



Università
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—
Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

Intercomprehension between two unrelated languages

A case study on Italian and Dutch

Relatore

Prof. Carmel Mary Coonan

Laureando

Maria Antonia Muilwijk
982159

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	5
LIST OF FIGURES.....	6
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	7
ABSTRACT	8
INTRODUCTION	9
1. WHY INTERCOMPREHENSION?	11
1.1 English as a lingua franca: the solution?.....	11
1.2 Receptive multilingualism as an alternative	13
1.3 An introduction to previous work on intercomprehension.....	16
1.4 Natural intercomprehension or need for instruction?	18
2. INTERCOMPREHENSION AND ITS READING STRATEGIES.....	21
2.1 Defining Intercomprehension	21
2.1.1 Receptive multilingualism.....	21
2.1.2 Lingua receptiva.....	23
2.1.3 Semicommunication	23
2.1.4 Intercomprehension	23
2.1.5 Summary.....	25
2.2 Reading strategies in intercomprehension.....	26
3. RESEARCH PROGRAMMES ON INTERCOMPREHENSION.....	30
3.1 An overview.....	30
3.2 The EuroCom method	34
3.3 The ICE programme.....	39
3.3.1 La progression en couches successives alternées.....	42
3.3.2 La progression en deux dimensions simultanées.....	43
4. SOMETHING TO HOLD ON: LOANWORDS IN DUTCH	45
4.1 The origin of loanwords in Dutch.....	45

4.2	French influence on Dutch	46
4.3	Latin influence on Dutch	46
4.4	German influence on Dutch	47
4.5	English influence on Dutch.....	47
4.6	Italian influence on Dutch	48
5.	THE CASE STUDY	49
5.1	Research questions and hypothesis.....	51
5.2	Method	54
5.2.1	Participants	54
5.2.2	Materials.....	55
5.2.3	Procedure.....	58
5.2.4	Analysis	59
6.	THE RESULTS	65
6.1	Transfer of intercomprehension strategies to an unrelated language.....	65
6.1.1	Number of words listed after the first few readings.....	66
6.1.2	The reading comprehension test.....	67
6.1.3	Capacity to translate less transparent words.....	69
6.1.4	Grammatical aspects	77
6.1.5	Time	81
6.2	The added value of audio added to the text.....	82
6.3	Manner of reading.....	84
7.	DISCUSSION.....	88
7.1	Are intercomprehension strategies transferable to unrelated languages? ..	89
7.1.1	Quantity of words understood after the first few readings.....	89
7.1.2	Score on the reading comprehension test	90
7.1.3	Capacity to translate opaque words and the usage of strategies.....	92
7.1.4	Suppositions about grammatical aspects.....	96
7.1.5	Time	97

7.1.6 Summary.....	99
7.2 The added value of audio.....	100
7.3 Reading method	102
7.4 Need for instruction?	105
7.5 Teaching intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses.....	108
7.6 Critical reflection	112
7.7 Suggestions for further research.....	115
CONCLUSIONS.....	117
REFERENCES.....	119
APPENDIX A - Questionario Intercomprensione	128
APPENDIX B – Reading comprehension test	130

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Main interview questions.	58
Table 2 - Number of words understood after the first few readings.....	66
Table 3 – Number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test.	68
Table 4a – Number of attempts to translate opaque Dutch words (IC group).....	70
Table 4b – Number of attempts to translate opaque Dutch words (N-IC group)....	71
Table 5a – Type and number of strategies used (IC group).	73
Table 5b – Type and number of strategies used (N-IC group).	74
Table 6a – Type of suppositions about the Dutch grammar (IC group).....	78
Table 6b – Type of suppositions about the Dutch grammar (N-IC group).....	79
Table 7 – Total amount of time to complete the test.	81
Table 8 – Number of extra words understood after the audio.....	83
Table 9a – Manner of reading the Dutch newspaper article (IC group).	85
Table 9b – Manner of reading of the Dutch newspaper article (N-IC group).....	86

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Schematic overview of the EuroCom method.....	37
Figure 2 – Average number of words understood after the first few readings.....	67
Figure 3 – Average number of correct answers on the test.	68
Figure 4 – Average number of translated opaque words.	72
Figure 5a – The average number of (different) strategies used	75
Figure 5b – The number of times participants mentioned a specific strategy	76
Figure 6a – Number of participants who mentioned each grammatical aspect.....	80
Figure 6b – Average number of suppositions about grammatical aspects.....	80
Figure 7 – Average of the total amount of time to complete the test	82
Figure 8 – Average number of extra words understood after the audio.....	84

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ABSTRACT

Earlier studies have shown that intercomprehension between related languages is possible. Once intercomprehension between related languages is studied, the step to intercomprehension between unrelated languages is not far off. The present case study investigated whether native speakers of Italian (n=5) who had attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages (IC group) were able to transfer their strategies to a reading comprehension test and translation of a newspaper article in an unfamiliar Germanic language (Dutch). Their results were compared to five university students without experience in intercomprehension (N-IC group). Of secondary interest were possible differences in reading the article and the added value of audio, which was added halfway through the test. Results showed a higher success rate for IC participants, which suggests that they were indeed able to transfer their strategies to an unrelated language. No differences in reading were observed and in most cases, audio was valued as useless. Nevertheless, some IC participants said they used the intonation pattern to better understand the overall article, which also confirms their capacity to transfer their intercomprehension strategies to an unfamiliar and unrelated language.

INTRODUCTION

Interest in receptive multilingualism and its possibilities has grown the last few decades. Until now, most research has been on the degree of mutual intelligibility between different related language pairs. Various studies and research programmes (e.g. see Klein and Stegmann, 2000; Hufeisen and Marx, 2007a; Bezooijen and Gooskens, 2007; Marx, 2012; Pietzonka, 2013) have demonstrated that related languages are indeed mutually intelligible, which makes receptive multilingualism and intercomprehension possible in situations where these languages meet each other. Now that this seems possible, the question is whether this is also possible for unrelated languages. This thesis presents a case study on intercomprehension between two unrelated languages: Italian and Dutch.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate whether students who attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages are able to transfer their strategies to a language belonging to the Germanic language family (Dutch). Their results are compared to the results of students without any experience in intercomprehension. This comparison sheds light on the importance of instruction in intercomprehension strategies and is a first approach to answer the question whether or not instruction in intercomprehension between related languages is enough to be able to build a general understanding of languages belonging to other language families. In contrast to most other studies that involve Dutch in their work on intercomprehension (e.g. the case study of Pietzonka, 2013), this study does not use German as a possible transfer resource for reading comprehension in Dutch. Instead, English is the only Germanic language that functions as a possible transfer resource together with possible knowledge of other Romance languages that the participants possess. A detailed explanation of these choices can be found in chapter 5, which presents and explains the current case study in full detail.

The following chapters are intended as an introduction to the concept of receptive multilingualism and more specifically to intercomprehension. Chapter 1 explains the current problem of Europe and summarizes the advantages of

receptive multilingualism and intercomprehension as they can offer a solution to the suppression of minority languages by the dominant English language. Once the concept and importance of receptive multilingualism and intercomprehension is explained, a precise definition of both terms is provided in chapter 2. Furthermore, their definitions are distinguished from other commonly used terms in the literature, such as *lingua receptiva* and *semicomunication*. As this thesis focuses on intercomprehension, chapter 3 provides an overview of various research programmes that occupy this field. Two programmes are explained in more detail: the EuroCom programme and the ICE programme. Further, because this thesis concentrates on intercomprehension between Italian and Dutch, the fourth chapter is about loanwords in Dutch. The various influences of foreign languages are briefly discussed and can, if recognized by the readers, function as a grip to hold on to when reading the unfamiliar Dutch language. Chapter 5 describes the case study on reading comprehension skills of native speakers of Italian in an unfamiliar Germanic language (Dutch) and the results are presented in chapter 6. Finally, the closing chapter (chapter 7) provides a summary of the main results of this study and tries to explain them. The chapter also discusses their implications for instruction in intercomprehension strategies and proposes a way to promote the concept of intercomprehension as most people are not yet familiar with the concept.

1. WHY INTERCOMPREHENSION?

Compared to other continents of the world Europe is quite small, but it has to deal with a large variety of different languages and cultures. The European Union consists of twenty-eight member states and twenty-four official languages¹. As a result of globalisation, contact with other countries and its cultures and languages becomes almost inevitable. Consequently, the need to speak or understand more than one language increases. The solution? Backus, Maracz and Ten Thije (2011) present four communicative strategies that can be used in multilingual situations: the use of English as a lingua franca, a regional lingua franca, receptive multilingualism or code switching. This thesis focusses on receptive multilingualism and its subgroup intercomprehension.

The sections that follow are an introduction to the above mentioned concept. Section 1.1 discusses the multicultural and multilingual problem of Europe and shows that English as a lingua franca is not the best solution in order to maintain linguistic diversity. Subsequently, in section 1.2 the concept of receptive multilingualism is introduced together with its advantages for its use in Europe. Section 1.3 further gives a general overview of previous studies on intercomprehension. Finally, in section 1.4, a brief overview is given of studies on the role of previous instruction in intercomprehension strategies, which is of special interest for the present case study.

1.1 English as a lingua franca: the solution?

Until now one of the main solutions for the above mentioned problem of Europe has been the use of one dominant language. In Europe, English is used as a lingua franca which makes communication possible between habitants of different nations. It dominates over all other languages and is therefore nearly always the official language in science, congresses or business meetings between partners

¹ Facts attained from: <http://europa.eu>

from different nations. One global language which is spoken and understood by most people facilitates communication enormously, but it also has its handicaps. Doyé (2005) summarizes the main arguments against the use of English as a lingua franca where he cites work from Phillipson (1992), who warns of the risk of 'English linguistic imperialism', and Bassnett (1993), who fears that the use of English as a lingua franca might eventually lead to a detachment of its cultural roots. Doyé adds to this the danger of a language becoming superficial when it is detached from its cultural background:

"The very circumstances that non-native speakers employ this language detached from its native foundation involves the risk that their communication lacks depth, clarity and significance. If in addition such communication becomes general practice, i.e. with many interlocutors involved who do not know the language well, then the disadvantage becomes a real danger." (Doyé, 2005, p. 8).

Castagne (2004b) even fears that the globalisation leads to a unification and simplification of cultural diversity and therefore to a decrease of the cultural heritage. He fears for state nationalism which has also serious consequences at a political level. Until now Europe has been characterised by its variety of cultures and languages but the globalisation risks erasing every single country's proper characteristics.

The above mentioned arguments illustrate that English as a lingua franca is not the solution if we want to maintain cultural and linguistic variety. That is why the European Union has made plurilingualism one of its goals of language education policies. The council of Europe stresses that plurilingualism is important for a number of reasons. Not only does it contribute to an increased awareness of other cultural groups that promote communication with other communities, it is also seen as "an essential component of democratic behaviour" (Council of Europe, 2007, p. 36). This refers to the fact that all languages, whether this is a native language or a minority language, should be respected and accepted. The

promotion of plurilingualism is therefore also an attempt to protect minority languages that risk being overwhelmed by national languages. Every language has the right to be used. “It is this overall multiplicity which is regarded as an anthropological and cultural heritage worthy of protection, in the same way as the artistic heritage, in the name of biodiversity” (ibidem, p. 37).

1.2 Receptive multilingualism as an alternative

An alternative for a lingua franca that simultaneously corresponds to the wish to promote plurilingualism is the concept of receptive multilingualism, i.e. reciprocal understanding between speakers of two different mother tongues without the use of a lingua franca. Each uses his own language and understands that of the other at the same time². This concept has been put forward as a solution for the current situation in Europe by various authors since it promotes an “equal status” for every language which makes this concept “politically relevant” (see e.g. Doyé, 2005, p. 9). Doyé also notes that “intercomprehension has a very solid psychological foundation. It rests on the interplay of man’s faculty for language and his ability to exploit his previously acquired funds of knowledge” (ibidem). Also Castagne (2004a,d) supports the idea of intercomprehension as the most approachable solution for the linguistic, social and cultural variety that represents Europe. According to him knowledge of two European languages is the base for understanding four or five other European languages with a minimum of effort. He argues that this linguistic competence enables European citizens to read literature and other culturally important documents in the original language which does not only contribute to an enlargement of knowledge, but also to a better understanding of these different cultures. Furthermore, he names the advantage of more autonomy in situations where interpreters or translations are not available

² Note that the term ‘intercomprehension’ is equally used. Here, I refer to section 2.1 for a detailed description of the usage of these two terms in the literature and in the present thesis.

(Castagne, 2004d, p. 92). Marx (2012) on the other hand, underlines its relevance in foreign language pedagogy:

“Today, receptive multilingualism can be a useful concept in foreign language pedagogy for a number of reasons: it supports the goal of cultural understanding across nations, corresponds to numerous national guidelines for foreign language learning, and places much less emphasis on the dominant role of English and thus sets a signal for the importance of all languages. Finally, it addresses some of the basic constraints on educational programs aiming at developing multilingualism: less time is necessarily devoted to each language, since receptive competencies are the primary goal, and more attention can be drawn to ‘smaller’ languages, which are often left at the wayside when curricular decisions must be made” (ibidem, p. 469).

On the question if receptive multilingualism³ is practical, Doyé (2005) reminds us of the fact that receptive multilingualism is actually already practised in a number of European countries and that this is not restricted to border regions. For example, it is also practised in “*institutional discourse* (such as in the workplace, on television, in educational settings, health care discourse, sale talk, meetings, etc.) and in *cross-generational communication* within and across language families” (Rehbein, Ten Thije and Verschik, 2012, p. 252). A few examples of countries/regions where this type of communication is used are mentioned below, where the most cited example is that of the Scandinavian countries. Scandinavian countries do not use a lingua franca in order to communicate with each other. In political meetings it is the custom that most participants use his or her own mother tongue⁴ (Zeevaert, 2007). Another example is multilingual Switzerland where university students from

³ Originally, Doyé uses the term ‘intercomprehension’ in his work. See section 2.1 for an explanation of the choice for receptive multilingualism.

⁴ Zeevaert (2007) explains further that in reality only Danes, Norwegians and Swedes have the possibility to use their mother tongue. The other participants from countries such as Faroe Islands, Finland, Greenland or Iceland are more difficult to understand in their mother tongue and do therefore have to use one of the three earlier named languages.

different cantons communicate with each other by using each their own mother tongue (Serra, 2012; Werlen, 2007, in: Rehbein et al., 2012). The latter is even an example of how “receptive multilingualism is practised across language families” (Rehbein et al., 2012, p. 253). Also in Dutch-German border areas receptive multilingualism is one of the used language modes (Beerkens, 2010). Braunmüller (2007) even describes how receptive multilingualism has been practiced commonly in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Terms where “people who had frequent contacts with foreigners, such as tradesmen, became even more flexible and more trained, both in processing other dialects and varieties and in understanding equivalent terms as well” (Braunmüller, 2013, p. 215).

The interest in intercomprehension and the possibilities for its use in the European Union has thus increased within the last two decades. A number of studies have investigated the possibility of mutual intelligibility between different language pairs. This does not mean that the importance of English vanishes completely. Grzega (2005) argues that English could still play an important role in intercomprehension. “Many internationalisms and language specific words in all European languages and a few eurofixes⁵ are of English decent” (ibidem, p. 1). Besides that, the added value of English is that, although it is a Germanic language, there is also a huge influence of French that originates from the Norman Conquest in 1066 (ibidem). In a way, this influence connects English to the Romanic language family and “this mixed character of English as well as the undeniable fact that English is the most common L2 (second language) among Europeans suggest that [...] the usual knowledge of English among Europeans or even English as an entire bridge language should constantly be integrated as a decoding aid for all target languages” (ibidem, p. 3). In fact, little time after the publication of Grzega’s article, another edition of the EuroComprehension method (EuroCom) was published under the name: ‘English – the bridge to the Romance Languages’ by Hemming,

⁵ With the term ‘Eurofixes’ he refers to the seventh sieve ‘Prefixes and Suffixes’ described in the EuroComprehension programme (EuroCom) that is designed to learn reading in several foreign languages. A further explanation of this programme and its Seven Sieves is provided in section 3.2.

Klein and Reissner (2011). This book shows the reader how useful knowledge of English is for comprehension of the Romance languages and teaches the reader further how to apply this knowledge in various exercises.

1.3 An introduction to previous work on intercomprehension

The present section introduces some previous studies on intercomprehension. Until now, most studies or methods on intercomprehension (or on one of the related terms)⁶ have concentrated on languages belonging to the same language family, thus sharing common roots. Therefore, a lot of work has been dedicated to the Romance languages (e.g. see Klein and Stegmann (2000) for the first edition of the EuroCom method that is designed for reading comprehension in Romance languages). Section 3.1 gives an overview of the major European projects on intercomprehension, where part of the projects is dedicated to the Romance languages. The initial focus on the Romance languages is not that strange since the Romance languages share a lot due to their common roots in Latin (Van der Linden, Berger, Klein, and Stegmann, 2006, p. 7). Recently, the Germanic languages have also received an increased amount of attention, although these language resemble each other less than the Romance languages (ibidem). The same EuroCom method that has been designed to learn reading in Romance languages has been developed for the Germanic languages as well, and is therefore called EuroComGerm (Hufeisen and Marx, 2007a). Apart from this, various researches have been carried out in order to test (mutual) intelligibility between different Germanic languages. These studies have proven that the concept of intercomprehension could work indeed. Marx (2012) for example, tested native speakers of German on a short reading comprehension test in unknown Germanic languages and found out that “subjects could apply their knowledge of German and English to a certain degree when reading texts in all other Germanic languages” (ibidem, p. 473). She also demonstrated that within these Germanic languages “Dutch was in general the

⁶ These related terms are discussed in section 2.1.

easiest to inference [...]” for a German public (ibidem, p. 477). She underlines that this is not surprising due to the fact that Dutch is the closest related language to both German and English. Consequently, a lot of studies do include German and English as transfer languages when it comes to reading comprehension in Dutch. An example of such a study is the case study of Pietzonka (2013) who led L1 speakers of German, with English as L2, perform a reading comprehension test in the for them unfamiliar Dutch language. The results are positive and show that intercomprehension between these languages is indeed possible. Pietzonka underlines that these data should be treated with caution since the number of participants is too low to be representative. However, compared to another study this data can, in a way, be confirmed. Möller (2007) did a study on the amount of Dutch-German cognates and the possible difficulties that a native speaker of German could encounter in identifying them. He showed, with help of a computer program, that “by far the majority of Dutch vocabulary is accessible for German readers, if they are familiar with a small set of sound correspondences” (ibidem, p. 302). These studies indicate that the Dutch language is quite good accessible for a native speaker of German. Also other studies on intercomprehension between Germanic languages showed promising outcomes. Bezooijen and Gooskens (2007) for example, carried out a study on Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans and showed that native speakers of Dutch are able to read newspapers in Frisian and Afrikaans up to a certain extent. Zeevaert (2007) on the other hand, did a study on inter-Scandinavian semicommunication⁷. He studied the functioning of this type of communication in group work sessions where participants communicated with each other in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Analysis of these meetings do indicate that this type of communication does indeed work.

A little less attention has been paid to intercomprehension between Slavic languages. However, the same EuroCom method that has been developed for the Romance and Germanic languages could be applied to the Slavic languages as well (cf. Zybatow, 2002).

⁷ See section 2.1.3 for a definition of this term.

Once intercomprehension within language families is studied, the step to intercomprehension between language families is not far off. So far little research is done on this area, but the first step has been made by Castagne. He initiated a programme called 'Programme InterComprehension Europeenne' (abbreviated 'ICE') on intercomprehension between related and/or neighbourhood languages of French. The programme develops "des techniques applicables à l'ensemble des langues européennes (romanes, germaniques, nordiques, slaves, grecque, ...)". (Castagne, 2004c, p. 92).⁸ Castagne claims that "les résultats déjà recueillis ont confirmé que les objectifs fixés pouvaient être atteints aussi avec des langues «voisines» comme l'anglais, l'allemand ou le néerlandais [...]"⁹ (ibidem, p. 93). The programme is explained in more detail in section 3.3.

1.4 Natural intercomprehension or need for instruction?

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, this thesis is a case study on native speakers (L1) of Italian doing a reading comprehension test in the for them unfamiliar Dutch language. Note that this is a case of intercomprehension between languages belonging to two different language families. Since the two languages in question are not related to each other, intercomprehension between these two languages is expected to be far more difficult. However, this particular situation makes it possible to investigate if earlier experience in intercomprehension can be applied to unfamiliar languages belonging to another language family; i.e. can students apply their strategies, developed during a course on intercomprehension between Romance languages, also to an unknown Germanic language (in this case Dutch)? As far as I am aware, this question has been posed only for languages within one particular language family. Research on intercomprehension between Romance languages showed for example that training in intercomprehension is not

⁸ Our translation: "techniques applicable to all European languages (Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, Slavic, Greek, etc)".

⁹ Our translation: "the results already obtained have confirmed that the objectives could also be achieved with «neighbourhood languages» such as English, German or Dutch [...]"

necessarily in order to (partially) understand another Romance language. One related bridge language should be enough (e.g. see Müller-Lancé, 2003, in: Marx, 2012, p. 470). The same is demonstrated for intercomprehension within Germanic languages and Scandinavian languages. For example, Marx (2012) studied the ease with which speakers of two Germanic languages could understand other languages belonging to this language family without having had previous training. Her hypothesis was that they were indeed able to transfer their linguistic knowledge in the reading comprehension text in previously unlearned languages. This was “supported by the partial success of subjects in the inferencing task” (ibidem, p. 477). Results from studies on the intelligibility between Scandinavian languages do also show a high rate of mutual understanding without instruction in intercomprehension strategies (e.g. see Braunmüller, 2006).

On the other hand, other studies show that previous knowledge that the participants possess, which is crucial in intercomprehension theories, is not always transferred. For example, an earlier study of Marx (2005) showed that “it seems that learners do not use their previous language and strategy knowledge automatically, but rather have to be made aware of parallels and transfer possibilities between languages, as well as be introduced to potentially useful techniques of how to use and employ previous foreign language learning strategies.” (Hufeisen and Marx, 2007b, p. 315). This implies that experience in an intercomprehension course increases the ability to make fruitful use of previous knowledge. This was exactly the setting of her experiment: two groups were tested on a listening comprehension tasks in the for them unfamiliar German language; one group received training in intercomprehension strategies (recognition of similarities between their already studied foreign languages), while the other group did not. In fact, results of the study proved that “compared to the control group, the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores on listening tasks at the language level of the learners. [...] On these texts, the main advantage shown by the sensitized learners reflected the ability to quickly, often automatically recognize English-German cognates and use this knowledge to build an

understanding of the text as a whole. Learners in the control group, who had not practiced interlingual strategies, were less able to make use of their previous knowledge of English and thus had fewer footholds on which they could build text comprehension". This study thus demonstrates that "training in interlingual strategies seems to be an important factor in whether declarative knowledge from other languages is, in fact, drawn upon when a text involves comprehension of an L3" (ibidem, p. 316). Although this particular study focusses on listening comprehension, the same could be true for reading comprehension, but it must be kept in mind that in a reading comprehension test participants have more time to think, which might allow them to make links with previous knowledge (Möller and Zeevaert, in press). However the lack of possibility to transfer previous knowledge was also observed in a study by Möller and Zeevaert (2010, in: Marx, 2012, p. 470). Marx therefore concludes that "without training or guidance in intercomprehension, the potential for intercomprehension is not recognized as strongly by learners" (Marx, 2012, p. 470). Also Castagne (2003) states that a lot of strategies we use in our mother tongue are not applied when reading in a foreign language. According to him, a lot of people do not transfer these strategies and have to be made aware of it.

In the next chapter, a precise definition is given of what exactly is meant by the terms 'receptive multilingualism' and 'intercomprehension' (section 2.1). Here, the various other terms used in the literature are discussed and confronted. After that, the attention shifts to the different strategies that make receptive multilingualism and intercomprehension possible (section 2.2).

2. INTERCOMPREHENSION AND ITS READING STRATEGIES

The goal of this chapter is to define the term ‘intercomprehension’ and to give an overview of the main strategies used in intercomprehension. The first section (2.1) gives a definition of the term ‘intercomprehension’ as it will be used in the present thesis and discusses other terms used in the literature. The second section (2.2) is dedicated to those strategies that make intercomprehension possible.

2.1 Defining Intercomprehension

The notion of intercomprehension has been defined in various ways by different authors, sometimes even using different terms. In the literature one may come across the following terms: ‘intercomprehension’ (e.g. Castagne, 2004a, 2007; Doyé, 2004, 2005; Marx, 2012), ‘receptive multilingualism’ (e.g. Beerkens, 2010; Braunmüller, 2013; Zeevaert, 2007), ‘lingua receptiva’ (Rehbein et al., 2012) or ‘semicomcommunication’ (Braunmüller, 2002; Haugen, 1966, in Zeevaert, 2007). At first sight these terms seem to be different terms for the same notion, but a closer look indicates small differences, depending on the situation in which it is used. Still, there is no real agreement on how each of these singular terms should be defined. The lack of a clear definition leads to variation in its use. This is confusing, since different authors attach a slightly different definition to the same term. In what follows, these terms are examined in more detail.

2.1.1 Receptive multilingualism

Before defining the term ‘intercomprehension’, let us start by giving a definition of the other terms used in the literature, starting with the term ‘receptive multilingualism’, which can be regarded as the covering term for all others. A quite general definition of this term is provided by Rehnbein et al. (2012). They define receptive multilingualism as follows:

“Receptive multilingualism is a mode of multilingual communication in which interactants employ a language and/or a language variety different from their partner’s and still understand each other without the help of any additional *lingua franca*. Their mutual understanding is established while both recipients use their ‘passive’ knowledge of the language and/or variety of their interlocutor(s)” (ibidem, p. 248-249).

In addition, it must be noted that “no active command of the addressee’s variety is needed, only some insight into the grammar and lexicon of his/her dialect or language, based on either genetic similarities or on previous (imperfect) learning” (Braunmüller, 2013, p. 215). This term covers the general idea of two persons from different nations speaking with each other, each using his or her own native language. Depending on the exact situation in which such a type of communication occurs, different terms are used. Although there is little variation, the term ‘receptive multilingualism’ usually refers to spoken communication, which is made evident by Zeevaert:

“Receptive multilingualism is seen as communicative practice used in situations of verbal interaction under special circumstances” (Zeevaert, 2007, p. 103).

Zeevaert further uses this term to define communication between “languages that are unrelated or only remotely related – under the condition that all speakers involved are familiar with both languages, and provided that the speakers have only a passive competence at their disposal” (ibidem, p. 105). However, this additional characteristic is not always mentioned in other studies.

In the sections that follow, it will become clear that the term used for this notion changes depending on the exact situation in which it is used. Different terms are used to refer to this type of communication depending on the relatedness of the languages in question or on the particular form in which it occurs (spoken or written).

2.1.2 *Lingua receptiva*

A variation on ‘receptive multilingualism’ is the term ‘lingua receptiva’, introduced by Rehbein et al. (2012). Their definition is almost identical to the notion of ‘receptive multilingualism’, but the authors tend to underline the “receptive component” with this newly introduced term (ibidem, p. 249). They define the term ‘lingua receptiva’ as follows:

“[...] *Lingua receptiva* is the ensemble of those *linguistic, mental, interactional* as well as *intercultural competencies* which are *creatively* activated when interlocutors listen to linguistic actions in their ‘passive’ language or variety. The essential point is that speakers apply additional competencies in order to monitor the way in which hearers activate their ‘passive knowledge’ and thus attempt to control the ongoing process of understanding” (ibidem).

2.1.3 *Semicommunication*

When mutual understanding occurs between two closely related languages, the term changes and is called ‘semicommunication’. The term was firstly introduced by Haugen (1966, in: Zeevaert, 2007).

Note that Braunmüller (2002) points out that the use of this term is “misleading because it suggests that the participants will only understand roughly ‘half’ of what has been said to them” (ibidem, p. 3). According to him, and other studies on intercomprehension between Scandinavian countries, this is not true.

2.1.4 *Intercomprehension*

Now that the most frequently used terms (that describe the idea of two persons of different nations communicating with each other, each using his or her own language) have been defined, this section provides a definition of the term ‘intercomprehension’. This term is used in two slightly different manners where the main difference lies in the inclusion or exclusion of spoken communication. Doyé

for example, describes the term ‘intercomprehension’ as follows, where he clearly includes both spoken and written material:

“Intercomprehension is a form of communication in which each person uses his or her own language and understands that of the other. [...] it includes both spoken and written communication and excludes using the target language, [...]” (Doyé, 2005, p. 7).

Remember that this definition resembles the earlier defined term ‘receptive multilingualism’ (see section 2.1.1). It almost describes the same concept, apart from the fact that in this definition written communication is explicitly mentioned. A similar definition of what he calls “intercompréhension fonctionnelle”¹⁰ is used by Castagne (2007, p. 156). He uses this term to describe a situation in which one is able to understand various languages without being able to speak them. He underlines that this works especially in situations where both speakers already have passive knowledge of the two languages used in the discourse. The example he gives is an Englishman with knowledge of French and a Frenchman with knowledge of English. Although they might have problems speaking the other language, they are able to understand them quite well. In such a situation they can communicate with each other perfectly, each speaking their own mother tongue. Within his definition of intercomprehension he does also refer to comprehension of written texts.

Marx (2012) and Möller and Zeevaert (in press) on the other hand, use the term ‘intercomprehension’ to refer to comprehension of written texts only. Marx (2012) uses the term ‘receptive multilingualism’ as a “hypernym” with intercomprehension as “its subgroup” which refers to written text comprehension only (ibidem, 288). Möller and Zeevaert use the term in the same way and explain why they separate these two modalities:

¹⁰ Our translation: Functional intercomprehension

“[...] in listening the time available for the processing of the input is limited and only one attempt at processing is possible, whereas in text reading there is no time limit and it is possible to jump back at will or to gather decoding clues from all over the text in order to improve understanding in a second or third reading (cf. Klein and Stegmann 2000: 13, 22–23, Hufeisen and Marx 2007: 5–7). On the other hand, in reading the possibility to check comprehension through an interactive communication process is excluded” (Möller and Zeevaert, in press: 1).

Their argument for separating written communication from spoken communication is especially crucial when we take intercomprehension between unrelated languages into consideration (such as Italian and Dutch, as will be investigated in the present thesis). So, time is of crucial importance to make connections with previously learned languages and/or to make hypothesis and inferences.

2.1.5 Summary

Section 2.1 gave an overview of the four most frequently used terms in the literature. The main difference is explained in terms of relatedness between the languages used in the discourse and the specific language mode (spoken or written). The present thesis mainly focusses on comprehension of a written text.¹¹ Therefore, I will adopt the definition of Marx (2012) in this thesis. That is, I will refer to ‘intercomprehension’ as a form of communication in which a person uses his or her linguistic repertoire to access and understand other (unknown) languages in written form. A productive use of the target language is excluded. The developed receptive competences are the key factor that enables one to read and understand articles in languages that he or she does not speak. The term ‘receptive multilingualism’ is used as a hypernym and thus refers to the overall concept that

¹¹ As will be described in chapter 5, after a while audio was added to the written text as a possible help to the participants. But since the participants had the written text in front of them, the participants still had the time to think and apply intercomprehension strategies. There was no time limit in contrast to a real spoken conversation (cf. Möller and Zeevaert, in press). Therefore, even though audio was added later in the test, I use the term ‘intercomprehension’ to refer to written texts only, as the added audio does not really change the conditions.

enables speakers of different languages to understand each other without the use of a lingua franca.

Receptive competences are extremely useful in situations where contact between persons from different countries is inevitable. Europe is such a plurilingual and intercultural space where contact between other cultures occurs all the time. Receptive multilingualism is therefore a very important approach that brings people with different native languages closer to each other and makes understanding the other's spoken or written language easier.

2.2 Reading strategies in intercomprehension

Reading a foreign language which one has never studied before requires the use of strategies and inferences in order to succeed. Klein & Stegmann (2000, p. 21) argue that we have funds of knowledge in a number of different fields that help us to interpret texts in foreign languages. We already possess these types of knowledge and therefore it has nothing to do with the new language itself. In order to learn to read in an unfamiliar foreign language we only need to become conscious of these different types of knowledge and apply them when we read a foreign language. Different authors have tried to organize these types of knowledge. An overview of these categories is given by Doyé (2004). He lists them as follows:

- General knowledge
- Cultural knowledge
- Situational knowledge
- Behavioural knowledge
- Pragmatic knowledge
- Graphic knowledge
- Phonological knowledge
- Grammatical knowledge
- Lexical knowledge

All these categories contain funds of knowledge that give the reader various clues about the content of the text, which further allows us to make inferences about less recognizable linguistic forms. For example, Lutjeharms (2007, p. 276) writes the following about inferring and the use of prior knowledge in reading a foreign language:

“Inferring and avoidance strategies¹² are inevitable to arrive at some – not necessarily correct – interpretation [...]. We need prior knowledge on all processing levels: script, spelling pattern, words with rules for their use, syntactic patterns, but also knowledge of the world for higher level processing and inferring. When reading a new language, we will try to transfer prior knowledge as soon as this seems possible. We need interpretable forms for the transfer of knowledge. Content knowledge can support the transfer of knowledge to the decoding level in combination with recognizable linguistic forms (internationalisms, cognates, expectations for word order, etc.) [...]”.

As it becomes clear from this quote, all kinds of knowledge we possess can be useful in decoding a text in a foreign language. For example, prior knowledge about the text type contributes to a better understanding of the text one is reading, since it allows the reader to build expectations about the purpose and/or content of the text. At the same time, the title of an article, images or an abstract can activate general knowledge about the world that might help understand the text better (ibidem, p. 277). These different funds of knowledge are very important when it comes to inferring, which is fundamental in the comprehension of a text written in a foreign language (Bougé and Cailliès, 2004). McKoon and Ratcliff (1992, p. 440) define an inference as “any piece of information that is not explicitly stated in a text”. Their definition is very broad and includes a large scale of different types of inferences, some of which are automatic and others more “problem-solving types

¹² Note that Lutjeharms uses the term *avoidance strategies*, which is also very important in intercomprehension and consists of skipping those words and phrases that are not immediately clear. This strategy is explained in more detail in section 3.3.1 (*la progression en couches successives alternées*), because it is part of the recommendations of the ICE programme.

of processing” (ibidem, p. 441). In this thesis, the term ‘inferences’ refers exclusively to consciously made inferences in order to solve the problems encountered in the Dutch text. The impact of inferences is expressed very well by Bougé and Cailliès (2004, p. 78):

“L’activité inférentielle est une activité capitale en compréhension de textes dans la mesure où elle intervient à tous les niveaux de l’élaboration d’une représentation mentale du texte: niveaux lexical, syntaxique et sémantique. Elle est par conséquent à la base de la compréhension de textes et particulièrement de la compréhension inter-langues. Formaliser l’activité inférentielle suppose non seulement l’analyse des langues mais surtout l’analyse du système cognitif de l’apprenant, notamment celle des processus mnésiques.”¹³

As mentioned earlier, there are many types of inferences. In this thesis only a restricted number of inferences are described, i.e. those inferences that enrich the mental representation (cf. McKoon and Ratcliff, 1992; Bougé and Cailliès, 2004 for a more detailed overview of different types of inferences). An example of such a type of inferences are elaborative inferences. They include semantic, predictive and instrumental inferences. Semantic inferences “might add contextually appropriate features of meaning to the representation of a concept, instrumental inferences might add the typical instrument for a verb (for example: *spoon* for *stirring coffee*), and predictive inferences might add information about “what should happen next” in a story” (McCoon and Ratcliff, 1992, p. 442). Castagne (2003) also refers to semantic inferences as fundamental for his approach. He describes this type of inferences as “guessing” the meaning of opaque words with the help of various clues in the text. He lists multiple examples of semantic inferences where other

¹³ Our translation: The activity of inferencing is an important activity in the comprehension of texts as it occurs at all levels of the development of the mental representation of a text: at the lexical, syntactic and semantic levels. It is therefore at the basis of text comprehension, in particular of comprehension between languages. To formalize the activity of inferencing requires not only the analysis of languages, but requires especially the analysis of the cognitive system of the learner, in particular the mnemonic processes.

elements in the text help the reader to give a semantic meaning to previously unknown items. They are listed below (ibidem, p. 5-10):

- The subject and object enable the reader to infer the meaning of the verb;
- The verb enables the reader to infer the subject and the object;
- The adjective enables the reader to infer the noun;
- The noun enables the reader to infer the adjective;
- Two syntagmas are known and enable the reader to infer the conjunction;
- A syntagma and a conjunction together enable to infer another syntagma.

Important to note is that Bougé and Cailliès (2004) underline that a minimum of linguistic knowledge is required in order to make this type of inferences. They further state that making inferences in a foreign language is not very natural to most learners. This means that most of the inferences should be taught. For this reason, different methods are designed that help the reader to improve their “capability of decoding linguistic utterances in closely related languages” (Zeevaert, 2007, p. 110). The next chapter presents some of these methods together with some research programmes and projects on intercomprehension.

3. RESEARCH PROGRAMMES ON INTERCOMPREHENSION

The previous chapter defined the term ‘intercomprehension’ and introduced the process of inferring which is one of the most important strategies that make intercomprehension possible. The present chapter continues by providing a general introduction to intercomprehension by summarizing the main research programmes and/or projects that have contributed to the promotion of this specific form of multilingualism. Section 3.1 gives an overview of the major projects while the following two sections (3.2 and 3.3) describe two of them in full detail:

- I. the EuroCom method;
- II. the ICE programme.

3.1 *An overview*

In this section some major European projects on intercomprehension are presented briefly in chronological order (cf. Sariçoban and Aktaş, 2011 for a more complete overview). Each project is accompanied with its internet address which can be consulted for more information.

- *Galatea:*

This was the first project on intercomprehension, which started in 1991 and ended in 1999. The project is dedicated to speakers of Romance languages (Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and French) who are trained in cross-comprehension of the other three Romance languages. The project resulted in a CD-ROM for each language where various texts and exercises were collected.

Internet address: <http://galatea.u-grenoble3.fr/>

- *EuRom4 (and its revised version EurRom5):*

EuRom4 (Blanche-Benveniste, 1997) is a manual on intercomprehension between four Romance languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French). The target group are native speakers of one of these Romance languages who are aided to reach a good reading comprehension in all four Romance languages discussed in the manual. Its continuation is the manual EurRom 5 (Bonvino, Caddéo, Vilaginés and Pippa, 2011), which is a new, revised edition of EurRom4. It is called EurRom 5 because a fifth language, which has been added: Catalan.

Internet address EurRom4: <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/delic/Eurom4/>

Internet address EurRom5: <http://www.eurom5.com/>

- *ILTE (Intercomprehension in Language Teaching Education):*

The ILTE project ran from 1998 until 2001 and focusses on language teacher educators and language teachers. The project is designed to “prepare teachers for the task of helping their students to transfer knowledge and skills from one language to another” (Doyé, 2005, p. 13).

Internet address: <http://www.lett.unipmn.it/ilte/>

- *IGLO (Intercomprehension in Germanic Languages Online):*

This project on cross-comprehension between Germanic languages started in 1999 and finished in 2003. The programme concentrates mainly on comprehension of written texts and focusses on people who are already familiar with a language belonging to the Germanic language family. The seven Germanic languages that are treated in the project are: English, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and Icelandic. The project focusses on the differences between these seven languages and presents various aspects of their grammar, vocabulary, and phonology.

Internet address: <http://www.hum.uit.no/a/svenonius/lingua/index.html>

- *EU&I (European Awareness and Intercomprehension):*

EU&I is a typical case of “border crossing” since it includes languages belonging to different language families (Doyé, 2005, p. 13). The languages that are part of the project are: Bulgarian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish. The theoretical concepts of the project are published in Martins (2005) and the practical applications can be found on DVD consisting of 7 modules (Shopov, 2010). Here learners can practice their intercomprehension skills in a virtual hotel room. These modules can also be found on their website.

Internet address: <http://www.eu-intercomprehension.eu/>

- *EuroMania:*

This project started in 2006 and finished in 2008. What makes this project on intercomprehension between Romance languages special is the target group. The project is designed for school children of 8 to 11 years old with a mother tongue belonging to the Romance languages. In the various modules they pass through, they learn to read in the various other Romance language through modules about various subjects, e.g. science and biology (Escudé, 2007).

Internet address: <http://www.euro-mania.eu/index.php>

- *Galapro:*

This project started in 2008 and ended in 2010. Its aim was to educate teachers in Intercomprehension between Romance languages (Catalan, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian). During a session participants learn about intercomprehension and are educated to design learning material which are evaluated at the end of the session (De Carlo, 2010).

Internet address: <http://www.galapro.eu>

- *EuroCom (EuroComprehension):*

This is one of the most extensive methods that has been developed for the three main European language families: the Romance languages (cf. Klein and Stegmann, 2000), the Germanic languages (cf. Hufeisen and Marx, 2007b) and also for the Slavic languages (cf. Zybatow, 2002). The method promotes reading comprehension in languages belonging to the same language family. The learners are guided by the so called “Seven Sieves” and learn reading in all other languages belonging to that particular language group. The central goal of the method is to take advantage of prior knowledge and to develop reading competences that reduce the effort of learning a language (Klein, 2004, p. 408).

Internet address: <http://www.eurocomprehension.info/>

- *Galanet:*

This project ran from 2001 to 2004 and belongs to the European programme Socrates. The project resulted in a learning internet platform for intercomprehension between speakers of Romance languages (Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and French). On this platform, which is designed as a “virtual language learning centre”, participants can practice their cross-comprehension skills in all four Romance languages within different “rooms” with many tools “to communicate with each other and train receptive and interactive skills (Degache, 2003, p. 2).

Internet address: <http://www.galanet.eu>

- *ICE (InterCompréhension Européenne):*

The ICE programme was launched in 2001 at the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne and is inspired by the EuRom4 project described previously. The target group are francophones who are trained in reading comprehension of three Germanic languages (English, German and Dutch) together with four Romance languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and

Romanian). Based on these meetings the research team develops techniques that can be applied to all other European languages (Castagne, 2004, p. 92).

Internet address: <http://www.logatome.eu/>

- *SIGURD (Socrates Initiative for Germanic Understanding and Recognition of Discourse):*

The aim of SIGURD is to increase awareness of linguistic similarities between seven Germanic languages: Dutch, English, German, Flemish, Norwegian, Swedish and Old Saxon. The project is especially created for students and teachers in secondary education. Within the SIGURD Portal they can find various Germanic fairy-tales and linguistic and historical texts that will help them to become aware of the linguistic similarities between their mother tongues and the other Germanic languages that are included in this project.

Internet address: <http://www.statvoks.no/sigurd/>

3.2 The EuroCom method

This section explains the EuroCom method in more detail and provides an overview of the strategies and techniques used in this particular method. An important principle in the EuroCom method is that the new languages are not completely unknown to the learner. In fact, the method shows the learner that they can perfectly make use of their knowledge of other European languages in learning the new one. A lot of linguistic elements can be transferred to the new language which means that they do not start learning the language from the absolute beginning (Klein and Stegmann, 2002). The method “makes learners aware of their ability to work out the meaning of unknown texts by the use of analogical reasoning and the logic of context [...]” (McCann, Klein and Stegmann, 2003, p. 13). As mentioned earlier in section 3.1 the method guides the learners through this process by means of the so called Seven Sieves that can be applied to the three main language

families in Europe: Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages. These sieves are used metaphorically and refer to the sieves of gold seekers. As gold seekers do, the learner must search for gold nuggets (a metaphor for familiar material) in the new language by passing them through the Seven Sieves. Repeating this process seven times with seven different language sieves the learner finally realises that a newspaper article in the new language is quite comprehensible. With this as a general basis the learner can then continue and search for the meaning of the remaining unknown words in the text (Van der Linden et al., 2006). The Seven Sieves thus simplify the process of getting an overall understanding of a text in a language never learned before. They are described in more detail below.

- *The First Sieve - Internationalisms:*

The first sieve filters words and proper names from the so called International Vocabulary. Words that belong to this category are present in most European languages and largely originate from Latin or Romance languages words are easy to recognize and according to Klein and Stegmann (2002: 14) an average adult knows about 5000 of them.

- *The Second Sieve - the Pan-Romance Vocabulary/Function words:*

In the EuroComRom edition (Klein and Stegman, 2002) the second Sieve treats the Pan-Romance vocabulary which contains all words common to the Romance language family. In the EuroComGerm edition on the other hand (Hufeisen and Marx, 2007a) this Sieve is replaced by the Sieve function words, which thus concentrates on function words in the various Germanic languages.

- *The Third Sieve - Sound Correspondences:*

Over a large period of time words and sounds change and each language develops in a different manner. With this sieve the learners are trained to use the sound correspondences provided by the method in order to recognize related words of different languages that have changed over time.

- *The Fourth Sieve - Spelling and Pronunciation:*

Sounds can be spelled in different ways, which may hinder recognition of a related word. This sieve concentrates on this problem and shows the learner the differences in spelling between the various languages belonging to the same language family.

- *The Fifth Sieve - Syntactic Structures:*

This Sieve shows the syntactic structures common to the languages belonging to the same language family. Again, knowledge of the syntactic structure of one language facilitates learning or recognizing syntactic elements in another language.

- *The Sixth Sieve - Morphological Elements:*

This Sieve concentrates on the recognition of morphological elements such as the formation of plural or verbal forms.

- *The seventh sieve - Prefixes and Suffixes:*

Here the learner is provided with a list of prefixes and suffixes. These are important for the deduction of compound words. Recognizing these elements allow the learner to extract the prefix (and/or suffix) from the root words.

Apart from these seven Sieves the method teaches the learners also how to read a text written in a foreign language. The various steps a reader should go through are represented in Figure 1 on the next page. It contains a schematic overview of the EuroCom method (the figure is taken from: McCann et al., 2003, p. 17).

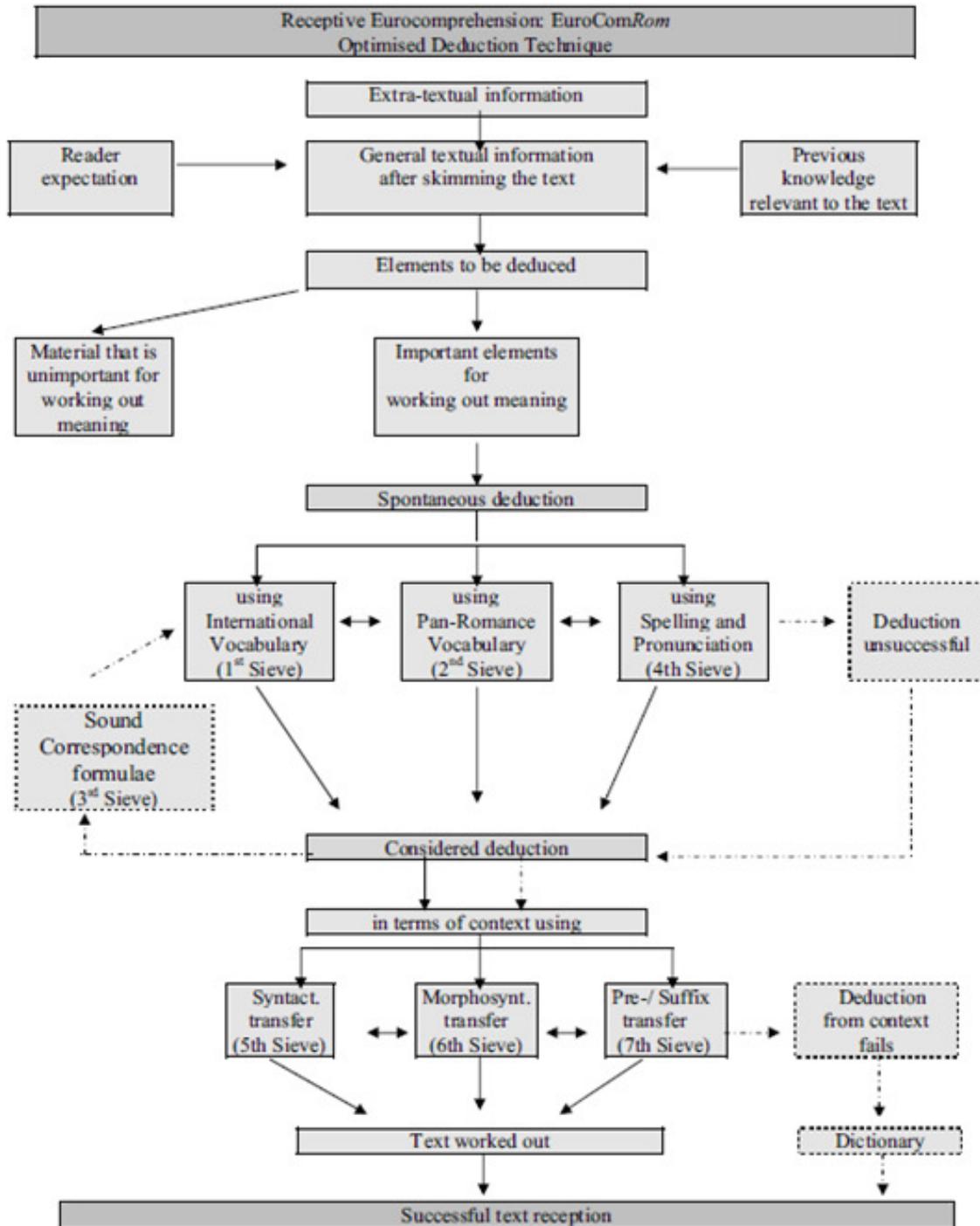


Figure 1 – Schematic overview of the EuroCom method.

This overview clearly shows that the EuroCom method relies on deduction, like many other methods on intercomprehension. The method describes the steps a reader should take in reading a new language. One of the first steps is the use of extra-textual information. Even before reading a text, we can make use of extra-

textual information and apply various funds of knowledge that we already possess but have nothing to do with the language in which the text is written, as every text is written in a context (Klein and Stegmann, 2002). The same authors list these types of knowledge, which can be used in a first approach to the text. The most important ones are listed below:

- The format of the text tells us what kind of text we have in front of us: literature, news article, official text, a set of instructions, a poem, a dictionary entry, etc.
- The format of a text also allows us to expect specific tense.
- Punctuation like quotation marks indicate that something or someone is being quoted.
- Paragraphs and possible illustrations that accompany the text provide us additional information about the content of the text.

I want to add one more indication to this list of external cues that, according to me, provides useful information too: capitals in the middle of a sentence very often refer to proper names of persons, cities or companies. If these are familiar to the reader they provide a good initial base to build on.

All these external cues “can help us to work out what the intended audience is, and what the text is trying to communicate. We use all these elements automatically in our own language: what we have to do is use them consciously and purposefully in the new language” (McCann et al., 2003, p. 20).

The schematic overview in Figure 1 further shows the way to read a text in a new language, following the strategies of the EuroCom method. After having used the extra-textual information, one reads the title or headline. These provide important information about the subject of the text and the reader can thus formulate his or her first expectations. After that, one can start a global reading (skim-reading of the text), starting with the first few paragraphs and the last one. At this stage it is very important to avoid reading every single word. That is, words

that are not immediately important to understanding the global meaning of the text should be ignored. This category mainly contains grammatical words. First it is important to get a global idea of the meaning of the text, which includes the theme, the tone and main aim of the text (information, amusement, persuasion etc.). From this point one can start applying the first four Sieves: the use of internationalisms, the Pan-Romance Vocabulary or function words, knowledge of sound correspondence and knowledge of spelling and pronunciation. At this point the reader should try to fill in the remaining gaps. Here, the context plays an important role, but also previously identified grammatical items help to codify the label of words in the text. For example, a subject implies possible verbs and/or adjectives in the same sentence. If the reader already has an idea of the meaning of the subject, this reduces the number of possible meanings of the verb and/or adjective. The same is of course true the other way around: identification of a verb also provides information about possible complements and objects. In this phase the learner is thus using three remaining Sieves which all have to do with grammatical structures of phrases and words. Reading the complete text one more time helps to identify even more words. At this point the authors underline that the learner should not aspire to perfection. After working through these steps they probably have built a quite good understanding of the meaning of the text (Klein and Stegmann, 2002, p. 21-22).

3.3 The ICE programme

Another programme that studies intercomprehension between different European languages is the ICE programme. Its aim is to promote plurilingualism in Europe and to enable European citizens to understand several languages without the need to speak them. The final goal is that each uses his or her native language in a conversation between people of different nations. In order to reach this goal, the ICE programme group has developed a method based on contrastive and descriptive linguistics (Castagne, 2003). The objective of the method is not to

describe the foreign languages that are treated, but to help the learners develop strategies and a controlled use of inferences in order to build an understanding of the foreign languages. The aim of the programme is not to teach the learners how to speak the foreign languages but only how to understand the general meaning communicated by a written article in a foreign language (Bougé and Calliès, 2004).

As mentioned before, the method is based on the EurRom4 project, which means that they have many techniques in common. However, in contrast with this project, the ICE programme goes beyond the boundaries of one specific language family. The programme is designed for a Francophone public and has organized empirical sessions on simultaneous learning of languages belonging to the same language family as the mother tongue (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and Rumanian) and languages belonging to another language family (the three Germanic languages: English, German and Dutch) (Caure, 2009). Observations during these sessions have led to the formulations of intercomprehensive strategies that subsequently can be applied to all other language families in Europe (Castagne, 2004b). Results of this programme have shown that intercomprehension is not only possible between related languages (for example French and Italian), but also between so called “neighbouring languages” (Castagne, 2011). These languages are not necessarily related to the target language, but the countries in which these languages are spoken are adjacent to one another. In the case of French, neighbouring languages that are not related are: English, German and Dutch. It even seems to be the case that relatively good results can be obtained in reading comprehension between languages that are neither related nor neighbouring languages of the target language. This was shown in a study on intercomprehension between French and Russian (Melnik, 2009, in: Castagne, 2011, p. 94).

The main characteristics of the ICE programme can be summarized as follows (adopted from Caure, 2009, p. 45-63):

- The programme only consists of training for reading comprehension;

- The programme concentrates on related and/or neighbouring languages;
- The foreign languages are treated simultaneously (e.g. the languages belonging to the same language family are constantly viewed together in one session);
- The choice of newspaper articles, because these articles have a structure familiar to the readers and because often the learner is already familiar with the subject, which enables the use of encyclopaedic knowledge;
- Sharing of the preliminary information available, which refers to the first phase in understanding a text together. In this phase the participants are asked what they have understood and what they further know about the subject after a first reading of the text;
- The participants use strategies and inferences to reach a first interpretation of a sentence in the foreign language;
- The final result is an approximation of the text, not a perfect translation;
- Interaction between the participants during the course is encouraged;
- The role of the teacher is to focus the attention of the participants and to guide them through the process of understanding without giving them the answers.

The ICE programme presents a teaching method that does not insert knowledge, but extracts all types of knowledge one possesses already (Castagne, 2004c). This means that the programme, like all other programmes on intercomprehension, takes advantage of the languages one already possesses in reading an unknown language (Castagne, 2003). Apart from this, the programme argues that the first step in intercomprehension between related and/or neighbouring language is to become aware of the fact that very often we already possess some general knowledge about the subject of the text. This “passive knowledge” concerns not only the subject of the article, but also includes information about the genre of the text and other types of knowledge at our disposal, which provides further information about what the reader can expect (Castagne, 2004d, p. 97). The use of

these general funds of knowledge is what Castagne calls "*l'approche intégrée*"¹⁴ (Castagne 2003, 2004d). Thanks to this first approach, the learner identifies transparent words, even though it must be underlined that intercomprehension goes far beyond the understanding of these international words (see section 2.2). What really matters are not the lexical or grammatical rules but the relations and interactions between these rules (Castagne, 2011, p. 84). Castagne further continues by arguing that these rules are systematic which means that they are perfectly accessible by means of inferences. With the help of practice of lexical and syntactic inferences, words that seem to be opaque at first glance can be made transparent. In the following sections, the two basic progression techniques formulated by the ICE programme are presented. These are the strategies that enable one to read a text written in a foreign language never learnt before.

3.3.1 *La progression en couches successives alternées*¹⁵

Very often when one starts reading in a foreign language, he or she applies a word for word or phrase by phrase strategy which immediately blocks the person once he or she comes across an unknown word (Blanche-Benveniste & Alii, 1997, in: Castagne, 2003, p. 13). Castagne (2003) argues that this is exactly what we should avoid since we need a macro vision of the text and use the context as much as possible in order to decrease the amount of apparently opaque words and consequently increase the possibility of success in making inferences about real opaque words or phrases. He proposes a different way of reading a text written in a foreign language whereby one arrives at the global sense after having read the text several times. Further, one should not only read from left to right, but also go backwards and forwards in the text, if necessary (Castagne, 2004c). He explains that this approach is very fruitful since it allows the reader to skip those words that are not immediately clear. Before worrying about the meaning of these words, one

¹⁴ Our translation: the integrated approach.

¹⁵ Our translation: progression in alternating successive layers.

should instead focus on all transparent structures present in the text. Using the gathered information allows one to make further inferences about all gaps left. Good readers already apply this technique in their mother tongue, but they tend to forget this strategy when they read a text in a foreign language. However, the positive news is that these persons do not need to develop an entirely new competence. They already apply this strategy in their mother tongue so they only need to learn how to transfer this strategy to reading tests in new languages (Castagne, 2003).

Once the reader has read the text as an entire unit, Castagne advises filling the gaps with empty words such as the French “*machin*” and “*machiner*” (Castagne, 2004c, p. 98).¹⁶ These words can represent all grammatical information available about the unknown words (such as the category, gender, number, etc). This tactic is very important because it allows the reader to complete the syntactic structure of the text. Even though lexical information may still be missing, the empty words already represent information about the grammatical category to which these unknown words belong. Together with the already transparent words this creates a far better understanding of the sentence and allows the reader to refine his comprehension of the text every time he reads the passages again (Caure, 2009).

3.3.2 *La progression en deux dimensions simultanées*¹⁷

The second progression technique is an addition to the previous one. Castagne (2004c) argues that the reader should combine two dimensions simultaneously in their attempt to comprehend a text written in an unknown foreign language: 1) the syntagmatic dimension which preserves the syntactic structure by replacing the unknown words with empty words as we already did in the former progression technique and 2) the paradigmatic dimension that consists in filling in existing lexical elements in the place of the former empty words. In this dimension one

¹⁶ The French words can be translated with the English “thing” and “to thing”. As they have no real meaning, they can represent grammatical information available about the unknown words.

¹⁷ Our translation: progression on two simultaneous dimensions.

starts to make assumptions about possible semantic meanings of the previous unknown words. These attempts do not need to be correct at once, it is normal to refine the text after several readings.

In case the text contains a restricted number of transparent words, Castagne (2004c) suggests alleviating the syntactic structure by temporarily putting elements that are semantically unimportant between brackets. This technique promotes a better understanding of the overall verbal architecture. Once this is generally understood one can reintegrate the removed elements. The same kind of technique can be applied to morphologically complex words. In order to make these transparent, one starts to remove all affixes until one arrives at the radical. First one tries to make this radical transparent by relying on knowledge of previously learnt languages, then the affixes can be placed back again to refine the sense of the overall sentence (Castagne, 2004d).

4. SOMETHING TO HOLD ON: LOANWORDS IN DUTCH

The previous chapters have functioned as an introduction to the concept of intercomprehension and explained its main strategies. As described in full detail in chapter 3, an important component of intercomprehension is the use of knowledge about the world and other languages one already possesses. The Eurocom programme dedicated two of the Seven Sieves to the recognition of words belonging to the international vocabulary and words that are very common among languages from the same language family. Also Castagne (2007) showed the importance of transparent words in foreign languages and showed how one can use them to make inferences about less transparent words. A lot of these transparent words are due to language contact, which has led to an enormous exchange of words, i.e. loanwords. Castagne (2011) notes that language contact facilitates reading comprehension. Because this thesis focusses on intercomprehension between Italian and Dutch, which seem to be two totally different languages, the current chapter is dedicated to the origin of loanwords in Dutch. Very often it is assumed that Dutch has much more in common with English, as they belong to the same language family. However, this does not mean that Dutch and Italian have nothing in common. In fact, this chapter presents earlier studies showing that Romance languages such as Latin and French have had their influence on the Dutch language. Therefore, being able to recognize these Romance influences on Dutch, facilitates intercomprehension between Italian and Dutch, thus creating a first base of comprehension to build upon.

4.1 The origin of loanwords in Dutch

The number of loanwords in Dutch is about 20% (Van der Sijs, 2009) or 27.9% (Gooskens, Bezooijen and Kürschener, 2010). Many people think that most loanwords in Dutch originate from English or German, but this seems not entirely true. Van der Sijs and Willemyns (2009) claim that most loanwords in Dutch

originate from French, followed by Latin and only after that by German and English. Other loans originate from Italian, Spanish, Indonesian, Yiddish, Japanese and Slavic languages such as Russian (named in order of frequency). The following sections briefly discuss the influence of the five most influential languages on Dutch: French, Latin, German, English and Italian.

4.2 French influence on Dutch

From the 12th century onwards French has had an influence on the Dutch language (Van der Sijs, 2009). According to Gooskens et al. (2010) 63.8% of all loans in Dutch have a French origin¹⁸. Many of these loans can be found in the semantic fields of art, science, fashion, jurisdiction, government and state of mind (Van der Sijs and Willemyns, 2009). Other French loans stem from the intermediate phase from Latin to the national language in which French has been used as the official written language. Furthermore, in the 14th and 15th century The Netherlands were governed by several French-speaking rulers (ibidem). As a consequence, “the upper classes were bilingual, and used many French words in their native languages. As their manner of speaking had prestige, the French words were adopted by the middle and lower classes, and thus got incorporated into the general language” (Van der Sijs, 1996, p. 139, in: Gooskens et al., 2010, p. 107).

4.3 Latin influence on Dutch

The second most influential language on Dutch is Latin, according to Van der Sijs and Willemyns (2009). The influence of Latin starts with the Romans as they introduced a lot of new objects, techniques and food in the area of the Germans (ibidem). As a consequence, a lot of Latin words were borrowed that still exist in the Dutch language. A few examples are: *poort* (Latin: *porta*, English: gate), *muur*

¹⁸ Gooskens et al. (2010) percentages derive from a study on the origin and number of loan words in the Europarl corpora, a collection of monologues and dialogues held in the European Parliament.

(Latin: *murus*, English: wall), *tafel* (Latin: *tabula*, English: table), *vork* (Latin: *furca*, English: fork), *markt* (Latin: *mercatus*, English: market), *keizer* (Latin: *Caesar*, English: Emperor), *pilaar* (Latin: *pilare*, English: pillar), (the examples are adopted from Van der Sijs and Willemyns, 2009, p. 89). Borrowing from Latin (and Greek) continued with the spread of the Christianity and later, in the 15th century in the period of the Humanism. Also a lot of names of plants and animals are derived from Latin, not to forget the large amount of scientific terms (ibidem, 2009).

4.4 German influence on Dutch

According to Gooskens et al. (2010) only 9.2% of all loans in Dutch have a German origin. Although Van der Sijs (2009, p. 353) notes that “German loanwords are in general immediately changed to Dutch morpheme shapes [...]. The result is that German loans are less easily recognizable as such than loanwords from other languages”. German has influenced the Dutch language especially in the fields of science, industry and trade (Gooskens et al., 2010)

4.5 English influence on Dutch

As mentioned in section 4.1, English is not the main source of loan words in Dutch. On the contrary, the study of Gooskens et al. (2010) points out that only 2.1% of all loanwords in Dutch have an English origin. Yet Van der Sijs and Willemyn (2009) name a slightly higher percentage of English loans: 10.3%¹⁹. However, they argue that on four random pages of a Dutch newspaper only 2.3% are English loans against approximately 25.2% loans with a Romance origin. The same authors explain the low percentage of English loans by the fact that, in contrast to French and Latin, English loans entered quite late in the Dutch language. The English language started to become influential only in the second half of the 19th century

¹⁹Their percentage is based on the total number of loanwords in the *Etymologisch Woordenboek* (the etymological dictionary).

and 20th century when English became the world language. As many other languages in Europe, Dutch borrowed words in the field of politics, sports, leisure, industry, traffic, technology and many others (Van der Sijs and Willemyns, 2009).

4.6 Italian influence on Dutch

In contrast to French, Latin, German and English, the Dutch language contains a poor amount of Italian loan words. Nevertheless, there are several semantic fields that are well-represented by loans from Italian. Most of these words can be found in the domain of arts, business and consumption (ibidem).

Although a native speaker of Italian will find a smaller number of loans from its native language in Dutch, he or she can still take advantage of the larger amount of Latin loanwords, which lie quite close to their native language. The large percentage of Romance loanwords in Dutch is thus a positive factor, and makes intercomprehension between Italian and Dutch not so impossible as it might seem at first glance.

The next chapter presents the research carried out for this thesis in full detail. The results will shed light on the success and/or effort in doing a Dutch reading comprehension test for native speakers of Italian with experience in intercomprehension.

5. THE CASE STUDY

This case study has been introduced briefly in the introduction, but is presented and explained in full detail in the current chapter. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this case study is to investigate whether native speakers of Italian can access a written text in an unfamiliar Germanic language: Dutch. This is a specific case of intercomprehension between two languages belonging to two different families, which complicates the task enormously. Two groups of participants have been recruited: one group of participants who attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages and another group of participants without any experience in intercomprehension. This case study compares the results of these two groups in a reading comprehension test and a translation of that particular text. This comparison makes it possible to investigate if earlier experience in intercomprehension can be applied to unfamiliar languages belonging to another language family. Of special interest is the question whether previous training in intercomprehension between Romance languages facilitates their reading comprehension in a Germanic language. Of secondary interest are the questions whether or not the IC participants read the Dutch newspaper article in a different manner than the N-IC participants, and the question whether audio added to the written text contributes to a better understanding of the content of the text. Various researchers argue that audio might contribute to the understanding of words that at first glance seem to be opaque, but show some similarity to the mother tongue and/or other languages when audio is added to the text (Castagne, 2003). Tyvaert writes the following about the added value of audio to a text:

“On vérifie que le mode oral est très utile pour découper les phrases en syntagmes principaux puisque les langues étudiées sont assez proches de ce point de vue en termes prosodiques (les divers syntagmes principaux se trouvant en quelque sorte

unifiés du point de vue fonctionnel en un fragment prosodiquement identifiable).”²⁰ (Tyvaert, 2008, p. 260, cited in Caure, 2009, p. 55).

Speech consists of many suprasegmental features such as the melody (intonation), stress and pauses that provide a lot of useful information. Very often these can be understood easily and thus provide extra clues about the meaning of words accompanying them.

Lutjeharms states that in normal reading comprehension “both orthographic and phonological features appear to be activated at some stage when reading a word. [...] Subvocalization is often observed for processing linguistically or semantically difficult text [...]” (Lutjeharms, 2007, p. 269). Providing the subjects with the right pronunciation may thus contribute to their process of reading comprehension. In a positive case the correct pronunciation reminds them of a word in their mother tongue or another languages they know.

Another motive to combine a written text in a foreign language with audio is provided by Möller and Zeevaert (in press, p. 1). They underline the fact that orthographic systems do not always facilitate the recognition of similar words in different languages. Sometimes languages use different graphemes with more or less similar pronunciations. Phonemes can thus be represented in different languages by different graphemes. In some cases apparently opaque words can thus be made transparent by providing the learners the right pronunciation of the words. For this reason the EuroCom method pays additional attention to the pronunciation of the graphemes used in each language (the fourth Sieve ‘Spelling and Pronunciation’). Lutjeharms (2007) adds to this the importance of pronunciation in reading comprehension “for rehearsal in the working memory and memorizing, as for possible future acquisition of other skills” (ibidem, p. 279).

Because of the reasons mentioned above, it has been decided to add audio to the written text in a secondary stage of the test, i.e. after the first few readings.

²⁰ Our translation: We find that the oral mode is very useful for cutting sentences into main phrases since the languages studied are quite close to each other in prosodic terms (the different key phrases are somehow unified from a functional point of view into a prosodically identifiable fragment).

The next few sections present the research in more detail. The research questions and hypotheses are presented in section 5.1 and the method of the research in section 5.2.

5.1 Research questions and hypothesis

The research questions of the current thesis can be formulated as follows, where the first question posed is of main interest:

- I. Are Italian native speakers who have attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages able to transfer their strategies to an unfamiliar language belonging to the Germanic language family (Dutch)?
- II. Does the audio rendering of the text have a positive effect on reading comprehension in Dutch for L1 speakers of Italian?

Later on, a third research question was added out of curiosity. However, given the fact that this research question was added on a later stage of the research, less attention will be paid to the following question:

- III. Do the students who have followed a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages read the Dutch article in a different manner than their fellows who did not follow the course?

The basic expectation that runs through the experiment is that the control group (the participants without any experience in intercomprehension) is not able to transfer their knowledge in understanding a foreign language never studied before, while students with previous instruction in intercomprehension are expected to have developed intercomprehension strategies that allow them to create a basic understanding of the content of the presented text in Dutch. Therefore, it is expected to find differences in accomplishment in the reading comprehension test they are presented with. Secondly, the addition of audio in a later stage of the

reading comprehension text is expected to have a positive effect on the comprehension of the Dutch article, at least for the participants with experience in intercomprehension. Furthermore, the difference in instruction is expected to lead to a difference in reading an unfamiliar foreign language. Recall that Castagne (2003) observed that a lot of persons block when they come across difficult words. They forget to continue reading which in many cases clarifies the text. This is a technique that is very important in intercomprehension, which is expected to be applied by the participants who attended a course in intercomprehension.

Based on the expectations expressed above, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

- I. Participants who have attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages are expected to be able to transfer their strategies to the Germanic Dutch language. These participants are thus expected to have better results in the reading comprehension test and translation than their fellows without any experience in intercomprehension, because of better developed strategies in reading unfamiliar languages. To be more specific:
 - They are expected to have listed more words in exercise two of the reading comprehension test, where they were asked to list all words they understood from the first few readings;
 - They are expected to have a higher number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test;
 - They are expected to provide a more detailed translation²¹, i.e. more (successful) attempts to translate less transparent words²², because of better developed intercomprehension strategies;

²¹ The second part of the test consisted of a translation of the same Dutch newspaper article that the read in the reading comprehension test (cf. section 5.2 for a detailed description of the test and procedure).

²² See section 5.2.4 for the criteria of these less transparent words.

- They are expected to have developed some suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language, such as suppositions about the word order and/or singular and plural forms;
 - Participants of the IC group are expected to spend more time on both tests because they do not easily give up thanks to their positive experience in reading foreign languages never learnt before.
- II. Reading the text another time while listening to the audio is expected to help the participants comprehend several other words that they did not understand without the audio.
- III. Participants with experience in intercomprehension are expected to read the Dutch article in a different manner than the participants without experience, i.e. in contrast to the control group they are expected to use extra-textual information such as knowledge about the text structure of the article, and to read backwards and forwards in the text as proposed by the ICE programme. It is also expected that they skip those words that are not immediately clear and continue reading to clarify the difficult parts.

Important to note is that, in contrast to most other studies that involve Dutch in their work on intercomprehension (e.g. the case study of Pietzonka, 2013), this study does not use German as a possible transfer resource for reading comprehension in Dutch. Instead, this study uses English as the only Germanic language for a possible transfer resource together with possible knowledge of other Romance languages that the participants possess. Students with knowledge of German or any other Germanic language (with exception of English) were excluded from the study. This is to limit the subject's knowledge of Germanic languages as much as possible since previous studies have demonstrated that knowledge of German (or other Germanic languages) facilitates reading comprehension in Dutch. Since the goal of the present study is to investigate the

possibility of transmission of intercomprehension strategies to languages belonging to another language family than that of the participant's mother tongue (Italian), knowledge of other languages belonging to same language family as the target language (Dutch) is undesired. English is the only accepted Germanic language since it is learned by almost all students as a second language. Nowadays, it is very hard to find young people without any knowledge of this widespread language.

5.2 Method

In what follows, the present case study is described in full detail. Characteristics of the participants (section 5.2.1), together with the used materials (section 5.2.2), the procedure (section 5.2.3) and type of analysis (section 5.2.4) are presented in the next pages. The results of the case study are presented in the next chapter.

5.2.1 Participants

Ten subjects (5 male, 5 female) aged between 20 and 61 were recruited for this case study. All participants possessed a university degree or were currently studying at university. They all had a mixed combination of university courses. The majority studied languages, whereas three subjects had a different discipline (International relationships, History and Arts). All subjects were native speakers of Italian and had learned between one and five languages. On average, they spoke four languages (including the mother tongue). None of the subjects had learned any Germanic language other than English. All participants had studied English as a foreign language in school. Other languages that were named, in order of commonality, were French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Japanese and Maltese.

The ten students were divided into two groups of five subjects each based on previous experience with intercomprehension, so that the first group (from now on called IC) contained five subjects aged between 23 and 61 who had attended a

course in intercomprehension between Romance languages in the past (Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan and Romanian). Three of them studied languages, the other two had a degree in another discipline. The control group consisted of the other five subjects, aged between 20 and 24, who never attended a course in intercomprehension (this group will be referred to as N-IC). Only one of them studied a discipline other than languages. Of all participants only two have been in the Netherlands in the past and for not more than a week. Both belonged to the IC group.

5.2.2 Materials

The research consisted of a questionnaire, a reading comprehension test based on a Dutch newspaper article, which also included a translation of the article itself, and finally an interview which was held with each participant individually. They are all described in the following sections.

5.2.2.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was composed of seven questions about the subject's age, degree course (including the question whether he or she has ever attended a course in intercomprehension) and the subject's language history to be sure that none of the participants had previous experience with Dutch or other Germanic languages (the only exception was English). They were also asked if they had ever been in the Netherlands. This question was posed in order to know which subjects might have been in contact with the Dutch language. Further they were asked for permission to be recorded during the test and interview. A copy of the questionnaire is added in Appendix A.

5.2.2.2 The reading comprehension test and translation

For the reading comprehension test a written text from the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* was chosen. Newspaper articles are frequently used in intercomprehension methods, since most people are familiar with the structure of a newspaper article, which consequently means that they know where they can find certain types of information. Furthermore, newspaper articles are about current affairs that are probably already known by the reader, which facilitates reading in the unfamiliar foreign language (Caure, 2009).

The chosen text that was about the discovery of a new dinosaur species in China, was slightly shortened to 144 lexemes, because the original text was too long. The article was chosen over other articles because of its subject that is known to almost everyone and thus allows the use of general knowledge about the world. In addition, this article contained a small amount of international words that gave the participants something to hold onto. The test consisted of two parts:

- I. a reading comprehension test with open and multiple choice questions;
- II. a full translation of the same newspaper article.

All questions were formulated in Italian and the participants were allowed to answer in Italian too.

The questions of the reading comprehension test were categorized according to global understanding. The first question asked the participants to give a short summary of the article and explain the main focus in three lines. In the second question they were asked to list all words they understood from the text and translate them into Italian. If present, they had to add the bridge language too. When they had finished their list they listened to the researcher who read the text aloud to them. In case they understood other words thanks to the pronunciation, they could write down these words in question three. In the next question they were asked to give a translation of the title. The questions that followed were

questions about the contents of the text, of which two were open questions and three true-false. In order to prevent guessing of the correct answer, a third column was added to the table so that they had to put a cross in the applicable column for each question: 'true', 'false' or 'I do not know'. A copy of the reading comprehension test can be found in Appendix B.

5.2.2.3 The interview

Finally, after the subjects had finished the test, they were interviewed in order to get insight in the types of strategies the participants used during the test and their opinion about the usefulness of the audio. The main interview questions that were posed are listed in Table 1 below. However, it must be noted that several additional questions were added depending on the answers of the participants.

The interview started with some general questions about their way of reading the article in the unfamiliar language. As described in full detail in sections 3.2 and 3.3, it is recommended by the EuroCom programme as well as the ICE programme to start reading the title and subtitle and if desired the last paragraph. The second question in Table 1 is formulated in order to get more insight in this process. Castagne (e.g. 2003, 2004c) further underlines the importance of reading not only from left to right, but if necessary also going backwards and forwards in the text, which he explains in his "*progression en couches successives alternées*" (see section 3.3.1). Question three and four were posed in order to see into which extent the participants apply this type of reading. Of other interest was the question whether the participants skip difficult words or not. Skipping difficult words is also one of the recommendations of the ICE programme and corresponds to the sixth question in Table 1. However, the main interview question was question seven in Table 1. In this part of the interview, the researcher discussed together with the participants the answers given on the reading comprehension test and the translation. The main focus lay on the strategies they applied in translating the Dutch newspaper

article. The last question was dedicated to the possible added value of the audio which was provided during the test.

Main interview questions
1. Was it difficult?
2. How did you start reading the text?
3. Did you read the text one time or several times?
4. Did you go back and forth in the text while reading?
5. How did you solve the difficulties you encountered in reading the text?
6. Did you skip difficult words or did you stop and try to translate it?
7. How did you arrive at the translations?
8. Did the audio help you understand more words?

Table 1 – Main interview questions.

5.2.3 Procedure

All participants were tested individually on different days and timeslots. They were first asked to complete a questionnaire. Afterwards they were presented a written text in the unfamiliar Dutch language. The text and questions were the same for all participants. Once the participants received the text they were instructed to read the text carefully and to answer the questions following it. If they had absolutely no idea what to respond to any of the questions they could simply write 'I do not know'. They were further asked to indicate when they finished the first two questions so that the researcher would read the text aloud to them. As mentioned earlier in section 5.1 this was intended as a possible help to the participants. No time limit was given. All participants could take as long as they needed to answer the questions. However, they were not informed that the researcher recorded the amount of time they took in order to complete the test. Time was recorded for the reading comprehension test as well as for the translation that followed it. After

having answered the questions they were asked to hand in the test. While the researcher corrected the test, the participants were provided with the second part: translating the same Dutch newspaper article to Italian. They were instructed to underline or to circle those words or phrases that they were not able to translate and to leave an open space in their translation. After having finished their translation they were given a small break of 5 or 10 minutes. Finally, the last part consisted of an interview in which the following items were discussed:

- the reading comprehension test;
- the translation;
- the strategies the participants adopted to answer the questions and translate the Dutch text.

No dictionaries or other media were allowed during the test.

5.2.4 Analysis

Data analyses for the reading comprehension test, translation and interview are presented in the sections below. Every section reproduces its corresponding hypothesis with a description of the type of analysis performed to answer that specific question.

5.2.4.1 The reading comprehension test

Analysis of the reading comprehension test served to answer the following hypothesis:

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have listed more words in exercise two, where they were asked to list all words they understood from the first few readings;

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have a higher number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test;
- Reading the text another time while listening to the audio is expected to help the participants comprehend several other words that they did not understand without the audio.

To answer the first hypothesis and compare the scores of the IC group with those of the N-IC group an average was made of the total number of words listed in exercise two. They were counted without considering the correctness of their translations.

Analysis of the number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test was based on five questions of the test: questions 5, 6, 7a, 7b, 7c (see appendix B for a copy of the reading comprehension test). In order to answer questions 5 and 6 correctly, the participants could rely on the numbers in the text. However, to answer question 6 correctly the correct numbers were not enough. Since they were asked how big the dinosaur was, they had to indicate whether the dinosaur was 15-20 meter 'long' or 'high', which decided whether the answer was counted as correct or wrong. In case they did not answer this in the reading comprehension test, they were asked in the interview. Question 7 on the other hand consisted of three multiple choice questions where they had to choose whether the three statements were 'right' or 'wrong'. They could also tick 'I do not know' in case they were uncertain about their answer. For this reason, every tick in the column 'I do not know' was counted as an incorrect answer. The number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test were counted for each group. Furthermore, an average score was calculated in order to be able to compare the scores of both groups.

One question of the reading comprehension test (question 3) was dedicated to the added value of audio and corresponds to the third hypothesis mentioned above. The participants were asked to inform the researcher when they had

finished answering question two, so that the researcher would read the Dutch article aloud. The subjects were informed to listen carefully. If they understood other words after having listened to the pronunciation of the researcher, they were asked to write these down in the table provided in question three of the reading comprehension test. These words were counted and an average was made to compare the scores of both groups. Results were combined with the subjects' comments about the usefulness of the audio in the interview in order to get an idea of those factors that were useful to the participants.

5.2.4.2 The translation and interview

To assess the remaining hypotheses, the translation and interview were used. All records of the interviews were transcribed, which gave a better insight in the different strategies used by the participants. Below, the remaining hypotheses are represented. Analysis is described beneath each hypothesis.

- Participants of the IC group are expected to provide a more detailed translation, i.e. more (successful) attempts to translate less transparent words, because of better developed intercomprehension strategies.

To assess this hypothesis, six words from the Dutch newspaper article were selected: *ontdekt* (ENG: discovered, IT: *scoperta*), *onderzoeksteam* (ENG: research team, IT: *squadra di ricerca*), *plantetende* (ENG: herbivorous, IT: *erbivoro*), *Krijt* (ENG: Cretaceous period, IT: *Cretacio*), *tijdperk* (ENG: age, IT: *era*) and *behoort* (ENG: belongs, IT: *appartiene*). These words can be considered as not immediately transparent to native speakers of Italian, i.e. the Italian and English counterpart are too different from the Dutch word to be linked without effort to the right translation. Of course some of these words have a small number of characters in common with their English counterpart (e.g. *Krijt* and *behoort*). However, it is expected that experience in intercomprehension is necessary in order to see these links. Although the chosen Dutch words have no or little assimilation to their

English and Italian counterparts, their meaning could be “guessed” because of little clues in the text. For example, the word *plantetende* neither resemble the Italian word *erbivoro* nor the English word ‘herbivorous’. However, the position as well as part of the word betrays its meaning. *Plant-* resembles to *pianta* in Italian, meaning ‘plant’. Further, the word is in between an indefinite article and a noun (a name of a dinosaur species). Very reasonable is the conclusion that this word should be an adjective describing a characteristic of the dinosaur. Because part of the word resembles the Italian and English word for ‘plant’ it could be hypothesised, with use of our general knowledge about the word and dinosaurs in specific, that the meaning of the word is *erbivoro*, which is correct. The same type of reasoning is possible for: *onderzoeksteam* and *behoort*, where part of the word resembles to the English translation and various other clues, such as transparent words surrounding the difficult word and graphic indicators, could be found in the same sentence. The word *Krijt* also has few letters in common with its Italian and English counterpart, but it was hypothesised that this might not be enough. However, also in this case there were other clues in the sentence that could help the participants to guess the meaning of this word. Participants could make use of their graphic knowledge, i.e. use various graphic indicators such as capitalization and/or punctuation marks (Doyé, 2005, p. 16). In this case the word *Krijt* starts with a capital, indicating that it is a proper name of a person, city or name of a period. Furthermore, the word was immediately followed by a phrase between brackets, indicating an explanation of the earlier mentioned words. Between the brackets there were other words that are assumed to be transparent such as *geologisch* (ENG: geological, IT: *geologico*), various numbers and then the words *miljoen* (ENG: million, IT: *millioni*) and *jaar* (ENG: year, IT: *anni*). With the help of the numbers and these three familiar words they could assume that the word *Krijt* could be related to a geological age that went from 145 to 66 million years ago. The capital indicates that it was probably the proper name of that specific age. Finally, the two other words *ontdekt* and *tijdperk* are less clear, but they are surrounded by words that

are very similar to Italian and/or English. Therefore, the participants could guess their meanings with the help of the context they created with the familiar words.

A checklist, consisting of the six words was used to tick the words the participant tried to translate (regardless of success). For each group an average was made. Next, the interview shed light on the various types of strategies the participants used to arrive at their translations of one or more of these six words. The various strategies were summed up for every single participant and put together in a table. The average scores of IC and N-IC participants were compared.

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have developed some suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language, such as suppositions about the word order and/or singular and plural forms.

Neither the comprehension test nor the interview contained questions about grammatical aspects. This was chosen on purpose so that thoughts about grammatical aspects would be spontaneous. In analysing this hypothesis all spontaneous expressions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language were gathered and counted for each participant. An average of the total different suppositions was made for both groups.

- Participants of the IC group are expected to spend less time on both tests because of their positive experience in reading foreign languages never learnt before.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher recorded the amount of time the participants took in order to complete the test (the reading comprehension test together with the translation). Again an average was made for both group of participants.

- Participants with experience in intercomprehension are expected to read the Dutch article in a different manner than the participants without experience, i.e. in contrast to the control group they are expected to use

extra-textual information such as knowledge about the text structure of the article, and to read back and forwards in the text as proposed by the ICE programme. It is also expected that they skip those words that are not immediately clear and continue reading to clarify the difficult parts.

The first few questions of the interview were dedicated to the participant's way of reading the Dutch newspaper article. Participants were asked how they started reading the article, if they read the article multiple times, if they also went backwards and forwards in reading the text (see Castagne 2003, 2004c) and what they exactly did when they encountered difficult words. In analysing their answers a grid was used which contained some of the main recommendations of the ICE programme, because this programme also focusses on intercomprehension between languages belonging to different language families. The grid was filled in for every participant, indicating whether he or she mentioned the various steps recommended by the ICE programme or not.

6. THE RESULTS

The results obtained from the preliminary analysis are presented in the following sections, but first the research questions that should be answered are recalled:

- I. Are native speakers of Italian who have attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages able to transfer their strategies to an “unfamiliar” language belonging to the Germanic language family (Dutch)?
- II. Does the audio rendering of the text have a positive effect on reading comprehension in Dutch for L1 speakers of Italian?
- III. Do the students who have followed a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages read the Dutch article in a different manner than their fellows who did not follow the course?

Section 6.1 presents the results regarding the first research question and is subdivided according to the various corresponding hypothesis. The second research question is treated in section 6.2 and finally the results of the third research question are provided in section 6.3.

6.1 Transfer of intercomprehension strategies to an unrelated language

In order to answer the first research question various hypotheses were formulated, which consisted of expectations regarding the number of words they understood after the first few readings, the results of the reading comprehension test, the quality of the translation, possible thoughts about grammatical aspects and the amount of time it took them to complete the test. The following sections show the results of all these aspects separately that together answer the first research question. The research question will be answered in section 7.1.6, in which the results of all separate hypothesis are combined and discussed.

6.1.1 Number of words listed after the first few readings

This section refers to the following hypothesis:

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have listed more words in exercise two where they were asked to list all words they understood from the first few readings.

Table 2 presents an overview of the results for every single subject, whether the graph in Figure 2 shows an overall image of the averages of both groups.

Subject	Score	Subject	Score
IC 1	35	N-IC 6	21
IC 2	16	N-IC 7	13
IC 3	23	N-IC 8	23
IC 4	22	N-IC 9	30
IC 5	30	N-IC 10	17

Table 2 - Number of words listed in question 2 of the reading comprehension test.

As can be seen from this table, subject IC 2 has a quite low score in contrast to its intercomprehension fellows. It must be noted that this subject happens to be the only participant of an advanced ages (61 years old), which is 30 years older than the oldest participants of the remaining four subjects of the IC group. In addition, subject IC 2 and IC 4 were the only participants of the IC group that did not possess a university degree in Languages, even though it must be mentioned that IC 2 attended various language courses in her free time. Therefore, age and study direction could have had an influence on the results, although this does not seem to be the case for N-IC 8 who also had a study direction other than languages, but nevertheless had an average score. A study with a larger amount of participants with different study directions is need to investigate this aspect in more detail.

The average scores of each group are visualized in Figure 2 and as we can see from the graph, subjects with experience in intercomprehension between Romance languages have indeed listed more words after the first few readings than their fellows without any experience in intercomprehension. On average, the participants of the IC group thought to have understood 25 words after the first few readings, which are four more words than the participants of the N-IC group (21 words). Note however that these numbers contain both good translations and bad.

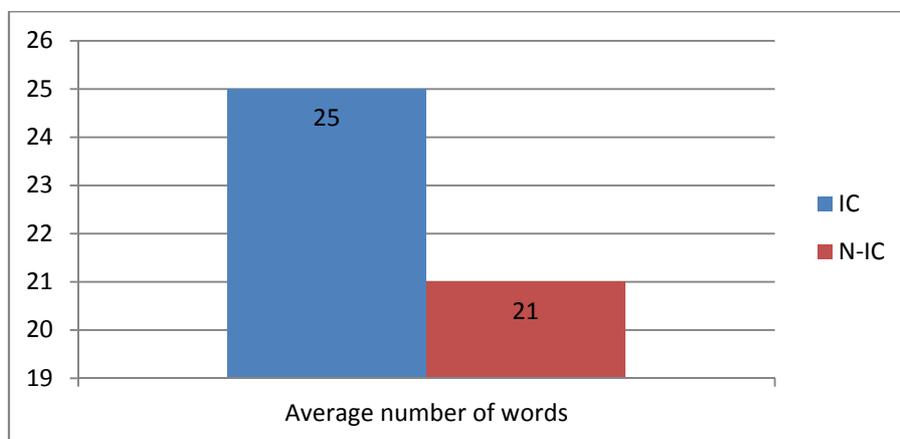


Figure 2 – Average of words that the participants listed after the first few

6.1.2 The reading comprehension test

When it comes to the overall comprehension of the Dutch newspaper article, it is interesting to compare the number of correct answers on the questions of the reading comprehension test. The corresponding hypothesis is recalled below.

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have a higher number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test.

The individual scores of each subject are shown in Table 3 on the next page. A difference has been made between the score in the reading comprehension test (the column 'Before interview') and the score after the interview, because various

participants had reconsidered their answers to the questions in the reading comprehension test when they performed the second part of the test, i.e. the translation. During the interview they had the possibility to review their answers and correct them. As can be seen from the table, only the participants of the IC group reconsidered their answers. Subjects of the N-IC group remained consistent with their answers given in the first test.

Subject	Before interview	After interview	Subject	Before interview	After interview
IC 1	3	3	N-IC 6	4	4
IC 2	2	3	N-IC 7	3	3
IC 3	1	1	N-IC 8	3	3
IC 4	2	4	N-IC 9	2	2
IC 5	3	3	N-IC 10	1	1

Table 3 – Number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test (total number of questions = 5).

The average scores of both groups are presented in the graph in Figure 3 below.

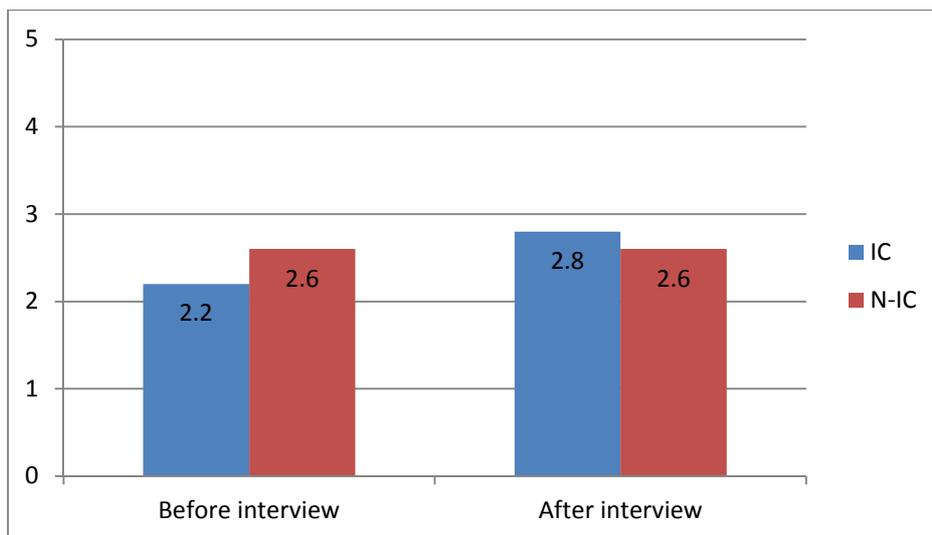


Figure 3 – Average number of correct answers in the reading comprehension test before the interview (the reading comprehension test) and after the interview.

Interesting in this data is that the N-IC group has a slightly higher score in the reading comprehension test than the IC group. As expected from the results shown in Table 3, only the average score of the IC groups rises a little bit after the interview, indicating that they reconsidered their answers given in the reading comprehension test during the translation and/or interview. Striking is that their final score even draws level with the score of their fellows of the N-IC group, ending up with a slightly higher score (2.8 against 2.6 for the N-IC group).

6.1.3 Capacity to translate less transparent words

The second part of the experiment consisted of a translation of the article read by the participants during the reading comprehension test. Here it was also expected to observe a difference in training between the two groups. Because the participants of the IC group have some experience in translating articles written in a foreign language they never studied before, the following hypothesis was formulated:

- Participants of the IC group are expected to provide a more detailed translation, i.e. more (successful) attempts to translate less transparent words, because of better developed intercomprehension strategies;

As described in section 5.2.4, six Dutch words were selected that were assumed to be not immediate clear to native speakers of Italian. However, several clues in the text betray their meaning. Participants of the IC group were expected to see and use these clues more than their fellows of the N-IC group. This section focusses on the number of attempts to translate these six selected words and the type of strategies used for it. First, the results of the number and averages of translated opaque words are presented, then the type of used strategies are discussed.

An overview of the individual results of the participants of the IC group can be found in Table 4a and those of the N-IC group in 4b. They have been separated for reasons of space. In each table, a distinction has been made between the written

translations in the test (which refers to the column ‘TEST’) and possible attempts in the interview (the column ‘INT.’). All attempts to translate one or more of these six selected words are marked with a cross (X) if the answer was correct or semantically close to the right translation, or with an asterisk (*) if the participant translated the Dutch word wrong. A dash (-) is used in case one of these words has been ignored, i.e. a blank space in the written translation or in when the participant declared to have no single idea about the meaning of the word in question during the interview.

Subject	IC 1		IC 2		IC3		IC4		IC 5	
	TEST	INT.								
Ontdekt	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Onderzoeksteam	X	X	-	X	-	X	-	-	-	*
Plantetende	*	*	-	*	-	-	X	X	*	*
Krijt	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X	X	X
Tijdperk	*	*	-	-	*	*	-	-	-	*
Behoort	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total	5	5	0	5	3	4	4	4	4	6

Table 4a – Number of attempts to translate one or more of the six selected opaque Dutch words (IC group).

Subject	N-IC 6		N-IC 7		N-IC 8		N-IC 9		N-IC 10	
	TEST	INT.	TEST	INT.	TEST	INT.	TEST	INT.	TEST	INT.
Ontdekt	X	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	X	X
Onderzoeksteam	X	X	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Plantetende	-	X	-	X	-	X	-	*	-	-
Krijt	-	X	-	-	-	X	-	-	X	X
Tijdperk	-	-	X	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
Behoort	-	-	-	-	*	X	X	X	*	*
Total	2	4	1	2	2	5	2	4	4	4

Table 4b – Number of attempts to translate one or more of the six selected opaque Dutch words (N-IC group).

As can be seen from these tables, the interview helped the major part of the participants to reflect more about the meaning of these six selected words. In some cases the interviewer asked them to think about a possible meaning of one of these words, in other cases the participants translated them spontaneously by themselves. In particular, one of the participants (IC 2) had a very poor translation, but started to complete the translation by herself during the interview. She admitted to find it easier to talk about the Dutch article than to write a translation where she was forced to catch the meaning of each word. Talking about the article, without giving her any clues, helped this subject a lot to organize her ideas about the text. At the end it emerged that she understood much more than she showed in her translation. The same was true for many other subjects.

When comparing the results of the upper two tables, it is already possible to see some difference in score, which indeed seems to be higher for the IC group. To be sure, an average has been made of the total number of translated opaque

words for each group. Figure 4 shows the averages for the written translation and those after the interview.

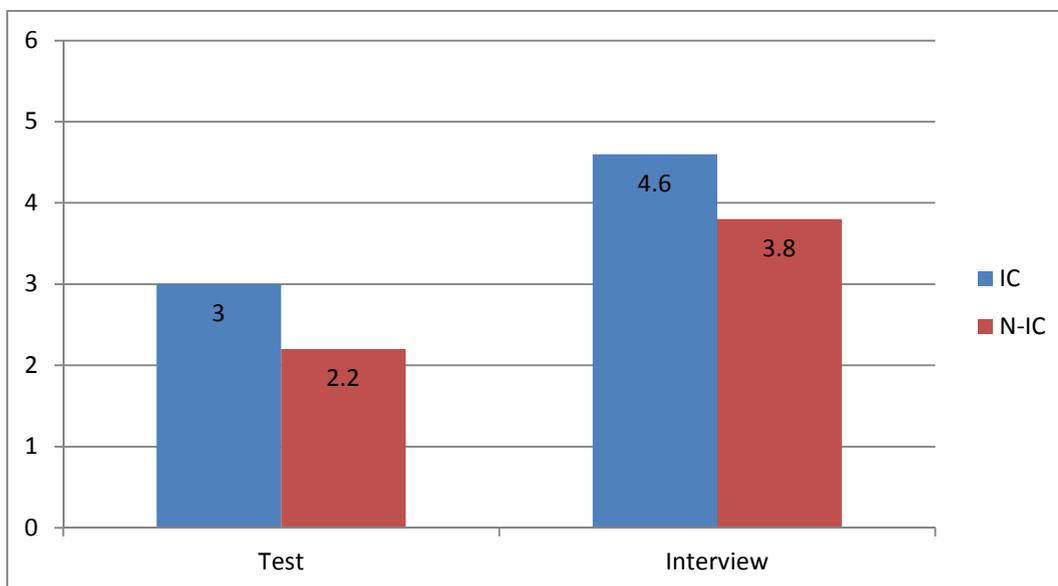


Figure 4 – Average number of translated opaque words in the written translation (test) and during the interview.

The graph in Figure 4 confirms that the participants of the IC group had a more detailed translation, i.e. they did more attempts to translate opaque words too, whereas participants of the N-IC group did ignore them more often. The graph also shows an increase in the number of translated opaque words after the interview for both groups. However the average number of translated opaque words is still higher for the IC participants (4.6 against 3.8).

Now, let us focus on the strategies used by the participants. The tables below show the strategies the participants named during the interview in order to translate the six selected Dutch words. Table 5a shows the results of the IC group. More crosses in one square of the table means that the strategy was mentioned several times by that particular participants.

Subject	IC 1	IC 2	IC3	IC4	IC 5
Type of strategie					
Knowledge about newspaper articles	X	-	-	-	-
Knowledge about (other) languages	X	-	-	-	-
Searching the word in other sentences	X	-	-	-	-
Resemblance to another language	XX	XX	X	XXX	XXXX
In search of the verb	-	-	X	-	-
With help of other words / context	XXXX	XXXXX	XXXX	XXXXX	XXXX
Graphic knowledge	-	XX	X	XX	-
Total	10	9	7	10	8
Total different type of strategies	5	3	4	3	2

Table 5a – Type and number of strategies used in order to translate the six selected Dutch words (IC group).

Note that in the overall test they probably used many more strategies. For example, the use of knowledge about (other) languages was used by many participants of both groups when it came to various grammatical aspects such as word order, comparatives and superlatives. However, these uses of the strategy are not counted in Table 5a (neither in Table 5b later on), because these words did not belong to the six selected words. The same is true for many other strategies named in the table. Furthermore, it must be noted that the use of a specific strategy was only marked as present when it was mentioned explicitly by the participant or when it became clear from the given explanations. Therefore, it is possible that other strategies were involved that were not mentioned by the participants. Examples of other strategies that were used in the overall test are: knowledge about the world, eliminating flexion, knowledge about sound shifts, and intonation when the researcher read the text aloud to them. The use of intonation is discussed in further detail in section 6.2.

The results of the N-IC group can be found in Table 5b on the next page.

Subject	N-IC 6	N-IC 7	N-IC 8	N-IC 9	N-IC 10
Type of strategie					
Knowledge about newspaper articles		X			X
Knowledge about (other) languages				X	X
Searching the word in other sentences			X		X
Resemblance to another language	X	X	XXX	XX	
In search of the verb	X				X
With help of other words/context	XXXX	X	XXXX	XXXX	XXX
Graphic knowledge	XX		X		X
Total	8	3	9	7	8
Total different type of strategies used	4	3	4	3	6

Table 5b – Type and number of strategies used in order to translate the six selected Dutch words (N-IC group).

As can be seen from both tables, both groups used more or less the same strategies, but in a different degree. Whereas the IC participants translated mainly words because they found a resemblance to words in other languages or with help of the context and/or transparent words in the same sentence, the N-IC participants named more different strategies. However, it must be noted that from all these strategies they also named the resemblance to other languages and the context as main strategies to translate one or more of the six selected Dutch words. This shows that these two strategies are clearly preferred by all participants and that both groups are able to use them.

Here it also is interesting to look at the average number of strategies that the participants of both groups mentioned during the interview. A difference has been made between the total number of strategies mentioned by the participants, which contain multiple uses of the same type of strategy because sometimes they were combined for the translation of one single word, and the average number of actual different strategies. These averages are shown in Figure 5a at the next page. As this graph clearly shows, the IC participants mentioned a larger number of strategies in

translating one or more of the six selected Dutch words than the N-IC participants. However, when we only focus on the use of different strategies, the graph shows that the N-IC used a slightly larger variety, as the crosses in Table 5b indicate. The finding that the IC participants mentioned a larger number of strategies (a number that includes strategies of the same type) is in line with the previous outcome that the IC participant translated more relatively opaque words. If they did more attempts to translate these words, they consequently used a larger number of strategies. Unexpected was the finding that the IC participants used less different strategies. These findings will be discussed in more detail in the discussion (section 7.1.3).

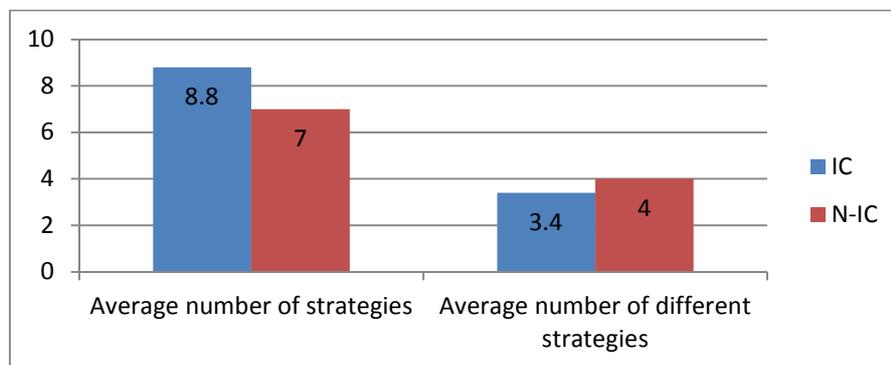


Figure 5a – The average number of (different) strategies used for a translation of the six selected Dutch words as mentioned in the interview.

In order to observe the usage of different strategies in more detail, a second graph was made. The graph in Figure 5b represents the number of times participants of the IC and N-IC group mentioned each of the strategies in the interviews. Note again that these are only the strategies used for the translations of the six selected Dutch words. In the graph the IC participants are separated from the N-IC participants, which perfectly offsets their strategy usage against each other.

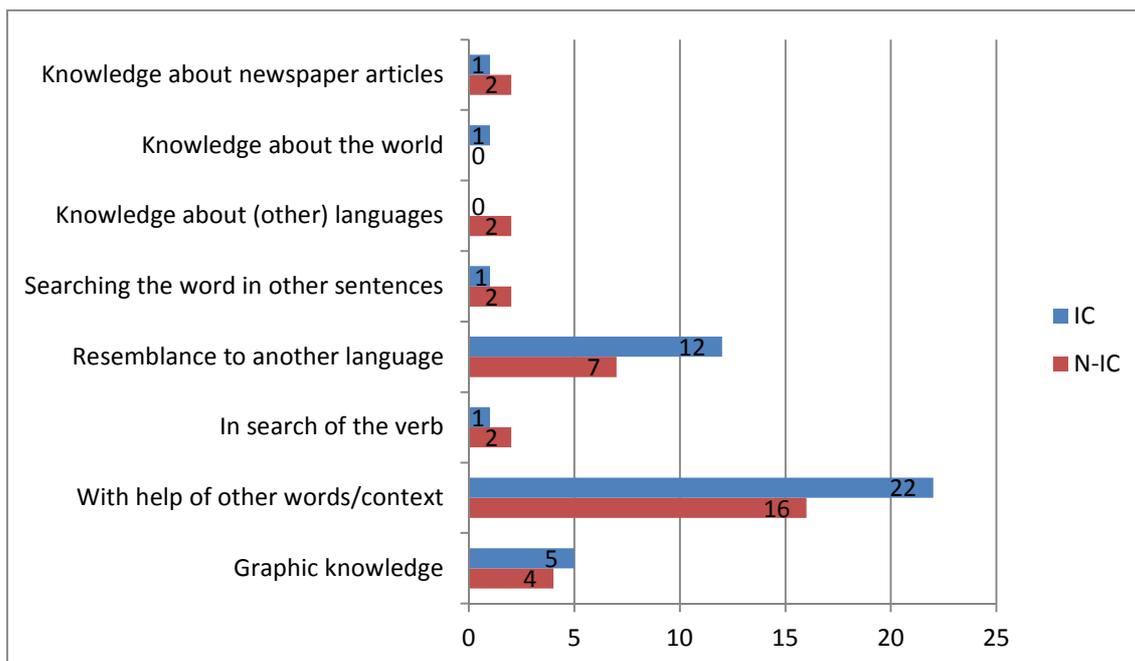


Figure 5b – The number of times participants of the IC and N-IC group mentioned a specific strategy during the interview.

From this graph it becomes clear that actually both groups named an equal number of strategies, i.e. seven. One strategy (knowledge about other languages or languages in general) was only mentioned by two participant of the N-IC group and another strategy (knowledge about the word) was only mentioned by a participant of the IC group. However, it is true that especially the latter strategy should be regarded with caution, since it is very likely that also other participants used this type of strategy, but did not explicitly mention it. The graph in Figure 5b further shows that, even though both groups mentioned an equal number of different strategies, the small differences found in the previous graph with the average number of different strategies (Figure 5a) is due to the fact that four of the seven mentioned strategies are represented slightly better by the N-IC participants. In other words, some strategies were mentioned only by one participant of the IC group, but by two N-IC participants. One strategy (knowledge about other languages or languages in general) was even mentioned by two participants of the N-IC group and by zero IC participants. As can be observed from the graph in Figure 5b, in total four strategies were mentioned one or two times more by participants

of the N-IC group. This is an interesting finding, because these four strategies, are typical strategies for intercomprehension. In addition, the graph below shows a clearly larger usage of the context and/or other more transparent words present in the same sentence for both groups, as observed earlier in Tables 5a and 5b. Also, both groups were able to identify a similar word in another language they knew and used this as a strategy to translate the Dutch words. Although both groups mentioned these two types of strategies very often, it is clear from the graph that the IC participants mentioned them even more than the N-IC group. In these two cases the difference is much larger than for all other strategies. Resemblance to another language is mentioned five times more by the IC participants than by the N-IC participants and the usage of the context and/or other words in the same sentence six times more.

Another interesting observation has been made during the interviews and regards the usage of graphic knowledge. As can be seen from Figure 5b, the IC and N-IC participants made more or less equal usage of this type of strategy (only one N-IC participant did not mentioned it). However, analysis of the interviews indicated that N-IC participants mentioned only the use of capitals as a graphic knowledge strategy, whereas participants of the IC group mentioned also the usage of commas and brackets as textual indicators that provided them with information about the meaning of one or more Dutch words. This indicates a more advanced usage of graphic knowledge for the IC participants.

6.1.4 Grammatical aspects

Another hypothesis concerned the amount of different suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language that the subjects had developed spontaneously during the test:

- Participants of the IC group are expected to have developed some suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language, such as hypothesis about the word order and/or singular and plural forms;

The individual results of the subjects' suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language are divided into two tables for reasons of space. Table 6a shows the results of the IC group and Table 6b those of the N-IC group.

Subject	IC 1	IC 2	IC3	IC4	IC 5
Grammatical aspects					
Definite article	X	X	X	X	X
Indefinite article	X	X	X	X	X
Gender article	X	-	-	-	-
Plural form	X	-	-	-	X
Comparative	X	-	X	X	X
Superlative	-	X	X	X	-
Compounds	X	X	X		X
Negation	X	-	X	X	X
Italian ' <i>imperfetto</i> '	X	-	-	-	-
Auxiliary	-	-	-	X	X
Verb is marked by -en	-	-	-	-	-
Past participle (-en)	-	-	-	-	-
Verb singular/plural	-	X	-	-	-
Verb goes at the end	-	-	X	-	X
Case	X	-	-	-	-
Total	9	5	7	6	8

Table 6a – Type of suppositions about the Dutch grammar (IC group).

Subject	N-IC 6	N-IC 7	N-IC 8	N-IC 9	N-IC 10
Grammatical aspects					
Definite article	X	X	X	X	X
Indefinite article	X	-	X	X	X
Gender article	-	-	-	-	-
Plural form	-	X	X	-	-
Comparative	-	-	-	-	X
Superlative	X	-	-	X	-
Compounds	X	X	-	X	X
Negation	X	-	X	-	X
Italian ' <i>imperfetto</i> '	-	-	-	-	-
Auxiliary	-	-	-	-	-
Verb is marked by –en	-	-	-	X	X
Past particle (-en)	X	-	-	-	X
Verb singular/plural	-	-	-	-	-
Verb goes at the end	-	-	-	X	-
Case	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6	3	4	6	7

Table 6b – Type of suppositions about the Dutch grammar (N-IC group).

Now let us compare the results of the two groups. Figure 6a shows the results of both groups in a graph. All grammatical aspects named in the test can be found on the left. The bars show the number of participants that mentioned that particular grammatical aspect for both groups. In general, the graph shows that each grammatical aspect is mentioned more often by the participants of the IC group, with the exception of the plural form and the right observation that some of the past participles end in –en, which is mentioned more often by N-IC participants.

These results already indicate a higher number of hypotheses made by the participants of the IC- group. However, for the exact numbers the average scores have been calculated, which can be consulted in the graph presented in Figure 6b.

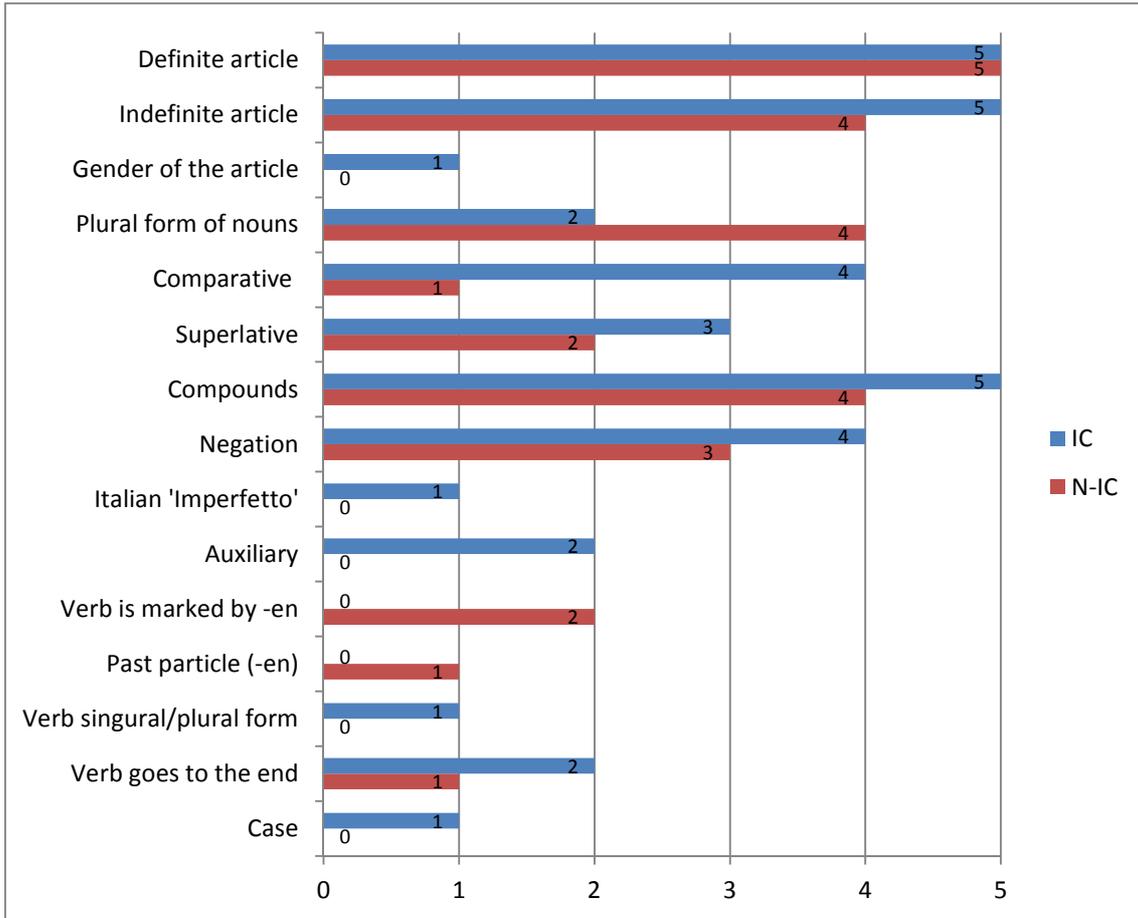


Figure 6a – Number of participants who mentioned each grammatical aspect (IC and N-IC group).

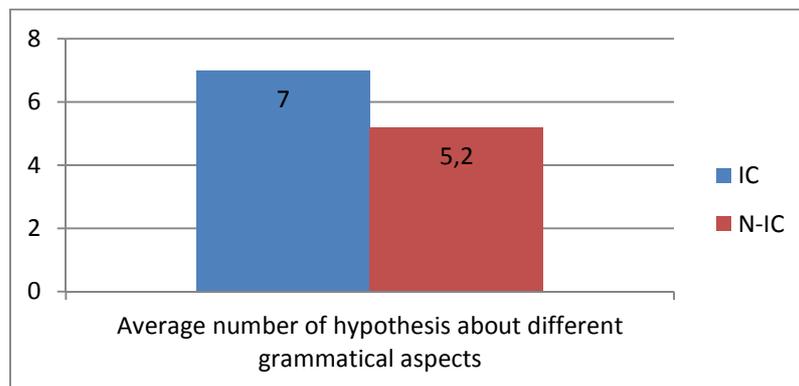


Figure 6b – Average number of suppositions about different grammatical aspects in Dutch.

As can be seen from Table 6 as well as from the graphs in Figure 6, on average participants from the IC group identified more grammatical aspects in the Dutch

newspaper article than their fellows from the N-IC group. Note that also false hypothesis are included in these results.

6.1.5 Time

As mentioned earlier, time was measured for each participant and was considered to indicate the degree of difficulty and/or the amount of effort each participant put into the test. Since reading an unfamiliar foreign language belonging to another language family than the mother tongue is not supposed to be easy, the hypothesis about the total amount of time to complete the test was formulated as follows:

- Participants of the IC group are expected to spend more time on both tests because they do not easily give up thanks to their positive experience in reading foreign languages never learnt before.

The individual results can be found in Table 7 below.

Subject	Time in min.	Subject	Time in min.
IC 1	58	N-IC 6	52
IC 2	57	N-IC 7	36
IC 3	36	N-IC 8	37
IC 4	29	N-IC 9	60
IC 5	45	N-IC 10	56

Table 7 – Total amount of time to complete the reading comprehension test and translation (in minutes).

It can be seen from Table 7 that the time to complete the test varies quite a lot among the subjects, especially between the IC subjects. Therefore, an average of both groups of participants has been made, which can be found in Figure 7 on the next page.

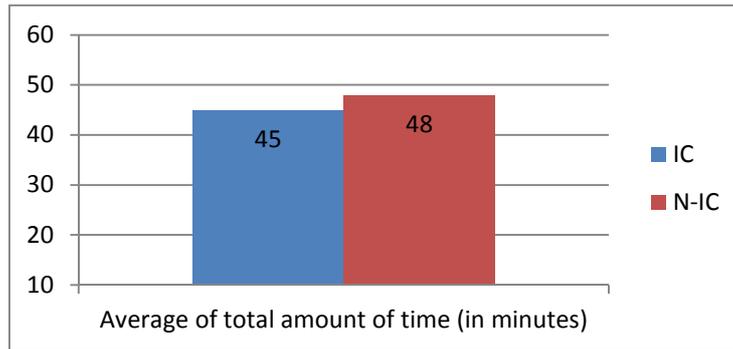


Figure 7 – Average of the total amount of time in minutes to complete the reading comprehension test and translation.

The averages in Figure 7 show a small difference in time, where against our expectations, the participants of the IC-group were a little faster than their fellows of the N-IC group. The results show that the subjects without any experience in intercomprehension did not give up easily as was actually expected.

6.2 The added value of audio added to the text

This section is dedicated to the second research question, which was formulated as follows:

- Does audio have a positive effect on reading comprehension in Dutch for L1 speakers of Italian?

The corresponding hypothesis is repeated below:

- Reading the text another time while listening to the audio is expected to help the participants comprehend several other words that they did not understand without the audio.

The results are presented in Table 8. This table contains the number of extra words each participant thought to have understood after having listened to the researcher who read the text aloud to them. Important to note is that this table contains also wrongly understood words. What is measured here is only the

capacity to use audio and to make fast links with words in other languages that are already known to the participant. Whether the written word is correct or not is of minor importance for this case study, because by adding other words to the list of possibly understood words the participant shows that he or she was able to use the audio as a strategy.

As can be observed from this table, very few words were written down after having listened to the audio. Yet a small difference between the two groups of participants can be observed. Table 8 clearly shows that participants from the IC-group wrote down more words than the participants of the N-IC group after having listened to the oral version of the article. Of the participants of the N-IC group, only one subject said to have understood one more word after the audio.

Subject	Number of words	Subject	Number of words
IC 1	1	N-IC 6	0
IC 2	2	N-IC 7	1
IC 3	2	N-IC 8	0
IC 4	2	N-IC 9	0
IC 5	1	N-IC 10	0

Table 8 – Number of extra words understood after listening to the aural version of the newspaper article.

One additional comment should be made about the results in Table 8. In the first instance subject IC 5 did not understand any other words after the aural version. Only during the interview, when the researcher pronounced one of the Dutch words a second time the participant understood that the word in question was a compound. That helped him to guess the correct meaning of the word. Apart from that word the audio did not help him a lot.

The average scores of both group of participants are presented in the graph in Figure 8 on the next page.

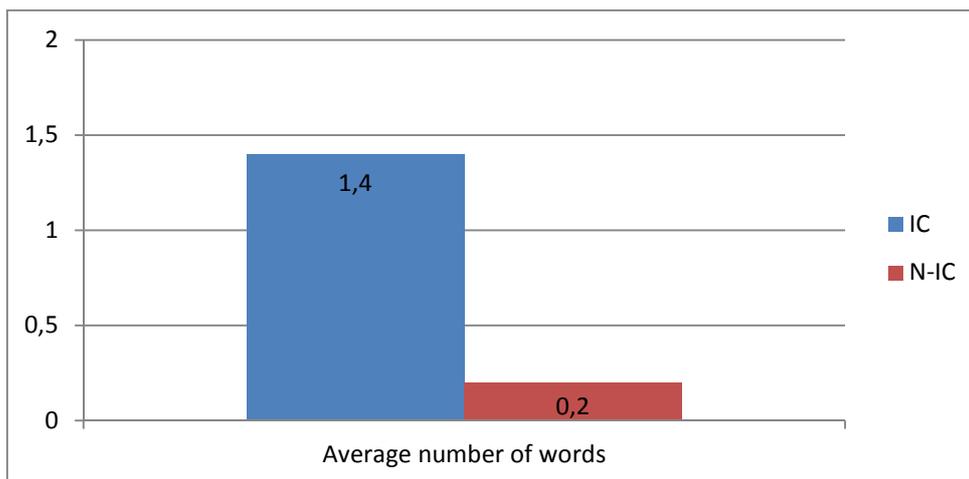


Figure 8 – Average number of extra words understood after having listened to the oral version of the newspaper article.

Although for most participants the audio was not enough to understand more words than they understood after the first few readings, the interview provided some interesting comments about the additional role of the audio. A lot of participants (mostly those belonging to the N-IC group) said that the audio confused them because the pronunciation of the Dutch words differed a lot from what they initially expected. Instead, some other participants agreed that the audio was not that helpful for understanding more words, but they said that the intonation had helped them to get a better global understanding of the text content. In total, four participants named the usefulness of the intonation in the interview, of which three belonged to the IC group.

6.3 Manner of reading

Finally, the added research question that was based on the first few general questions of the interview regarded possible differences in reading the Dutch newspaper article between the participants who followed a course in intercomprehension and those who did not. It was expected that:

- Participants with experience in intercomprehension read the Dutch article in a different manner than the participants without experience, i.e. in contrast to the control group they are expected to use extra-textual information such as knowledge about the text structure of the article, and to read back and forwards in the text as proposed by the ICE programme. It is also expected that they skip those words that are not immediately clear and continue reading to clarify the difficult parts.

The individual results can be found in Tables 9a and 9b, where the first table shows the results of the IC group and the latter those of the N-IC group. Again a cross (X) means that it became clear from the interview that the participant in question used or applied that particular recommendation of the ICE programme. As can be observed from both tables, some cells are filled with a question mark. Unfortunately, in these cases the data obtained from the interviews held with each participant individually, were insufficient to conclude whether or not the participant applied that type of reading or not. This is due to the fact that the research question was added in a later stage of the research. Nevertheless, it is interesting to take a look at the data that could be collected. Therefore, the results in Tables 9a and 9b can be considered as a first attempt to answer the question, but further research is needed to provide a real answer.

Some ICE recommendations	IC 1	IC 2	IC 3	IC 4	IC 5
Using funds of knowledge	?	?	X	?	X
Reading several times	X	X	X	X	X
Reading back and forwards	X	X	X	X	X
Skipping difficult words	X	X	X	X	X

Table 9a – Some of the recommendations of the ICE programme regarding the way to read an unfamiliar language (IC group).

Some ICE recommendations	N-IC 6	N-IC 7	N-IC 8	N-IC 9	N-IC 10
Using funds of knowledge	?	X	X	?	?
Reading several times	X	?	X	?	X
Reading back and forwards	X	X	X	X	X
Skipping difficult words	*	X	X	X	X

Table 9b – Some of the recommendations of the ICE programme regarding the way to read an unfamiliar language (N-IC group).

As can be seen from these tables, both groups read the Dutch newspaper article in more or less the same manner. Based on this selection of ICE recommendations, there does not seem to be a difference between the two groups. The only observation that can be made is that one participant of the N-IC group (N-IC 6) did not immediately skip difficult words. Here it is important to add that his answer to the question what he did when he encountered difficulties in the text was a doubtful case. He answered that he read the phrase again and stopped reading when he did not understand one or more words. As, in contrast to all other participants, he seemed to be less aware of the fact that continuing reading solves the problem in many cases, his answer was assessed as indicated in Table 9b.

Another comment is needed on the usage of funds of knowledge. It is very hard to assess whether or not the participants of this case study used their prior knowledge while reading the article or not. Those participants that have a cross in the table for the usage of funds of knowledge have mentioned this specifically during the interview (in most cases they said they used their knowledge about the structure of a newspaper article). However, it cannot be stated that all other participants did not use various funds of knowledge while reading the Dutch article. They only did not mention it during the interviews. Therefore, a question mark was inserted in the tables.

As the results of both groups are almost identical and because some data is missing for several participants, no graph is added as this provides no further information.

The following chapter summarizes the main results obtained from this study and discusses its implications for teaching intercomprehension strategies.

7. DISCUSSION

This chapter can be divided into three imaginary parts. The first part (sections 7.1 until 7.3) summarizes the main findings of this case study. The results are interpreted, discussed and where possible compared with earlier research in intercomprehension in order to answer the three research question of this thesis:

- I. Are native speakers of Italian who have attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages able to transfer their strategies to an unfamiliar language belonging to the Germanic language family (Dutch)?
- II. Does the audio rendering of the text have a positive effect on reading comprehension in Dutch for L1 speakers of Italian?
- III. Do the students who have attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages read the Dutch article in a different manner than their fellows who did not follow the course?

The second part of the discussion (sections 7.4 and 7.5) concentrates on the implications of the previously discussed findings. Two themes are discussed: the need for instruction in intercomprehension strategies (section 7.4) and the proposal to introduce intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses (section 7.5), which is intended as a first attempt to spread the concept of intercomprehension among students of languages.

As with any other study, this case study has some limitation and aspects that could be improved. These are discussed in section 7.6. The chapter also provides some suggestions for further research, which are proposed in section 7.7.

7.1 *Are intercomprehension strategies transferable to unrelated languages?*

This section discusses the findings of the first research question. The results of the IC group and the N-IC group were compared to each other on various aspects of the test: the number of words they thought they understood after the first few readings, the number of correct answers to the content questions of the reading comprehension test, the capacity to translate less transparent words, the use of intercomprehension strategies, possible suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language and the total amount of time needed to complete the test. It was hypothesized that participants of the IC group would score higher on all aspects and would not give up easily, compared to the N-IC group, because of their positive experience in reading foreign languages never learnt before. Therefore, it was expected that it would take them a little longer to complete the test.

Analyses of the data do indeed show differences in performance between both groups, most often with a higher score for the participants of the IC group. Before drawing any conclusions, the results of both groups for each of the aspects mentioned previously are discussed in more detail below. Finally, the first research question is answered in section 7.1.6.

7.1.1 *Quantity of words understood after the first few readings*

As expected, analysis showed that subjects with experience in intercomprehension between Romance languages listed more words after the first few readings than their fellows without any experience in intercomprehension. On average, the IC participants thought they understood 25 words after the first few readings, whereas the N-IC group had listed 21 words. It is plausible to assume that the difference is the result of previous instruction in intercomprehension, which trained the IC participants in seeing relationships between different languages. The finding that they listed more words after the first few readings could indicate that they indeed did identify more relationships between Dutch words in the article and words in languages they already knew, than the participants without previous

training in intercomprehension. This finding is in line with Castagne (2007) as he claims that the more one practises the techniques of intercomprehension, the more one is able to detect transparent words that were not recognized in an initial stage. He argues that seeing certain connections between transparent sequences requires habit, which means training (Castagne, 2003).

Other factors that could have influenced these results and might explain the higher number of words listed by the participants of the IC-group is the number of languages known by each participant. On average, the participants of the IC-group did know slightly more languages than the participants of the N-IC group. Still the chance that this influenced the results is assumed to be very low, since all participants declared that English and Italian were the two languages that had been most useful to them, i.e. two languages that were well known by all participants. The only possible difference could have been in the number of years of instruction in the English language. This is probably a little higher for those of the IC group since two of them studied English at university against none of the participants of the N-IC group.

7.1.2 Score on the reading comprehension test

In analysing the answers given to the questions of the reading comprehension test, some unanticipated findings were reported. Contrary to expectations, the participants of the N-IC group had a slightly higher score on the contents questions of the reading comprehension test than the participants of the IC-group (i.e. on average the N-IC answered 2.6 questions correct, against 2.2 for the IC group). This finding is hard to explain. A first hypothesis was that the difference in score might be due to a higher number of 'I do not know' answers in the multiple choice questions on the part of IC participants, which all participants were asked to tick in case they were not entirely sure of their answer. In analysing the data these were counted as incorrect answers. It could have been the case that the participants of the IC group were just a little more doubtful and chose the column 'I do not know'

with more regularity in answering the multiple choice questions. However, a closer look at the data shows that this is not the case. Both groups have an equal number of 'I do not know' responses which indicate that the participants of the IC group made really more errors in the answered questions. The discussion of the test that was held with each participant during the interview, does not reveal any other possible explanations for the lower score of the IC group. However, the interview revealed something else that is very interesting. While the researcher discussed the test with all participants separately, two participants revised their answers given earlier on the questions of the reading comprehension test. Both participants who revised their answers belonged to the IC group. The N-IC participants remained consistent with their answers and did not change anything during the interview. The two participants who revised their answers explained that it was only during the translation task that they understood some more words, which enabled them to answer the question(s) of the reading comprehension test that they first answered with 'I do not know'. As for almost all participants, reading the text more than once helped them to understand more words that helped them to create a context to build on. This is exactly what is recommended by various intercomprehension programmes and projects such as EuroCom (cf. Klein and Stegmann, 2002) and ICE (Castagne, 2004a). The fact that the two IC participants revised their answers on the reading comprehension test brought the average score of the entire group even a little bit higher than the N-IC group, so that after the interview the IC group scored a little higher on the test. Of course these data are not representative at all due to the small sample of participants. Nevertheless, the finding that some of the IC participants revised their answers during the interview, suggests that their strategy use was more successful than that of the N-IC participants. At least, it enabled them to understand and/or infer the meaning of previously unknown words, which eventually helped them to solve some of the problems they encountered earlier in the reading comprehension test.

7.1.3 Capacity to translate opaque words and the usage of strategies

It was hypothesised that the participants of the IC group were able to translate (not necessarily perfectly) more opaque words in the Dutch article than their fellows of the N-IC group. As previously described in the analysis (section 5.2.4), this was tested on six selected words that were assumed to be relatively opaque to native speakers of Italian. Results show that the IC participants indeed did slightly more attempts to translate these opaque words, where the N-IC group ignored them more often. On average, the IC group translated three of the six selected words, against approximately two words translated by the participants of N-IC group. Note however that the average score of the IC group could have been a little bit higher, since one of the participants (IC 2) made an extremely poor translation compared to the other participants of the group. She translated zero opaque words. During the interview she explained that she found it easier to talk about the article than to write a translation. In fact, during the interview she translated almost all selected opaque words. Also other participants were able to translate some more words during the interview when they were asked if they had any ideas about a possible meaning for these words. This means that after the interview both groups had translated more opaque words than they initially had (4.6 opaque words translated by the IC group and 3.8 by the N-IC participants). A possible explanation is that talking about an article written in a foreign language is much easier than actually writing a translation, just as participant IC 2 indicated. In writing a translation, one has to find one word in one's native language that describes the concept of the foreign word, while speaking with another person about a possible meaning of the foreign word allows also for a broad description of the concept and might help to organize one's ideas. Earlier studies on reading comprehension showed that (group) discussions are favourable to reading comprehension and help students to understand the text better (e.g. see Nystrand, 2006 for an overview of such studies). Also Castagne (2004c) encourages group discussion during the intercomprehension sessions of the ICE programme. Of course it is true that this

type of (group) discussions are different from the interview held in this case study, because the researcher did not express his ideas and therefore there was not the sharing of ideas and opinions which promotes reading comprehension. Still, during the interview the researcher focussed on various aspects of the reading comprehension test and translation. Asking the participants why they had chosen for a particular translation might have helped the participants to reflect more about their answers and while speaking it might even have led to other notions. Further, the researcher asked the participants if they had any idea about the meaning of words they had not translated in the test. It turned out that sometimes a participant had not translated a word in the test, but actually had some ideas about its meaning. These ideas were revealed during the interview, which also explains the increased number of attempts to translate opaque words after the interview.

So, after the interview the average score of translated opaque words increased a little bit for both groups. However, the IC group still scored a little higher (4.6 against 3.8 translated opaque words). It was expected that these differences were due to a better use of intercomprehension strategies by the participants of the IC group. However, results show that both groups used more or less the same strategies, but to a different degree. Although the participants of the IC group did use strategies more often (8.8 times against 7), the N-IC group used more *different* strategies (the N-IC group used on average four different strategies against 3.4 on the part of the IC group). Where the participants of the IC group were better in seeing links with other languages and used the context and/or other words in the same sentence to “guess” the meaning of the opaque words most of the time, the N-IC group used also various other strategies, such as their general knowledge about the structure of other languages they learned, as well as the structure of a newspaper article (which were also used by one IC participant). As mentioned earlier, this analysis only regards the strategies used in order to translate the six selected opaque words. The fact that it appears from this analysis that the IC participants did not use their general knowledge about other languages or the

structure of a newspaper article, does not count for the overall test. In fact their usage of these strategies was observed in various other contexts that were not included in the analysis. Therefore, it seems to be the case that for the participants of the IC group the context and links with other languages were enough to translate more opaque words than the participants of the N-IC group. This better developed skill is also reflected in the large difference in usage of these two strategies. Although both groups used these two strategies most frequently, the difference in usage between the two groups is larger than for all other strategies mentioned during the interviews. That is, the context was mentioned six times more often by the IC participants and the resemblance to other languages five more times, whereas all other strategies were mentioned only one or two times more often by one or the other group (cf. Figure 5b in section 6.1.3). This suggests that the IC participants have developed better skills in recognizing cognates and that they are better in using the context to infer the meaning of less transparent words. Nevertheless, the N-IC participants also used these strategies frequently.

Another strategy that was used by both groups is the use of graphic knowledge (e.g. see Doyé, 2005 for an exact explanation of this type of knowledge). Interestingly enough, the N-IC group used only capitals, whereas participants of the IC group also used punctuation, such as commas and brackets to guess the meaning of difficult words. This is a more advanced use of graphic knowledge, which reflects a good practice in using all clues a text offers, which is probably acquired during the intercomprehension course.

Nevertheless, it was not expected that the N-IC group would use more different strategies. This is in contrast to Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2003, in: Hufeisen and Marx, 2007b, p. 315) who stated that “learners tend not to make use of their previous knowledge on a systematic basis, however, as only the lexicon is evident to them as a transfer base”. The results of this study show that the participants of the N-IC group also used other strategies that were not only based on lexical transfer. Various participants of this group did make use of their knowledge about other languages or languages in general, as well as knowledge

about the structure of newspaper articles. An interesting example of the usage of knowledge about (other) languages is the struggle with the Dutch sequence *het geologische tijdperk* (EN: the geological age). Almost all participants understood the word *geologische* well and assumed that one of the other words should mean 'age', as those two words normally go together. Surprisingly enough, most of the participants of the IC group relied on their mother tongue, whereas some of the N-IC participants did involve also their knowledge about other languages or languages in general. That is, most of the IC participants assumed that the Dutch word *het* should probably mean 'age', because in Italian the noun precedes the adjective (*era geologica*). In addition, the word *het* is as short as the Italian word for 'age', which is *era*. However, one of the participants of the N-IC group took into consideration that the English word order is slightly different than in Italian. Dutch being a Germanic language would probably use a word order similar to that of English. Therefore, this participant correctly concluded that the word *tijdperk* should mean 'age', because in English the noun follows the adjective. Another participant of the N-IC group did also correctly translate *tijdperk* with 'age', using its knowledge about languages in general. That is, she reasoned that in many languages content words are structurally more complex than function words. Nevertheless, the finding that the N-IC participants were able to use various other strategies than simple language transfer is in line with a study of Shopov, Pencheva and Köksal (2005). They gave undergraduate students (advanced foreign language learners) two reading comprehension tests in languages that they had not studied before and were asked what they understood and which strategies they used. Results showed that the participants were "able to use Intercomprehension strategies effectively and also to describe and explain those strategies" (ibidem, p. 93). Like the subjects of this particular study, most of the participants of the N-IC group studied languages. This might explain their good use of intercomprehension strategies. It is reasonable to think that they developed various reading comprehension strategies during their studies, which they were able to apply to the unfamiliar Dutch language. This raises interesting questions about the possible implementation of

intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses. The finding that language students already seem to have a good base of reading comprehension strategies that they tend to be able to apply on unfamiliar languages, suggests that a little more attention to intercomprehension in normal languages courses could contribute in an interesting way to more widespread and conscious use of intercomprehension. This idea is discussed in more detail in section 7.5.

7.1.4 *Suppositions about grammatical aspects*

Analysis of the data confirms the hypothesis that IC participants make more suppositions about grammatical aspects of the Dutch language. On average, the IC group made 7.2 suppositions about grammatical aspects, whereas the N-IC group made 5.2. Both groups discovered more or less the same grammatical aspects, but in general the number of participants who discovered a specific grammatical item was a little higher for the IC group (cf. Figure 6a in section 6.1.4). Interesting to note is that participants of both groups very often relied on knowledge about other languages in making suppositions about Dutch grammar. Here it is interesting to briefly mention Meißner's Multilingual Processing Model in which he speaks of a spontaneous learner grammar. The spontaneous grammar consists of regularities in the target language and is based on transfer from other languages that are known by the learner (Meißner, 1998). In other words, the learner uses his or her knowledge of previously learned languages to "construct hypotheses about structure(s) in the new language. In doing so, it is expected that the learner will continually formulate and re-formulate hypotheses about the new language, thereby constructing a *spontaneous hypothesis learner grammar*" (Hufeisen and Jessner, 2009, p. 122). Participants of this case study did indeed discover regularities in the Dutch languages that was very often because of resemblances to one or more languages that they had learned. They transferred their knowledge of structures in other languages to formulate (but in some cases also reformulate)

their grammatical hypothesis about the Dutch language. Therefore, these results support Meißner's idea of a spontaneous learner grammar.

Let us now turn to the question whether the higher number of grammatical suppositions of the IC group is due to experience in intercomprehension or not. An interesting comment was made by one participant of the IC group. He mentioned that he was able to discover some grammatical aspects because of the intercomprehension course that he attended. The example he gave was that he learned during the course that in Romanian the definite and indefinite article is a suffix attached to the noun. This type of "unexpected" grammatical aspects learned about other languages during the intercomprehension course helped him to search for certain grammatical aspects in positions that did not correspond to the Italian structure. The intercomprehension course, even if it was an intercomprehension course focussed on another language family, therefore might have opened the eyes of the participants of the IC group. During the course they came in contact with a variety of languages that they did not know and they were trained to focus on regularities within those languages. In such a way they learned about the characteristics of those languages and saw in which way they differ from their mother tongue. This general knowledge about languages can be extremely useful in discovering the grammatical structure of an unfamiliar language.

7.1.5 Time

The final aspect that was taken into consideration in order to answer the first research question is the total amount of time that the participants needed in order to complete the test. Measuring time is often a good indicator for the difficulty one has had with the task or the amount of effort one puts into the test. In this case, it was expected that the IC participants would spend more time on the task, since they have a positive experience with intercomprehension. Therefore, it was expected that they would not give up easily. The N-IC participants without experience in intercomprehension, on the other hand, were expected to give up

earlier and therefore spend less time on the whole test because reading an article in the unfamiliar Dutch language might seem an enormously difficult task to them. Unfortunately, the results regarding the amount of time it took the participants to complete the test are difficult to interpret, because the amount of time differed a lot between the participants of each group. On average the IC group was three minutes faster (the IC group spend 45 minutes on the test, against 48 minutes for the N-IC group), which was against the expectations. However, the small sample size does not allow us to draw real conclusions. Another study with more participants is needed to investigate this aspect in more detail. For now, the finding that the IC participants were a little bit faster in completing the test could also be interpreted as a result of their experience in intercomprehension. In general, the IC participants scored higher on the overall test than the N-IC participants, as we saw in the previous sections. The combination of these two findings, a higher score in a smaller amount of time, could be related to their experience in reading unfamiliar languages. In any case, the fact that the difference in time between the two groups is insignificant, suggests that none of the two groups gave up easily and that the task was achievable.

The large variety among the participants probably suggests that more individual factors were present. It is hard to retrieve which individual factors have influenced the large differences in time. In the literature different aspects are named that vary from motivation to attitudes towards a language. It is quite known that motivation influences the reading process. Lutjeharms states that “motivation for text content implies more attention is given to it, which leads to deeper processing” (Lutjeharms, 2007, p. 278). Subjects that were more motivated and/or interested in the text content might have wanted to try to understand the article in much more detail, whereas less motivated participants might have been satisfied by finding the answers on the reading comprehension test and a less detailed translation. However, the interview did not bring up such statements, which means that further research is required to establish whether or not motivation for text content might have influenced the large individual differences in time.

Bahtina and Ten Thije (2010) name the possible negative effect of ideological factors, since they affect attitudes. According to them attitudes “can either enhance or block comprehension between communities and languages within constellation” (ibidem, p. 3). However, Bezooijen and Gooskens (2007) concluded after a study on the effects of a positive/negative attitude toward a language that attitudes are not related to text comprehension. Of course there are many other individual factors that might have influenced the results. It is out of the scope of this thesis to investigate this in more detail.

7.1.6 Summary

Combining the results discussed above, allows us to answer the first research question. The fact that almost all hypotheses were confirmed shows that we can indeed observe a difference in score between the IC and N-IC group. Very likely this is the result of the intercomprehension course between Romance languages that the IC participants attended. Other factors that could have influenced the results, such as a discipline other than languages and/or age, are not likely to be responsible for these results, since these factors were more present in the IC group than in the N-IC group. Therefore, the finding that the IC group scored higher is most likely due to the only other difference between both groups, which is the course in intercomprehension. This means that participants who attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages seem to be able to apply their intercomprehension strategies also to a language belonging to another family, as demonstrated with Dutch in this case study. Of course the extent to which they are able to transfer their strategies also depends largely on the amount of cognates present in the texts (Möller and Zeevaert, in press). Therefore, texts about science or technology will be much easier to understand, because these contain a larger amount of international terms (Warchal, 2006). Informal texts are probably much harder to understand for a native speaker of Italian without knowledge of Germanic languages other than English.

The difference in score between the two groups, with an advantage for the IC participants, indicate that trained intercomprehension skills make a difference in foreign language comprehension.

The finding that participants who attended a course in intercomprehension are able to apply their strategies to a language belonging to another language family is very promising for further research of the possibility of intercomprehension between unrelated languages. This study supports the ideas of Castagne (2011) and Melnik (2009, in: Castagne, 2011, p. 94) that intercomprehension between different language families is quite possible.

7.2 *The added value of audio*

The second research question regarded the added value of audio. Literature on intercomprehension provides good reasons to add audio to a text written in an unfamiliar language. As described earlier in chapter 6, various researchers argue that audio might contribute to the understanding of words that seem to be opaque at first glance (Castagne, 2003). Others, such as Tyvaert (2008, in: Caure, 2009, p. 55) point out that spoken language consists of various prosodic clues that help the listener to identify the principal and subordinate clauses. But also research of conventional language teaching shows that the teacher's reading aloud has positive effects on the reading comprehension of EFL students (e.g. see Amer, 1997). In this study a Dutch newspaper article was read aloud to native speakers of Italian without knowledge of any other Germanic language, except for English, after they had read it by themselves, and they were asked if they understood any other words. During the interview that followed the reading comprehension test and translation, they were asked for the added value of the audio. Although it was expected that the audio helped the participants a little bit in understanding a few more words, especially those participants who attended a course in intercomprehension, the overall comment was that the audio did not facilitate the lecture much. On average, the IC participants thought they understood 1.4 extra

words after having listened to the audio against only 0.2 for the N-IC group. Some of the participants even said that the audio confused them, since it was so different from what they expected. Lutjeharms (2007, p. 279) writes about this that in order to facilitate recognition “new graphemes and their pronunciation [...] have to be acquired [...]”. This explains the confusion of the participants, because Dutch graphemes are quite different from those in Italian. For example, the phoneme /u/ is represented in Italian by the grapheme <u> but in Dutch by <oe>. The same is true for the phoneme /i/ which in Italian is represented simply by <i>, but in Dutch becomes <ie> and must not be confused with <i> which represents another phoneme, which is /l/. Someone who does not know about the pronunciation of these graphemes will probably transfer the pronunciation rules of its own language while reading and get confused when he or she is exposed to a totally different (but correct) pronunciation than they expected. This example emphasises the need to concentrate on differences in pronunciation when setting up an intercomprehension course designed for native speakers of a language belonging to another language family. The EuroCom programme does already pay attention to this aspect in their fourth Sieve, but this example shows that it becomes even more important for intercomprehension between different language families, because the differences in pronunciation are expected to be larger.

An additional motive for the small amount of extra understood words is that the participants heard the aural version of the article only once. It could have been more useful to the participants if they had the possibility to hear the aural version various times so that they could familiarize themselves with the sounds of Dutch. As Möller and Zeevaert (in press, p. 1) argue, “orthographic systems can facilitate or complicate the recognition of common words and so cause considerable differences between difficulty in reading or listening”. In this case, the orthographic system of Dutch differs from the Italian and caused some difficulty. They might have used the audio better if they had heard it a second or third time. This short comment to improve further research is discussed in more detail in section 7.6.

Apart from the results in the number of extra words that the participants thought they understood after having listened to the audio, the interviews revealed another interesting finding. Some participants (mostly those who belonged to the IC group) said during the interview that the audio might not have helped them a lot in understanding more words, but that the intonation was useful in understanding the general meaning of the article. It helped them to better understand which words belong together and form meaningful units. This is exactly one of the advantages of reading aloud, mentioned for instance by Amer (1997). The IC participants were able to use the pauses and/or rising or descending tone to understand the course of the sentence better. Some intonation patterns reminded them of particular structures, which helped them to interpret those sentences better. This confirms the earlier mentioned statement of Tyvaert (2008, in: Caure, 2009, p. 55) in which he argues that spoken language consists of various prosodic clues that help the listener in identifying the principal and subordinate clauses. It is very likely that the capacity of these participants to use the various prosodic clues for a better understanding of the sentence construction, is also the result of previous instruction in intercomprehension. During the course in intercomprehension between Romance languages, the participants also listened to the aural version of the articles they read. So, in the course they attended they were trained in using various clues provided by speech. The finding that these participants used these clues in listening to a much more distant language also indicates that they are able to transfer their strategies to languages belonging to another language family.

7.3 Reading method

The last research question was whether or not participants with experience in intercomprehension reading a text in an unfamiliar language in a different manner than participants without experience. Attention was focussed on four recommendations of the ICE programme: using funds of knowledge, reading the

article several times, reading backwards and forwards and skipping difficult words. As mentioned already in section 6.3, the gathered data turned out to be insufficient to assess the usage of these four recommendations for all participants. The concluding marks of this section are therefore only based on the data that could be collected, which contains some gaps. Consequently, the results are not representative at all and it is only possible to express some assumptions and some general tendencies.

Based on the gathered data, no significant difference between the two groups was observed. This was against the expectations. It was expected that the difference in instruction between the two groups would have led to a difference in reading a totally unfamiliar language. In other words, it was expected that N-IC participants would not read backwards and forwards and that they would stop reading when they encountered difficult words. However, the results showed that in most cases also the N-IC participants applied these four recommendations for reading a text written in an unfamiliar language. Only one N-IC participant did stop reading when he encountered difficult words. Remember that Castagne's (2003) claims that beginner readers often apply a word for word reading in a foreign language, whereas they use a global reading in their mother tongue. On the other hand, it can be argued that the readers who participated in this study are advanced readers, since most of them studied languages at university. Seeing the results in this light, it is actually not so surprising that both groups of participants read the article in the unfamiliar Dutch language in more or less the same manner. Students of languages often read texts in a language that they have not mastered completely, so they have probably developed various strategies to deal with these difficult kinds of readings. At this point, it is interesting to consult the literature on reading strategies in second language learning in order to see whether these strategies differ from the recommendations of the ICE programme or the advised reading method for intercomprehension in general. It is out of the scope of this thesis to give an extensive overview of the literature on reading strategies in foreign language learning. A very brief enumeration of various language strategies

used by second language students to improve their reading should be sufficient. Singhal (2001, p. 1) provides an overview of research on reading strategies and writes that “these strategies consist of a whole range of strategies including skimming and scanning, contextual guessing, reading for meaning, utilizing background knowledge, recognizing text structure and so forth”. This enumeration of just a few reading strategies already shows some correspondence with the recommended steps to read an article written in an unfamiliar language as described by both the EuroCom and ICE programme (recall the description and recommendations of these programmes provided in sections 3.2 and 3.3 of this thesis). In the same article, Singhal reviews several studies on reading strategies of successful and unsuccessful language learners, e.g. Hosenfeld (1977) among others. According to this study the successful reader “kept the meaning of the passage in mind while reading, read in broad phrases, skipped inconsequential or less important words, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. The unsuccessful reader on the other hand, lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept” (Singhal, 2001, p. 3). Note that the characteristics of a successful reader, as described above, perfectly match the main recommendations of the ICE programme, i.e. reading the article in its whole context and skipping unimportant or unknown words, because very often their meaning becomes clear while continuing to read (Castagne, 2003). In other words, good (foreign language) readers possess the reading skills that are needed to be able to read a text in an unknown language. This explains why no differences in reading method were found between the IC and N-IC participants in this study, because the latter group consisted mainly of students studying languages at university.

So far the findings of this particular case study have been interpreted and discussed. The following two sections discuss what these findings can mean for the promotion of intercomprehension and for further research on intercomprehension

between unrelated languages. Two subjects are discussed: the need for instruction in intercomprehension between languages families for students who already attended a course in intercomprehension, and the proposal to introduce intercomprehension strategies consciously in ordinary language courses in order to spread familiarity with intercomprehension and to increase the students' curiosity.

7.4 Need for instruction?

In the introduction to this thesis it was mentioned that the results of the main research question of this thesis are hopefully a first attempt to answer the question whether or not instruction in intercomprehension between related languages is enough to be able to build a general understanding of languages belonging to other language families. Of course a lot more research is required to answer this question, but the results of the current study allows us to speculate a little bit about a possible answer. But, before discussing this in more detail, let us first focus on the general need for instruction in intercomprehension strategies.

As already discussed in section 1.4, various studies have focussed on the question whether natural intercomprehension between related languages is possible or not. Some of these studies indeed have demonstrated that intercomprehension between related languages is possible without instruction (e.g. see Müller-Lancé, 2003; Marx, 2012 and Braunmüller, 2006). Other studies claim that learners have to be made aware of parallels between different languages and the possibility to transfer prior knowledge to the target language (Marx, 2005, in: Hufeisen and Marx, 2007b). The results of this study take a position somewhere in between these two claims. First of all, the current study is about intercomprehension between two unrelated languages and is therefore different from the situation of intercomprehension between languages belonging to the same language family. For this reason it was expected to be much more difficult. Nevertheless, the results show that participants who did not attend a course in intercomprehension were, against our expectations, able to extract the main ideas

from the Dutch newspaper article. They performed better on the reading comprehension test and translation than was expected initially, and during the interviews they mentioned various strategies that make intercomprehension possible. The fact that most participants were studying languages will have influenced these results. On the other hand, results also showed a difference in performance between students who attended a course in intercomprehension and participants who did not. This finding indicates that, although participants without experience in intercomprehension seem to be able, up to a certain extent, to read a foreign language never studied before, a course in intercomprehension is an added value to the comprehension of unfamiliar languages. Participants who attended such a course were better in seeing links with words existing in other languages and in using the context to infer the meaning of less transparent words. They also made more use of different graphic clues that appeared in the text and used more often the intonation of spoken language for the purpose of understanding the written text. In this sense, a course in intercomprehension seems to widen the capacity to make fuller use of one's prior knowledge and other clues provided by the text itself. So, in a way the former two claims are both true. On the one hand this study supports those studies that claim that natural intercomprehension is possible (with the additional finding that it even seems to be possible between unrelated languages such as Italian and Dutch). On the other hand it supports studies that claim that participants without experience in intercomprehension strategies are not able to transfer all prior knowledge (e.g. the study of Marx, 2005, in: Hufeisen and Marx, 2007b), because this study demonstrates a difference in performance between the two groups, which was favours those who have attended a course in intercomprehension.

Let us now turn to the question whether or not instruction in intercomprehension between related languages is enough to be able to build a general understanding of languages belonging to other language families. The finding that the IC participants were able to transfer their strategies learned during a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages to a Germanic

language without knowledge of any other Germanic languages, except for English, is very promising. If the text is about a familiar subject (such as the discovery of a new dinosaur species in this case) with a certain amount of international terms that are quite often present in scientific texts, learners with experience in intercomprehension are able to transfer their strategies to an unrelated language. These international words really play an important role, because they provide the reader something to hold on to. It is from there that they can infer the other, probably opaque words that have their origin in the other language family. As soon as the reader knows one or more languages from the same language family as the target language (e.g. German, as the target language of this case study is Dutch), the reader probably doubles his or her chances to understand an article written in the unfamiliar and unrelated language. To take the situation of this case study as an example, it could be hypothesised that if native speakers of Italian who attended an intercomprehension course between Romance languages have knowledge of two Germanic languages (English and German) they would not necessarily need to attend a course in intercomprehension between Germanic languages in order to be able to read Dutch. Because they already have experience in intercomprehension strategies and do also know a little bit about Germanic languages, I assume that they can perfectly transfer their strategies to Dutch. However, as was the case with the participants of this study, if they do not have knowledge of any other Germanic language, except for English, I personally think that an intercomprehension course between Germanic languages could still be an added value. Of course, the attention shifts from learning to apply intercomprehension strategies to learning about the characteristics of Germanic languages, sound correspondences and other common aspects between these languages. Further, as turned out to be important in this case study, in order to be able to use audio to improve reading comprehension, particular attention should be paid to the grapheme-phoneme correspondences, because it turned out that Romance and Germanic languages (or at least Dutch) differ quite a lot in their orthographic systems.

The following section is not about intercomprehension between related or unrelated languages, but proposes an idea to make more people familiar with the concept and strategies of intercomprehension. As intercomprehension strategies improve one's capacity to read various languages without having to learn them, the strategies can also be taught to improve and speed up language learning of one specific language. Therefore, the next section proposes to include intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses as a first attempt to gain a larger public for intercomprehension.

7.5 Teaching intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses

The previous section discussed the need for instruction. It was concluded that a course in intercomprehension strategies does make a difference. Subjects who attended a course in intercomprehension were able to transfer their strategies to languages belonging to another language family. Although a difference in performance was observed between the two groups, an unexpected finding was that the N-IC participants scored quite well too. To a certain extent, they were also able to use their knowledge of other domains in understanding an unfamiliar language and as 'good language learners' they read the Dutch article in more or less the same manner as the IC participants. This was against our expectations, but in retrospect not that surprising since most participants were studying languages at university. It is very likely that during university language courses they were taught several reading strategies and techniques that they could use in the reading comprehension test for the unfamiliar Dutch language. This means that intercomprehension strategies are already present in language courses to a certain extent. Unfortunately, the concept of intercomprehension and its possibilities is often still unknown to both the general public and a lot of teachers of languages (Capucho, 2011). By intentionally introducing and teaching intercomprehension strategies in an ordinary language course, which seem to be part of the programme already, students as well as language teachers become aware of its possibilities,

not only for the target language, but also for different languages. Of course it is true that intercomprehension focusses on understanding various languages never learned before. I am aware of the fact that this is not attainable within an ordinary language course, since in this case the focus is only on one language. However, intercomprehension strategies can be used perfectly well in such a specific language course, because that language is still unknown by the students, to a large extent. Active use of prior knowledge, inference strategies and transfer of knowledge of previously learned languages, which together form the concept of intercomprehension, are therefore also useful in language teaching of one particular language. If students of ordinary language courses are made familiar with the concept and advantages of intercomprehension and apply the strategies during the course, this will help to make intercomprehension better known by the general public. Knowing that the same strategies can be applied to other languages as well, might make the students curious and challenge them to apply the strategies consciously to other (unfamiliar) languages they encounter. This will be a first step in spreading the use of intercomprehension. As this study showed, students who were familiar with the concept of intercomprehension were indeed able to apply the strategies to a certain extent, to a language that was not treated during the intercomprehension course or even belonged to another language family.

According to Doyé (2007), intercomprehension should not be difficult to introduce in the educational system. In his paper he argues that “Intercomprehension is in perfect accordance with basic educational ideas which – by most pedagogues – are considered as principles of any modern educational system and it can contribute considerably to their practical implementation” (ibidem, p. 487). He substantiates his point of view by demonstrating that intercomprehension meets the requirements of four important educational principles which are matching, consciousness/awareness raising, motivation and learner autonomy. The similarities between intercomprehension and these four education principles are briefly summarized below, as described by Doyé (2007):

- *Matching* means that the teacher builds his or her activities on the knowledge the students already possess. In intercomprehension the prior knowledge of the students is exploited, because it forms an important base for understanding texts written in unfamiliar languages. Therefore, according to Doyé (ibidem, p. 488), intercomprehension teaching is “ideally suited for the realization of didactic matching [...]”;
- *Consciousness Raising* refers to the concept of awareness, which plays a huge role in education. Intercomprehension is in complete accordance with the idea of the learner’s awareness. Students are made aware of their prior knowledge and learn how they can use them in understanding foreign languages;
- *Motivation* is another crucial aspect in leaning foreign languages or in learning in general and is closely related to awareness raising. For intercomprehension we can say that “if learners become aware of what pre-conditions they fulfil, which funds of knowledge they possess that might help them to understand texts in languages they have not learned so far, then they are better motivated for the encounter with such texts” (ibidem, p. 490). Further it is argued by Doyé that Intercomprehension strengthens the student’s need for exploration, which is one of the classes of motives identified by Brown (1987, in: Doyé, 2007, p. 491). This creates a form of attractiveness, which is one of the two conditions that stimulate intrinsic motivation, according to Heckhausen (1974, in: Doyé, 2007, p. 491);
- *Learner autonomy* is one of the main aims in educational programmes. According to Doyé, intercomprehension also meets this requirement: “the acquisition of intercomprehension competence lends itself to being organised as a self-directed process, where the learners identify their needs, become aware of their pre-knowledge in the various domains [...] and apply it for the understanding of “new” texts and utterances” (ibidem, p. 493).

Doyé's arguments are convincing and show that intercomprehension indeed meets the four educational principles. Of course intercomprehension does not replace language courses (DGLFLF, 2006), but it is a useful addition to promote plurilingualism, language diversity and language learning, as is one of the aims of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2006). Making students of ordinary language courses familiar with and conscious of the concept, advantages and strategies of intercomprehension, does not replace the need for a real intercomprehension course either. It is only intended as a small step in getting familiar with the concept of intercomprehension and to make them aware of the prior knowledge they possess, which they can use in learning/reading a (new) language. It can be seen as a type of education in language learning since one learns how the meaning of an unknown word can be inferred in many cases, instead of immediately consulting a dictionary. This example describes the main difference between intercomprehension and conventional foreign language teaching as expressed by Doyé:

“In the latter, the emphasis is on the teaching of new content (words, phrases, utterances etc.), in the former it lies on the mediation of strategies to understand such content. In this sense the acquisition of intercomprehension competence is bound to be exercised as an autonomous process and is superior to traditional ways of foreign language education” (Doyé, 2007, p. 7-8).

In such a way, intercomprehension can be seen as an expansion of one's reading competence in the language one studies. At the same time, I agree with Doyé (2007) that it increases one's motivation, because by applying the intercomprehension strategies, a foreign language suddenly becomes less foreign as the readers might have thought initially. A lot of elements are already familiar to the students, they only need to become aware of them.

As concluded in the previous section, intercomprehension courses are still desirable. It is in those courses that the students are really trained in seeing

similarities between different languages, since they apply the strategies not to one single language, like in a normal language course, but read various texts in different languages together with the instructor. An example of how intercomprehension could be implemented at university is provided by Carrasco, Degache and Pishva (2008). They provide an example of an intercomprehension course between Romance languages. It is not within the scope of this thesis to describe how an intercomprehension course between two different language families (in this case Romance and Germanic languages) should look like. Further research is necessary to identify those arguments that should receive extra attention in order to bridge the gap between two language families. However, results of this case study underline the importance of specific attention to grapheme and phoneme correspondences because these can differ a lot from each other, as expressed in section 7.2.

7.6 Critical reflection

This study was an interesting contribution to other work on intercomprehension between different language families. However, the results should be treated with caution, because of the small number of participants. Therefore, the results are not representative and further research with a larger amount of participants is needed to confirm or disconfirm the tendencies shown by this case study.

Another difficulty lies in the formation of the two groups that have been compared to each other. While the participants of the N-IC group shared a lot of characteristics, such as age and study direction, the IC group was not that homogeneous. These participants differed a lot in age: between 24 and 61 years old. Such a large difference in age is due to the difficulty in finding persons who had attended a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages. The course attracted not only students but also a great variety of people in middle age who also responded to the advertisement to participate in the case study. In the absence of sufficient students as candidates who had attended the course in

intercomprehension, the older candidates were also included in the present study. However, it must be kept in mind that these large differences in age could lead to differences in performance on the reading comprehension test and translation. The same is true for differences in discipline, although these differences were smaller. Only one participant of the N-IC group and two of the IC group studied something other than languages. However, the finding that the IC group still performed better on the test than the N-IC group, despite the fact that the group was less homogeneous, is in favour of the results. It indicates that participants with experience in intercomprehension between Romance languages are able to transfer their strategies to Dutch, despite the larger differences between the participants of that group.

If the same study could be repeated with a larger amount of participants, two aspects should be improved. First of all, one shortcoming of this study was that the collected data failed to answer the second research question (see sections 6.3 and 7.3). In some cases, the researcher had to pursue certain answers from the participants on the questions of the interview in greater depth. For example, in analysing the data it was not clear to what extent participants had used their prior knowledge in reading the Dutch article. Of course this is hard to measure, but it could have been asked more clearly during the interviews. Furthermore, it subsequently appeared that for some participants of the N-IC group it was also not clear whether they had read the text several times before answering the questions of the reading comprehension test. Consequently, the data contained some gaps, which made it more difficult to provide a good answer to the research question of secondary interest. The second aspect of the study that could be improved for a possible continuation of this case study regards one aspect of the experimental method. The third research question of this study focussed on the possible added value of audio added to the text. However, the participants heard the aural version of the article only once. It would have been better if they had had the possibility to listen to the text several times. For most participants it was the first time they had heard spoken Dutch. Listening to a language never heard before might be

overwhelming and therefore influence the capacity to use the audio for a better comprehension of the text. If the study were replicated, the participants would be allowed to listen to the audio several times in order to let them first get accustomed to the sounds of the Dutch language.

A final comment regards the implementations of the results of this case study. As mentioned earlier, the success rate to which native speakers of Italian with experience in intercomprehension are able to transfer their strategies to a language belonging to another language family, largely depends on the type of text and probably also depends on the unknown language. As the text chosen for this study was a newspaper article about the discovery of a new dinosaur species, the text contained various international words that are typical of scientific texts. This facilitates reading enormously. If another, less scientific text was chosen, for example an extract of a Dutch novel story, it would probably have been much more difficult to catch the core meaning of the text. Furthermore, the finding that native speakers of Italian with previous training in intercomprehension were able to transfer their strategies to Dutch, does not entail that people with experience in intercomprehension are able to transfer their strategies to all other languages of other language families. Recall from chapter 4 that most loanwords in Dutch have a Romance origin (cf. Van der Sijs, 2009; Van der Sijs and Willems, 2009; Gooskens et al., 2010), which might make Dutch easier to understand for native speakers of a Romance language than other Germanic languages. For example, the study of Gooskens et al. (2010) studied the proportions and origins of loanwords in contemporary Dutch and Swedish. Although they concluded that Swedish has more loanwords than Dutch (44.4% against 27.9%) the loanwords in Swedish mainly originate from Low German, whereas in Dutch most loans originate from French. Note that most loans in Swedish originate from a Germanic language, whilst Dutch has more influences from a Romance language. Therefore, Scandinavian or Slavic languages might be even more difficult, if not impossible, without knowledge of one or more languages belonging to that language family. Further research in intercomprehension between various language pairs belonging to different

language families is needed in order to prove that intercomprehension between unrelated languages is possible.

7.7 Suggestions for further research

Over the last few decades receptive multilingualism and intercomprehension have received more interest and various studies have investigated to what extent this ideal communication mode could be realized. The research started with studies on mutual intelligibility between related languages, which seemed to be quite successful. The research findings even led to the creation of various methods to promote intercomprehension between several languages belonging to the same language family. This case study went a step further and concentrates on the less explored area of intercomprehension between two unrelated languages. Although, this study resulted in some interesting findings, a lot of research is still needed in order to fully understand the possibilities for intercomprehension between unrelated languages. First of all it would be interesting to repeat this study with a higher number of participants in order to have more representative results. Of course the results obtained from this study cannot be regarded as valid for intercomprehension between all other unrelated languages. Especially because the Dutch language has various traces of Romance languages such as Latin and French, which might be less present in other languages of the Germanic language family or the Slavic, as has been stated in the previous section too. Therefore, similar studies should be carried out with different unrelated language pairs.

Another interesting setting for further research is to test students of other disciplines than languages on their capacity to read an unfamiliar language. In this case study, as well as various other studies on the capacity of students to read in an unfamiliar language (e.g. see Marx, 2012 and Pietzonka, 2013), mainly students enrolled in language courses at university participated. As results from this study, even those participants who did not attend a course in intercomprehension between Romance languages were able to extract the main idea of the Dutch

newspaper article to a certain extent. Remember from chapter 2 that Bougé and Cailliès (2004) underline that a minimum of linguistic knowledge is required in order to make linguistic inferences about the possible meaning of unknown foreign words. For this reason, students of languages probably have less problems in using them, because they are linguistically well trained. They read texts written in the foreign language they study all the time and have developed several strategies in doing so. Interesting to investigate is how students who do not study languages at the university, but for example something in the field of science, such as math or physics, score on a reading comprehension test on an article in an unknown language. If receptive multilingualism and/or intercomprehension is really seen as an alternative to English as a lingua franca (e.g. Doyé, 2005; Castagne 2004a,b), also less linguistically developed people should be able to deal with it. Furthermore, such a study sheds light on the need and difficulties of this particular target group, which can be useful in realizing material that is adapted to their needs.

Finally, for further research it would be interesting to investigate the possibilities and advantages of inserting intercomprehension strategies in ordinary language courses as was suggested in section 7.5 of this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of data from the reading comprehension test based on a Dutch newspaper article, the participants' translation of that article and the interviews held with the participants after having completed the test, have revealed that there is a difference in performance between participants who attended an intercomprehension course in Romance languages and participants who did not. As was hypothesized, the five participants who attended the course performed better on the test than the five other participants without experience in intercomprehension. Although they scored almost equal on the questions of the reading comprehension test, the IC participants were able to identify more words after the first few readings, did more attempts to translate less transparent words in the translation task, had formulated more suppositions on various grammatical aspects of the Dutch languages and were able to do so in more or less the same amount of time as the N-IC participants. This suggests that students are able to transfer the intercomprehension strategies they learned in a course on Romance languages to the Germanic Dutch language. However, a surprising finding was that the N-IC participants, who mostly studied languages at university, also performed quite well on the test and were able to extract the main meaning of the Dutch newspaper article, too. In addition, they read the article in more or less the same manner as the IC participants, which corresponded to some of the main recommendations of the ICE programme. This was not expected, but suggests that students of language disciplines also (unconsciously) develop some intercomprehension strategies during the language classes at university. Furthermore, as "good readers" they seem to know how to read an unfamiliar language.

Of secondary interest was the question whether audio added to the text in a later stage of the test, would help the participants to understand a few more words than they did initially. Results showed that the IC participants indeed thought to have understood a few more words, in contrast to most N-IC participants who

considered the audio as confusing and useless. Although the IC participants were also not very enthusiastic about the added value of the audio, they did mention their use of intonation to better understand the general meaning of the article more often. Again, these results show that participants with experience in intercomprehension between Romance languages are able to transfer their strategies to a language belonging to another language family (in this case Dutch).

The results of this case study allow us to carefully draw two other conclusions:

- I. The finding that the N-IC participants scored quite well on the test and were able to use and name several intercomprehension strategies, supports the idea of earlier studies that intercomprehension without instruction is possible, to a certain extent. Nevertheless, the difference in performance between the IC and N-IC group suggests that instruction is still an added value, especially for unrelated languages.
- II. The finding that the audio was often valued as confusing, because it did not match their expectations, provides us with a little bit more insight into what aspects are important for intercomprehension courses between unrelated languages. This finding shows that grapheme-phoneme correspondences should not be neglected, because they may differ a lot between languages belonging to different language families.

Finally, the conscious introduction of the concept and strategies of intercomprehension consciously into ordinary language courses, so that students are made aware of its possibilities and power has been suggested. This could be a first step in reaching a larger public interested in intercomprehension and to their becoming capable in using its strategies in understanding unfamiliar languages.

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APPENDIX A - Questionario Intercomprensione

Dati personali

Età: _____

Livello e tipo di studio: _____

Hai mai fatto un corsi di intercomprensione?

- sì, un corso di lingue romanze / germaniche / slave*
 no

() cerchia la risposta giusta*

Quali lingue conosci? Aggiungi nella prima colonna eventuali altre lingue che conosci. Scrivi nelle colonne restanti il tuo livello di abilità secondo il Quadro comune europeo di riferimento per le lingue (vedi retro per una descrizione più dettagliata).

Lingue	Comprensione		Parlato	Scritto
	Ascolto	Lettura		
Inglese*				
Francese*				
Tedesco*				

() Depenna se non le conosci.*

Dove e per quanto tempo hai studiato queste lingue?

Sei mai stato in passato in Olanda? Per quanto tempo? _____

Autorizzi la registrazione durante il colloquio?

- sì
 no

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
Spoken interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skillfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. I can do have a problem. I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Spoken production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

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Intercomprensione tra italiano e olandese – Prima parte

Leggi il testo seguente e prova a rispondere alle domande qui sotto. Se non sai una risposta, scrivi “non lo so”.

Nieuwe dinosaurussoort in China ontdekt: de Yongjinglong datangi

Door: Martine Steenvoort – 31/01/14, 15:23

Een onderzoeksteam, geleid door paleontologen van de Universiteit van Pennsylvania, heeft in het noordwesten van China een nieuwe dinosaurussoort ontdekt. De nieuwe dino heeft de naam Yongjinglong datangi gekregen.

De nieuwe dinosoort is een plantetende Sauropoda. Deze leefde in het Krijt (het geologische tijdperk dat van ongeveer 145 tot 66 miljoen jaar geleden duurde). De Sauropoda behoort weer tot de Titanosauria: een groep waarin we de grootste levende organismen die ooit op aarde rondliepen, aantreffen.

De paleontologen concludeerden, aan de hand van fossielen die al in 2008 ontdekt waren, dat de nieuwe dino niet de grootste in de groep Titanosauria was. Geschat wordt dat de Yongjinglong ongeveer 15 tot 20 meter hoog was. Maar de fossielen behoorden waarschijnlijk tot een jong exemplaar, een volwassen Yongjinglong zou dus nog een stuk groter kunnen zijn.

Fonte: <http://www.volkskrant.nl>

(1) Di che cosa parla questo articolo? Riassumilo in queste righe.

(2) Quali parole sei riuscito a capire? Scrivile nella tabella insieme al significato della parola in italiano. Scrivi nella terza colonna quale lingua che conosci ti ha aiutato a capire (= lingua ponte).

Parola olandese	Parola in italiano	Eventuale lingua ponte

(3) Lettura oralizzata: Quali parole in più sei riuscito a capire?

Parola olandese	Parola in italiano	Eventuale lingua ponte

(4) Prova a dare una traduzione del titolo:

(5) Quando viveva il Yongjinglong datangi?

(6) Quanto grande era il Yongjinglong datangi trovato?

(7) Metti una crocetta nella colonna giusta solo se sei convinto delle risposte. Se non sai una risposta metti una crocetta nella colonna "non lo so".

- a) I fossili trovati erano di un dinosauro adulto.
- b) La specie era carnivora.
- c) La specie trovata apparteneva ad un gruppo che contiene gli organismi più grandi mai trovati sulla terra.

Vero	Falso	Non lo so

