real multilingualism from the perspective of one's own native English represents a major challenge.

Circulation between languages is more than a mere technique. It is a dynamic virtue that helps one to develop what one is while developing the will and the ability to be American. For here, you can't deny the reality of the diversity of the coexisting languages, contrary to what has often been done in Europe. One of the great challenges of the United States, therefore, is in the didactic treatment of this coexistence.

Obviously, the natural and social place for that is school, from early childhood to university. How to master the English language while mastering other languages that are a crucial asset in a multilingual nation and a multilingual world? That is where intercomprehension can contribute to the debate.

1-1 A historical and dynamic reality



This 2011 map¹ shows the counties where at least 10% of the population speak another language than English at home. This suggests four things. One: English is spoken by an overwhelming 90% in 2,347 counties — 75% of the territory. Two: Spanish is spoken in 708 counties (22.4% of the territory) geographically distributed between the South-West and the larger urban centers. Spanish represents

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/national/us-language-map/>

62% of the non-English languages spoken in the USA. It is by far the second American language. Three: two European languages — French and German — are also historically inscribed in the geography of 36 counties. Four: the native American languages remain present on some geographical spots of 23 counties, reminding us that America, originally a multilingual nation, still hosts many native languages².

The map shows specific linguistic presences that bear witness to the demographic pressure of large neighboring centers (the Southern border for Spanish) and to the weight of history (as in Louisiana and the Quebec border for French). Other than English, French, Spanish and German are three important European languages that came over with the first migrations.

1-2 Are the current diversities problems or assets?

Government statistics make it possible to observe the evolution of the languages spoken in the USA over a period of thirty years (1980-2010). They make it very clear that the reality of bilingualism has increased tremendously. Indeed, while the global population has increased by 37.6% over thirty years, the share of Americans speaking another language than English at home has increased by 158.2%³. Is that a problem or an asset? Although this phenomenon only concerns a minority as nearly 80% of all Americans speak only English at home, it does require some explanation.

The strongest progression of non-English languages most spoken at home reflects the most recent immigration waves: Vietnamese (+599.2%), Russian (+393.5%); Chinese (+345.3%); Korean (+327.1%); Persian (+256.5%); Spanish (+232.8%) or Tagalog (+231.9%). However, the languages belonging to more ancient immigration waves tend to disappear from family usage: Italian (- 55.2%); Yiddish (-51%); German (-32,9%) or Polish (-25,9%). The (growing in-)ability to speak the language of one's original community may be an indicator of social integration or inclusion in the new society in particular through inter-marriage or dwindling new arrivals.

Beyond the figures, it is worth trying to qualify the action of speaking a language other than English in the family and private circle. Language inclusion — as in the ability to speak several languages at home: one's mother-tongue and English— is all the more frequent as the population is socially favored. The 2011 survey questioned Americans on their own estimation of the quality of their spoken English⁴: 25.9% of the nearly 38 million Spanish speakers said they do not speak English well, of which 9% said they do not speak English at all. The Chinese figures are very similar: 29.6% (of which 9.7% non-English speakers) The French-speaking community, on the other hand, has very few monolingual individuals (0.6%) while the "French Creole" speaking population has about 4.3%. It is not language in itself that is a impeding factor but the social origin of its speakers, as Catalan sociolinguist L.V. Aracil showed a long time ago⁵.

The second explanatory factor is the « linguistic distance » between the speaker's native language and the English language. The closer one's native language to the natural organization of the English language (in terms of syntax, morphology, vocabulary and cultural references), the more naturally it comes to speak English « well ». That linguistic proximity may be either natural – between

² Between 100 and 150 distinct languages in the USA and in Canada, spoken by more than half a million people.

³ Cf. U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 and 1990 Census. Census 2000, and the 2010 American Community Survey.

⁴ Detailed Languages Spoken at Home by English-Speaking Ability for the Population 5 Years and Over: 2011.

⁵ Lluís V. Aracil, « Conflicte lingüístic i normalització lingüística a l'Europa nova », 1965, *Papers de sociolingüística*, Barcelona, La Magrana, 1982, 23-38.

Slavonic, Romance or Germanic European languages⁶ — or cultural: thus the communities issued from the former British Empire and whose school system or socialization use English find it hardly difficult to speak English « well⁷ ».

In fact, the more recent the immigrant community, the more difficult it is for its members to master the English language. Quite logically, linguistic integration takes time. On the other hand, the larger the immigrant community, the lesser the ability to master the English language, as if too high an integration in a community practically made independent because of its number were an obstacle to insertion in the English language. That is particularly striking about the two larger linguistic communities – Spanish and Chinese. The circulation of language skills at school — what we call a didactic approach of the contact between languages — is therefore a major challenge.

As a last preliminary step, we need to define what we call “linguistically close” languages as opposed to “linguistically remote” languages. This is important so as not to fantasize the notion of “language groups” as watertight and opposed to the historically dominant group that is English. First, the idea that each language is a homogenous⁸ linguistic block must be dispelled. Second, the perception of the linguistic remoteness of a language is relative. I met a young Chinese student at the San Francisco airport once, and asked her where on earth she had learnt the beautifully fluent French she spoke. “In Varsaw”, she said. That struck me dumb. For a European, Polish and French are two seriously different languages. “Of course not!” she said, “as seen from China, Polish and French are quite similar: same alphabet, same syntax, and a vocabulary based on the same linguistic roots.”

That Chinese student reminds us that the languages of European immigration all belong to the same family. Her experience confirms that we could quite effortlessly transfer our language skills from one European language to the other and thus enter the realm of what we will henceforth call the “intercomprehension of related languages”

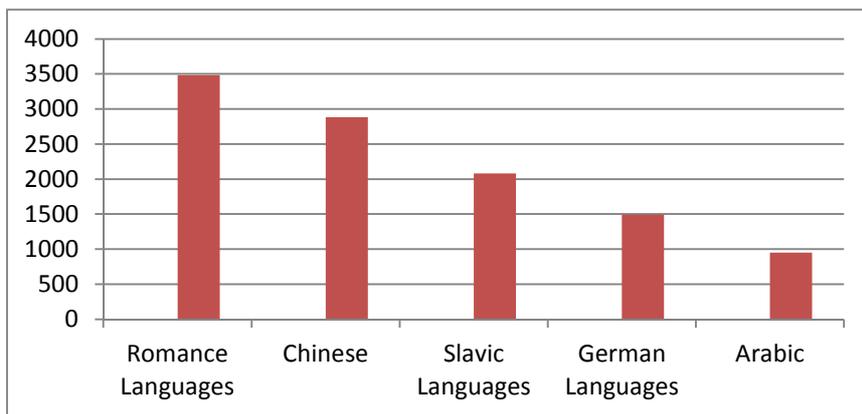
We can enter an unknown language, or a foreign language — as they used to be called at school in particular — for the very reason that we already know and speak one language — our own. But also because that language belongs to a far wider group of languages that form a *family*. Intercomprehension consists in understanding how a family of languages works in order to learn one or several specific languages. It relies on the notion of interlinguistic transfer⁹. Now, in the United States, while the languages spoken are probably innumerable, they can easily be reduced to a few large families. Besides English which is by far the most dominant language spoken as an only language by a little more than 230 million Americans, and after Spanish, which is spoken also by more than 37 million people, the most widely spoken languages are the Romance languages, used by nearly 3.5 million people.

⁶ Among the 135 000 speakers of Scandinavian languages 1,7% say they don't speak English well, and 0,1% say they don't speak it at all. However, among the 213 000 Cambodians 29,5% think they don't speak English well, and 6,6% say they don't speak it at all.

⁷ Schooling and Language Socialization are clearly major factors in the mastery of languages, of English and of multilingualism (English + mother-tongue + another language) as evidenced by the two large linguistic communities from countries where English was or is the language of schooling and an official language for administration. Only 6.5% of the 650,000 Hindi-speaking Americans speak a little or no English; the figure is 10.7% for the 374,000 Urdu-speaking Indians (the language of Indian Muslims and the official language of Pakistan).

⁸ The Chinese community uses several distinct languages. Mandarin is the main language, although divided into eight dialects from the West to the North of China, but other languages coexist on the Chinese mainland, especially in the densely populated South-East: Wu (around Shanghai) and Cantonese especially in the far-South.

⁹ Of which he spoke as early as 1923 in his article « The influence of first-year Latin upon the ability to read English », *School and Society*, 17, 1923, 165-168.

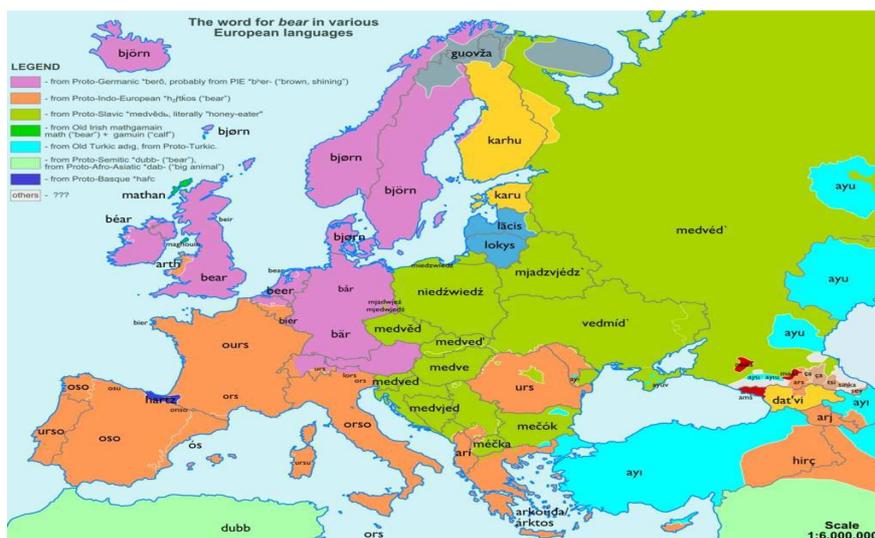


English is the most Romance of the Germanic languages, notably through its lexicon. Spanish speakers have natural abilities that just need to be didactically organized for them to enter other Romance languages with ease and understand the circular, transparent phenomena that connect English, Spanish, French, Italian or Portuguese. Similarly, the 230 million mono-lingual English speakers could find it useful to enter Romance languages — including Spanish, French and Italian which have been present on American soil for so long, and are historical languages, in some places, just like English.

Let's reflect on the stakes and the benefits of such a didactic approach. First, it would enable individuals to master some languages spoken by the vast majority of American citizens. Second, for the country as a whole, intercomprehension would make it possible for all the official languages of the American continent: English, Spanish, French and Portuguese — to interact. After all, they are spoken by nearly one third of the world population.

2- A few historical considerations

Learning a language without taking other languages into consideration is a rather recent approach. 97% of the 500 million citizens of the political Europe speak languages derived from three large families: 42% speak a Romance language (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Romanian ...), 39% speak a Germanic language (English, German, Dutch, Scandinavian languages) and 16% speak a Slavonic language (Polish, Czech, etc.)



These three families share a tremendous part of their vocabulary. The more “specialized” the words — chemistry, mathematics, nuclear physics — the more our languages seem close, at least wordwise. To this day, the 42% speakers of Romance languages have the feeling that they speak languages that are a little different, but not really foreign, for all their languages — to which one should add non-national languages such as Occitan which was the language of the first European poets and of Literature Nobel Prize Frederic Mistral, or Catalan, which is very close — are Romance languages. In short, as we all speak bad Latin, we all understand each other...!

This practice of intercomprehension is both scholarly and intuitive. As a scholarly activity it was defined for the first time in the Renaissance. In the 16th century, curious volumes were printed for the likes of tradesmen, the new elite that did not speak Latin and took Europe and the world by storm through the commerce of ideas and goods. These books were called *Colloquia*, or conversation textbooks¹¹. This was a time when vernacular languages soared in royal administration and the Church¹² thanks to the newly invented printing press. About one hundred of these dictionaries for merchants and travellers were published until the 18th century in the highly active merchant zone of the Netherlands, through Flanders, France, Spain, England, in the large pivotal cities of European trade.

In the 19th century, the invention of philology gradually revived a form of comparative language studies. Romance philology is the most dynamic and the most fruitful of them all. Many German and French scholars pointed out word transparency, parallel morphology, and syntactic fluidity between all Romance languages. In 1888, a renowned dictionary of pedagogy advises the study of other Romance languages — Occitan, Spanish, Italian — for a better learning and understanding of the way the French language works.

Scholarly knowledge gives birth to intuitive practices illustrated by the literature of many centuries. This letter written by Racine to La Fontaine in 1661 marks the two authors’ discovery of the existence of an *other* Romance language (Occitan) in a political sphere now largely centralized around Paris.

“We went on the Rhône for two days. (...) From Lyon I had begun not to understand the language of the country very much, and not to be understood myself. (...) I swear that I am as badly in need of an interpreter as a Moscovite would be in Paris.”

What does Racine do? To understand and make himself understood, he uses languages belonging to the same family:

¹⁰ <http://www.businessinsider.com/european-maps-showing-origins-of-common-words-2013-11>.

¹¹ Cf. Sandrine Caddéo and Béatrice Charlet-Mesdjian, « Latin et intercompréhension », in *Didactiser le contact des langues en milieu scolaire : convergences, intégration, intercompréhension*, Actes du Colloque « Unité et diversité des langues. Théorie et pratique de l’acquisition bilingue et de l’intercompréhension », Toulouse, directed by P. Escudé, Paris, Editions des Archives Contemporaines, 2014.

¹² As early as 1492, Spanish grammarian Nebrija said that « La lengua es compañera del Imperio », and French became the sole language of the royal administration (1512-1539) ; Bembo normalized a central « Italian » (1525) ; Luther spread the translation of the Bible in a German dialect that was to become standard German as we know it (1522-1534).

“However, I am beginning to realize that it is a language mixed with Italian and Spanish, and as I understand both languages rather well, I sometimes resort to them to understand others and to make myself understood¹³.”

Closer to our times, Italian author Mario Rigoni Stern’s *Storia di Tönle* (1921-2008) tells the story of a simple shepherd from Asiago, between Italy and Austria, who, because of his poverty, his nomadic life and his central geographic location, has more language skills in 1914 than any ordinary European of his times.

“Other than Cimbre, he spoke Austrian and German dialects as well as Bohemian Romani, Hungarian, Croatian and Italian¹⁴.”

What this means is that for this man, who has never been to school, the daily intercourse with speakers of other languages has given him language skills in numerous dialects and Germanic languages (Cimbre, Austrian, German), Slavonic languages (Bohemian, Croatian), Romance languages (Italian) and even in Hungarian, which belongs to none of these families.

Jules Ronjat, a French linguist and the editor of Ferdinand de Saussure’s *General Linguistics Course*, gave a name to this practice for the first time in 1913 — he called it *intercomprehension*. This practice means that ordinary or scholarly speakers alike can lead a sustained conversation although they are not aware of belonging to the same language. To be able to do that, the first requirement is that there is a need for them to exchange: speaking and understanding only make sense if meaningful and purposeful. That is how the speakers will notice the differences but most of all the resemblances between the languages:

“The differences in pronunciation, morphology, syntax and vocabulary are not such that a person mastering one of our dialects to near perfection could not talk in that dialect to another person speaking a different dialect that she masters to near perfection too¹⁵.”

For these differences are less important than the numerous similarities. A sustained practice of co-construction will lead to the *awareness of a common language*.

“One clearly has the feeling of a common language, pronounced a little differently; the context makes it possible to grasp sounds, forms, phrases and words that would puzzle if they were isolated. You ever so seldom have to ask for a word to be explained or repeated, or to change the turn of a sentence to be better understood.”

That says it all. Through intercomprehension you belong to a family of languages if you master one language of that family. Ronjat takes the study of languages and their didactic approach from philology (where each language is studied in its singularity) to linguistics (the science that studies what languages have in common, whether universal or specific). Ronjat was the editor of Saussure whose *General Linguistics Course* propelled language studies into modernity. For Saussure,

“In every human collectivity two forces are always working simultaneously and in opposing directions: individualism or provincialism [esprit de clocher] on the one hand and intercourse — communications among men — on the other¹⁶.”

¹³ Letter from Jean Racine to Jean de la Fontaine, Uzès, 11 November 1661. The letter ends with the Occitan salutation *adioussias*.

¹⁴ Mario Rigoni Stern, *Storia di Tönle - L'anno della vittoria*, Einaudi, 1978. In a footnote, Stern explains that Cimbre is a Germanic language spoken by the population of the high Italian plateaus – now an extinct language.

¹⁵ Jules Ronjat, *Syntaxe des parlers provençaux modernes*, Mâcon, Protat frères, 1913, p. 13.

¹⁶ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique générale*, Paris, Payot, 1916, édition Tullio de Mauro, p. 481.

This truth is particularly useful when dealing with language learning. There is hardly any doubt that for Ronjat, the saussurian “force of intercourse” is intercomprehension, which enables the global unity of language beyond dialectal particularisms.

But this is 1913 and states all over Europe have built their identities as monolithic nations around a single common language. National education systems enforce a standardized, purified version of the national language with the idea that bilingualism and the contact between languages is necessarily detrimental. Navigating between languages is henceforth seen as a mistake or a fault, and duly punished as such.

Our language learning system is generated by our political vision of languages: when we are taught that languages are *foreign*, we are taught to beware of them and to beware of *false friends*. Once we rediscover that these languages belong to the same family, that they are not foreign but rather linked by a natural continuum that is historical but also cultural and linguistic, we can integrate intercomprehension as an effective and dynamic didactic practice. This became possible only after the nationalisms had ended after WWII, and after the emergence of the notion of a political Europe, minutes before globalization¹⁷.

In the 1970s the great French linguist Claire Benveniste established the idea that in French, spoken language is not a lesser version of written language, but a different form of linguistic logic and expression that says the same things but differently. Having introduced the notion of a form of duality within something that had previously been considered whole and indivisible, Claire Benveniste could then fling wide the gates for linguistic practices of intercomprehension¹⁸. However, it took another generation for these “plural practices” to finally appear in our curricula.

3- Euromania : an example of intercomprehension as part of school practice

From 2005 to 2008 I conducted a University program¹⁹ that created the first European textbook for pupils aged 8 to 11. All resources are free online on the website www.euro-mania.eu: a textbook in the seven Romance languages, a recording of all the texts in the textbook, a teacher’s manual, a forum, etc. We based our work on the observation that in Europe, every Romance language school system — in France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Romania— provides its pupils with monolingual textbooks to teach subjects that are common to all the countries. We therefore invented a principle by which pupils would learn a common knowledge or know-how (for instance, building an electric circuit, understanding numeration, ...) through documents and texts in various languages that all belong to the same family of languages. Thus pupils acquire the notions on the curriculum while learning to understand the way their own language works and building multilingual skills. The didactic economy of the project that teaches those three things — cognitive, metalinguistic and multilingual skills — over a single period of class is based on four types of integration.

¹⁷ Cf. Pierre Escudé, « Histoire de l’éducation : imposition du français et résistance des langues régionales », dans Georg Kremnitz, *Histoire sociale des langues de France*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013, p. 339-352.

¹⁸ Cf. Elisabetta Bonvino’s communication **XXX**.

¹⁹ With a subsidy of 270 000 € (360,000 USD), this program involved fifteen linguists, didacticians and pedagogs from France (Toulouse), Spain (Valladolid), Italy (Roma), Romania (Bucarest) and Portugal (Leiria) over a period of three years. We worked « in intercomprehension », each one of us speaking his own language, with French and Spanish as a common language.

3-1 Integrating languages together

The first step was about the linguistic aspect. We sifted through language elements that are common to all our languages. That step was made easier by numerous published works on Romance philology²⁰. We selected two kinds of comparative elements: on the one hand, what we call “bridges”, and on the other hand, a number of morpho-syntactic elements.

Bridges are tiny variations in the way the same word is written in various languages. These variations sometimes prevent us from perceiving the lexical transparency between languages: they indicate (or sometimes they don't) phonological changes that have taken place in Romance languages over the years.

<i>Latin</i>	Portuguese	Spanish	Catalan	Occitan	French	Italian	Romanian	<i>English</i>
<i>castănĕa</i>	castanha	castaña	castanya	castanha	châtaigne	castagna	castană	<i>chestnut</i>

Their accumulation renders texts more opaque and increases the impression of foreignness. However, if they are given the following words to look at simultaneously, pupils will quickly guess that it is in fact the same form written differently in different languages. The same, but different. The system is global and coherent, and it hinges on variations. Pupils will learn to organize their observations like this:

<i>Latin</i>	PT	ES	CA	OC	FR	IT	RO
<i>-nĕ-</i>	-nh-	-ñ-	-ny-	-nh-	-gn-	-gn-	-n-

This parallelism works with words that have the same etymological form. Thus the French words *montagne* (mountain), *pigne* (pine cone), *gagner* (to earn but also to gain), *vigne* (vine) or *vignoble* (vineyard), *signaler* (to signal), *ligne* (line) can be “decoded” by Spanish or Portuguese pupils once they have identified the following “bridge”: [gn FR = ñ ES = nh PT]. The bridge is not a law²¹, but rather a tool that sometimes enables to clarify opacities, to play around with the shape of the words and to observe that the key to the meaning often lies in the variations of the written form.

The same group of words yields another parallel:

<i>Latin</i>	PT	ES	CA	OC	FR	IT	RO	EN
<i>ca-</i>	ca-	ca-	ca-	ca-	châ-	ca-	ca-	<i>che-</i>

Over this continuum one may observe a gap with French, then with English, as if the Romance lexicon of the English language were grafted onto the Romance continuum through French and Occitan. Other forms need to be observed in order for a new bridge to appear:

²⁰ *Grammaire des langues romanes*, F. Diez, Paris, Franck, 1874 ; *Eléments de linguistique romane*, E. Bourciez, Paris, Klincksieck, 1910 ; *Manuel pratique de philologie romane*, P. Bec, Paris, Picard, 1970 ; *Manuel de Linguistique romane* de J. Allières, Paris, Champion, 2001. Famously comparativist publications such as *Pratique des langues romanes*, S. Reinheimer & L. Tasmowski, Paris, l'Harmattan, 1997 ; *De una a cuatro lenguas. Del español al portugués, al italiano y al francés* by our colleague C. Hernández-González, Madrid, ArcoLibros, 2001 and *Comprendre les langues romanes. Méthode d'intercompréhension*, P. Teyssier, Paris, Chandeigne, 2004, also helped us.

²¹ The forms in PT / ES / IT are : montanha / montaña / montagna ; pinha / piña / pigna ; ganhar / ganar / guadagnare ; vinha / viña / vigna ; assinalar / señalar / segnalare ; linha / línea / linea.

<i>Latin</i>	PT	ES	CA	OC	FR	IT	RO	EN
<i>capreă</i>	cabra	cabra	cabra	cabra	chèvre	capra	capră	<i>goat</i>
<i>cămășiă</i>	camisa	camisa	camisa	camisa	chemise	camicia	cămașă	<i>shirt</i>

Henceforth, pupils will be able to decode a [ca-] in all other Romance languages whenever they read a [ch-] in French.

When pupils observe the following words:

<i>Latin</i>	PT	ES	CA	OC	FR	IT	RO	<i>EN</i>
<i>dignitas</i>	dignidade	dignidad	dignitat	dignitat	dignité	dignità	demnitate	<i>dignity</i>

they immediately create the bridge [-dad ES = -té FR]. Once they get used to manipulating repetitive forms and to observing parallels, pupils will be able to conceive the missing forms in the grid:

<i>Latin</i>	PT	ES	CA	OC	FR	IT	RO	<i>EN</i>
	parcialidade							
		opacidad						
			particularitat					
				libertat				
					fraternité			
						discontinuità		
							securitate	
								<i>humanity</i>

This means that the regularity of the formal repetition of forms is the way to create *predictability* (= predictibilidad / prédictibilité) among learners. This fundamental skill is the capacity (= capacidad / capacité) to create meaning in new forms, to invent language — inasmuch as inventing means finding something that already exists. This capacity of invention gives pupils some control over their learning process. After they have discovered about twenty of those bridges, pupils gain security, pleasure and ease in entering related languages. Learners soon find that texts are clearer, and the reoccurrence of identified forms strengthens their understanding of the global system. Because they have learnt to navigate between languages and transfer meaning, their understanding of words, forms and meaning grows exponentially.

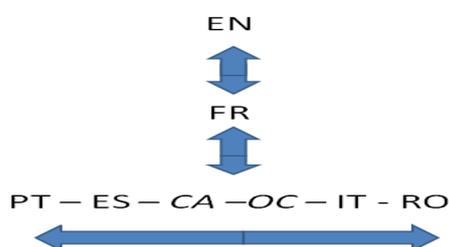
The second language element studied in this procedure concerns morphosyntactic features - i.e. what is involved in either syntactic agreement or government. Every language has ways to deal with notions of singular and plural; gender; closeness and remoteness; present, past and future, etc. We proceeded the same way as for the bridges and defined twenty morphosyntactic entries²². The idea is not for pupils to become experts in each language, but to understand the global architecture of these languages to grasp them as they are and to reword content in their own language.

After that, we distributed one bridge and one morphosyntactic entry in each of the twenty modules of the textbook. We wrote texts with easily identifiable occurrences of forms that included the said bridge and morphosyntactic entry each. Guiding pupils through the observation and the manipulation of these forms helps them to build skills and confidence in the global system of Romance languages.

²² See the *Portfolio* on the website www.euro-mania.eu.

The only remaining difficulties lie in occasional snags in the parallelisms (contrary to other Romance languages, French requires a subject before the verb - just like English!); diacritics (the circumflex in French, as in *château* or *châtaigne*, where other Romance languages – and English – use an *-s*; the Portuguese *tilde* on the *ã* or on the *õ*...); the absence of the *-s* to indicate the plural in Italian and Romanian, etc. Each snag in the parallelism indicates the entrance in a language's specific territory.

Pupils enter the new languages through full texts, never through isolated words or lists of words. These texts must be coherent, authentic, and they often provide cultural awareness that is seldom found in strictly “communicative” approaches. The final *portfolio*, module 21 in the textbook, reorganizes all linguistic entries and offers exercises in scanning, listening, manipulating and writing. It introduces lexical units in a systematic way that follows the linguistic and geographic continuum of *Romania* in which French holds a specific place as it connects the Romance languages to English within the Romance arch.



3-2 Integration of languages and subject matters

Integrating languages and subject matters makes it possible to work with texts that have a meaning and bear a pragmatic intention. Understanding the text makes it possible to understand what one *must* do or understand in class. Reciprocally, the subject *sustains* the interest and meaning of the text. Language ceases to be described as an object (as in a grammar lesson), or merely imitated (as in a communicative situation), but as the core of the work at hand: the text needs to be entered, manipulated, questioned and scrutinized for it to make sense. That sense is induced by the maths, science, or history lesson. Moreover, each lesson is organized around at least five texts or documents, each in a different Romance language, which echo each other and help build the core knowledge or know-how that is expected in the curriculum.

That method is also called *Content and Language Integrated Learning*. Form is not dissociated from content. That is why language works as a global and spatial text and not as a linear addition of isolated words: even if one word – or several words – does not make sense immediately, the text as a whole can still serve a global intention. Just like in a television program when the anchorperson utters a word that does not immediately resonate for me: I still understand a whole, an intention. I don't stop because of a lexical unit unknown to me, I don't give up because of an opacity, I remain engaged in an active and global quest for meaning.

The themes of the 20 modules were thus selected because they are common to the curricula of the five national education systems. The interest of the technology lessons is that teachers and pupils can immediately validate the understanding of instructions: for instance, if the “water-rocket” takes off at the end of module 5, it means that pupils have understood how to build it, thanks to the explanations given in each of the Romance languages.

The principle that lies behind the textbook is that of the “experimental approach”. The starting-point is an “epistemological obstacle²³”, a problem-situation that needs solving. Pupils must form hypotheses about the situation and suggest ways to solve the problem. The next step consists in observation and research based on two pages of 5 to 7 diversified documents each written in a different language. The simultaneity of these 5, 6 or 7 documents in distinct languages but with the same “bridge” and morphosyntactic element is fundamental: the eye can move from one text to the next, look out for clues, formulate hypotheses and validate them. The reasoning and the explaining that follow are conducted in the pupils’ own language – the language used in the classroom – and based on the documents that helped them make their hypotheses in the first place. The first part of the module ends with a final written summary, a synthesis of conclusions written in the classroom language — just like with a monolingual textbook.

In the second part, the subject as such is set aside and the work centers on language, and specifically on the two items that were strewn across the scientific or technical documents, but that are now rendered explicitly in texts with a specific cultural content. The experimental method also applies to these texts: pupils are invited to observe and organize their observations through the grids at hand before re-using the forms in the exercises or in the *portfolio*.

3-3 Integration of understanding and producing skills, and of oral and written activities.

A preliminary observation is that teaching/learning is essentially a matter of language. Mathematics, history, science are also, and perhaps crucially, languages. The whole process of observing the problem-situation, validating or invalidating scientific hypotheses or questioning one linguistic point or another in an “unknown” text are as many moments when pupils enter other languages to assimilate them and make them yield meaning. That impregnation is fundamental and corresponds to what Ronjat calls “language storing²⁴”, a phase of internal comprehension that the teacher will make explicit by asking the pupil to reword in the classroom language.

However, each class contains students with multilingual language histories. In that case, pupils can at last develop the latent skills that in most cases are never activated and often not even considered as skills. Rewording is an opportunity to structure bridges, transfers, elements of linguistic complicity and of a construction of a global language system. Besides, the construction of a scientific or historical object is never limited to one language. Constructing this knowledge through several languages places it at a distance where it can be questioned and examined in all its depth, and to rediscover it later on as it is in reality. Grammar and communicative methods tend to divide the globality of language into large – and sometimes watertight – chunks: writing here, listening there, understanding first, speaking later. But this grid, useful as it may be for teachers to assess pupils’ skills and progression, hides the fact that language is a whole.

	Understanding	Production
Oral	1- Listening comprehension	2- Speaking 3- Conversation
Written	4- Reading comprehension	5- Writing

²³ “All knowledge is in response to a question. If there were no question, there would be no scientific knowledge. Nothing proceeds from itself. Nothing is given. All is constructed”. Gaston Bachelard, “Epistemological obstacles”, in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, Paris, Vrin, 1938.

²⁴ Jules Ronjat, *Le Développement du langage observé chez un enfant bilingue*, Franctfort, New-York, Peter Lang, 2013.

Intercomprehension adds one dimension to this grid. Assessing reading comprehension in a given language (for instance, Italian for a French speaker) will be conducted through a speaking activity in French. Of course, intercomprehension class work mainly relies on reading comprehension activities, for the simple reason that the only written form allows several linguistic objects to remain indefinitely accessible for simultaneous observation.

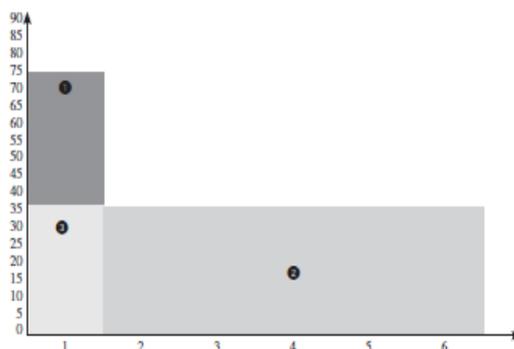
Levels	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Activities						
Reading comprehension		←	←	←	←	←
Listening comprehension		←	←	←	←	←
Writing		←	←	←	←	←
Speaking		←	←	←	←	←

Comparing, transferring and predicting accelerate and reinforce the acquisition and understanding process. Over a relatively short period of time, pupils become rather highly competent at reading comprehension in languages of the same family, which then drives the other skills forward in a more autonomous and confident way.

3-4 Curricular integration

What we have just developed may seem obvious and fascinating, but turns out to be hardly practical in our school system based on compartmentalized knowledge where integration is not welcome. The general organization of our education systems follows a horizontal separation and a vertical hierarchy of languages and contents. Teacher training, when there is such a thing, prepares teachers to accept this and work that way. No teacher would dare to use intercomprehension unless they mastered all the skills in all the languages.

The common misconception behind that is the idea that intercomprehension is another word for polyglossia. But no! The idea is not to learn 5, 6 or 7 languages. The idea is to get an understanding of the globality of these languages. To learn to learn languages. To grasp the fact that each and every one of us has the potential ability to make connections between languages that are only arbitrarily and artificially defined as foreign. To enter the reality of our multilingual, complex world.



The graph above²⁵ visualizes how complementary “traditional” language teaching (left, the darker rectangle 1 + 3) and the intercomprehension method (right, the lower, longer rectangle 1 + 2) are. Where traditional language teaching aims to give pupils as rich and comprehensive a set of

²⁵ Cf. P. Escudé & P. Janin, *L'intercompréhension, clef du plurilinguisme*, Paris, CLE International, 2010, p. 55.

language abilities as possible (75% ability in a “foreign” language), intercomprehension favors a more modest and more restricted set of skills (35% language ability) applied to a larger number of languages. At the end of the day, the one gives highly precise skills in one given language. The other opens a wider space of comprehension (35% over 6 languages opens a space that is three times as wide as 75% over one language). Moreover, intercomprehension builds ties between the first language – English or Spanish in the USA – and languages belonging to the Romance family, and to a certain extent, with English. That interconnection appears as the small pale rectangle on the left in our graph. That zone is the zone of metalinguistic skills which is the real driver of an in-depth understanding of the way languages work.

For the time being, *Euromania* is the only textbook based on an intercomprehension approach. It is as such a kind of laboratory. We have deliberately targeted the youngest age-group – between 8 and 11 -, for the children have enough reading skills but also because primary school is still multidisciplinary: a single teacher is in charge of teaching the main language, a foreign language, scientific subjects and other subjects. The textbook offers written documents that have all been recorded and are accessible on the web site for class use and oral practice.

The textbook does not set a language progression for this does not mean anything in a multilingual space. Within one language, there is a progression from simple notions to more complicated ones. But in a language family, some characteristics will seem obvious because they are very close or similar to English or to Spanish, while others will seem more remote or less frequent. This permanent relativity is part of the interest of this approach. The teacher organizes the progression of the class around the subjects as needed. In any case, the linguistic aspects studied in modules 1, 8, or 20, will also appear in the other modules, even if they are not specifically highlighted there. For language is a global unit from the start.

Such an approach requires a little risk-taking. Even with help from the teacher’s book, the teacher may sometimes not be able to explain this or that linguistic phenomenon. Far from a pedagogy consisting in the imitation of a single, vertical but non-transferable model, the approach is collaborative. What the teacher does master is the scientific content of the subject. The rest builds on the active participation of the class, driven and moderated by the teacher.

Intercomprehension places a bet on the intelligence of the pupils, on their ability to link, connect, manipulate and explain the global and the specific organization of a set of languages. We tell pupils the truth: this is a multilingual world, and the only way to gain access to that world is to build a true multilingualism. The only remaining issue is the didactic engineering process that will enable the transfer of efficient methods²⁶ adapted to each level, from primary school to university.

²⁶ The team directed by Clorinda Donato and Markus Muller at the California State University Long Beach has been placing that enthusiastic bet with our help since 2009.