

**PUBLIC SELECTION BASED ON QUALIFICATIONS AND INTERVIEW FOR THE AWARDING OF NO. 1 EXPERIENCED GRANT LASTING 24 MONTHS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH PURSUANT TO ART. 22 OF LAW NO. 240/2010 AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES (SC 10/G1 - HISTORICAL AND GENERAL LINGUISTICS - SSD L-LIN/01 - HISTORICAL AND GENERAL LINGUISTICS) TYPE B
PICA CODE: 20AR004**

announced with decree of the Chancellor Rep. no. 74/2020 of 10.02.2020 and posted on the official registry of the University on 18.02.2020

RESEARCH PROJECT

“Translation in Slavic intercomprehension: language skills and electronic tools”

Research structure: Department of Foreign languages, literatures and cultures

Duration of the grant: 24 months

Scientific Area: 10 - Antiquities, philology, literary studies, art history

Academic recruitment field: 10/G1 – Historical and general linguistics

Academic discipline: L-LIN/01 – Historical and general linguistics

Scientific Director: Prof. Giuliano Bernini

1) Objective:

The project aims to apply the theoretical and methodological tools of intercomprehension to the practice of translation, with the aim of developing a set of specialized materials for Italian-speaking learners of Russian L2.

The project focusses on translation from and into Polish, a language not directly known to the students, but closely related to Russian. Besides being an official EU language, Polish is also the second Slavic language in terms of number of speakers.

The project consists of two stages. The first empirically investigates the students' translation skills in the absence of specific intercomprehension training; the second is devoted to the development of a training programme aimed at enhancing the pre-existing skills of students. Particular attention will be paid to the electronic tools made available by the recent development of digital humanities.

2) Theoretical framework:

Intercomprehension is a communication mode in which users take advantage of the similarities between languages belonging to the same family (Slavic, in the case of this project) for practical purposes. Under favourable conditions, this makes it possible to avoid the use of a vehicular language in interactions between speakers of languages belonging to the same family.

Research initially focussed on the contrastive analysis of specific languages pairs in order to elaborate specific language teaching tools, some of which were distributed commercially. With few exceptions, these are devoted to the written comprehension of Romance languages: moreover, they typically target native speakers of one of the languages in contact. The potential of intercomprehension for translators have been addressed only marginally, mostly with the goal of increasing the efficiency of translation practice when large quantities of texts are involved, as is the case of EU bureaucracy.

Contemporary translators can count on numerous electronic tools recently developed in the field of digital humanities. These appear particularly valuable in the case of intercomprehension-based translation; indeed, it can be argued that this practice is made possible only by the existence of such tools. In this respect, intercomprehension-based translation appears to be a vast and almost unexplored field of analysis.

3) Research project description:

The first phase of the project aims to collect empirical data on the spontaneous ability of Italian-speaking university students of Russian L2 to translate authentic Polish texts in the absence of specific training.

The second phase involves the development of a minimum syllabus aimed at strengthening such spontaneous skills. In addition to an adequate selection of texts, materials will be prepared along the following lines:

a) linguistic factors. Elements of comparative grammar and vocabulary will be selected in such a way as to consolidate the students' awareness of the more conspicuous differences between Russian and Polish while maintaining a minimum workload.

b) electronic tools. The working hypothesis is that the multilingual material made available by the recent development of digital humanities opens up possibilities so far precluded to translation through intercomprehension. A non-exhaustive list of resources includes the following:

- online vocabularies;
- monolingual and parallel corpora;
- collections of inflected paradigms;
- specific teaching resources for the learning of L2, eg SMARTool.

The experimental phase will involve students of L2 Russian of various proficiency levels enrolled at the University of Bergamo. They will be asked to produce translations to and from L3 Polish.

A first version of the experimental syllabus will be proposed to students of Russian L2 enrolled in the master's degree, preferably as a seminar administered within the Language Competence Centre. Particular attention will be paid to limiting the students' workload as much as possible.

The project also foresees the development of a syllabus on Slavic intercomprehension for users external to the University of Bergamo.

Key-words: translation; Slavic intercomprehension; contrastive analysis; electronic tools

4) Time:

The project spans over two years, thus articulated:

1. data collection and analysis; development of teaching materials and methods;
2. experimental course; evaluation of results; development of a syllabus for external users.

5) Expected results:

Intercomprehension-based translation has the potential to exert a significant positive effect on the language skills of foreign language students.

First, the processing of texts written in an unknown L3 is a form of inductive learning, in which the learner's attention exclusively focusses on the differences with the known L2. Against a minimum workload, this leads to the development of L3 receptive skills.

Second, the pervasive reliance on L2 Russian stimulates thorough meta-linguistic reflection. It is therefore expected that by translating to and from L3 Polish, students will deepen also consolidate their L2 Russian skills.

Third, intercomprehension-based translation heavily relies on electronic tools. These are widely employed in university-level foreign language courses, too; in this respect, practice on L3 texts appears as a precious opportunity to improve one's skills in these tools.

The skills resulting from the proposed activities are likely to exert an immediate impact on student employment prospects. The same methodology can also be applied to the training of external users, bringing a source of income to the University and conferring it greater prestige in the sector.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the didactic applications of intercomprehension have been touched only marginally by existing research. Moreover, while intercomprehension research so far has mainly focussed on native speakers of related languages, this project considers an under-researched population like Italian learners of L2 Russian. The project therefore has the potential to produce highly innovative and impactful publications.

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