

## **Mutual Intelligibility of Closely Related Languages within the Romance language family**

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### **Thématique : Médiations**

As part of a research on the mutual intelligibility of 16 European languages (3 main language families – Germanic, Slavic and Romance), this paper investigated the mutual intelligibility within the Romance language family. Native speakers of Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, French and Italian participated in three different tests, all of them in a written and spoken form. The first test was a simple word translation task where the participants were confronted with 50 words in the related language and had to translate them to their native language. We used this method to test intelligibility on the word level. The second test was a cloze test, which is a text where 12 words were deleted and put on top of the text. The participant's task was to fill the gaps. This test was chosen to test intelligibility on a text and sentence level. The last task was a picture test where the participants would read or hear a text in a related language and then had to pick the right picture out of four. This was designed to investigate the overall understanding of a closely related language.

The online experiment was conducted from October 2013 until and data is still collected until April 2014. Anyone was able to participate. Age, level of education, background knowledge, language attitudes, language contact and other factors were later taken into account and the groups were matched to be comparable.

The results vary depending on age and education, as well as depending on the factor whether the test was a written or spoken one. For this paper we chose a group of high educated 18-30 year old with no background knowledge in the test language. The overall results show that on all levels Spanish and Portuguese are show the highest mutual intelligibility (including a high asymmetry for the spoken tasks), followed by Spanish and Italian. French is clustered further from the three mentioned above and Romanian shows the smallest degree of intelligibility with the remaining Romance languages. However, for Romanian a high asymmetric intelligibility was measured. Romanians understand all the other Romance languages to a much higher extent than vice versa.

We also measured the orthographic, phonetic, syntactic and morphological distances among the material using the Levenshtein distance measurement. The results of the distance measurement and of the experiment will be correlated to create a model of mutual intelligibility in general and for several subgroups (e.g. the above mentioned paper).