

## DiFree Newsletter- 5, March 2024

In this Issue: Sonia Di Vito, Associate Professor of French Language at the University of Tuscia, describes Intercomprehension as a form of dialogue in which each person uses his or her own language to communicate and its use in teaching foreign languages; Elisa Iandiorio, Web and Digital Marketing consultant, Big Data Analyst and University Instructor, provides advice on how to succeed in the freelance job market by building a unique personal brand.



*The initial months of the new year have been very productive.*

*UNITUS arranged its second LTTA in January and it was quite a success with speakers invited to show high school and university students how to write an effective CV, which will meet the scanning criteria of AI-powered selection ATS (Applicant Tracking System) software, how to land a digital internship and how to promote one's talent and work via LinkedIn. Participants were also able to benefit from the presence of accomplished freelancers and Human Resource managers sharing their experiences. The event was also an opportunity for the launch of the DiFree interactive repository of freely downloadable multilingual CV, Resumé, Video-CV and Portfolio samples, complemented by a free e-learning course in English on Cold Pitching, which aims at developing the writing skills and expanding the solo-employment professional macrolanguage needed to succeed in the Freelance job market. Since multilingual skills are fundamental in a world where freelance jobs are mostly landed via international labour platforms, Sonia Di Vito's short article presents an innovative, efficient and joyful method of learning new languages – Intercomprehension. And since any skill may be underappreciated unless it can be showcased in the labour market, a few tips on personal branding will be supplied in Elisa Iandiorio's contribution.*

*DiFree partners met for their 5th TPM in Porto on the 22nd of February: it was an occasion to discuss partners' contribution to the realization of the virtual career Hub in Panteion with the involvement of national stakeholders and define the criteria for the creation of the video lessons on Mentorship which will be part of ISCAP's mentoring program, available next fall.*

*We are all thrilled: these new tasks bring us closer to the completion of the project!*

**A.R.**

## Intercomprehension and distance language learning

Sonia DI VITO

### A form of intercultural communication

Intercomprehension is described as an effective approach to language learning that encourages students to rely on the similarities between languages from the same family to overcome comprehension challenges. It primarily focuses on mastering receptive skills, which are essential for understanding messages in an unfamiliar language. The concept gained popularity in the 1990s and is supported by two main disciplines: third language learning and simultaneous language learning. This method is pedagogically sound and has been widely applied in formal education settings.

### Approach and methodology

Developed over the last 30 years, Intercomprehension is based on the possibility of establishing communication between individuals and groups of individuals who speak different languages belonging to the same linguistic family. It is considered an effective language learning approach which encourages students to overcome comprehension challenges relying on the similarities between languages related to the learner's mother tongue (the Romance family in our case) or related to a language of education. It applies to both written and spoken communication, with each modality requiring different types of strategies to decode texts produced in unknown languages. Written Intercomprehension relies primarily on the transparency of words and their interpretation, facilitated by the common origin of languages belonging to the same linguistic family.

Understanding spoken language, on the other hand, is undoubtedly a more complex process, though not impossible, as demonstrated by numerous studies conducted over the last thirty years. It tends, however, to focus on receptive skills, as the development of comprehension is the most tangible way of using the knowledge of a related language to learn a new one.

Its distinguishing feature from other foreign language teaching methodologies is that whole linguistic families are the object of learning activities. The only pre-condition needed is that one of the languages must already be mastered by the learners, either as their mother tongue or as a second language (FREPA 2012: 7). This pre-acquired language learning experiences is used as a foundation for learning new languages.

Intercomprehension is part of the four plural approaches described in CARAP (Cadre de Référence pour les Approches Plurielles, or Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches), which aim to develop plurilingual and pluricultural competence by leveraging the potential synergies of integrating knowledge of multiple languages. From a scientific perspective, the concept of intercomprehension has been used by linguists and anthropologists in Africa and America to assess intelligibility in an unknown language. This communicative practice was common in cultural exchanges and the methods of evangelization used in the Middle Ages. It was also highlighted in the research of linguist Ronjat on Provençal, who noted that people from different villages could have familiar conversations and discuss business with ease.

In the early 1990s, various research groups began exploring the possibility of transforming this communicative practice into a pedagogical approach to propose and promote a new way of learning and teaching languages. These reflections led to numerous national and international

research projects demonstrating the feasibility of such a hypothesis. The advantages of Intercomprehension include political, educational, and psychological benefits, promoting unity in diversity within the European context and enhancing learners' motivation to study foreign languages.

### What is it good for?

Intercomprehension can be effectively linked to online multilingual learning and teaching for professional purposes. Here's how:

#### 1. Enhancing Multilingual Communication Skills

- **Relevance for Global Workplaces:** Intercomprehension develops the ability to understand and communicate across languages, a valuable skill in globalized workplaces where employees and professionals often interact with colleagues and clients from diverse linguistic backgrounds.
- **Real-Time Communication Strategies:** Teaching Intercomprehension fosters strategies for understanding written and spoken content without requiring complete fluency, enabling professionals to engage effectively in multilingual environments.

#### 2. Incorporating Digital Platforms

- **E-Learning Tools:** Online platforms like Moodle, as mentioned in the provided text, can host Intercomprehension activities, simulations, and multilingual collaborative projects. Tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Padlets can support interactive and asynchronous communication.
- **Professional Development:** Language-specific modules integrated into professional training programmes can use Intercomprehension techniques for disciplines like law, healthcare, or business.

#### 3. Customizing for Professional Contexts

- **Domain-Specific Terminologies:** Intercomprehension activities can be tailored to include terminology and contexts relevant to specific fields, such as technical manuals for engineers or medical reports for healthcare professionals.
- **Practical Outputs:** Participants can work on multilingual tasks such as creating user guides, presentations, or reports, fostering both language skills and professional knowledge.

#### 4. Fostering Collaborative Online Work

- **International Networking:** By creating international groups, intercomprehension training mirrors real-world professional scenarios where multilingual collaboration is essential.
- **Team Projects:** Professionals can be trained to produce deliverables like reports, marketing content, or e-books collaboratively in multiple languages, using intercomprehension to ensure mutual understanding.

## 5. Cultural and Interpersonal Skills Development

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** The practice encourages respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, critical in international business and diplomatic contexts.
- **Soft Skills:** Professionals develop patience, adaptability, and active listening, all crucial for teamwork and leadership in multilingual settings.

## 6. Facilitating Lifelong Learning

- **Cross-Linguistic Competence:** Intercomprehension motivates professionals to learn additional languages by leveraging similarities with known languages, making multilingualism more achievable.
- **Adaptability in Dynamic Environments:** Professionals stay competitive by acquiring skills for learning and adapting to new languages and communication methods.

### Training sessions

Thanks to the APICAL association and a group of professors who integrated intercomprehension into their students' training, a training session on intercomprehension for international students is organized every year. This session usually lasts three months, from September to December, and involves between 100 and 150 participants, including trainers and students from European and South American universities.

The objective of this training is to design outputs such as e-books, videos, Padlets, or photo diaries to synthesize reflections and exchanges within the international working groups. These groups are created to facilitate plurilingual exchanges and bring together students who wish to interact on the same topic. The intercomprehension sessions are generally divided into five phases:

- **Phases 0 and 1:** During the initial weeks of orientation, students introduce themselves and get to know other participants by completing and reading profiles. Each participant may express themselves in their native language and strive to implement strategies that allow understanding and interaction with speakers of other, little-known or unknown languages. Part of the work focuses on discovering the platform used to promote plurilingual exchanges, which are mainly written. This is carried out on the Moodle platform of the University of Grenoble-Alpes, where a scenario based on the production and post-production phases of a film has been created.
- **Phase 2:** This phase is generally dedicated to selecting a short film, whose content will serve as the guiding thread for the entire training session.
- **Phase 3:** Work begins in international groups composed of one or two participants from each university. During this phase, students create a detailed work programme specifying the title and type of final product, the chosen theme, dissemination methods (e.g., social media or other communication channels), and collaborative teleworking methodology (what needs to be done, who will do it, which tools to use, etc.).
- **Phase 4:** This is the operational phase, where decisions made during Phase 3 are implemented. Participants, under a professor's supervision, may split into subgroups based on assigned tasks

and use tools and platforms for faster communication, such as WhatsApp. Video meetings are widely used to review progress on the final product.

- Phase 5: The final phase focuses on disseminating and promoting the final product to the public through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as evaluating the group outcomes. Assessments are conducted using questionnaires in which participants highlight their progress, feelings, and experiences during the training.

Analysis of these questionnaires has shown that this experience of telecollaborative work is described as fascinating, interesting, enriching, constructive, and energizing. Participants usually identify the training sessions as a new way of learning languages, emphasizing how such an experience could be turned into daily practice and implemented beyond the training itself. They also develop skills beyond language learning, including teamwork, decision-making, patience, time management for task completion, and respect for others' time and perspectives. Students particularly appreciate the opportunity to "act" and create something tangible: the design of a final product was one of the strengths of this type of training.

In summary, integrating Intercomprehension into online multilingual learning and teaching aligns well with professional purposes by equipping individuals with practical communication skills, fostering collaboration, and promoting cultural awareness—all essential in today's interconnected professional world.

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## Personal Branding: A Journey Towards Authenticity

Elisa IANDIORIO

Personal branding is the art of telling who we are and what makes us unique, a journey that goes beyond simply promoting ourselves. In an increasingly competitive world, where the offerings are vast and competition is fierce, the true difference lies in the person. It is not a logo, nor a product, or an advertising campaign: personal branding is what others say about us, the reflection of our identity, and the value we convey.

The main goal is to build an authentic and consistent image, capable of positioning oneself in the job market or within a specific professional field. To achieve this, it is essential to start with a deep understanding of oneself: the skills, strengths, passions, and values that represent us. Only then can we identify the message we want to communicate and the reasons why others should choose us. This process, although complex, is crucial to stand out and leave a mark.

Effective personal branding does not merely make you visible; it helps you stand out and create meaningful connections. It increases job opportunities, improves the perception of your skills, and promotes the development of relationships that can enrich your career. It is a long-term investment that requires authenticity, consistency, and a constant effort to tell your story in an interesting and engaging way.

Promoting yourself does not mean selling yourself, but rather highlighting what makes us unique. It is important to understand that it is not just about what we say about ourselves, but how others perceive what we do and represent. Being authentic is the key: people do not seek perfection, but truth and transparency. The ability to inspire emotions, engage, and make others believe in your value is what transforms personal branding into a powerful tool for growth.

### Key Skills for Personal Branding

Working with personal branding requires a range of multidisciplinary skills that allow a person to create, manage, and communicate their identity effectively. Some of the most important skills include:

#### Self-awareness and personal analysis skills

It is essential to know your strengths, weaknesses, values, and goals. This awareness is the foundation upon which to build an authentic and credible image.

#### Storytelling and effective communication

Being able to tell your story in an interesting and engaging way is key to capturing the audience's attention. A clear, coherent, and authentic narrative can make a significant difference in how others perceive our value.

#### Digital skills

Being present online in the right way is crucial. Knowledge of social media, professional networking

platforms, and content creation tools helps build a strong digital reputation.

### Online reputation management

Monitoring what is said about us on the web, responding appropriately, and working to build a positive online presence are critical aspects of maintaining control over your personal brand.

### Relational skills and networking

Personal branding is not built in isolation. Creating and maintaining authentic relationships with colleagues, partners, and clients is essential for expanding your network and increasing professional opportunities.

### Adaptability and continuous learning

The world of work and communication is constantly evolving. Staying updated on trends and developing new skills is essential to keep your personal brand relevant and competitive.

### Strategy and planning

Effective personal branding is not the result of improvisation. It requires a well-defined strategy that includes clear goals, specific targets, and a plan to communicate your value.

### Empathy and emotional intelligence

Understanding the needs, desires, and emotions of your audience helps to create deeper and more authentic connections. Empathy is one of the keys to establishing meaningful relationships.

### Creativity and originality

In a crowded market, standing out is crucial. The ability to propose innovative ideas and communicate in a unique way can help capture attention and leave a lasting impression.

Telling your story is an exercise in awareness and creativity. Every detail, from the words you use to the way you present yourself, contributes to building a strong and credible image. Even online behavior plays a crucial role, as digital reputation greatly impacts how others perceive us. Being present in the right way, creating relevant content, and engaging in meaningful conversations can make a big difference.

Ultimately, personal branding is not just a strategy, but a journey toward authenticity. It is a way to highlight the best of ourselves, telling not only who we are today, but also who we aspire to become. Being unique is not a coincidence, but the result of a conscious effort that leads us to value our identity, bringing to the surface what distinguishes us and makes us memorable.

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