

Receptive multilingualism

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Course level: introductory

Course description

If two people do not speak the same language as their native, what are their options for communicating? They could use English, or one person could switch to the language of the other, if they speak it well enough. But there is one other possibility that does not require too much language knowledge: if the languages in question belong to the same family, both interlocutors could simply speak their native language. This mode of communication is called receptive multilingualism (RM) and has been used between speakers of Czech and Slovak; Swedish, Danish and Norwegian; Spanish and Portuguese; Serbian and Macedonian for decades.

This course offers an introduction to theoretical and methodological approaches to receptive multilingualism in Europe. We start by defining receptive multilingualism, exploring its use throughout history and discussing different modes of communication people can use when their native languages differ. Secondly, we discuss the notion of mutual intelligibility, which is a prerequisite for successful RM communication and introduce the MICReLa project, whose main goal is to measure intelligibility of different Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages. Next, we focus on linguistic factors influencing intelligibility of closely related languages i.e. the similarities in the lexicon, phonology, syntax etc. The fourth lecture is devoted to extra-linguistic factors influencing intelligibility and here special attention will be paid to the attitudes of Serbian and Croatian speakers to each others' varieties and the potential influence attitudes may have on intelligibility in the future. Finally, we shall explore whether receptive multilingualism can be increased by teaching i.e. if we can train people to understand another language better without actually giving them a standard language course.

Day-to-day programme

Lecture 1: Receptive multilingualism in Europe: history and current language policies

Lecture 2: Mutual intelligibility of closely related languages

Lecture 3: Linguistic factors influencing intelligibility

Lecture 4: Extra-linguistic factors influencing intelligibility

Lecture 5: Didactic approaches to receptive multilingualism