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"English, let me join you!"
The pedagogical potential of a short intercomprehension experience in a secondary school using songs in Germanic languages

Abstract
This study explores two individual variables, language aptitudes and beliefs, before, during and after a short intercomprehension experience through songs in two Germanic languages, German and Dutch, with baccalaureate secondary school students, aged 16 and 17, attending a high school in Badalona, a city near Barcelona. A mixed-method methodology with a pre-post design was used to collect data, including one pre-test (n=44) and one post-test (n=46), as well as participants' declarative data during the Germanic intercomprehension (ICG) experience with songs. After carrying out the ICG activity, the results reveal that participants have a slightly better ability to identify short-written fragments in the two target Germanic languages. In addition, there has been a change in students' beliefs regarding their image as language learners. Participants also expressed a more favourable attitude towards exploring new languages and relying on prior linguistic knowledge after the ICG experience. These descriptive findings suggest promising avenues for further research on cognitive and affective variables in the scarcely explored field of intercomprehension.

Keywords: intercomprehension, Germanic languages, songs, language aptitudes, language beliefs

1. *Introduction*

This research is driven by the growing importance of intercomprehension (IC), an alternative approach to language learning that focuses primarily on written —and to a lesser extent, oral— comprehension of words, sentences, and texts in languages that, although initially unfamiliar, share linguistic features with languages the learner already knows or has learned in the past. This is often the case, for example, when learners of Italian can understand Spanish.

Interest in the IC approach is *in crescendo* within today's multilingual European contexts (Pishva, 2019). This trend is supported by key language education policy documents published by the Council of Europe (CoE), particularly *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CoE, 2001; *Companion Volume*, CoE, 2018) and the *Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures* (Candelier et al., 2012). These frameworks have contributed to the growing recognition of pluralistic approaches —of which IC is one— as valuable pedagogical models for enhancing the teaching and learning of additional languages[1].

In this regard, and building upon the pedagogical foundations of IC, a key question emerges: how can learners leverage their knowledge of previously acquired languages to decode unfamiliar ones, and what beliefs do they hold about them? It is important to note that, in the context of additional language education —particularly English— within the Spanish educational system, where this research is situated, explicit connections between languages are rarely emphasized. Instruction tends to neglect the potential benefits of drawing on learners' existing linguistic knowledge to facilitate understanding of syntactic, morphological, or lexical features in new languages.

Several studies have highlighted that the predominance of a largely monolingual model for teaching and learning English has contributed to a declining interest in other additional languages (Arenare, Carrasco Perea & López-Ferrero, 2021; Grzega, 2005; Klein, 2008). These studies, however, emphasize the potential of English to serve as a source of linguistic transfer, supporting the comprehension of other languages. This aligns with one of the core principles of IC: the idea that previously acquired languages can facilitate access to languages structurally or historically connected.

On this point, it is worth noting that English shares several linguistic features with various languages inside the Germanic family such as German, Dutch, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, among others. Yet, some

1 The term *additional language* (AL) is used in place of *second language* or *foreign language*, as these latter terms often imply a hierarchical or sequential model of language acquisition. In contrast, the concept *additional language* reflects the idea that languages are added into the learner's linguistic repertoire without being ranked above or below existing ones (De Angelis, 2007; Judd, Tan & Walberg, 2001).

researchers praise the advantages that learners with an advanced level of English may have in inferring meaning and grasping the general message of texts in Germanic languages (Hemming, Klein & Reissner, 2011; Hufeisen & Neuner, 2004). This idea is encapsulated in the title of this article — "English, let me join you!" — which reflects how Germanic languages, in this occasion, German and Dutch, can be meaningfully introduced in the classroom. Through such exposure, learners can become aware of the linguistic proximity between English and these two languages. In this study, German and Dutch "join" English within an IC-oriented framework for additional language learning, thereby exploring the extent to which a previously acquired language such as English might function as a facilitating language — or "bridge language"— to establish walkaways towards non-initially explored languages.

As stated by López Barrios (2011), in an IC learning environment, press and specialized texts are highly recommendable to develop a basic level in written IC. However, an important question arises: to what extent can IC also be applied using other types of texts? Could songs, for instance, serve as a valuable tool for enabling learners to decipher languages originally perceived as unfamiliar? Salas Alvarado & López Benavides (2017) suggest that the repetition of several structures in pop songs may encourage learners to recognize linguistic patterns, thereby fostering an initial engagement with prior non-explored languages. In this sense, Bokiev & Ismail (2021: 1497) argue that songs are used "not only to make classes more interesting but also to promote learners' [linguistic and] cultural awareness" (brackets are the author's own).

To connect this last statement with the IC approach, it is necessary to mention that choosing pop songs as working texts within this study may 1) stimulate learners' interest, 2) seem a feasible challenge and 3) offer pedagogical value in terms of fostering language learning aptitudes and shaping young language learner beliefs. For these reasons, this investigation seeks to contribute to the still-emerging field of experimental research on intercomprehension by examining its potential impact on two key individual differences in language learning: linguistic aptitudes and beliefs. Therefore, a brief literature review will be presented to outline the central issues concerned in this article.

2. *Theoretical framework*

This study draws on three interrelated areas of inquiry: the teaching of intercomprehension among Germanic languages (§2.1), the pedagogical use of songs (§2.2), and two individual learner variables, language aptitudes and beliefs (§2.3). This final section also explores how intercomprehension-based pedagogical interventions may influence these variables. These three dimensions are presented below.

2.1 An approach to intercomprehension and its studies within the Germanic language family

This first section provides a brief definition of intercomprehension. Even though the concept can be understood from various perspectives —cognitive, social or language policy-oriented—, this article primarily addresses its pedagogical dimension. Since the 1990s, numerous projects and research studies have promoted the educational potential of IC. Yet, the present chapter will concentrate specifically on academic works within the Germanic language family, highlighting the unique contribution of this project within the Spanish context.

2.1.1 Intercomprehension and its didactic prism

Even though intercomprehension can be defined in multiple ways, it may be succinctly described as an alternative pedagogical approach in linguistic education that seeks to encourage learners to make them aware, respectful, and proactive towards other languages that may coexist in their respective contexts. In an IC learning environment, learners activate their linguistic repertoire to understand one or more languages based on previously acquired knowledge of other languages (Clua & García Santa-Cecilia, 2019). IC-based initiatives aim to foster this intrinsic ability that learners possess to comprehend languages in both written and/or oral forms.

While most IC research has been devoted to the Romance language family since the mid-1990s, this article draws attention to projects and studies dealing with intercomprehension among Germanic languages to justify the relevance of the present study.

2.1.2 Projects and academic research in Germanic intercomprehension

In relation to pedagogical initiatives involving Germanic languages, it is essential to distinguish between two geographical contexts. On the

one hand, the European context has generated a more extensive body of projects that have subsequently been implemented in classroom settings. On the other hand, a significant initiative has emerged in Latin America, driven by a research group from the National University of Córdoba in Argentina.

The following table lists the main pedagogical projects developed in Germanic intercomprehension.

Table 1. Pedagogical projects in Germanic intercomprehension. Key: E: European, L: Latin-American.

E or L project	**Pedagogical projects in Germanic intercomprehension**
E	*EuroComGerm – Die sieben Siebe: Germanische Sprachen lesen lernen* (Hufeisen & Marx, 2007)
E	*EIC* [*European Intercomprehension*] or *ICE* [*Intercompréhension Européenne*] (Castagne, 2004)
E	*IGLO* [*Intercomprehension in Germanic Languages* Online] (University of Tromsø, 1999)
E	*SIGURD* [*Socrates Initiative for Germanic Understanding & Recognition of Discourse*] (VOX Voksenopplæringsinstituttet, 2003)
E	*English: The Bridge to the Romance Languages* (Hemming, Klein & Reissner, 2011)
E	*The Plurilingualism Project: Tertiary Language Learning - German after English* (Hufeisen & Neuner, 2004)
L	*INTEGER: Manual de intercomprensión en lenguas germánicas para hispanohablantes* [*INTEGER: Intercomprehension handbook in Germanic languages for Spanish speakers*] (Lauría de Gentile, Merzig, Trovarelli, van Muylem & Wilke, 2016).

In terms of academic research on intercomprehension involving one or more Germanic languages, we may cite studies by Grzega (2005), Klein (2008), Möller & Zeevaert (2010) and Marx (2011). Even though these studies are grounded in a theoretical-philological perspective, they conclude that prior knowledge of one Germanic language —mainly English— facilitates access to other languages within the same family. English, in fact, not only aids comprehension of Germanic languages but also of Romanic languages, owing to its dual heritage, with approximately 60% of its lexicon deriving from Latin (Grzega, 2005).

More recently, two quasi-experimental studies —based on a doctoral dissertation—have examined how young learners aged 10-14 years, following IC training, were able to decode more effectively various Romance languages and improve their written comprehension in English by their prior knowledge in this language (Arenare, 2024; Arenare, Carrasco Perea & López-Ferrero, 2021).

Despite these promising findings, hardly any experimental research has been uniquely devoted to Germanic languages, and almost none to date has explored the pedagogical use of songs, a text typology whose pedagogical application in the classroom context could be highly beneficial for language learning.

2.2 Songs and their pedagogical use in the classroom

In the second part of this article, we focus on the pedagogical potential of songs in the language teaching and learning process. As stated in the examined literature, music has a remarkable capacity to facilitate the acquisition of linguistic elements. In this regard, we consider pop songs —the most used genre in the reviewed studies— to be particularly well-suited for pedagogical use in the classroom when introducing IC, as they entail a feasible challenge for young learners.

2.2.1 Research on the use of songs for language learning

Music is a ubiquitous element in everyday life and serves as a therapeutic outlet for many individuals to escape from their routine (Bokiev & Ismail, 2021; Salas Alvarado & López Benavides, 2017). It is therefore reasonable to consider that the incorporation of songs into the classroom can contribute positively to the learning environment. According to Failoni (1993), when used with clear pedagogical aims,

songs can enhance learners' communicative competence. Furthermore, research has shown that the use of music in language instruction not only reduces classroom anxiety but also increases learner motivation and attentiveness. In the English as a Foreign Language[2] (EFL) context, songs have been found to positively influence learners' pronunciation, as well as grammar and vocabulary acquisition (Davis, 2017; De Castro Martínez, 2014; Legg, 2009; Tegge, 2018).

Aligned with the multilingual approach adopted by Rekelj (2013) in her doctoral research on the use of music, this study explores whether working with songs in languages unfamiliar to learners can foster not only motivation but also linguistic development. The following section outlines how IC can be applied as a pedagogical lens for reflecting on linguistic similarities and differences through the medium of song.

2.2.2 Songs and linguistic features: how can they be applied pedagogically through IC?

It is known that songs, particularly pop songs, often rely on simple, repetitive structures. This repetition has a positive cognitive effect, as it facilitates the automatization of linguistic patterns, and a linguistic advantage because it exposes learners to authentic input (De Castro Martínez, 2014; Failoni, 1993; Sundberg & Cardoso, 2018).

From an intercomprehension perspective —focused on listening and reading— working with songs in prior "unseen" languages may serve as an engaging and intellectually stimulating activity. This approach encourages learners to approximate meaning in multiple languages and to develop comprehension strategies. Sundberg & Cardoso (2018) advocate that such activities can enhance learners' "reading readiness". They argue that, within brief metalinguistic reflection, learners acquire "decoding strategies" that support their understanding of texts in related languages —for instance, Spanish learners being predisposed to decode Galician.

Considering this, approaching songs through an IC perspective offers a valuable opportunity to encourage young learners to activate existing

2 The term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is used in this case as it is the most widely used concept in the examined literature, even though the word foreign, aligned with our point of view, entails a negative connotation.

strategies for reading in other languages and to foster an attitude of openness toward linguistic diversity. This study therefore considers two individual variables, language aptitudes and beliefs, to examine whether a short IC pedagogical experience using songs in two Germanic languages —hereafter referred to as ICG experience— may positively influence young learners' linguistic development.

2.3 Individual variables: language aptitudes and beliefs

Language aptitudes and beliefs have been taken into account in this study, as they are recognised as two of the most influential variables in language learning (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020). Drawing on the application of the IC approach in our research, we explore whether, following a brief ICG experience, students' aptitude for decoding statements in previously unknown languages improves, and whether their beliefs shift toward a more proactive and open attitude to the languages they are currently learning —or would like to explore in the future.

2.3.1 The concept of language aptitude and its approach in this study

In second language acquisition (SLA), *language aptitude* has traditionally referred to an individual's innate ability or talent to learn languages, often associated with stable, cognitive traits (e.g. Carroll, 1981). However, in the present study, we adopt a broader and more dynamic understanding of this construct, distancing ourselves from views that frame aptitude as a fixed or innate trait.

Instead, we conceptualise *language aptitude* as a learner's predisposition and set of emerging linguistic skills that allow them to decode lexical, morphological, and other structural features of prior unexplored languages. This approach aligns more closely with usage-based and plurilingual models of language learning, where learners develop partial and evolving competences in multiple languages based on exposure and strategy rather than on innate talent alone.

In this sense, we also reject the idea of "gifted individuals" with exceptional language knowledge, as it is often difficult to determine "the number of languages they have learnt […] in view of the lack of clear-cut criteria as to what counts as knowledge of a language" (Biedroń & Pawlak, 2016: 165). No language user possesses complete competence across all skills in all languages; one may have strong oral

or written comprehension but more limited production skills. This view is consistent with one of the pillars of IC as a pedagogical approach: learners possess partial, yet dynamic, competences across their language repertoire.

Furthermore, we consider language aptitude to be a complex phenomenon influenced by contextual and intrapersonal variables (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020). Learner testimonies analysed by Griffiths & Cansiz (2015) highlight that motivation and beliefs are intricately linked to aptitude and can foster a positive mindset towards language learning. Accordingly, we hypothesise that after the ICG experience, students may gain a greater appreciation for their existing language knowledge and develop a broader vision of future language learning possibilities, a phenomenon that is intrinsically related to language beliefs.

2.3.2 The concept of language belief and its research trajectory

The concept of *language belief* is notoriously difficult to define and is often regarded as a "fuzzy concept" (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020: 149). Consequently, it encompasses a constellation of related terms, including *attitudes*, *values*, *opinions,* and *judgements*. For this study, we adopt Griffiths' (2018: 22) working definition of a *belief* as "something which an individual holds to be true, e.g. 'I am/am not a good language learner'".

Language beliefs have been extensively researched over the past four decades (Abdi & Asadi, 2015). Among the most influential contributions is the work of Elaine Horwitz, who developed the *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) in the late 1980s (Horwitz, 1987, 1988). This 34-item questionnaire has become "one of the most widely used instruments in studies on beliefs about language learning" (Abdi & Asadi, 2015: 105). In the study, the BALLI is adopted to assess whether baccalaureate students exhibit changes in their beliefs about English and other language-related dimensions following the ICG experience.

In this sense, learners' beliefs offer insight into their interest in learning (new) languages, their perceived predisposition to do so, and the outcome they expect. We therefore argue that it is relevant to examine students' beliefs about the value of languages —both in general and in relation to specific items in the BALLI— before and after the ICG experience.

2.3.3 The impact of intercomprehension in language learners' beliefs and aptitudes

Students hold beliefs that influence how they process, envision, and relate to any language. While deeply held beliefs may be resistant to change, it is ultimately the learner's openness and willingness to revise them, which can lead to meaning transformation. A shift in beliefs, in turn, may positively affect their language aptitude by enhancing receptivity to new input and strategies.

In this regard, the study by Arenare, Carrasco Perea & López-Ferrero (2021), which serves as a methodological reference for our research, is particularly relevant. In their study, middle school students in Italy (aged 10-14) participated in a pre- and post-test design. There was a comparison between a control group and an experimental group (referred to as GIC) that received a 21-hour IC pedagogical intervention with Romance languages. After the intervention, students in the GIC showed a greater ability to identify the target language in presented statements and were more prone to take risks in naming a language rather than responding with "I don't know". This outcome "can be interpreted as an indication of a new openness towards otherness", Arenare, Carrasco Perea & López-Ferrero (2021: 12).

Accordingly, our study addresses both language aptitudes and beliefs to 1) assess whether there is an observable change, after the ICG experience, in how learners identify and decode two unexplored Germanic languages, and 2) explore if students' beliefs evolve in relation to specific BALLI items —especially those concerning English and sociolinguistic perceptions— following their engagement with the ICG activity.

3. *The study*

This chapter presents the key components of the empirical research conducted in this study. It is organised into three main sections: section 3.1 introduces the research questions; section 3.2 describes the research context and participants; and section 3.3 outlines the methodological approach, including the research design, instruments for data collection and procedures for data analysis.

3.1 Research questions

This study is guided by four research questions: two focus on the variable of language aptitude, and the other two address students' language beliefs. The aim is to explore the impact of an intercomprehension-based pedagogical experience, centred on the use of songs in German and Dutch, on baccalaureate students' ability to decode unfamiliar languages and on their beliefs about language learning.

RQ1. To what extent are baccalaureate students able to decode and identify short written statements in German and Dutch after participating in the ICG experience with songs?

RQ1.1. How is this receptive ability demonstrated: through correct identification of the target language(s), accurate decoding of meaning, or both?

RQ2. In what ways do baccalaureate students' language beliefs change after participating in the ICG experience with songs?

RQ2.1. Which specific changes can be observed in students' beliefs about the English language and other language-related issues (e.g. learning potential or language difficulty)?

3.2 Context and participants

The study was conducted in a Spanish public secondary school with students aged between 16 and 17, in May 2022. The investigation consisted of three phases: in the first one, the project was introduced, and a pre-test was administered; in the second one, the researcher delivered a one-hour ICG session using songs with baccalaureate students and, in the third phase, a post-test was distributed, and students provided feedback regarding their enjoyment of the ICG activity (see §3.3.2 for further details).

Learners were attending a high school in Badalona, a city near Barcelona. A total of 44 students took part in the pre-test phase, 55 in the ICG session, and 46 in the post-test phase. Except for one participant, none of the students had previously studied or been exposed—either formally or informally—to the two Germanic languages used in the ICG experience (German and Dutch). The vast majority reported having

an intermediate or advanced level of English, and nearly half of them indicated holding a basic certificate in French (A1 or A2 level). This suggests that most participants had some degree of knowledge of at least one additional language beyond Spanish and Catalan.

Although participants were speakers of both Spanish and Catalan (and in some cases other home languages), 30 out of 44 reported primarily using Spanish in personal and public domains. This raises questions about whether participants' inferencing during the comprehension of German and Dutch was predominantly based on Spanish or other languages in their repertoire.

3.3 Methodology

In the following section, a brief introduction to our chosen methodology, a mixed-method design, is provided. Subsequently, the instruments used in the research are described, along with an explanation of the data analysis procedures.

3.3.1 Mixed-method design

This research adopted a mixed-method design based on a pre-post approach with the same group of students, although in the high school they were divided into two groups. By analysing data from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, we aim to "increase the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of the study" (Dörnyei, 2007: 173).

As it has been mentioned above, the study was structured in three phases: the pre-phase, the experimental phase, and the post-phase. Quantitative data were primarily collected during the pre- and post- phases, while qualitative data were gathered throughout the experimental phase.

3.3.2 Instruments and data analysis

For this research, several quantitative and qualitative instruments were combined. A brief pilot phase was done to value the suitability of the quantitative tools, which were two questionnaires. Quantitative data were collected through a pre-test (n=44) and a post-test (n=46). Both tests incorporated 6 items from the original 34-item BALLI questionnaire to explore participants' beliefs about English and related sociolinguistic aspects. Additionally, 4 items developed by the researcher were added by the researcher to seek students' perceptions of whether English was related to other languages (e.g. "The languages that I

frequently use are related with English", "English helps me understand other languages"). Two additional questions were also proposed to collect learners' beliefs regarding the similarities they thought English had with other languages and about the ability they thought they had to comprehend a list of languages, with a particular focus on the target languages of the ICG activity, German and Dutch.

Regarding the language aptitude variable, a short exercise was administered in both tests, featuring statements in various languages to assess participants' ability to identify and interpret unfamiliar linguistic input. For each statement, participants were asked to complete two tasks: first, to identify the language they believed the sentence belonged to; and second, to write down what they could understand from the sentence, or which elements helped them infer its meaning. If they were unable to make any guess, they could simply write "nothing". The pre-test included 15 statements, 3 in German, 3 in Dutch, and 9 distractors in other languages such as Italian, Portuguese, or Latin. The post-test increased this to 20 statements, including the same six German and Dutch items, which are listed in the following table.

Table 2.German and Dutch statements used to analyse the language aptitude variable.

Language	**Statement**	**English Translation**
German	Wo ist es?	Where is it?
German	Das gefällt mir.	I like this/that.
German	Einen schönen Tag.	(Have) a good day.
Dutch	Waar is het?	Where is it/he?
Dutch	U kunt gaan zitten.	You can sit here.
Dutch	Dank je.	Thank you/Thanks.

Qualitative data were collected during the ICG experience with 55 participants from two separate classes, each attending an identical session led by the researcher. Students were unaware of the activity's purpose or the languages involved. The session focused on listening to and reading the lyrics of two pop songs: one in German, *Lieder* (Songs) by Adel Tawil, and another in Dutch, *Als Het Avond Is* (When It Is

Evening) by Suzan & Freek. The main objective was to observe to what extent students could understand words in both languages based on their prior linguistic knowledge and whether they could provide justifications for identifying the language of each song. For each song, students first answered "What do you think the song is about?". Then, during a second listening, they noted familiar words, inferred possible meaning, and identified the language of the song. When reading the lyrics, students were instructed to underline familiar or recognizable words.

These tasks were followed by a 12-minute group debate, conducted in small groups of 3 to 6 participants, in which students reflected on the activity through a series of metacognitive and metalinguistic prompts prepared by the researcher (e.g. "What language did you work with?", "Did you find any familiar words?", "Do these languages have anything in common?"). Although all groups were asked to record the discussion and send it to the researcher, only 7 did so, yielding data from 27 students (about half the participants).

For data analysis, quantitative data were primarily treated descriptively, reflecting the exploratory nature of the study. The short duration of the one-hour ICG intervention and inconsistencies in participant attendance between the pre- and post-tests made paired analyses methodologically unsuitable, as such analyses require consistent participation and sufficient intervention length to yield meaningful changes. To address these limitations and avoid overinterpretation, the study adopted a descriptive and exploratory approach. Nonetheless, non-parametric inferential tests —specifically the Mann–Whitney U-test — were employed to explore potential differences between independent groups, without assuming paired data.

Qualitative data were transcribed following the transcription conventions of Calsamiglia & Tusón (1999) and Tusón (1995) and analysed using basic content and discourse analysis criteria.

4. *Results*

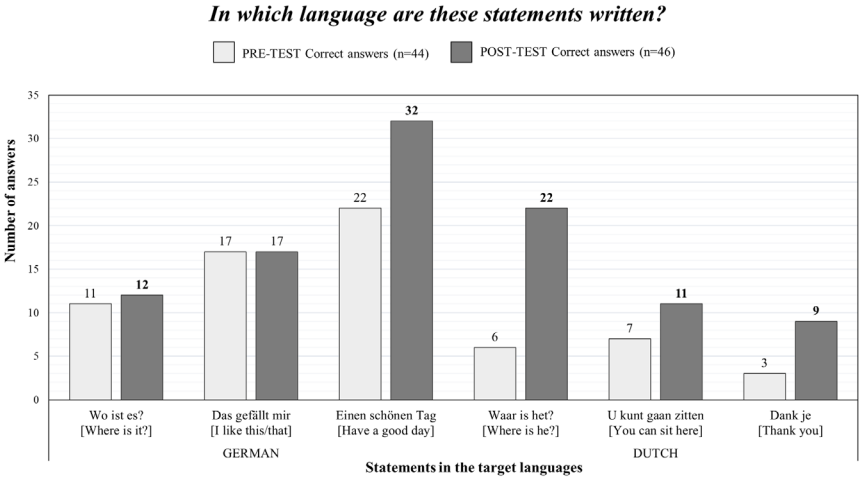
This chapter presents the results obtained from the ICG experience, focusing on two main aspects: students' aptitude to decipher German and Dutch (Section 4.1), and their beliefs as language learners (Section 4.2). While the activity lasted only one hour, the analysis provides insights

into possible shifts in students' linguistic awareness and attitudes. Nevertheless, all interpretations should be made cautiously, considering the limited time frame and the exploratory nature of the intervention.

4.1 Regarding students' language aptitude to decipher German and Dutch

Results reveal that participants, after carrying out the ICG experience, showed a slightly improved ability to identify written fragments in the two target Germanic languages. This outcome can be observed in the following graphic, where improvement is evident in 5 out of 6 statements in German and Dutch.

Graphic 1. Correct answers in the pre-test and post-test activity with statements in German and Dutch.



In addition, after the ICG activity, fewer students selected the "I don't know" answer, as illustrated in the following graphic. In 4 out of the 6 sentences in German and Dutch, learners were more willing to take a risk and associate each sentence —some of them correctly— with a specific language.

Graphic 2. Answers with the "I don't know" option in the pre-test and post-test activity with statements in German and Dutch.

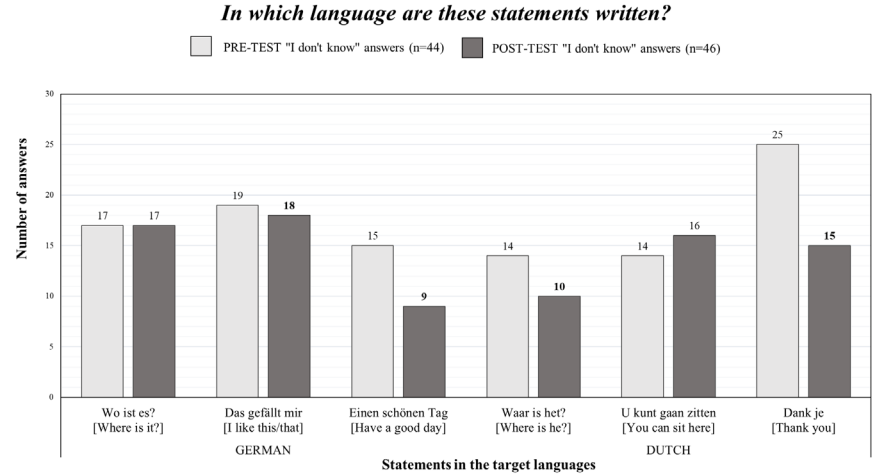


Table 3. Comments on the German and Dutch statements given in the pre-test and post-test.
Note: Students answered in Spanish; for this reason, pronouns are frequently elided in this language.*

		COMMENTS IN THE PRETEST (n=44)	COMMENTS IN THE POSTTEST (n=46)
GERMAN	Wo ist es? [Where is it?]	No correct answer was given.	No correct answer was given.
	Das gefällt mir [I like this/that]	No correct answer was given.	1 correct answer was given ("I like something")
	Einen schönen Tag [Have a good day]	No correct answer was given.	2 correct answers were given ("Have a nice/wonderful day") 4 students advocated that Tag was "day" in German
	TOTAL OF COMMENTS	**35 comments**	**38 comments (3 of which were correct)**
DUTCH	Waar is het? [Where is it/he?]	No correct answer was given, though one student was almost close (Where is she?)	3 correct answers were given ("Where is (he)?")*
	U kunt gaan zitten [You can sit here]	No correct answer was given.	No correct answer was given.
	Dank je [Thank you/Thanks]	1 correct answer was given with its correct association ("Thanks" with the Dutch option) 3 correct answer were given with an incorrect association ("Thanks" with the German option)	8 correct answers were given with an incorrect association ("Thanks" with 7 German option and "Thanks" with 1 Russian option)
	TOTAL OF COMMENTS	**22 comments (1 of which was correct and 3 partially correct)**	**43 comments (3 of which were correct and 8 partially correct)**

Although, comprehensibly, the results are not statistically significant (the highest being 0.069 for correct answers to the statement *Dank je*, with the significance threshold set at 0.05), they may indicate a slight increase in students' ability and willingness to associate unknown linguistic input with related languages. In this sense, it is also worth examining whether students were able to interpret the meaning of these statements (see Table 2). If so, this would support the idea that brief exposure can foster some understanding of previously unexplored languages.

As shown in Table 2, students were able to produce more acute comments on the statements after the ICG activity. It is worth noting that the sentences used in both the pre-test and post-test did not appear in the pop songs used during the activity. Therefore, students could not rely on previously seen material. However, some linguistic elements —such as proper nouns, pronouns, and conjunctions— were indeed present in the lyrics. In the metalinguistic activity, students acknowledged that such elements helped them establish connections with previously learned languages, particularly English, and made sense of words and verses in the songs:

S2 {G1, L15-L16}: […] *war* | eh: *Land* eh: **because they are *mainly* English words** | then Michael (laughs) which is a noun in English em:
S6 {G2, L5}: and: *basically* we have recognised **German for its use of dieresis** […]
S8 {G3, L15}: *Ägypter* | Egypt {XXX} […] **meiner mine "mío" the possessive in English** […]
S15 {G4, L17}: we coincide that most **words were *similar* to English and Spanish and Catalan**
S16 {G5, L25-L26}: […] it is true that **in French there were *similar words*** and its way of *pronouncing* it [referring to Dutch] was quite similar […][3]

3 S stands for student; G, for group, and L, for the line in which the statements were found in the conversation. These statements were originally expressed in Spanish, but an approximative translation has been done so that the reader gets an insight of the main ideas that baccalaureate students declared in the metalinguistic exercise. Words in italics show emphasis given by students and their importance in the discourse. In brackets, there are sentences to contextualize what learners are referring to.

Moreover, several students reported that the ICG experience helped them discover new languages, stimulated curiosity about further learning, and let them reflect on their existing linguistic knowledge. These reflections on aptitude are closely tied to changes in students' beliefs, which are addressed in the next section.

4.2 Regarding baccalaureate learners' language beliefs

After the ICG experience, some changes were observed in students' beliefs about their image as language learners and their perception of English and other language-related issues. At this point, we would like to highlight what students answered in these two questions, formulated via a 6-point Likert scale from 0 to 5: "What relationship has English with these languages?" (see table 3) and "To what extent are you able to understand these languages?" (see table 4).

Table 4. Language learners' beliefs about the bonds between English and German and English and Dutch.

What relationship has English with these languages?		Values in Likert Scale (0: nothing, 5: a lot)								
		0	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN	MODE	MEDIAN
Pre-test (n=44)	GERMAN	**12**	8	7	5	10	2	1.97	0	2
Post-test (n=46)		7	6	9	**11**	**11**	2	**2.41**	3.5	2
Pre-test (n=44)	DUTCH	8	**11**	8	8	8	1	2.00	1	2
Post-test (n=46)		5	10	9	**14**	6	2	**2.26**	3	2

Regarding the perceived relationship between German and English, while the most common answer in the pre-test was 0 (no relation), students' responses shifted to a mode of 3.5 in the post-test, indicating a more positive view. As for Dutch, 11 students initially noted some similarity with English. In the post-test, 14 students gave more confident answers. The lower score in the Dutch-English comparison may reflect the novelty of Dutch for many learners, as some expressed:

S2 {G1, L30}: I **knew *absolutely* nothing** about the Dutch language
S13 {G4, L1}: we have worked with the German and Dutch languages and I don't know about you but **I knew *nothing* about them**
S14 {G4, L2}: ***nothing*** | me neither **we knew nothing about them *but* now we know a little more**
S18 {G5, L3-L4}: **I have said Dutch but I could have said another thing *truth told***

This sentiment is also reflected in Table 4, where students reported on their perceived ability to understand the two languages.

Table 5. Language learners' beliefs about their capability to understand German and Dutch.

To what extent are you able to understand these languages?		Values in Likert Scale (0: nothing, 5: a lot)								
		0	1	2	3	4	5	MEAN	MODE	MEDIAN
Pre-test (n=44)	GERMAN	**26**	12	5	1	0	0	0.56	0	0
Post-test (n=46)		**18**	**18**	8	2	0	0	**0.87**	0.5	1
Pre-test (n=44)	DUTCH	**30**	8	5	1	0	0	0.47	0	0
Post-test (n=46)		**25**	19	0	2	0	0	**0.54**	0	0

After just one hour of exposure, students only slightly adjusted their views on their ability to understand German and Dutch. In the case of German, a third of the students reported that they could understand it "a bit" (value 1). For Dutch, however, perceptions shifted less, likely due to the language's unfamiliarity. These modest shifts suggest some early metalinguistic awareness after the ICG experience with songs, though they remain limited in scope and should not be overstated.

Another aspect that warrants attention is students' responses to selected BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) items, as they provide additional insights (see Table 5).

Table 6. Students' answers regarding some BALLI items. A 4-point Likert scale was contemplated for this part (1 for "strongly disagree"; 2 for "not strongly agree"; 3 for "somewhat agree", and 4 for "strongly agree").

	People around me think that it is important to learn English.				
	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)
Pre-test (n=44)	1	2	15	26	44
Post-test (n=46)	2	2	8	**34**	46

	Learning English (or any other language) is learning to translate it from other languages I know better.				
	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)
Pre-test (n=44)	10	18	11	5	44
Post-test (n=46)	7	15	**19**	**5**	46

	I have a special skill that helps me learn English (and other languages).				
	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)
Pre-test (n=44)	15	13	11	5	44
Post-test (n=46)	**8**	**19**	13	6	46

	Some people have a special ability that helps them learn English and several languages.				
	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)
Pre-test (n=44)	4	5	12	23	44
Post-test (n=46)	5	4	**22**	**15**	46

In the first row of Table 5, in the item "People around me think that it is important to learn English" there has been a slight increase in the value 4 responses in the post-test. This suggests that more students strongly affirmed English's value as a language of immense potential. For the item "Learning English (or any other language) is learning to translate it from other languages I know better" we can see the following result: while students opted for answering in the pre-test on the strongly disagree or not strongly agree scale, in the post-test a higher number of positive responses, but especially in level 3, is found out. Therefore, the scale in the post-test is moved towards the values of "agree". This may indicate an increased awareness of language transfer and strategic processing.

In the second row, for the item on the left "I have a special skill that helps me learn English (and other languages)", it becomes evident that more students, 19 in total, selected value 2 for this item in the post-test. This contrasts with answers in the pre-test, whose mode is value number 1 (strongly disagree). This might reflect a growing, albeit cautious, confidence in their linguistic abilities. Notably, the adjacent item shows a decrease in the number of students selecting value 4 in the post-test (15 out of 46, compared to 23 out of 44 in the pre-test), suggesting they were less inclined to attribute language learning success to a "special ability" that only others possess. This shift implies that students may now see language learning as more achievable and less dependent on innate talent. It aligns with the idea that a brief intercomprehension experience can prompt them to question prior assumptions and adopt more realistic beliefs.

Despite these shifts after the ICG experience, it is important to underline that most results were not statistically significant. Only two items showed significant changes before and after the ICG experience which must nonetheless be interpreted within the limits of a one-hour exploratory session.

Table 7. Students' answers regarding items with relation to the relationship between languages.

	English helps me understand other languages.					*The language(s) I use most frequently are related to English.*				
	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)	1	2	3	4	TOTAL (n)
Pre-test (n=44)	7	12	18	7	44	15	19	5	5	44
Post-test (n=46)	4	8	**18**	**16**	46	**7**	18	**15**	6	46

The item "English helps me understand other languages" reached a significance level of 0.029 by applying the Mann-Whitney U-test. In the post-test, 34 students (74% of the sample) answered with values 3 or 4, suggesting that English is perceived as an aid to learning other languages. This is likely tied to their realisation, during the ICG activity, of English's affinity with German and Dutch. Similarly, for the statement "The language(s) I use most frequently are related to English", baccalaureate learners shifted from values 1 and 2 in the pre-test to 2 and 3 in the post-test, with a significance level of 0.019.

To conclude this section, we highlight several reflective comments from students, collected during the post-test:

> "You can **understand isolated words from a language which is *completely* distant** to yours habitually".
> "**We *fool* ourselves with "I don't know this language**". That is, I've seen that **if we think beforehand, we can *actually* get to understand a lot**".
> "We can **understand *a lot far more*** than we think of languages we don't know".
> "Some languages are similar: **if you know one language, you can learn another one similar easily**".

These comments reflect students' emerging awareness of intercomprehension. Despite their initial unfamiliarity with the target languages, they began to perceive the potential to understand and learn them. While encouraging, these reflections represent early-stage outcomes of a short intervention and point to areas for further exploration and pedagogical development.

5. *Discussion*

This chapter discusses the main findings of the study considering the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, particularly concerning plurilingual competence, intercomprehension, the use of songs in the classroom context and learners' beliefs and attitudes. The results suggest

that the ICG activity —although limited in time —activated learners' existing linguistic resources and opened new perspectives on language learning.

One of the clearest effects was the increased self-confidence shown by participants when faced with statements in German and Dutch. They were more willing to attempt comprehension and made less use of the "I don't know" option in the post-test, suggesting lower anxiety and higher engagement. This tendency aligns with the concept of reading readiness (Sundberg & Cardoso, 2018) and supports the idea that learners can activate inferential strategies even in languages they have never studied.

Sevel students relied on English as a mediating or bridge language, showing awareness of its "transferability power" (Hemming, Klein & Reissner, 2011) and using it to navigate German and Dutch. Some participants also referred to a Romance base in these languages, an interesting metalinguistic intuition that echoes Grzega (2005) and Klein (2008). Although their perception may not be linguistically accurate, it reveals how learners build hypotheses based on previous knowledge and perceived proximity.

This perception is connected to plurilingual openness (Coste, Moore & Zarate, 2009) and confirms that intercomprehension can foster an attitude of exploration, approximation, and metalinguistic reflection. These tendencies were also visible in the post-test beliefs questionnaire, where students expressed a more positive view of English, saw themselves as more capable language learners, and valued the role of previously acquired languages in learning new ones. This supports findings from Arenare, Carrasco Perea & López-Ferrero (2021), who showed that IC activities can reshape learners' beliefs.

It is important, however, to interpret these results with caution. The intervention consisted of a single one-hour session, and the quantitative findings did not show statistically significant improvements in comprehension. Although some qualitative changes are evident —especially in students' attitudes and openness— they cannot be generalised. Additionally, we cannot conclude whether the use of songs supported structural or lexical learning, as this would require a more prolonged and targeted intervention.

Nevertheless, the activity helped us observe how learners activated their plurilingual repertoire in a contextualised, motivating task.

The familiarity of the genre (songs), combined with the novelty of the languages, created a space for curiosity, experimentation, and metalinguistic reasoning.

6. *Conclusions*

This study aimed to explore the potential impact of an intercomprehension-based activity involving songs in German and Dutch on young learners' linguistic aptitudes and beliefs. Although the intervention was brief and the quantitative results were not statistically significant, the findings provide some meaningful insights into how learners interact with unfamiliar languages.

With regard to language attitudes, the results indicate that baccalaureate students were slightly more capable of identifying and understanding short statements in German and Dutch after the ICG activity. Participants showed greater willingness to engage with unfamiliar linguistic input, and the number of "I don't know" responses decreased modestly in the post-test. This suggests a reduction in language-related anxiety and a greater openness to interacting with languages they had never studied.

Concerning language learners' beliefs, the data show a positive shift following the ICG experience. Participants expressed a stronger perception of English as a valuable language in their environment, an increased sense of self-efficacy as language learners, and a heightened awareness of the role of language transfer to approach the feasible learning of other languages from a receptive perspective. Two items in the questionnaire showed statistically significant changes related to the perceived connection between English and other languages, as well as the usefulness of previously acquired languages in learning new ones. These findings reinforce the relevance of intercomprehension as an approach that can support the development of plurilingual competence and promote more confident attitudes toward language learning.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the study does not provide sufficient evidence to determine whether the use of songs can directly support the acquisition of grammatical structures or vocabulary in previously unexplored languages. One of the main limitations of this research is the duration of the pedagogical experience, which was

restricted to a single one-hour session. Despite this limitation, the activity seems to have contributed to (1) awakening students' interest in lesser-known languages, (2) inviting them to adopt a more open and exploratory stance towards language diversity, and (3) activating learners' latent linguistic potential through a familiar textual genre, which is music.

Looking ahead, future research in the emerging field of experimental intercomprehension could explore additional variables within the cognitive and affective domains, particularly through more extensive and varied pedagogical interventions. Expanding the scope of studies to include a broader array of target languages, text types, and longitudinal approaches would also help to capture more nuanced developments in learners' aptitudes and beliefs over time. In an increasingly multilingual world, nurturing the ability to engage with unfamiliar languages with curiosity and confidence represents a key educational goal, and intercomprehension appears to be a promising pedagogical path toward that aim.

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