

**The Florida State University
Experience:
From Spanish to Italian**

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**“Intercomprehension”
&
Multilingualism
Workshop**

**Teaching Italian to
Romance Languages
Speakers**

**Italian Language Resource Laboratory
John D. Calandra Italian American Institute
Queens College - CUNY**

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The Florida State University (FSU) Experience with Italian for Spanish speakers

- Why is it important to have Italian for Spanish speakers classes?
- The FSU Italian Program
- Florida's demographics
- Administrative and practical issues in setting up these classes
- Solutions
- Case study: The Institut de Français (Villefranche-sur-Mer, France)

My own personal experience with "intercomprehension"

&

Dr. Frédéric Latty's views on Romance languages speakers learning French

The numbers:

- 5 ½: full time faculty
- 600+: classes with enrollment of over 600 per semester
- (Minors cannot be tracked)
- 45+: Majors & co-majors
- 2000: year of foundation of MA Program
- 8: average number of graduate students per year
- 11: Current number of MA students
- 40: number of MA degrees awarded since 2000

100% placement record in Ph.D. programs or job market

1 out of 4 Floridians speak a language other than English in their homes.

More than 27 % of Floridians spoke a language other than English in 2011 (Spanish or Spanish Creole majority)

Florida's residents: 17.9 millions.

Florida's overall population is 19.3 million people.

3.6 million are Spanish-speaking denizens (over the age of 5).

Almost **½ million Floridians speak French creole** (language of Haiti and other former French colonies).

Other largely spoken languages were:

Portuguese (Brasilians in South Florida)

German (along the Gulf Coast, Vietnamese (Orlando)).

Florida's population is 22.5% Hispanic. The most important groups are:

Cuban-Americans in Miami-Dade County;

Puerto Ricans in Orange and Seminole Counties;

South Americans, mainly Colombian, Venezuelan, and Argentinians in Southeastern Florida;

Nicaraguans are concentrated mainly in Miami-Dade;

There is also a large historical Latino Population in the Tampa area:

it composed mainly of Spaniards, Cubans and Italians.

In contrast with the West Coast or Southwest US, the Mexican-American presence is quite small.

FSU students' body composition

As of Spring 2013 the **total FSU Student body** was of **39,659**

Spring 2010: 4,474 students recognized themselves as Hispanic

Spring 2011: 4,957 “ “

Spring 2012: 5,370 “ “

Spring 2013: 5,626 “ “

These data reflect the census data of a growing Hispanic population.
Not possible to collect data on the % of Spanish speakers on campus

FSU STUDENTS' BODY COMPOSITION

Spring 2013 Gender vs. Race

RACE	FEMALE	MALE	NOT REPORTED	TOTAL
American Indian Native Alaskan	82	50	0	132
Asian	539	516	0	1,055
Black	2,176	1,248	0	3,424
Hawaiian Pacific Islander	10	5	0	15
Hispanic	3,124	2,502	0	5,626
Non resident Alien	788	909	0	1,697
Not reported	329	359	0	688
Two or more races	493	341	0	834
White	14,221	11,967	0	26,188
TOTAL	21,762	17,897	0	39,659

FSU STUDENTS' BODY COMPOSITION

Fall 2012 Ethnicity Distribution

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
American Indian Native Alaskan	133	0.3%
Asian	1,105	2.7%
Black	3,599	8.7%
Hawaiian Pacific Islander	14	0.0%
Hispanic	5,733	13.9%
Non Resident Alien	1,773	4.3%
Not Reported	746	1.8%
Two or More Races	851	2.1%
White	27,347	66.2%
Totals	41,301	100.0%

RESULTS OF NEW CLASSES

In only one year, Italian for Spanish speakers classes have:

- Lured highly motivated students into Italian language learning
- raised our enrollment in general
- already raised our minor and major numbers
- Attracted a high number of graduate students

Appealing features:

- **Specially “tailored” class for a target student body**
- **Less classroom time**

Italian for Spanish Speakers class: 50 minutes M, W, & F
Regular Italian language class: 50 minutes M-Th

- **Popular time slots**
11:00-1:00pm

Problems:

- The need to use a special code (FOL instead of ITA) to be able to offer it only 3 times a week (but for the normal 4 credits)
- This caused recognition problems for students looking at course offerings
- Students wondered if it was the equivalent of the normal ITA language class
- If it counted for credits towards the Minor/Major

Fall 2012:

- First class of FOL3940: 13 students enrolled

Spring 2013:

- FOL3940: 10 students
- FOL3941: 10 students

Summer 2013: Advertising Campaign

- 1) Emailed class description and flyers to all undergraduate advisors on campus
- 2) Emailed all students enrolled in ITA1120 for the fall inviting them to switch class if they were fluent in Spanish
- 3) Emailed all Spanish majors, co-majors, and those taking the Spanish for heritage speakers classes
- 4) Emailed all Hispanic students' organizations on campus
- 5) Plastered catchy posters (with Pitbull's face) around campus (Students Union, International Students' Global Center, etc...)
- 6) Emailed previous students asking to advertise with their friends
- 7) Mused about posing an ad on the students' newspaper, but did not have funds!

Results:

Fall 2013:

FOL3940: 20 students

Objective:

To be able to offer the 3 language levels of Italian for Spanish Speakers every semester

Class organization:

- Same textbook as regular ITA1120
- Coverage of the same program
- Instructor is free to structure syllabus, customize content, devise exams

THE MOTIVE

Languages I speak: Italian, English, Czech

Languages I studied: Latin, Attic Greek

Languages I read: Spanish, French

- How would my intercomprehension skills function when forced to actively enter the oral production phase in another Romance language?

May 2013: I decide to seriously study a Romance language, French.

- I want to be able to speak French.

THE PLACE

Institut de Français –Villefranche-sur-Mer, Nice (founded in 1969)

- Specialized in the teaching of spoken French
- Based on the structure-global method, or St. Cloud-Zagreb method
- “Total approach” program. Emphasis on audio-visual method and fundamental French vocabulary
- Mission: teaching foreign adults (over 21) the French everyone speaks
- Almost exclusive focus on oral production (not written)
- 4 weeks sessions. Full immersion
- 8 ½ hours of instruction per day, 5 days a week
- Common breakfast @ 8:15. Lunch at a table for 8 with a professor.
5:15 pm: tea-time.
- No language other than French allowed at the Institut (2 Euro fine)
- Classroom size: max 10 students

MY LEVEL:

* I never formally studied French grammar, I could not pronounce properly or speak except for basic sentences, I could not understand radio or TV.

First day: written placement test comprising of:

- 1) A listening and comprehension exercise (I did well)
- 2) A reading and comprehension exercise (I did very well)
- 3) An auditory acuity exercise (I thought I did well but I flunked it)
- 4) A descriptive exercise based on pictures (passing)
- 5) A dictation (passing)

Oral test:

5 minutes max to describe scenes depicting a family's daily activities.
I used basic, minimal sentences.

*Results of this first test were revealed at the end of the course when we took it again (exactly the same test) and the two were compared.

To my great surprise -and chagrin-, I was placed in the advanced group (the 7th out of 8).

My schoolmates just needed to review grammar and improve their fluency, they had studied French for years.

- I had almost no grammar knowledge and no active vocabulary
- My reading comprehension was on a par with theirs,
- My listening comprehension was weaker than theirs
- My oral production was almost non-existent

- After 1 week, thanks to the effect of the “fundamental vocabulary,” my listening comprehension was close to 100%.
- Intercomprehension at the auditory level had kicked in
- I was constantly comparing with Italian

- After 2 weeks the breakthrough in oral production happened: I could sustain conversations on literature, direct debates

MY PROGRESS

- The Italian sentence structure was my roadmap
- I thrived on using verbs, words and expressions that are similar in Italian
- I had problems “owning” sentences, verbs, and idiomatic expressions that I could not relate to Italian. At times, it was extremely frustrating.

The exit test, identical to the entrance test, showed that I had improved in all areas, but dramatically in:

- 1) My auditory acuity skills
 - 2) My oral production fluency and oral production correction
- I was told I have a quite strong Italian accent
 - That I make recurrent pronunciation mistakes (I suspect these are a legacy of my decades-long, mainly visual approach to French).

Quoting Dr. Frédérik Latty:

Master in Languages for Business, Nice-Sophia-Antipolis University (France)

Diploma in Advanced Studies, Linguistics, Oxford Brookes University (UK)

Institut de Français Teaching Supervisor and Executive Assistant (24 years)

Les élèves de langue latine apprenant le français présentent souvent des profils similaires :

- 1) une compréhension très dominante;
- 2) une grande aisance et fluidité à l'oral;
- 3) une correction d'expression assez moyenne, voire faible;
- 3) une acuité auditive assez similaire aux élèves venant d'autres langues (anglo-saxonnes notamment);
- 4) une prononciation assez moyenne;

Tous ces éléments me semblent liés (et c'est la raison pour laquelle j'ai choisi de les classer dans cet ordre).

Quoting:

...Cette facilité de compréhension entraîne cependant **2 inconvénients majeurs** qui peuvent se révéler catastrophiques si l'élève n'en prend jamais conscience (c'est le rôle du professeur de l'aider à en prendre conscience) :

1) une trop grande fluidité d'expression

(l'élève a tendance à penser inconsciemment "je comprends bien donc je peux parler... il suffit de dire la même chose que dans ma langue "à la manière française")

et (par conséquent)

2) une mauvaise correction d'expression,

l'élève perdant tout sens de l'effort pour produire des structures correctes et se contentant de "franciser" sa propre langue.

Quoting:

Dans un groupe composé uniquement d'élèves "cibles", je ferais beaucoup moins d'exercice de compréhension (ou des choses très spécifiques, liées à des points techniques comme l'ordre des pronoms, la différence entre le passé composé et l'imparfait, les formes négatives pour les forcer à écouter d'une autre manière, plus précise et moins globale).

En revanche, je mettrais l'accent sur des exercices très systématiques ciblés sur la grammaire (pour déraciner leurs fautes caractéristiques) et de l'expression libre "encadrée" c'est à dire suivie de correction.

Des exercices spécifiques de prononciations sont aussi nécessaires e/é, b/v, les consonnes finales, les nasales.

Conclusions

Although skewed towards oral production, my recent experience at language learning while activating intercomprehension skills has been both humbling and empowering.

It has offered me a fresh, hands-on perspective on what the experience can be like for Romance Languages speakers learning Italian.

I find that in my Italian conversation I am now much more attuned to the great possibilities and possible downfalls of intercomprehension.

Whatever one's take on the Institut's pedagogical method might be, it has worked wonders for me. When thinking of our "target" students, there is one thing, in particular, that I have embraced. It is the emphasis on correct oral (and written) production. It is not a matter of checking and stifling the student's desire to communicate but, rather, helping her focus on and strive for accuracy from the beginning. I find this especially important since our students will often continue with coursework at the minor and major level.