

# The Ties that Bind: Italian for Spanish Speakers in Intercomprehension

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# Bilingualism and Multilingualism in America

- According to the Census Data, 65% of Americans are either Bi- or Multilingual.
- At California State University, Long Beach, this is a reality we see in our classrooms every day.
- “Know the language history of your students!” (exhortation by pedagogy expert at a recent meeting.)



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# What to do?—What we did—What We are doing

- The Three Phases of a Language Teaching Transformation at CSULB
- 1) What to do?  
How it started.
- 2) What we did  
Our first four years.
- 3) What we are doing  
How we are teaching our classes, projects,  
where we are going.



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# Who are we? What do we do?

- The Department of Romance, German, Russian Languages and Languages, California State University Long Beach
- BA & MA Programs in French, German, Italian (MA in 2014!) and Spanish
- We credential teachers and train teaching associates for our own language programs



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# Hispanic Serving Institution

- CSU Long Beach is an HIS “Hispanic Serving Institution”
- Hispanic-Serving Institutions seek “to expand educational opportunities for, and improve the attainment of, Hispanic students”
- This kind of opportunity has been explored primarily in STEM disciplines, but what about language acquisition?



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# NEH Initiatives for HSI's

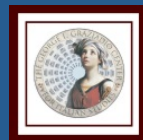
- National Endowment for the Humanities: French and Italian for Spanish Speakers
- **Project Directors:**
  - Clorinda Donato, Professor of French and Italian
  - Claire Martin, Professor of Spanish
  - Markus Muller, Dept. Chair and Language Coordinator



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# Intercomprehension comes to CSULB

- Pierre Escudé and Pierre Janin, authors of:
- *Le Point sur l'Intercomprehension, clé du plurilinguisme*, 2010 visit CSULB
- A new field is before us: Intercomprehension, which means the ability to understand the spoken and written languages belonging to the same family of languages if you know one of those languages.



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# Intercomprehension comes to CSULB

- In our case, this was the family of the Romance languages because we are able to work with:
  - 1) heritage speakers of Spanish or
  - 2) L2 speakers of Spanish

These are the students in our Italian for Spanish speakers courses. We know who they are. What can we do about it?



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# Intercomprehension comes to CSULB

- French Cultural Attaché, Laurent Devèze proposes Intercomprehension project to CSULB in 2006. Funding procured to offer one section of French for Spanish speakers.
- French for Spanish Speakers begins in 2008. Our methodology consists largely in accelerating the classes and in experimenting with what we now call “Adapted Intercomprehension.”



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# Intercomprehension comes to CSULB

- In 2009, Italian for Spanish speakers begins.
- In terms of methodology, we are trying to negotiate three “methods”
  - 1) The **Communicative** Approach
  - 2) Adapted **Intercomprehension** and **Intercommunication**
  - 3) **Intercomprehension**: languages in circulation for the purpose of understanding



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# Intercomprehension: Definition

- What is Intercomprehension?
- Intercomprehension utilizes a language learner's knowledge of one Romance language, (in our case Spanish) to accelerate acquisition of a second or third Romance language, (French and/or Italian).



# Intercomprehension and Europe

- European Intercomprehension

Those studying Intercomprehension in Europe are almost always native speakers of at least one Romance language.



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# Intercomprehension and The United States

- Intercomprehension in the USA

Those studying Intercomprehension in USA are almost always heritage or L2 speakers of Spanish whose linguistic identity is hybrid and/or transnational. Their attitude toward the heritage or L2 language they speak is very different from the attitude of an L1 speaker.



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# American (USA) Intercomprehension

- New Contexts for Intercomprehension:  
Spanish Speakers in the United States and  
Acquisition of the Romance Languages
- Several factors in play:



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# American (USA) Intercomprehension

- New Contexts for Intercomprehension:  
Spanish Speakers in the United States and  
Acquisition of the Romance Languages
- Several factors in play:
- Statistics:



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2010 census numbers confirm that Latinos alone will comprise 18 per cent of the U.S. population. Already, in the states of California and Texas, they are 37.6 per cent;



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When analyzed by age, Latinos under the age of 18 make up more than 50 per cent of the youth population; in 2006 they had a purchasing power of \$789 billion, a figure that is expected to reach \$1 trillion this year.



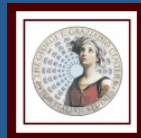
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While such socio-political motivations have been crucial for the development of Intercomprehension, a new set of socio-political criteria provide a backdrop for Intercomprehension in the Americas



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Latin America, Canada, and the United States each offer distinctive socio-geographical contexts where Intercomprehension can grow and prosper if the lens is adjusted



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Why do Latino students study  
Intercomprehension? Why do  
non-latino students want to  
study it and how are they  
brought in?



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French for Spanish Speakers:  
Three semesters of Instruction

Italian for Spanish Speakers:  
Three semesters of Instruction



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## What motivates students?

- 1) acquisition of a new language, better use of time at the University and improved job prospects
- 2) most jobs for college graduates ask for knowledge of one or two languages



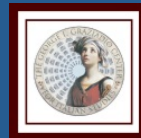
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Latino learners are able to see value in their bilingual competencies in English and Spanish within the framework that the learning of another romance language affords, be it French, Italian, Portuguese.



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Instead, with  
intercomprehension a more  
solidly bilingual competence  
emerges as competencies  
among similar languages are  
transferred.



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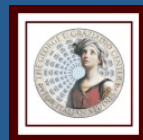


Thus language security emerges in the two source languages we use, Spanish and English, not to mention a stronger sense of self and confidence, both of which are very necessary on the job market.



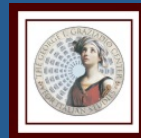
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Our program has been done with the help of Pierre Escudé and the University of Toulouse, and we are now working on materials, which brings me to the last part of my presentation, the very powerful ability to introduce authentic materials early, a factor that makes it possible to read literature and specialized materials.



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Speaking is important too—  
communicative activities for  
intercomprehension of great  
interest in USA.



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Press: *Los Angeles Times*,  
December 31, 2011

[http://www.latimes.com/  
news/local/la-me-french-  
spanish-20111231,0,3944823  
.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-french-spanish-20111231,0,3944823.story)



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# Project Expansion: NEH Grant



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## Purpose of Project

"French and Italian for Spanish Speakers" brings language-teaching faculty together from four Southern California institutions to explore the philosophy, methods and application of intercomprehension and plurilingualism to teach French and Italian to Spanish speakers.

## Results

San Pedro High School in Los Angeles is teaching the first French and Italian for Spanish speakers courses for the first time this semester. There are 46 students in Italian for Spanish speakers, and 41 in French for Spanish Speakers.

## Why Intercomprehension

Early access to humanities content among language learners is the primary goal of intercomprehension. Content and language are taught in tandem, which enables students to read cultural texts of all kinds -- literature, art history, history, etc.-- from the onset of language study.



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# Intellectual Rationale: Augmenting Humanities Content

**1)** Intercomprehension expands the language and humanities content acquisition potential of students as a function of their preexisting language base and cultural baggage.



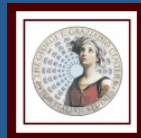
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2) It builds metalinguistic and metacultural awareness and sensitivity as well as critical thinking thanks to the simultaneous study of multiple cultures, languages and literatures.



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3) Traditional learning works in a binary system of juxtapositions and oppositions, intercomprehensive learning employs content in a language space that promotes integration and connections rather than exclusion.



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4) Our project opens a dialogue about new teaching practices for new audiences of educators and learners through group study, discussion, observation and modeling of the intercomprehensive teaching and learning model.



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# Intercomprehension and Heritage Speakers

- We looked at who our students were and began to think seriously about their double competencies in English and in Spanish, a growing Californian, as well as national reality.
- Sociolinguistic biases have prevented us from seeing clearly two fundamental realities:
  1. The belief that English has no or little connection with the Romance languages;
  2. In many cases Spanish, for our students, is not seen as an academic on the same level with English or the languages they are studying.



# Intercomprehension

- Language contact characterizes a globalized world, and has become a hallmark of daily life in the United States, especially in a University environment.
- Knowledge of Romance languages is an unavoidable reality.
- We begin from the premise, then, that many of our students speak two languages, English and Spanish.
- We have thus created an approach that enables them to access language competencies in a second Romance language more rapidly, confidently and efficiently by working with the family of Romance languages.

# Intercomprehension

- Our approach is an adaptation of what is known as « Intercomprehension » in Europe, where it was first practiced a century ago.
- Over the past few years, scholars such as Claire Kramsch have begun to think about who our students are, the languages they already speak, and why we should rethink language teaching. Her article, «Authenticity and Legitimacy in Multilingual SLA» in the new journal, Critical Multilingualism Studies, addresses a number of these issues, without, however offering a concrete model for engaging them.  
<http://cms.arizona.edu/index.php/multilingual/article/view/9>

# Intercomprehension

- We have been working on such a model over the last six years.
- In 2008, The French Cultural Services from the Embassy of France brought us into contact with Pierre Escudé and Pierre put us in touch with Elisabetta Bonvino, Roma 3, who presented with us last year in Los Angeles. Pierre and Elisabetta have produced the much of the important didactic work and the tools for learning Intercomprehension that exist today.
- We are also teaching a purely Intercomprehension course at CSULB using EUROM5. We will be happy to discuss this experience during the second part of this workshop.



# Challenges

- One of our biggest challenges has been to bring the Communicative Approach together with Intercomprehension.
- What you will see today is the result of our efforts which now follow a specific plan of development that integrates Intercomprehension into the communicative language classroom. It has been a team effort, one that requires the numerous expertises that you will hear about today.



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