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FEATURES OF “INTERCOMPREHENSION” IN CONDITIONS OF TRILINGUALISM

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Abstract

The modern multicultural and multilingual situation that has developed in the Republic of Kazakhstan is best reflected in the official policy of trilingualism - the desire for all people in Kazakhstan to master three languages - Kazakh, Russian and English. The possession of all three languages is deemed mandatory for professionals in all fields of activity. The purpose of our study is to identify cases of “intercomprehension” where communicants understand each other and can respond to received information through speaking different languages, and thereby applying all three languages in professional activities. Our method of research is interviewing teachers of multilingual groups. Using this method allows for us to identify the presence of such a thing as “intercomprehension” in the academic environment, to establish forms of oral and written understanding, and to analyze the prospects for the use of “intercomprehension” competence in the conditions of trilingualism for more fruitful teaching activities. Based on an analysis of interviews with university professors, it is revealed that “intercomprehension” promotes quick understanding a foreign language regardless of available or unavailable knowledge of the language, place of work and position, conversation topic, location, etc. The basis of “intercomprehension” is the existing, but unused knowledge of the subject. In addition, “intercomprehension” attracts knowledge of one’s language for a clear statement of thoughts in a foreign language, developing the skills of understanding speech in different languages, and aims at acquiring professional competence.

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Keywords: Intercomprehension, trilingualism, multi-code communication, competence.



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1. Introduction

The development of a trilingual society is the focus of Kazakhstan's language policy, as well as the transition of the Kazakh language to a Latin alphabet from a Cyrillic alphabet. The research of these language situations is important, for us to understand the actual functioning of the languages and the features of "intercomprehension" in Kazakh society.

Mongilyova (2015) made studies of Kazakh bilingualism and was concentrated on language choice in communication, which is depends on age, traditions, ethnical features, education.

Actual Kazakh situation of use of several languages in on society is not considered as new and abroad there are many examples of this multilingual coexistence of cultures and languages. The Kazakh multi-lingual society is not a new phenomenon as there are already many examples of multilingual coexistence between different cultures and languages. One of the best and representative, in our opinion, examples is "European intercomprehension". One of the best representatives of multi-lingual coexistence, is the example of "European intercomprehension". The purpose of the study is identifying cases of "intercomprehension" in Kazakhstan where communicants understand each other and can respond to received information, speaking different languages (mainly Kazakh, Russian and English), thereby applying all three languages in professional activities. The purpose of our study is to identify cases of "intercomprehension" in Kazakhstan where communicants can understand and respond to received information through speaking different languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English) thereby demonstrating application of all three languages in professional activities.

The newness of the research consists in analysing the situation of usage of three languages from three different language families.

2. Problem Statement

At the end of the 20th century, a new term "intercomprehension" appeared in philology, which is now firmly in use. At the end of the 20th century, a new term "intercomprehension" began to be used among philologists, and today has become widely used (Backus et al., 2013; Barrio, 2019; Bonvino, Fiorenza, & Velásquez, 2018; Jágrová, Avgustinova, Stenger, & Fischer, 2019; Olmo & Muñoz, 2019; Perea & Carlo, 2019; Smidfelt, 2018; Stein-Smith, 2018; Stenger et al., 2017).

This term refers to the ability of people to maintain communication with each other, speaking their own language and understanding at the same time what the interlocutor is saying. This term refers to the ability of people to maintain communication with each other, through speaking their own languages as well as understanding what the interlocutor is saying. In Europe, there is the Association for Promoting Intercomprehension – APIC. According to this association, the idea of the intersubjective nature of verbal communication is embodied mainly in teaching understanding of foreign languages.

In the methodology of teaching foreign languages, an approach was proposed - a multilingual approach (approche plurilingue). This approach differs from others in that it considers activities that include linguistic and cultural varieties. The multilingual approach, along with the intercultural, subject-language integrated, motivation for languages includes "intercomprehension" between related languages (Sizova & Yershova, 2012).

This “intercomprehension” approach promotes fast and effective mastery of the language and the study of culture, and is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern world. “Intercomprehension” promotes fast and effective mastery of the language, as well as the study of the target culture, and is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern world. The approach is aimed at increasing the demand for language training in the framework of multilingual education.

The basis of this approach is the method by which learning to understand languages is receptive (passive). The basis of the multilingual approach focuses on the method of receptive (passive) learning and understanding languages. Here we are talking about languages that are in one language group, i.e. knowing the native language, we understand other languages.

For the first time, linguists from four universities in France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy were involved in this approach in the framework of the EuRom4 project: C. Blanche-Benveniste, S. Caddeo, E. Castagne, E. Bonvino. The first textbook “EuRom4 : méthode d’enseignement simultané des langues romanes” on this program was released in 1997.

The main advantage of this approach in language teaching was that the result was achieved in a very short time: the student acquires the skills of understanding texts in all four languages in 40 academic hours. Consequently, the novelty consisted precisely in the speed of learning simultaneously four languages.

Currently, the EuRom4 project is not relevant, as new, more advanced programs are developed taking into account the acquired experience, which include several more languages (Molnar, 2018). Over time the results of the EuRom4 project lost relevance, as newer and advanced programs began to develop, which considered acquired experiences, including several more languages.

However, on the basis of this teaching method, various “intercomprehension” projects have been developed, tested and implemented. However, because of the EuRom4 project, various “intercomprehension projects have been developed, tested, and implemented. The difference from each other lies in the fact that the number of languages studied varies from 2 and above, at the same time or in sequence, the study of languages takes place, training is conducted for the purpose of written or oral understanding. Based on various goals, “intercomprehension” education projects offer the following levels of education: early learning; adolescent education; teaching senior pupils (students and adults) (Yershova & Sizova, 2011).

“Intercomprehension” is a teaching and communication technique that does not require the use of an additional language by interlocutors belonging to the same language family. The main advantages of “intercomprehension” include minimal effort to understand a foreign language, existing but unused knowledge of the subject, attracting knowledge of one’s own language to understand someone else’s, and development of multilingual knowledge. Based on the foregoing, interpersonal understanding contributes to the acquisition by students of global language competence, identified by the similarity of language material to be understood (Znakov, 2018).

In our work, citing research “Practices and Potentials of Intercomprehension” of Simone van Klaveren, Joanne de Vries and Jan D. ten Thije, “intercomprehension” is a form of multilingual communication, in which people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds speak their own

languages, while still understanding each other without the help of additional language – i.e. *lingua franca*» (Klaveren, Vries, & Thijs, 2013).

3. Research Questions

This paper deals with problems suggested by the following questions:

- to study "intercomprehension" in conditions of trilingualism
- to reveal features of "intercomprehension" based on analysis of interviews with university teachers
- to draw conclusions about using "intercomprehension" in the academic environment.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose is to determine cases of "intercomprehension" in which the interlocutors understand each other and can respond to the information received, speaking three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English.

5. Research Methods

During this research, the method of lean research was applied. Lean research approach to conducting field research, including interviewing, was created by researchers at MIT and Tufts University (Hoffecker, Leith, & Wilson, 2015).

List of interview questions were composed upon the structure of interviews conducted in the research of "intercomprehension" (Klaveren, Vries, & Thijs, 2013) and is presented above.

List of interview questions:

- What institution of higher education do you work in?
- In which department (chair, unit) do you work?
- What languages do you speak?
- What other languages do you work with?
- What position do you hold, what functions do you perform at your university?
- List the main functions in your field of activity!
- In your opinion, what is "intercomprehension" ?
- Do you use "intercomprehension" in your work at the university?
- In what situations did you have to apply "intercomprehension" in communication at a university?
- What languages do you use for "intercomprehension" ?
- On what, in your opinion, does successful "intercomprehension" depend on?
- Do you agree that it depends on the tasks and position of the person (person) with whom you are talking (with a boss or colleague)?
- Do you agree that the successful use of "intercomprehension" depends on the language spoken by the person (s) with whom you interact (for example, you are Kazakh, but he is German or French)?

- from the topic of conversation?
- from the location where the communication is made?
- Is there an “intercomprehension” in your teaching?
- Give an example of where and when in your professional activity you used “intercomprehension” !
- What languages do you use for “intercomprehension” at work?
- What determines the need for “intercomprehension” in your work?
- When you talk about your work with colleagues, do you resort to “intercomprehension” (if necessary, advice on your subject, for example)?
- Do you feel comfortable in situations of “intercomprehension”?
- Explain why yes or why not!
- Do you think your university could be an example of the successful functioning of multiculturalism and multilingualism through “intercomprehension” ?

The main goal of the study was identifying cases of “intercomprehension” where communicants understand each other and can respond to received information, speaking different languages, thereby applying all three languages in professional activities.

6. Findings

The answer on the first question was similar of all recipients but we kept this question in the form because of the perspective of questioning faculty staff of other universities in Kazakhstan to produce more accurate and truthful data upon the same methodology. The response to the first question was similar among all participants – A. Baitursynov Kostanay State University.

From the second to sixth questions the results are cited below (R is for Respondent, from 1st to 13th).

Question 2 – In which department (chair, unit) do you work? – R1 *Department of History of Kazakhstan and Philosophy*; R2 – *Department of Mechanical Engineering*; R3 – *Department of History of Kazakhstan*; R4 – *I work as a lecturer at the department of foreign philology and also work as head of the international relations office*; R5 – *Department of International Relations*; R6 – *Department of Information Systems and Informatics*; R7 – *Department of Software*; R8 – *Institute of Economics and Law*; R9 – *Department of Journalism and Communication Management*; R10 – *Department of History of Kazakhstan*; R11 – *Information Technology Department*; R12 – *Department of Criminal Law and Procedure*; R13 – *Department of Civil Law and Process*.

Question 3 – What languages do you speak? – R1 – *Kazakh, Russian, English – excellent, Tatar – spoken, Arabic – with a dictionary*; R2 – *Native - Russian, English – intermediate level*; R3 – *English, Russian*; R4 – *In English, Russian*; R5 – *Russian, English, a little Kazakh*; R6 – *In Russian, in English, I know a little French and Czech, a little Kazakh*; R7 – *Kazakh and Russian - fluent, English - I can express my thoughts, I can speak*; R8 – *In Kazakh, in the state language, in Russian, a little in English*; R9 – *Russian, Kazakh, English*; R10 – *Russian, Kazakh a little and a little in English*; R11 – *Russian, Kazakh, partially English*; R12 – *Russian, English*; R13 – *Kazakh, Russian, English*.

Question 4 – What other languages do you work with? R1 - *A bit with German*; R2 – *None*; R3 – *Kazakh, Polish*; R4 – *Sometimes German, French, Polish, Czech*; R5 – *With Polish, Romanian*; R6 – *Russian, Kazakh, English*; R7 – *None*; R8 – *Russian, Kazakh, English*; R9 – *None*; R10 – *no more other than these*; R11 – *Kazakh*; R12 – *None*; R13 – *Kazakh*.

Question 5 What position do you hold, what functions do you perform at your university? – R1 – *Associate Professor, member of the Council of Young Scientists*; R2 – *Head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering*; R3 – *Associate Professor*; R4 – *Head of International Relations*; R5 – *Senior Specialist, International Relations Department*; R6 – *Teacher of the department*; R7 – *Senior teacher of the department*; R8 – *Head of the department of management*; R9 – *Head of the department, mainly of a managerial nature*; R10 – *Associate professor, teaching, scientific work at the department*; R11 – *Head of the department*; R12 - *Part-time teacher*; R13 – *Teacher, Responsible for Employment*.

Question 6 - List the main functions in your field of activity! – R1 – *Conducting classes, teaching general disciplines, maintaining educational documentation*; R2 – *Administration at the department, lead the practice*; R3 – *Teaching, educational work, scientific work*; R4 – *Development of cooperation, academic mobility, partnership between universities, mainly in the educational field, less in scientific*; R5 – *Academic mobility of students incoming and outgoing, correspondence on the work of our unit, establishing contacts*; R6 – *I conduct classes, carry out public assignments of the department, etc.*; R7 – *I carry out additional assignments for the department*; R8 – *The organization of the educational process, the management of the department*; R9 – *Basic informational, managerial, educational, educational, enlightening partially*; R10 – *Lecturing, practical testing, responsible for science and international cooperation*; R11 – *Department management*; R12 – *Provide knowledge to students*; R 13 – *Qualitative preparation for training sessions, conducting training sessions, monitoring, maintaining feedback, scoring*.

As it is seen from the table, the respondents represent a variation of working positions at the University and they almost all speak two or three languages or can use three languages in their work. Next their responses on the question seven about “intercomprehension” are presented below:

R1 – *“Intercomprehension”, in my opinion, refers to the field of intercultural communication. People who speak different languages nonetheless understand each other*; R 2 – *Probably, this is how we say “shala Kazakh”, that is, if a native speaker of Kazakh speaks semi-Kazakh and semi-Russian, then I, in principle, will understand that idea that he wants to convey*; R 3 - *“Intercomprehension” is understanding of ethnic culture, representatives of another ethnic group, its language*; R4 – *when knowledge of one language helps to understand some phrases and the meaning of certain texts in another foreign language*; R5 – *People can understand each other speaking in different languages*; R6 – *I think that this is an understanding by people of different linguistic ...*; R7 – *Possession of more information in different languages, information and meaning are transmitted, etc. and cultural understanding, the culture of different nations, traditions and more knowledge*; R8 – *I think this is an opportunity to communicate in several languages and understand each other*; R9 – *Interpersonal understanding-interlingual understanding*; R10 – *“Intercomprehension”, such a word, the first time I come across it*; R11 – *Understanding between speakers of different languages*; R12 – *When students are versatile in various*

fields; R13 – Difficult to answer, understanding between someone and someone. It matters when we conduct classes in multilingual groups, it is very important there and multilingualism develops skills.

As we can see from the answers about the meaning of “intercomprehension”, not every respondent can explain the idea, but numerous respondents understand the premise of this notion and try to reflect their own experience and find the response.

About the usage of “intercomprehension” in their work (question 8), respondents gave the totality of positive responses, they think they use it in this or that sense.

As they were asked about the situations of “intercomprehension” usage (question 9) they cited the following contexts: teaching disciplines in multilingual groups for students; answering student’s questions; conducting training sessions; communicating with students in multilingual groups; speaking with scholar guests from foreign countries; understanding a native speaker of another language; owning a minimum vocabulary; conducting excursions for delegations of foreign visitors. So, the respondents use the competence of “intercomprehension” in different situations and can apply it not just to the process of teaching disciplines.

Asking Question 10 about languages they use while implementing the “intercomprehension” competence, respondents reflected their usage of languages in the following ways: the Kazakh language – 12, the Russian language – 8, the English language - 7.

Almost every respondent marked English in his language background (12 of 13), the second language used is the Russian (8 of 13), and the Kazakh language is chosen as the language used in “intercomprehension” by only 7 respondents which is less than half of all interviewers.

The reasons of successful “intercomprehension” (question 11) were highlighted by respondents and are given below:

R1 – awareness of the participants of this communication process of the importance of going beyond the boundaries of their language sphere and mastering those languages that are priority for this community; R2 – percentage of the languages used in the conversation with the interlocutor; R3 – arrogance, that is, a person must overcome his timidity in knowledge of the English language and, with a small deficit or stock of relevant words, and even poor technology of use, still try to use this language; R4 – language experience, attentiveness, ability to compare and analyze; R5 – level of language proficiency and level of education of the person himself; R6 – intuitive abilities of a person, even if a person does not speak English, but at the level of intuition, he guesses or in the context can understand what is the task that he must perform; R7 – language proficiency from a grammatical point of view, from the level of knowledge of the language; R8 – level of language proficiency, the degree of its perception; R9 – environment is important; R10 – vocabulary; R11 – knowledge of the language; R12 – wishes of the student and teacher; R13 – level the student speaks his native language. The narrower the horizons and lexical stock of the native language, the more difficult it is to explain this in a non-native language. Also, the techniques of teaching.

The answers on questions from 12 to 15 about other reasons of successful “intercomprehension” are given in the figure 01.

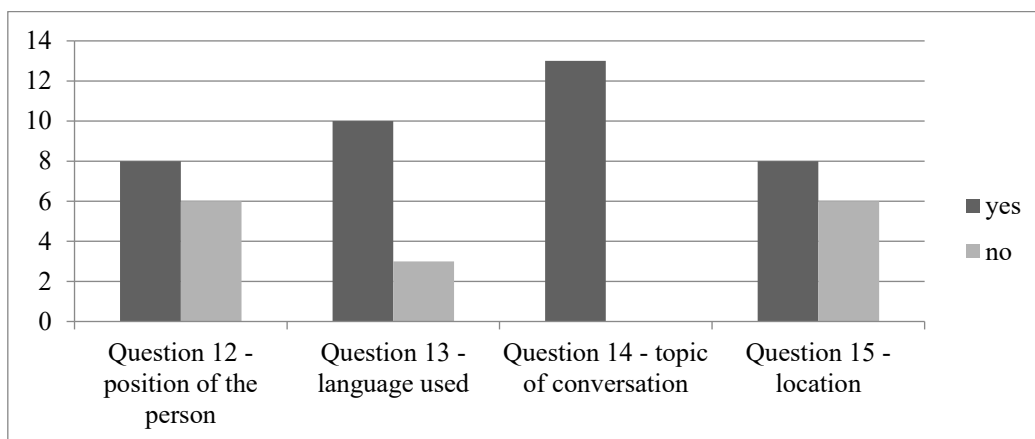


Figure 01. Respondents' opinions on the other reasons of successful "intercomprehension"

Respondents answered question 16 about presence or absence of "intercomprehension" in their work in a following way: 3 persons answered that there is intercomprehension in their professional activities and 10 persons answered "intercomprehension" is absent in their work.

Interviewing persons asked question 17 about their examples of "intercomprehension" usage by work: "intercomprehension" was used in training sessions, supervised practices, documentation, studying, teaching multilingual groups, communicating with foreign guests, participating in international events, in internship overseas, business trip, meeting with foreigners, visiting meetings at English Club with native speakers.

The purpose of "intercomprehension" was characterized in a following way: it is necessary to establish communication with students, to teach disciplines, to lead an administrative activity, to prepare reports, to communicate successfully, to improve interpersonal understanding with foreigners, and to ensure the quality of the educational process.

On communication with colleges, 8 interviewers implement "intercomprehension" (question 20) versus 5 respondents who said that they don't use it.

About the comfort of usage "intercomprehension" said "Yes" (it is comfortable to apply "intercomprehension") 6 persons and 7 persons said "No" (question 21). According to the comfortable or non-comfortable usage of "intercomprehension" respondents cited the following reasons of their answers: comfortable usage depends on the knowledge of cultural specifics, on the interest to the languages, on the adaptation competence, on the communication atmosphere, and the non-comfortable position in "intercomprehension" usage depends, according to the answers of respondents, mainly on their low level of languages.

The last question 21 of interview was about the opinion of respondents about the level of "intercomprehension" usage at Kostanay State University and 10 of interviewers asked "Yes". They think KSU could be called a good example of "intercomprehension", 3 respondents asked "No", so they don't think KSU is a good example of "intercomprehension".

7. Conclusion

Based on interviews with teachers of multilingual groups of the university, cases of “intercomprehension” were revealed in which the interlocutors understood each other and reacted to the information received, speaking three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English.

During the study, interviewees indicated that they used forms of using oral and written understanding in the classroom in multilingual groups, as well as when communicating with colleagues in different situations. An analysis of the teachers’ answers allowed us to determine the percentage of their use of languages in their professional activities, the awareness of the use of “intercomprehension” in their work, cases of “intercomprehension” in the academic work of a university teacher. In addition, comments were received from teachers on the quality of “intercomprehension” within the university.

Thus, for more fruitful teaching activities, the use of “intercomprehension” is relevant regardless of the situation, the position held, and the functions performed, the location and language of the communicants.

The research findings can be used to eliminate shortcomings in the work of teachers of multilingual groups, to review the training of specialists working in a multilingual group.

The prospect of the research is a survey of students regarding the presence of “intercomprehension” in their educational activities, identifying the degree of interaction of three or more languages in their communication at the university, and using the results of both experiments to improve “intercomprehension” in the academic environment of the university.

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