TRAINING MULTILINGUAL COMPREHENSION SKILLS AT SEA WITH THE HELP OF MOVIES

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Abstract:Although English has long been established as the lingua franca of the sea, in the light of today's multi-ethnic, multilingual crews living and working altogether on board ships, cultural and language barriers complicate and even hinder proper communication. Therefore, seafarers are highly motivated to be able to communicate across languages and cultures. In this respect, intercomprehension provides them with opportunities to build up double synergies between the development of competence in Maritime English and the development of plurilingual skills in order to bolster effective communication and foster better human relationships. Teaching intercomprehension at sea with the help of movies offers a number of advantages both for the teacher and for the student. The visual input provided by movies is a powerful learning aid because it allows students to activate their own real world schemata and, thus, relate to the language content in a more personal and straightforward way. When utilizing movies in the context of intercomprehension the teacher can readily resort to three types of input format: the visual (the movie imagery), the audio (the dubbed versions) and the textual (the subscripts) which can be individually exploited or mixed together for a more complex multilingual experience. This paper aims to provide a springboard for future teaching ideas by presenting some ready-made activities which target the development of intercomprehension skills in the maritime context.

Keywords: intercomprehension, multilingualism, maritime English, ESP

I. WHAT IS INTERCOMPREHENSION (IC)?

The concept of intercomprehension can be considered one of the most prominent linguistic manifestations and academic theorizing of the European Community's efforts to promote multilinguism and multiculturalism thorough its language and educational policies and programs.A concise definition of the conceptis provided by Peter Doye, who describes intercomprehension as "a form of communication in which each person uses his or her own language and understands that of the other." (Doye, 2005:7). Intercomprehension, just as the term reveals it, targets the development of the receptive skills rather than the productive ones. It is not that people are expected to be fully proficient in many foreign languages, which would be considerably difficult to achieve, but rather that they can activate those comprehension strategies that allow them access to information in other foreign languages. Intercomprehension promotes insight into many languages instead of the mastery of a single one. As Umberto Eco argued: "a Europe of polyglots is not a Europe of people who speak many languages fluently, but, in the best case scenario, of people who can communicate, each speaking his own language and understanding that of the other, but who, while not being able to speak it fluently, by understanding it, even with difficulty, would understand the "spirit", the cultural universe that every one expresses when speaking the language of his ancestors and of his own tradition" (Eco, 1995)

Although the term IC has been included in French dictionaries since 1975 (*Le Grand Larousse de la langue française*), English dictionaries mention terms such as

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interlanguage(Selinker, 1992) or *interlingual* (Weinreich, 1953) instead. The notion of IC is associated also with the concepts of *intercultural communication, inter-discourse communication, intercultural discourse, intercultural competence, and interpersonal communication across cultures, inter-group communication* (Pencheva, 2013). The cultural dimensions at play have been emphasized by Dr. Filomena Caphucho who relates IC to concepts of plurilingualism and pluricultural competence: "the competence to co-construct meaning in intercultural/interlingual contexts and to make pragmatic use of this in a concrete communicative situation." (Capucho and Oliveira, 2005:14).

II. IC STRATEGIES

Although English has long been established as the lingua franca of the sea, in the light of today's multi-ethnic, multilingual crews living and working altogether on board merchant ships, cultural and language barriers complicate and even hinder proper communication. Therefore, seafarers are highly motivated to be able to communicate across languages and cultures. In this respect, intercomprehension provides them with opportunities to build up double synergies between the development of competence in Maritime English and the development of plurilingual skills in order to bolster effective communication and foster better human relationships.

Teaching a foreign language does not only imply the transfer of lexical and structural items or the correct pronunciation, but also the insight into another culture, the ability to communicate effectively beyond the written or spoken word. Intercomprehension is the recognition of the potential of such learning strategies outside the boundaries of just one foreign language. Consequently, one of the first things we can do for our students is to recognize the need to capitalize on the foreign language knowledge they already possess. In doing so we would help them develop their skills not only to approach informational chunks in other, unknown languages, but also to autonomously acquire the specialized vocabulary in the language(s) they know. Here are some intercomprehension strategies which could be successfully applied to the study of Maritime English:

1. Students should be helped to *become more aware of internationalisms*(especially well represented in technical language) of Latin and Greek origins or modern English. As Peter Doyé points out "On average, adult Europeans have 4000 of these easily recognizable words at their disposal." (Doye, 2005) All seafarers are bound o be familiar with such terms such as GPS, radar or sonar. mean. Moreover, the very common word anchor comes from the Latin *ancora*or from or cognate with Greek *ankyra*which meant anchor, hook.

2 Students should develop their *awareness of lexical similarities among languages*, especially among those within the same family. For instance, the English *buoy*is very similar to the Danish, *Bøje*, the Norwegian *Bøye*, the Swedish *Boj*or within the Romance family, the French *Bouée*and the Italian *Boa*.

3. Knowledge of Romanian is instrumental for students when deducing the meaning of specialized vocabulary in the other languages. An example would be the word *frigate*. *Frigate* was found in Middle French *frigate*and the even more accessible Italian *fregata*, spelt identically in Romanian.

Basically, in addition to teaching specialized vocabulary, intercomprehension can be used to develop the learners' multilingual receptive competence by means of a set of transfer-based deduction skills. Considering the natural capacity of human beings to learn foreign languages, it would be extremely beneficial if our students were made aware of the linguistic wealth they already possess and the ways in which they can use that to understand other languages.

III. PRACTICING IC AT SEA THROUGH MOVIES

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Teaching IC at sea with the help of movies offers a number of advantages both for the teacher and for the student. First of all, the visual input provided by movies is a powerful learning aid because it allows students to activate their own real-world schemata and, thus, relate to the language content in a more personal and straightforward way. Consequently, their learning motivation is significantly boosted. Moreover, the free availability of downloadable multilingual subscripts makes it particularly easy for the teacher to juggle with a variety of languages in the effort to raise the students' awareness of IC strategies. When utilizing movies in the context of IC the teacher can readily resort to three types of input format: the visual (the movie imagery), the audio (the dubbed versions) and the textual (the subscripts) which can be individually exploited or mixed together for a more complex multilingual experience. This section of our paper is meant to provide a springboard for future teaching ideas by offering some ready-made activities which target the development of IC skills. We have chosen to exploit a very well-known movie, *Captain Phillips*, which deals with a highly poignant issue in the current maritime community, i.e. piracy.

Introduction**:** In order to introduce the topic, the teacher can show students the movie poster and ask them to brainstorm on what they already know about the movie, whether they have seen it or not. If the students haven't seen the movie, then the teacher should encourage the students to make guesses on the plot of the movie based on what they can see in the poster.

Task 1: Safety Measures

Students watch *Sequence 1* (00:09:44 – 00:11:04) from the English version in which Captain Phillips arrives in port and goes on board his ship. They answer the following questions first in groups and then in plenary.

- What 2 things draw the Captain's attention as he goes on board the ship?
- How does the Captain feel about what he notices as he goes on board the ship?
- Why are these issues potentially problematic?

Next, students watch *Sequence 2* (00:10:09 -00:10:22) from the Italian-dubbed version and try to write down any words they might recognize in the Italian language. The teacher encourages them to discuss phonetic and lexical similarities between Romanian and Italian. They answer the question:

- What is Captain Phillips ordering his First Mate to do?

Students watch *Sequence 3* (00:12:30 – 00:12:43) from the English version to confirm their guesses from sequence 2. The teacher allows for a brief clarification in plenary to make sure all students are on the same page.

Task 2: Cargo

Students watch Sequence 4 from the Spanish-dubbed version (00:09:48 – 00:10:00). There are no subtitles. The students try to catch any words they might recognize in the Spanish language. The teacher encourages them to discuss phonetic and lexical similarities between Spanish, their mother tongue or any other Romance languages that they might be familiar with. The students listen and answer the following questions:

- What is the topic of the conversation between Captain Phillips and his First Mate?
- What helped you guess the topic of their conversation?
- Are there words that sounded similar to your mother tongue or other Romance languages that you know? Which were these words?

Then, students move on to *Sequence 5* from the English version (00:11:40 – 00:11:55), this time with Italian subtitles. They do the following tasks before they watch this sequence: Students work in groups and analyze the written form of numbers in Italian in the chart provided. They

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might make the connection between *cento* – cent- one hundred or *due- doi*, *etc. The teacher e*ncourages them to share their deduction strategies in plenary so that their other colleagues might benefit from their insights too. For the next task students have to identify the three languages (Italian, Spanish and French) in which the cargo details are recorded in the chart. Linguistic knowledge of Romance languages will come in handy and the teacher should lead the students' deduction process by providing the grammatical, lexical and phonetic framework for it.

Students watch *Sequence 6* from the English version (00:11:40 – 00:11:55), this time with Italian subtitles. There is no sound. Check their numbers for Italian and confirm that they have correctly identified the Italian version of the cargo details. They discuss and correct their remaining choices of French and Portuguese with the teacher. Finally, the students discuss in plenary the lexical and phonetic similarities and differences between the four languages (Italian, Portuguese, French and English) in the completed chart.

Task 3: Route

For this task, students work in groups in order to recognize place names. They have to watch *Sequence 7* from the Italian-dubbed version (00:09:41 – 00:10:06). In this sequence, Captain Philips and his First Mate are discussing the route of the voyage. Students listen and write down any place names they can recognize. Then they move on to *Sequence 8* from the English version (00:11:56 – 00:12:19), this time with Portuguese subtitles. They have to write down 5 place names mentioned in the video. Next, the teacher provides copies of a map with the place names written in English so that the students can check their work. This particular task is meant to raise the students' awareness of internationalisms and how paying attention to such lexical items can facilitate one's comprehension of oral or written input in related languages. The students watch *Sequence 9* from the English version, this time with Spanish subtitles (00:11:56 – 00:12:20). They number each highlighted place on the given map from 1 to 5 in the order in which they are mentioned by the First Mate.

The following step is to work on the navigation plan/ route in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English. They are given speech bubbles with the phases of the navigation plan/route in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English. Each bubble contains one phase expressed in all the five languages (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French and English). Students start with the English lines and try to put them in chronological order, thus creating the support for their work on the remaining languages. Moreover, they can use the map in exercise 2 to help them solve the task. Once they have identified the chronological order of the lines in English, they write them under the heading English in the provided chart. They then do the same with the lines in the rest of the languages. Again, they need to activate their linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge of Romance languages in order to identify the given languages and complete the chart. At the end of this activity students discuss in plenary the lexical and phonetic similarities and differences between the four languages (Italian, Portuguese, French and English) in the completed chart. They also discuss the importance of being aware of Internationalisms when decoding texts.

Task 4: Leaving port

First students are presented with five port leaving orders in Spanish/ French/ Portuguese / Italian. They have to work in groups in order to match the five orders in the given languages. The teacher checks in plenary. Then the students are provided with 6 pictures, which are freeze-frames from *Sequence 10* from the English version (00:12:50-00:13:37) illustrating port leaving maneuvers. The students have to put the given pictures in chronological order and write 1-6 next to each picture. Then the students watch the same *Sequence 10* from the English version

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(00:12:50-00:13:37) with English subtitles and write the English orders next to each correct picture. Finally they will have to match the pictures to the each of the five port leaving orders expressed in Spanish/ French/ Portuguese / Italian.

Task 5: Emergency Call

Students watch *Sequence 11* from the Italian-dubbed version (00:17:05 – 00:18:08) and answer the questions:

- What is happening?
- What is Captain Phillips doing?

Students use linguistic and extra-linguistic clues (contacts on the radar screen/ captain looks through the binoculars and sees the skiff, etc.) to try to deduce what is going on. A short plenary discussion about the procedures to be followed in such a situation might prove helpful and act as an anticipatory element for the activities to come.

For the next activity, students look at the transcript of *Sequence 11*. The language of the transcript has been deliberately chosen to be Italian as it is the closest to Romanian and can allow students to confidently tackle the task. There are numerous similarities between Italian words in the task and their Romanian equivalents: pirateria – piraterie; distanza- distanta; rotta- ruta; nave- nava; l'equipaggio – echipajul etc. With the help of this task students are prompted to comprehend basic navigation terms in Italian. For instance when they read *2 gradi, 2 primi nord, e 49 gradi, 19 primi est* it is obvious that the text is about position at sea while 17 nodi can only describe speed. At the end of the activity students are encouraged to look at scripts in Spanish, Portuguese, French and English and identify other lexical, syntactical, phonetic similarities among these languages.

Conclusions

We believe that it is our job as teachers to motivate students by making them aware of how much they already know. Students should capitalize on their general knowledge of the world, their expertise in a particular field, their competence in their mother tongue as well as in a foreign language they already know. Moreover, we should strive to develop the students' general linguistic competence. While teaching a foreign language, teachers should also give their students information about language systems and language families, thus developing their general language knowledge and enabling them to make correlations between languages more easily. Finally, we believe that it is important to raise awareness of and promote respect for cultural diversity through intercultural learning. Language is one of the most important carriers of culture, therefore, we feel it is essential that students receive an intercultural education while learning a foreign language. The more aware students become of cultural diversity and various cultural patterns, the more effective and affective communicators they become. In our particular case, since our students are expected to be functional in a multilingual, multiethnic professional environment, we feel that they need to be equipped with some general cultural competences in order to efficiently accomplish their tasks.

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