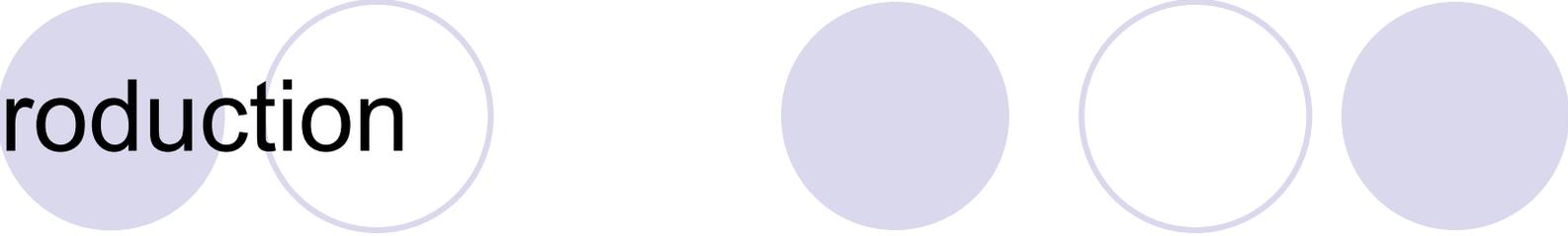# Intercomprehension activities: newspapers

Eu&I Training course for teachers and trainers

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Introduction

- Why "newspaper" activities?

EU&I project work has been divided among thematic focus groups, based on

a) possible *sources* for people to engage in intercomprehension (newspapers, tv, stories, multimedia, songs)

b) modes of communication (production vs. comprehension)

c) processes in intercomprehension (e. g. the role of stereotypes)

Composition of thematic group

- Composition of the "newspaper" thematic focus group: based on
  1. interest in source
  2. language diversity: authors of activities are
     - Rea Delveroudi (University of Athens) : *Greek*
     - Argyro Moustaki (University of Athens) : *Greek*
     - Carmen Nogales (IES Vaguada de la Palma, Salamanca): *Spanish*
     - Todor Shopov (Sofia University): *Bulgarian*
     - Katja Pelsmaekers (University of Antwerp): *Dutch*
- 4 countries, 4 languages, 3 alphabetic scripts : this is reflected in the activities that were developed

Focus of newspaper activities: weather

- Weather reports: why?
  - Newspapers include a wide range of text formats: e.g. advertising, photo captions, recipes, text articles, sports tables, weather reports
  - Informal experiments with a variety of such text formats in 4 different target languages had shown that
    - for texts in a "remote" language (i.e. not close to native language or other known languages) the text is better understood when
      - its "genre" can easily be detected
      - people have clear expectations about the genre
      - there is a substantial amount of paralinguistic and graphic information
    - (please turn over)

Focus of newspaper activities: weather (ctd.)

- there is a mixture of better and less familiar elements in the text (e.g. recognisable proper names or "international" words mixed in)

- Weather reports have all of the above, and more:

  - affective component 1: people are usually interested in the weather
  - affective component 2: Weather and geographical maps are easily associated with *leisure* and *travel,* which many people feel positive about.

Weather reports
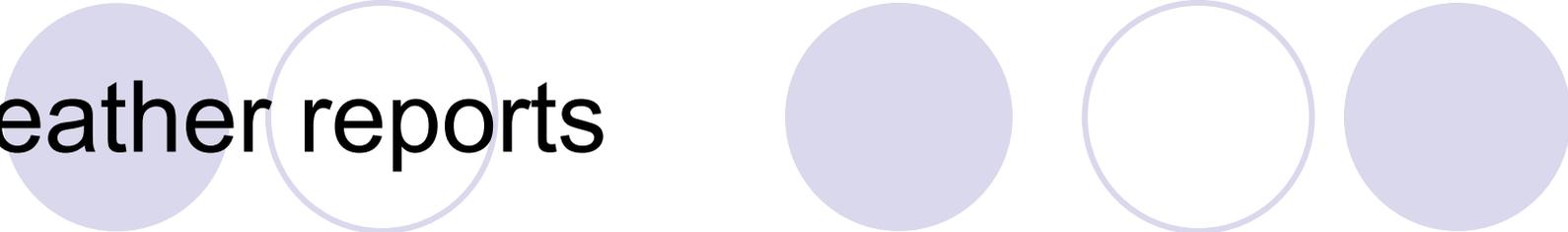
- National newspapers in the 4 target languages had weather reports with
  - Recognizable maps
  - Placenames which would allow for a decoding of an unfamiliar alphabetic script
  - Internationally used weather icons (e.g. sun/cloud) which would allow for smooth meaning generation
  - *Repetition* of message in full text

Weather reports: a guided tour

- Relative "difficulty" of languages?
  - Many Europeans have a second language: English, French, German are popular second languages
  - Spanish and Dutch are quite "close" to French and German respectively, and use the same alphabet >>> Spanish activities are more "advanced" and further away from weather report reading
  - Greek and Bulgarian are more remote: not so close to popular second languages and different alphabetical script >>> these activities are somewhat simpler and oriented to deciphering the alphabet

Weather reports: a guided tour

Now use the DVD and click on the newspaper to start; you will see:

- a simple outline map of Europe;
- shapes of Greece, Bulgaria, Spain, Belgium highlighted;
- under the map, four click – and - drag suitcases bearing the names of the four capitals in the local spelling and script:

  Brussel, Madrid, Αθήνα , София

- soundfiles linked to the suitcases so that when you double-click on the suitcases, you hear the pronunciation of the names of the capitals in the target language.
  - Try this out: does it work?
  - What have you already learnt about the sound value of the following Greek and Bulgarian letters: (Gr.) θ, ή, ν (Bulg.) C, ф, и, я ?

Weather report: Greek target language activities

- Go the map of Greece
  - do not forget to double-click on Ελλάδα / Αθήνα
    >>> which new letters/sounds have you learnt?
- Go the Greek weather (report)
  - have you discovered what it is called ? (Ο ΚΑΙΡΟΣ)
- There are two weather maps, and the user is asked to *infer* what *today's* map is and match "today" with its Greek equivalent
  - what is/are the principle(s) underlying this inference task?

Greek target language activities II

- ## Reading minimum and maximum temperatures for Athens today; features:

  - Distinguishing the form **Αθήνα** (3rd encounter!) from other Greek forms

  - Reading universal figures

  - Reading icons for minimum and maximum

  - Learning from mistakes: the Greek forms that are the "wrong" answer also have sound files so that even more letter/sound associations can be picked up

  - "Help" function redirects user to earlier screen with the correct form **Αθήνα** (= 4th viewing)

Greek target language activities III

- Now go to the next step: maps of Greece and Europe
    - As in the preceding step, a previously viewed form, ΕΛΛΑΔΑ, is now set off against a new form, ΕΥΡΩΠΗ, which is nevertheless also resembling the form that the user knows in his/her own language.
    - This step is moreover made "easy" because user recognises the shape of the maps >>> cf. goals of the project: make people aware that intercomprehension is possible and feasible!

Greek target language activities IV

- Next steps:
  - reinforcing acquired knowledge, and adding new elements, (e.g.) ΚΟΣΜΟΣ, which many users will also partly recognize from their own language(s).
  - conscious reflection on script and language

- Can you complete these exercises now?

Bulgarian target language activities

- Now go to the Bulgarian weather report activities and do them.

- Answer the questions:
    - Was this Bulgarian section developed according to the same principles as the Greek one?
    - Did you think it was easier or more difficult?
    - How much can you now remember from what you learnt in the Bulgarian activities?
    - Have these activities changed your perceptions about the "difficulty" of Bulgarian?

Dutch target language activities

- Different emphasis: no attention to script, reference to other Germanic languages. Ethnocentric?

  - Most people in Europe know the latin alphabet (if only by having a second language in this script) >>> we assumed the script would not pose a problem.

  - Many people in Europe know either English or German as a second language but not Dutch >>> reference to better known languages that have many forms in common.

  - Activities sometimes rely on "implications": if you can read the weather map, what does that imply for the luggage you take

Dutch target language activities II

- Emphasis
  - Development is less gradual: words are taken out of their context and are to be matched with icon, while going back and forth to context remains possible

    - Maan

  - More emphasis on "content" of weather report and test of text comprehension in multiple choice questions
  - Attention to phonetics (comprehension of spoken forms) and spelling that is possibly misleading, from the point of view of reference languages (English, German)

Spanish target language activities

- ## Most "advanced" activities
  - Spanish has many elements that return in many other European languages; Spanish is increasingly powerful as second language
  - Avoiding boredom with user (endless weather reports) >>>weather report recedes into background to the advantage of "the way", i.e. a popular pilgrimage itinerary
  - Reliance on common cultural heritage rather than current knowledge of newspaper genre

Spanish target language activities II

- Now go to the Spanish activities and do them.
  - Make a note of
    - Your estimate of the difficulty of these activities for the general public
    - How you performed yourself: how often did you get negative feedback?
    - How long did it take you to complete the Spanish section?
    - Is there a significant difference with time spent in other sections?

Weather report activities: evaluation

- Now that you have tried the activities yourself, answer the following questions
- Time:
  - Were you able to complete the activities in a reasonable time? (i.e. did you not get bored before you were finished)
- Clarity:
  - Was it always clear what you were expected to do?
  - Were feedback and help screens effective in that respect?

Weather report activities: evaluation II

- **Attractiveness**
  - Did you find the activities attractive?
  - What would have to be changed to make them more attractive?

- **Text and image**
  - Do you think there is a healthy balance between how much text and image you get on the screen?
  - Would you change anything here?

Weather report activities: evaluation III

- ## Overall effectiveness
  - Would you say you became more aware of the possibilities of intercomprehension (in a newspaper context)?
  - Do you have the impression you have learnt something of the target languages while you were doing the activities?