LINGUA FRANCA VS. LINGUA RECEPТИVA: DOES ENGLISH ALWAYS WORK BETTER?

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ABSTRACT

In its 2007 report, the European Commission’s High Level Group on Multilingualism noted a lack of knowledge on interlingual communication possibilities in Europe and called for a more thorough investigation into the potentials and limitations of receptive multilingualism and English as a lingua franca (ELF). While previous research has focused on different aspects of ELF, including phonology, lexico-grammar and pragmatics (Jenkins et al, 2011), the intelligibility of English as a lingua franca is still in need of closer examination. Furthermore, the use of receptive multilingualism, whereby interlocutors speak to each other using their own native languages, is yet to be explored, as this phenomenon has mainly been studied in the Scandinavian context so far (see Gooskens, 2013).

This study investigates whether it is easier to understand a closely related language or non-native English produced by a speaker whose mother tongue is closely related to the listener’s native language. In particular, the study examines how well Slovenian and Portuguese native speakers deal with Croatian and Spanish respectively compared to non-native English produced by the same speaker. For the purposes of the experiment, native speakers of Croatian and Spanish were recorded narrating two short films in their respective mother tongues and English. A total of 142 Slovenian and 85 Portuguese speakers took part in the experiment, in which they listened to one of the recorded Croatian and Portuguese speakers telling a story in their native language and English. The intelligibility of the two modes of communication was measured using multiple choice questions. The results show that intelligibility of both language modes in both groups is relatively high, although Slovenian participants scored higher when confronted with a Croatian speaker telling a story in English than when listening to a recording in Croatian. In addition, a number of extralinguistic factors were also considered in an attempt to gain deeper insight into the nature of intelligibility of lingua franca English and lingua receptiva.
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1. Introduction

Verbal communication is a process in which interactants exchange information through spoken or written messages in order to achieve mutual understanding. To reach this goal, the speaker or writer needs to ensure that the message they are conveying can be appropriately decoded by the listener or reader. Not surprisingly, the necessary prerequisite for sending and receiving verbal information is that interlocutors share a common linguistic background, as verbal communication is likely to fail if this requirement is not met.

Communication between speakers of different native languages is normally conducted in one of the three ways: using a lingua franca such as English, interacting in a mother tongue of one of the interlocutors or by exchanging messages with each of the interlocutors speaking their own L1. While speakers of genetically unrelated mother tongues are as a rule forced to resort to the first or sometimes to the second mode of communication, speakers of closely related languages may also employ the third option as a way of getting the message across. However, the extent to which interaction in one’s own mother tongue is feasible depends on the linguistic relatedness between the languages in question and, naturally, on the degree of mutual intelligibility of the two or more tongues. Quite intuitively, the closer languages are genetically, the greater possibility that the speakers will be able to understand each other. Yet, as globalization is gathering pace and the knowledge of foreign languages is on the rise, even speakers whose mother tongues are closely related tend to switch to a lingua franca, usually English, in order to ensure better understanding.

Despite the fact that the knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, is increasing consistently, there are still many people who do not speak an L2 or whose communicative language competences are not at a level which would allow a successful interaction. In such situations, communication between speakers of closely related languages appears to be only possible by means of their mother tongues. Moreover, even if the interactants do speak a foreign language which may qualify as a lingua franca, it is not clear whether communication can be even more successful if they converse in their native languages. Whether communication between speakers of closely related first languages is likely to be more successful through interaction in mother tongues or English is exactly what the present study aims to investigate.
1.1. Motivation for the study

As we live in an increasingly connected world, communication plays an essential role in various aspects of life, including education, business, trade, health care and travel. This is particularly evident in Europe, as many different languages and dialects are spoken in relatively small area compared to other continents. Since the majority of the European population lives in the European Union, many citizens and other stakeholders in the member states are bound to interact with speakers of different languages on a daily basis, not just in an official form, but also in numerous informal encounters, given that freedom of movement is one of the core EU values. Yet, in spite of frequent interactions with speakers of other languages, communication among EU citizens is not always successful due to many reasons, the major one being that interlocutors cannot always find a common language.

In 2007 the European Commission’s High Level Group on Multilingualism published a report addressing communication issues in the EU and set out a number of recommendations for promoting linguistic knowledge and diversity in the member states. Ever since the Maastricht Treaty multilingualism has been of key EU policies, whose aim is to encourage both language learning and language preservation. This gained even a more significant momentum during the first decade of the twenty-first century, which saw the largest influx of new countries in the history of the Union. As a result, the number of new official languages more than doubled during the period.

In the Report, the Group noted that communication in the EU still needs to be improved and pointed out that multilingual competence is of paramount importance for both the society and citizens as individuals (European Commission, 2007: 22). Furthermore, the High Level Group also proposed a set of recommendations for research into multilingualism. Among other things the Group urged for an empirical investigation into the potentials and limitations of English as a lingua franca in Europe as the most common means of monolingual dialogue between different language communities. Another research area recommended by the Group is the potential use of receptive multilingualism among speakers of the three largest language families in Europe – Germanic, Romance and Slavic, with a particular emphasis on identifying interlingual communication strategies employed within these three language groups (European Commission, 2007: 21–22).

Research on English as a lingua franca gathered pace over the course of the previous decade. Many scholars have dealt with various aspects of the use of English at an international level and a comprehensive overview of the research will be provided in the next
chapter. Both theory and practice have attested that English acts as the *de facto* lingua franca in Europe, as it is the most commonly spoken second language in the EU. However, monolingual communication in English is often fraught with problems, as speaker proficiency varies at both national and international levels. On the other hand, research into receptive multilingualism is only in its infancy, especially in Europe, where communication in first languages between speakers of closely related languages has only been investigated in some contexts and regions, such as Scandinavia and the Low Countries.

Following the conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Group on multilingualism, this project aims to empirically test communication between speakers of two pairs of closely related languages in Europe by comparing the intelligibility of non-native English and a related language. In particular, this study will examine whether interaction between native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, and Croatian and Slovenian, is more effective if conducted in English as an intermediary language, or if conversation is also possible or even more likely to succeed if performed in the respective native languages. Thus, the ultimate goal of the investigation is not only to explore the potential of these two modes of communication, but also to set a basis for future research and provide guidance for language policies both in the EU as an umbrella institution and countries where the test languages are spoken.

This thesis is divided into 6 sections. Following the introductory remarks, Section 2 provides a comprehensive overview of the research on English as a lingua franca and receptive multilingualism respectively and casts light on some of the key concepts underpinning these two fields. Section 3 deals with the methodology and data used in the study, whereas Chapter 4 reports on the results of the experiments. Section 5 discusses the results and implications of the study. Finally, section 6 concludes the thesis and points to some limitations of the study.
2. Background

This section is structured as follows. I first define some of the essential concepts relating to the phenomenon English as a lingua franca and give an outline of research done in this field. I then introduce the notion of receptive multilingualism, drawing extensively on prior research and basic theoretical constructs. Following a theoretical overview, I specify the main research questions that will be addressed in the present study.

2.1. Lingua franca

Throughout history and depending on the context, era and linguistic traditions, many languages have been used as a lingua franca to enable speakers of different mother tongues to communicate with each other. During the period of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, Greek and Latin most commonly acted as mediums of communication between speaker communities of two mutually unintelligible languages (Phillipson, 2008). Furthermore, Aramaic, Arabic, French, Malay, Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili among others have also had a lingua franca status at various points in history (see Ostler, 2005).

Lingua franca can be defined as “a language that is used for communication between groups who do not speak each other’s languages, as well as between native speakers (if any) of the lingua franca and other groups” (Thomason, 2001: 269). According to Jenkins et al, (2011) and following Knapp & Meierkord (2002), the term lingua franca originally referred to a pidgin language that used to contain features of several Italian dialects, as well as Arabic, Greek, French, Persian, Portuguese and Spanish and it was primarily used for trade and commerce. English emerged as a major lingua franca much later, although it was used earlier as a medium of communication in British colonies in Africa and Asia. In addition, Meierkord (2012) also points out that lingua franca originally stood for an auxiliary language that was associated “with its performing very specific and restricted purposes only”.

2.1.1. Defining English as a lingua franca

English as a lingua franca (ELF) started to receive attention from scholars during the 1980s, when the phenomenon was studied as part of applied linguistics and intercultural communication and in these initial stages researchers were mostly focused on interactions between non-native speakers of English (Meierkord, 2012). The expression English as a
lingua franca started to be used during the 1990s, when authors explored this matter within the framework of sociolinguistics, pragmatics and conversation analysis. However, it was only in the 2000s that ELF research gathered pace, with numerous theoretical, empirical and corpus-based studies published since then.

Although *prima facie* the term English as a lingua franca appears easy to grasp, this linguistic phenomenon has been approached from different perspectives and therefore its definitions often vary. In her monograph on theoretical and conceptual issues around lingua franca English, one of the most prominent scholars specializing in the field, Barbara Seidlhofer, defines ELF as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice” (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7). This definition implies that lingua franca English is not a homogenous language system which strictly follows the norms of native English, but rather a tool which serves for establishing communication between speakers not sharing the same mother tongue. Moreover, ELF defined like this assumes that native speakers also act as ELF users, taking into account that English is also employed as a lingua franca by native speakers in their interactions with non-native speakers. For some authors native speakers do not qualify as ELF users, including Flirth (1996), who regarded ELF as a medium of communication “between persons who do not share a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication (1996: 240). As English clearly is not a foreign language for its native speakers, Flirth thus argues that we can only speak of ELF if it involves non-native speakers. This view is, however, not supported by the majority of researchers specializing in this field, who claim that native speakers cannot and should not be excluded from ELF communication.

### 2.1.2. ELF vs. EFL

Ever since ELF research gained momentum at the turn of the 21st century, scholars have insisted on drawing a clear line of demarcation between the concept of lingua franca English and English as a foreign language. The former is a medium used in interactions between speakers of different L1s, whereas the latter is a variety of English which is used in formal settings such as school and which is geared towards communication with native speakers of English. Another important linguistic feature that helps distinguish ELF from EFL is code switching, which is regarded as a major pragmatic resource in lingua franca communication, whereas this phenomenon is treated as a gap in knowledge in the field of English as a foreign
language (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010). In other words, while the main purpose of ELF communication is to get the message across and to enable mutual understanding between interlocutors of different mother tongues, the primary concern of EFL learners is to reach native-like proficiency to the highest possible level (Jenkins et al, 2011).

Nevertheless, such a distinction has been met with disapproval by some EFL and ELT authorities. In a reaction to an article by Widdowson (2012) on implications of ELF from both sociolinguistic and teaching perspectives, Swan (2012) argues that EFL and ELF should not be viewed in opposition to each other, as EFL is a prerequisite for the use of English as a lingua franca and therefore these two concepts cannot be separated from each other. In a reply, Widdowson (2013) suggests that ELF research should help language professionals reconsider the way English is conventionally taught, pointing out that English used for international communication has become a common language in its own right that is not expected to conform to the traditional native speaker norm. Widdowson’s view is shared by most leading ELF researchers (e.g. Seidlhofer, Jenkins and Cogo, referred to later in the paper), who claim that ELF should not be regarded as a deficient version of native English, but rather as a heterogeneous variety with its own properties (discussed in detail in section 3).

2.1.3. ELF and World Englishes

English as a lingua franca is often discussed in relation to the World Englishes paradigm. The term World Englishes refers to all varieties of the English language spoken around the world. When describing World Englishes, the most commonly accepted model which helps capture the concept is that of Kachru’s (1985), consisting of three concentric circles. The first is the Inner Circle, which stands for regions where English is used as a first language, namely the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle comprises all regions which had gone through the period of Anglophonic colonization and where English is used as a second or additional language, such as India, Singapore, Nigeria, Ghana or Zambia. In these countries, English has established itself as a language used for official, co-official or educational purposes (Bolton, 2012). The third and the largest circle is the Expanding Circle, which refers to all those regions where English is used as an “international language” and where English is typically taught as a foreign language. For example, those regions include countries such as China, Brazil, Spain, Germany, Russia, Egypt or Saudi Arabia.
In an attempt to relate the ELF to the World Englishes paradigm, Jenkins (2009) suggests that ELF does not only comprise the use of English in the Expanding Circle, but also includes communication in which English is used as a first or second language (i.e. in the Inner and Outer Circles). This view is also shared by Seidlhofer (2004), who argues that the international use of English (i.e. *lingua franca*) should not only be conceptualized in the context of the Expanding Circle only, considering that native speakers of English (i.e. Kachru’s Inner Circle) and those of the indigenized English varieties (i.e. the Outer Circle) also take part in interlingual interactions in which the medium of communication is English.

### 2.1.4. Research trends in English as a *lingua franca*

As mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of English as *lingua franca* started to receive scholarly attention during the 1990s. A study that introduced the ELF concept was the one by Flirth (1996), in which, as noted above, he proposed a definition of *lingua franca* English as a chosen medium of communication between speakers who do not share a common first language. His study was focused chiefly on interactions between non-native speakers of English, in an attempt to demonstrate that communication can still be successful despite deviations at various levels from the standard English norm. As we will see later, the mainstream ELF movement gradually distanced itself from making comparisons between *lingua franca* and the so-called proper English. Such an approach was already heralded in 1999 by House, who called for a more thorough analysis of the nature of ELF interactions in order to find out whether such communication is actually *sui generis*, that is, a linguistic variety in its own right.

A major breakthrough in ELF research occurred in 2000 with the publication of the seminal work by Jennifer Jenkins. In this empirical study Jenkins showed that intelligibility problems in ELF communication could be largely attributed to phonological features in interlocutors’ speech. The principal goal of the investigation was to identify which phonological features led, and which did not, to failure in communication in English as a *lingua franca*. The data were collected from non-native English speakers of various L1 backgrounds and using diverse methods including recordings of naturally occurring speech and field observation. In particular, Jenkins looked at communication breakdowns in mixed L1 classrooms, information gap activities involving pairs of listeners and speakers of different L1s, as well as at the way nuclear stress is produced and received. The obtained qualitative data prompted Jenkins to create what she labelled as Lingua Franca Core, i.e. the crucial
characteristics that play an essential role in ELF intelligibility, but also to come up with a list of non-core features that are generally not expected to impinge upon ELF interactions.

According to Jenkins (2000), there are several pronunciation features that comprise the Lingua Franca Core, and without which intelligibility would be significantly impeded. These include:

- all consonants, except for dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ and dark ‘l’ /ɫ/, which did not cause intelligibility problems in Jenkins’ data,
- initial consonant clusters as in ‘sport’ or ‘bring’,
- vowel length distinctions, as in ‘live’ /liv/ and ‘leave’ /li:v/ or ‘ship’ /ʃip/ and ‘sheep’ /ʃi:p/ and,
- the place of nuclear (tonic) stress.

Apart from the sounds /θ/, /ð/ and /ɫ/, the following phonological features are classified by Jenkins as non-core, i.e. not aggravating intelligibility: vowel quality, weak forms of function words, consonant assimilation and other features of connected speech, word stress placement\(^1\) and stress timing. Another important conclusion of Jenkins’ research concerns phonological accommodation, i.e. a situation in which speakers adjust phonological features to make their pronunciation more intelligible. More precisely, she observed that speakers made an additional effort to accommodate their speech depending on whether it was important for the listeners to understand every word or not. Accommodation is usually associated with the term ‘convergence’ and normally takes three main forms: replicating the interlocutor’s ‘deviant’ forms (e.g. an Italian speaker omitting the initial /h/ in the word ‘hill’ when talking to a French speaker, in order to make his pronunciation more intelligible if the French interlocutor produces the same form); adopting NS phonological forms (especially when the interlocutor is not of a similar L1 background), and avoiding certain NS forms and expressions (e.g. booze instead of alcohol; see later Seidlhofer, 2004). Furthermore, although there have been some attempts to replicate this study over the past years (e.g. Pickering, 2009), no studies so far have offered findings opposite to those of Jenkins’, which is why the above-mentioned core and non-core pronunciation features are still considered as highly

\(^1\) Word stress refers to the prominence assigned to a syllable in a polysyllabic word. Conversely, (tonic) stress represents the most prominent syllable in a tone unit, which is a term used in the study of intonation. Some utterances may be broken down into tone units, each of which carries a nuclear tone. If a particular segment in a tone unit is stressed, listener attention will be drawn to it. For example, in the sentence *He bought a MOTORBIKE*, the nuclear (tonic) stress is on the word ‘motorbike’, as the speaker places emphasis on the piece of information he or she thinks is important. However, if the speaker focused the listener’s attention on something he or she did not intend to, this can negatively affect intelligibility. For more details, see, for example, Roach (2001).
relevant in the research of ELF intelligibility. Still, it is worth noting that Jenkins’ conclusions are chiefly based on observations and their impact on intelligibility has never really been empirically tested.

Another major area of interest among scholars has been the role of lexis and grammar in ELF communication. A number of corpora involving interactions in English among speakers of a wide range of L1s have enabled a detailed insight into these aspects of ELF use, including the VOICE corpus\(^2\) compiled by researchers at the University of Vienna in Austria, and the Corpus of English as an Academic Lingua Franca\(^3\) at the University of Tampere in Finland. The analyses of these and other corpora allowed for identifying some recurring lexical and grammatical forms that learners appear to employ in ELF communication. The evidence from corpora reveals that interactants make use of linguistic forms in various creative ways, which sometimes do not follow the standard native speaker norm. In fact, many studies such as Cogo & Dewey (2006) have shown that speakers of various first languages exhibit similar language features in their ELF interactions and, more importantly, that these forms were found to be beneficial for communicative situations. Seidlhofer (2004) provides a comprehensive overview of lexical and grammatical forms that are characteristic of lingua franca interactions. Although the salient ELF forms which she identified are considered erroneous or deficient by English language specialists, corpus findings have revealed that the use of such linguistic material hardly poses any significant obstacle for the intelligibility of English as a lingua franca. These features include the following:

- Dropping the third person present tense -s
- Confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*
- Omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL, and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL
- Failing to use correct forms in tag questions (e.g., *isn’t it?* or *no?* instead of *aren’t they?*)
- Inserting redundant prepositions, as in *We have to study about…*
- Overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do, have, make, put, take*
- Replacing infinitive-constructions with that-clauses, as in *I want that*
- Overdoing explicitness (e.g. *black color* rather than just *black*).

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\(^2\) Available online at: [http://www.univie.ac.at/](http://www.univie.ac.at/)

\(^3\) Available online at [http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/elfacorpus](http://www.helsinki.fi/englanti/elfa/elfacorpus)
On the whole, none of these deviations from standard English led to any serious communication breakdowns or obscured intelligibility in the VOICE corpus. Nevertheless, Seidlhofer (2004: 220) points out that some other issues were found to cause misunderstandings, including what she calls “unilateral idiomaticity”, where certain expressions such as idioms, phrasal verbs or metaphors used by the speaker may pose a problem if the interlocutor is not familiar with a particular set expression (e.g. piece of cake for something that is very easy). In this regard, Seidlhofer (2004) calls for devising a method to operationalize and measure the ELF communicative success with respect to intelligibility and acceptability of interactants’ pronunciation and lexicogrammar. The present study will attempt to address this issue.

2.1.5. ELF in Europe

Moving on to lingua franca communication in Europe, the status of the so-called European ELF in this region is yet to be explored. English is undoubtedly the de facto lingua franca in Europe (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010), since it is used as a primary medium of communication among non-native speakers in the European context. It acts as a lingua franca in virtually all formal and informal interlingual interactions in Europe, starting from the EU, various business, academic and political settings and meetings, to casual conversations. Keeping in mind such a widespread use of English in lingua franca contexts, Europe can be regarded as a typical example of the Expanding Circle. Furthermore, Berns (2009) notes that ELF researchers have not adopted a single term to refer to ELF use in Europe and consequently proposes the terms European English and Euro-English in order to capture the sociolinguistic reality of its use among Europeans for interlanguage communication. However, this label has not gained currency yet, possibly because such terms might be perceived as slightly derogatory, just like Asian English or Chinglish\(^4\).

As far as research into ELF use in Europe is concerned, so far the focus has been primarily on corpus-based and descriptive studies, while empirical and quantitative approaches have hardly ever been adopted. The previously mentioned VOICE project carried out at the University of Vienna produced corpora of ELF interactions among speakers of different L1 backgrounds, thus providing valuable resources for analysing naturally-occurring ELF conversations. The VOICE corpus has helped identify some general features in ELF use

\(^4\) Chinese English
predominantly in the European context, while more in-depth analyses are yet to be performed. Furthermore, language attitudes in ELF communication have been investigated in the LINEE project (see Cogo & Jenkins, 2010, which looked at the perception of lingua franca English among university students in Hungary, Czech Republic and the UK. Based on the qualitative data collected in individual interviews, speakers in all three countries were aware of the importance of ELF communication and generally exhibited positive attitudes towards ELF skills and accents of non-native speakers of English.

2.1.6. Intelligibility and ELF

One of the fundamental issues in research on English as a lingua franca is that of intelligibility. Not surprisingly, the success of an interaction in English as a medium of communication between speakers of different L1 backgrounds will ultimately depend on how well the interlocutors can understand each other. In this sense, communicative success can be approached from various perspectives: whether interactants are able to recognize sounds, words or utterances, whether they are able to grasp the meaning of a word or utterance, or whether the speakers can correctly decipher the intention the speaker is trying to convey in an utterance.

Overall, intelligibility has been an elusive concept, which has sparked somewhat divergent definitions and views among researchers. Probably the most widely accepted approach to intelligibility is the so-called Smith paradigm, which was proposed by Smith & Nelson (1985) and further refined by Smith (1992). The broader concept of Intelligibility, written with a capital ‘I’ consists of three components: intelligibility (with a lower-case ‘i’) in the narrow sense, comprehensibility and interpretability (see also Nelson, 2008). Intelligibility in the narrow sense refers to word or utterance recognition, or the correct identification of distinct elements of speech. Comprehensibility entails assigning a meaning to a word or utterance, which Smith & Nelson (1985) associate with the locutionary force within Speech Acts Theory (see Austin, 1962). Finally, interpretability represents the most complex level and is concerned with the recognition of the speaker intention behind the meaning of the word or utterance, which according to Smith and Nelson corresponds to the notion of the illocutionary force.

A word or utterance may thus appear completely intelligible to a speaker, but comprehensibility and especially interpretability of the linguistic unit can be obscured at the
same time. To illustrate, the sentence *He’s such a wet blanket* may appear perfectly intelligible to a listener, as he or she is able to identify all the words, but the same person will not be able to comprehend the sentence if or she is not familiar with the figurative expression *wet blanket*, which stands for a person who wants to spoil other people’s enjoyment. On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that an utterance can be comprehensible, but not intelligible, and in this sense, intelligibility in speech can be paralleled with legibility in writing (Sewell, 2010.) Moving on to a higher semantic level, an expression can be both intelligible and comprehensible, but its interpretability might be hampered. For instance, the utterance *It’s so hot in here* is likely to be both intelligible and comprehensible, but the listener may not be able to correctly interpret what the speaker is trying to communicate if he or she does not realize that the speaker’s intention might be to elicit an appropriate reaction (e.g. that the listener turns on the air conditioner or open the window).

Another group of researchers, most notably Munro & Derwing (1995), Derwing & Munro (1997) and Munro (2008), have taken a slightly different approach to intelligibility in the context of L2 speech, which might have led to a certain confusion in terminology. The above-mentioned scholars make a distinction between intelligibility, comprehensibility and accentedness. Intelligibility is defined by Munro & Derwing (1995: 291) as “the extent to which an utterance is actually understood”, which corresponds to the Smith’s representation of the same notion. Comprehensibility, on the other hand, refers to the perceived difficulty in the listener’s attempt to understand the utterance. Finally, accentedness refers to the way the speaker’s non-native pronunciation is perceived by listeners. Munro & Derwing (1995) do point out that what they called “heavily accented speech” may not always be lower in intelligibility and comprehensibility than non-accented speech, but they do not seem to draw a clear line between intelligibility and comprehensibility as Smith does. In fact, comprehension and accentedness defined as above do not seem to play a significant role in communication, as they are rather subjective categories and do not reflect the actual understanding of the message by the listener. In addition, the perceived difficulty in speech comprehension is very difficult to operationalize, as the listener might think that they have understood the message and therefore rate it as easier to understand, when in reality they failed to apprehend the meaning of the utterance. In the present study, the term intelligibility will be used in its widest sense as conceptualized in the Smith paradigm (spelt here with a lower-case ‘i’ for the sake of convenience) and will correspond to the above described concept of ‘comprehensibility’.
2.1.7. Mutual intelligibility of English as a lingua franca

Research on intelligibility of English as a lingua franca is still in its early stages. So far scholars have been mostly focused on intelligibility in native speaker – non-native speaker interactions, whereas comprehension in ELF communication in the Expanding Circle is yet to be explored and described in more detail. In general, intelligibility may be affected to a lesser or greater degree by different variables, including speaker and listener factors (see Pickering, 2006). With respect to speaker factors, prosody was found to be a major obstacle in successful decoding of messages in interactions between native and non-native speakers. More precisely, non-native speakers of English are more likely to be understood better by native speakers with improvements in grammatical and prosodic accuracy, rather than with primary focus on the correct production of phonetic segments (see, for example, Munro & Derwing, 1995; Derwing & Munro, 1997). Conversely, in ELF interactions involving solely non-native speakers, pronunciation issues seem to create the most serious difficulties in comprehension, as demonstrated in Jenkins’ (2000) study referred to above. Jenkins also argues that syntactic inaccuracies do not present a significant barrier to intelligibility, which was also reported by Meierkord (2004), unlike, for example, familiarity with vocabulary, which can be a consistent source of intelligibility problems in ELF communication.

Listener factors have also been shown to play a significant role in the mutual intelligibility or lingua franca English. An important factor affecting comprehension is how well a listener is familiar with the pronunciation of a particular non-native speaker group, i.e. the way they realize their phonemic inventory in English. For instance, Bent & Bradlow (2003) measured the mutual intelligibility of English sentences uttered by Korean, Chinese and American English speakers and identified what they called a “matched interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit”, as non-native listeners found highly proficient speakers with whom they share a native language to be as intelligible as native speakers of English. Additionally, a number of other factors may impede intelligibility in ELF interactions, including listener attitude (Smith & Nelson, 1985), level of listener tiredness, familiarity with a particular topic, etc.

As regards mutual intelligibility of English spoken by non-native speakers of English, several studies have been conducted so far, including the one by Wang (2007) at the University of Leiden, which is particularly relevant for this project. In her PhD thesis, Wang compared how well speakers of American English, Dutch and Chinese understand each other when speaking English. Drawing on the results of Bent & Bradlow (2003) and measuring
intelligibility at the sentence and word level, Wang’s main hypothesis was that interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit will indeed play a role in mutual intelligibility, or in other words, that the more distant two L1s of the speaker and listener, the lower intelligibility of English. Her results show that in terms of correct phoneme identification the listener effect is much higher than the speaker effect. She also found that all three listener groups gained advantage from interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit, as they scored higher when presented with recordings of a speaker with whom they share a native language. Additionally, the intelligibility benefit was highest for the Chinese speaker-listeners combinations, since the Chinese phonemic repertoire is rather different from that of American English and Dutch. On the other hand, English and Dutch are much closer genealogically, which is why the effect of shared L1 is much lower for these two groups of listeners.

Munro et al. (2006) investigated the intelligibility of L2 English from Cantonese, Japanese, Polish and Spanish backgrounds by listeners whose L1 is Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese or English. Using a dictation test, a common method for measuring intelligibility, the authors looked at the intelligibility, comprehension and accentedness of L2 utterances respectively. Their findings offered little support for interlanguage intelligibility benefit, mainly involving Japanese learners, whereas listeners in other groups did not score higher on English utterances produced by speakers with whom they share the same or similar L1 background, nor did they rate the utterances as less accented than speech produced by speakers having a less familiar accent. Also, the authors suggest that bias against a foreign- accented speech is rather individual and represents a matter of choice, adding that most speakers probably share the same ability when it comes to comprehension of accented speech. In addition, they conclude that unfamiliarity with a particular accent might make listeners anxious about the speech they are about to hear, which may result in lower comprehension because they are convinced that they will not be able to understand it.

2.2. Receptive multilingualism

This subsection focuses on the phenomenon of receptive multilingualism. I first discuss the fundamental principles surrounding this issue and then proceed to an overview of relevant research.
2.2.1. Basic concepts of receptive multilingualism

A mode of communication in which interlocutors of different L1 backgrounds use their own languages while speaking to each other is a long-standing phenomenon. Up until the late Middle Ages and early Modern Age multilingual communication in which speakers chiefly used their own mother tongue or dialect was very common in many parts of Europe, especially in Scandinavia, the Baltic area and the Low Countries, as most people spoke only the language they acquired at home. However, the establishment of nation states during the 18th and 19th century led to linguistic homogenization and standardization, which opened the way for monolingual communication (ten Thije & Zeevaert, 2007).

Receptive multilingualism sparked researchers’ interest in the second half of the 20th century. One of the first scholars to tackle this linguistic phenomenon was Scandinavian sociologist Haugen (1966), who provided an empirical account of interlingual communication between native speakers of Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. Haugen conceptualized this mode of interaction as semicommunication, in which interlocutors converse using their mother tongues and are still able to understand each other due to the genetic proximity of the two language varieties. This term is, however, sometimes considered inappropriate, as the prefix semi- implies that speakers are only able to understand each other to some degree and never fully. This is normally not the case, despite the fact the problems in communication may occur due to both linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Since Danes, Norwegians and Swedes are used to interacting in this way, the label semicommunication does not seem to entirely capture the actual linguistic reality in Scandinavia.

The concept of semicommunication later became to be referred to as intercomprehension (Berthele, 2007) and plurilingual communication (Lüdi, 2007). Nevertheless, a term that seems to have established itself in the recent linguistic literature is receptive multilingualism (e.g. Braunmüller, 2007; ten Thije & Zeevaert, 2007; van Bezooijen & Gooskens, 2007; Bahtina & ten Thije, 2012). Rehbein et al. (2011: 248-49) define receptive multilingualism as “a mode of multilingual communication in which interactants employ a language and/or a language variety different from their partner’s and still understand each other without the help of any additional lingua franca”. This means that the passive knowledge of the language variety spoken by interlocutors helps them to reach mutual understanding. By redefining the notion as receptive multilingualism, Rehbein et al. (2011) give particular prominence to the hearer perspective (apart from that of the speaker), as proper comprehension of the speaker’s message is equally important for the success of a communicative situation. In fact, they
introduced a slightly different label for this type of interlingual communication, dubbing it *lingua receptiva*, which represents a combination of “linguistic, mental, interactional as well as *intercultural competences* which are creatively activated when interlocutors listen to linguistic actions in their ‘passive’ language or variety (2011: 249; emphasis original).

Receptive multilingualism involves a number of speaker’s and hearer’s strategies that appear to be necessary to gain mutual comprehension. Speaker’s components may include metadiscourse activities such as repairs or rephrasing, as well as speech accommodation, which entails slower speech or articulation rate and more accentuated pronunciation (see Bahtina & ten Thije, 2012). Conversely, the hearer’s mental processes include alignment, which refers to adaptation to the speaker’s accent, lexicon or syntax, and the so-called inference-making machine. The latter mechanism represents a cognitive process in which interactants use various kinds of knowledge, including formal linguistic and general knowledge, to make inferences about the spoken or written discourse produced by the interactant. General knowledge of the world may help interactants understand the context of the message, whereas linguistic knowledge such as awareness of cognates and false friends in two closely related languages may facilitate interlingual communication.

### 2.2.2. Research on receptive multilingualism

Prior research into receptive multilingualism has shown that this phenomenon is frequently applied in a variety of contexts, including border regions, institutional discourse (e.g. business meetings, educational environment or commercial settings), and inter-generational interactions (Rehbein et al, 2011). Although receptive multilingualism in Rehbein et al.’s definition does not necessarily imply that speakers and listeners solely use their mother tongues for communication, this phenomenon has often been conceptualized as mutual intelligibility of closely related languages, which is concerned with how well speakers of genetically close languages understand each other, as well as with factors affecting mutual comprehension.

Even though investigation into mutual intelligibility between closely related languages can be traced back to the middle of the 20th century (e.g. Haugen, 1966), this research field is still relatively underexplored and has so far focused solely on certain language groups. Ever since Haugen’s seminal work, research on mutual intelligibility has largely been confined to inter-Scandinavian communication, or more precisely, to Danish, Norwegian and Swedish. A
possible reason for this might be that receptive multilingualism has been widely applied in Scandinavia for centuries due to the linguistic proximity of languages spoken there, as well as the fact that those countries have been consistently making endeavours to promote interaction in speakers’ L1 and thus enhance political, economic and cultural co-operation. Some of the most influential publications on mutual intelligibility in Scandinavia include Zeevaert (2004), Braunmüller (2007), Gooskens (2007), Kürschner et al. (2008) and Schüppert & Gooskens (2011). The intelligibility of Dutch, Frisian and Afrikaans has also been thoroughly investigated, as these West Germanic languages are genetically closely related (see, for example, van Bezooijen & Gooskens, 2007), while inter-lingual comprehension was also studied on the case of Dutch and German (Beerkens, 2010).

Moving on to receptive multilingualism in the Romance and Slavic language areas, very few studies have been conducted on mutual intelligibility between languages belonging to these two families. As regards the Romance languages, Jensen (1989), for instance, looked at the mutual intelligibility between Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. Led by the language situation in Latin America and inspired by the anecdotal evidence on interaction between native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, Jensen carried out a listening-comprehension test with a view to determining the degree to which these two languages are intelligible, as well as to providing substantial evidence about possible asymmetry in comprehension in Spanish-Portuguese interactions. His findings revealed a small, but a significant difference in the intelligibility between Spanish and Portuguese ($p < 0.05$), as the average score for Brazilian speakers listening to Spanish was 58, whereas native speakers of Spanish understood roughly 50 percent of the recording in Brazilian Portuguese. Jensen did not find a significant correlation between attitudes and intelligibility, and asserts that the asymmetry in the degree of intelligibility between Spanish and Portuguese is “not overwhelming” and can largely be put down to individual factors such as the subject matter and the amount of exposure (1989: 851). Apart from this study, the intelligibility between Spanish and (European) Portuguese has not received significant scholarly attention yet.

Similarly, receptive multilingualism among speakers of Slavic languages is yet to establish itself as a research field, despite several studies that have been published on interlingual comprehension in this language family, including mutual intelligibility of Czech and Slovak (Nábelková, 2008). To the best of my knowledge, there have not been studies, either empirical or theoretical, of the mutual intelligibility of Croatian and Slovenian.
2.3. Research questions in the present study

Having regard to the above presented theoretical framework, the current project aims to examine the possibility of using receptive multilingualism and English as a lingua franca in interactions among speakers of two closely related Romance and Slavic languages respectively, namely Spanish and Portuguese, and Croatian and Slovenian. Due to a limited scope of this study, I will only be looking at how speakers of Portuguese cope with Spanish speakers speaking their own language and English, as well as how well Slovenians understand Croatian and English produced by Croatian native speakers. The ultimate goal is to establish which mode of interaction is more likely to enable effective communication between these two groups of speakers, as well as to check whether and to what extent certain extralinguistic factors may contribute to the comprehension of lingua receptiva and lingua franca. Specifically, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How well do Slovenian native speakers understand Croatian compared to Croatian- accented English?

2. How well do Portuguese native speakers understand Spanish compared to Spanish accented English?

3. Is there any difference in the intelligibility of Croatian and Croatian-accented English for Slovenian speakers and the intelligibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for Portuguese speakers with respect to the listener age and border proximity?

As this topic so far has not been investigated empirically, this thesis will hopefully add a contribution to communication studies of both receptive multilingualism and English as a lingua franca and provide directions for future research.
3. Methodology and design

This section is organized as follows. I first refer to the method that were used to carry out the analysis and then I proceed to describe the stimuli used for recording speakers. Finally, I outline the experiments employed to test the intelligibility of the two language modes in question.

3.1. Method

The intelligibility of closely related languages and non-native English has been tested so far in a variety of ways and in diverse settings. Gooskens (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of different experimental methods for measuring mutual intelligibility of closely related languages. According to her, intelligibility can be tested at both spoken and written level and using various tasks such as word and text translation, transcription, content questions, reaction times, to name a few. Naturally, all these methods have their own strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of an appropriate experimental task is often dependent on the intelligibility aspect that is being investigated, feasibility of the experiment and financial resources.

As this study is concerned with comparing two possible communication modes between speakers of closely related languages, it was decided to test the intelligibility of free speech. Although some other tasks such as translations or cloze tests might be particularly suitable for looking at the potential contribution of various linguistic factors to comprehension, I am of the opinion that measuring intelligibility at the discourse level can provide the closest possible insight into real life communicative situations, in which both speakers and listeners have to devise a way to deal with the message they want to convey or decode. However, spontaneous speech is often difficult to elicit, while it is particularly challenging to obtain speech samples that might be comparable across several speakers or even languages, as discourse might be affected by the content, form, setting or degree of formality. For this reason, it seemed most appropriate to compare the intelligibility of lingua franca English and lingua receptiva using semi-spontaneous speech, in which interlocutors produce language freely on a given topic, whose content and form are controlled to a large degree by the nature of the task. This type of speech production is also highly recommended by Gooskens (2013), as it simulates a natural situation in a controlled setting, though she points out that this type of task makes it difficult to use the same material for different test languages.
3.2. Stimuli

After careful consideration of advantages and disadvantages of diverse methods, it was decided to use a retelling task as the most appropriate stimuli for testing how well Portuguese and Slovenian speakers understand native speakers of Spanish and Croatian respectively when narrating a story in English and their mother tongues. In eliciting free speech, researchers have used a variety of different visual materials as prompts for narratives, including cartoon strips (e.g. Skehan & Foster, 1997; Yuan & Ellis, 2003; Tavakoli & Foster, 2008; Tavakoli & Foster, 2011), silent films (e.g. Skehan & Foster, 1999; Schmid, 2002) or even map tasks (Anderson et al, 1991). While all these tasks are very interactive and as such provide for great language complexity (see Yuan & Ellis, 2003), I decided to use silent films as prompt materials for retelling, considering that they require less cognitive effort in interpreting the story and thus help establish greater control of the variability in the storyline than picture tasks do.

As the purpose of the task was to check how well listeners deal with English and a related language spoken by the same person, it was of utmost importance to ensure that conditions in which both narratives are produced are as equal as possible. I initially considered having speakers retell the same film, first in their native language and then in English. However, this option was ruled out, since the second retelling would possibly have resulted in greater language complexity, accuracy and fluency like previous research has shown (for more details, see Tavakoli & Foster, 2008). Consequently, I decided to use two short silent films as prompts for narratives, so as not to give priority to any of the communication modes. Keeping in mind Gooskens’ (2013) concern that the same stimulus can hardly be used twice to measure intelligibility of two or more closely related languages, the present project will use two films of similar length to elicit English and related language narratives from the same speaker. Furthermore, choosing appropriate films turned out to be a challenging task, as many factors had to be taken into account, including duration and interpretability of the story, while I also had to ensure that the videos feature culturally-unbiased content. Also, I wanted to make sure that the two films did not contain any dialogue or spoken narrative, in order to obtain retellings produced solely using the speaker’s own linguistic repertoire.

Although I considered visual prompts that have been used in prior studies (e.g. Charlie Chaplin and Mr. Bean), I eventually opted to look for a more recent video material, which
would not only be equally novel to all speakers, but it would also address more contemporary themes and thus lead to greater speaker engagement. Potential videos were looked up on the video-sharing website YouTube, using key expressions such as ‘silent film’, ‘without dialogue’ and ‘short film’. Several films were shortlisted based on similarity of structure, content and length. In consultation with the research group, two videos were subsequently selected as the most appropriate for the purposes of this research\(^5\). A number of criteria had to be considered while selecting videos for retelling, including length, ease of interpretation, pace of the action and suitability of the content. In addition, it was also important to ensure that the number of characters in the films was limited to not more than three so as to prevent possible confusion among both speakers and listeners.

The first short film is 4.59 minutes in length\(^6\). It tells a story about a girl who is running towards the train station as she is apparently late for her train. When the girl arrives at the station, she goes to the self-service ticket machine to purchase a ticket, but she has to wait in a queue. The young man in front of her is taking too long to buy his ticket, which makes the girl more nervous as she is afraid that she will miss the train. When the girl finally gets to the machine, she buys a ticket quickly, but unfortunately her train departs just when she arrives at the platform. Clearly disappointed, the girl sits on a bench to wait for the next train next to the same young man who was buying a ticket at the machine. While the young man was reading his book, the girl was fidgeting on the bench and checking her mobile phone anxiously, when all of a sudden a man with a hood approaches from behind and snatches her purse which she put next to her. The young man sitting next to the girl runs after the thief and manages to get the purse back. He returns the purse to her and the girl in a moment of exultation gives him a hug. The girl then gets on the train while the young man is waving at her. In the closing scene, the girl opens a wallet with the boys’ picture in it while sitting on the train and in a flashback we realize that she had actually stolen it from the young man while she was hugging him.

The second silent film\(^7\) is slightly longer (5.32 minutes), not counting the opening and closing credits which were cut from the version that was shown to the speakers. The film

\(^5\) The authors of the two selected videos were contacted by email in order to obtain permission for using the films for the purposes of the study. Only one author (Joel Plunkett) responded, giving permission for using his material and even expressing delight that his piece of work would help in conducting the experiment. No answer has been received yet from the other author (Eugene Ramos), so the video was used without formal agreement from him. The videos are referenced below.

\(^6\) Author: Joel Plunkett; title: The Man and the Thief; available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5MLKUnnT_A

\(^7\) Author: Eugene Ramos; title: Faith; available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-QJYS9Vg7c
follows a young man, who gets up at 6 a.m. and gets ready for work. He opens the fridge in order to get some food; however, the fridge is almost empty and he reaches for an almost empty pint of milk. When he closes the fridge, we see all the outstanding debts that he needs to pay off. He pours milk into a bowl of cereal, but since there are only a few drops in the can, he adds water as a replacement for milk. Unfortunately, this mixture apparently tastes horrible and the boy decides not to eat it. Then, he takes his bikes and goes to work, where he secretly checks an online dating website. After work, he goes to a park for a walk and there a skater knocks him down by accident. The boy’s glass fall off and while he is trying to find them, people unintentionally walk over them and break them into pieces. Dismayed at a terrible day, the boy returns home and starts reading the Bible before he goes to sleep. The next day after the usual routine he takes his bike in order to go to work, but when he opens the garage he finds a small white puppy standing on the pavement. He decides to take the dog for a walk to the same park, where he spots an advertisement for a missing dog. The boy takes the dog to the address that was specified in the advert and gives it back to a woman, who looked absolutely delighted to see her pet again. The film ends with a scene taking place two years later, where we see the boy and the dog owner living happily together.

Prior to the actual recording process, both films were piloted with two people in order to ensure that the videos are adequate for retelling. The two pilot participants were asked to watch each film only once and retell one story in English and one in their native language (Brazilian Portuguese and Montenegrin respectively) in Audacity. Following the retelling, they saved both recordings in a separate folder and sent them as an email attachment. Since the narratives were satisfactory, it was concluded that the videos are appropriate for the envisaged task.

### 3.3. Recording process

The first part of the experiment consisted of recording native speakers of Croatian and Spanish respectively retelling the two videos in question. For the purposes of the experiment, the task was set up in an online platform using the survey software SurveyGizmo\(^8\). This proved to be a very convenient and cost-effective solution, as the speakers’ personal data and recordings were obtained in real time from faraway locations.

\(^8\) [http://www.surveygizmo.com/](http://www.surveygizmo.com/)
The survey consisted of a background questionnaire, instructions for the task, a short film and a short post-test. The text of the survey was drafted in English and then translated into Croatian and Spanish, which means that speakers in both countries were presented with a survey in their respective native languages. This was done not only to ensure full understanding of the questions and instructions, but also to avoid potential priming effects among subjects for the part of the task which was supposed to elicit non-native English. Following a welcome note and explanation of the task, the speakers had to provide some personal information in the background questionnaire, including details about age, sex, level of education, country they grew up in, languages spoken at home, possible periods of life spent abroad and the use of and exposure to English. Since the recording was to be carried out in the audio editing program Audacity, the survey also contained detailed instructions on how to use the software.

Following an Audacity tutorial, the speakers were presented with guidelines for the first task, which involved retelling in the native language. The speakers were asked to watch the videos carefully only once and proceed to the next page. After each video the subjects were instructed to describe the events in the video from the beginning to the end. They were also advised not to interrupt their retelling in case they make a mistake, but rather to proceed without stopping the recording. In addition, the subjects were presented with ten screenshots of the film (see Appendix), which were created to help them remember as many details as possible, as well as to ensure that they do not divert from the storyline while narrating the plot. Although the order of the videos was set as random, every speaker retold the first film in their mother tongue and the second one in English. When finished with the retelling, the participants were asked to save each recording on their desktop as an mp3 file and under a code generated by the platform so that they could upload it in the next step. Finally, after both tasks were completed and recordings successfully uploaded, the speakers were asked to share their opinion about the task and given an opportunity to leave their email address if they want to be informed about the results of the research.

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\[9\] Videos were embedded in the platform, so the speakers were not redirected to the YouTube website.

\[10\] An important input came from a participant who took part in the pilot experiment. Namely, the recordings were initially meant to be saved in the .wav format in order to enhance the quality of the tracks. However, the pilot test-takers experienced great difficulty while uploading the .wav file, as the process took too long and often failed due to internet connection problems. For this reason, it was decided that all recordings should be saved as mp3, which are considerably smaller in size and therefore can be uploaded quickly.
3.3.1. Speaker details

Not surprisingly, finding and recording speakers was one of the crucial steps in carrying out the project. As targeted participants were students who have not spent a substantial period of study or live abroad, the entire recording process took place in Croatia and Spain respectively. Due to financial, logistic and time constraints, it was decided to hire student assistants in the two countries who would find and record speakers. The student assistants were recruited using personal contacts in Croatia and Spain. They received substantial online training on how to use the platform and the purpose of the task, along with the procedure and the speaker profile targeted by the experiment. Their job also involved setting up equipment, ensuring that the recordings are made in uniform manner, as well as providing assistance to the participants in case of technical problems or any kind of doubts. In addition, the assistants received a fixed payment based on an estimated 16 hours and were asked to complete the job within 2 weeks not counting training.

A total of 30 speakers took part in the recording. The participants were all female so as to control for the effect of gender on voice quality, as previous research has shown that women are overall more intelligible than men (see Bradlow et al. 1996). Additionally, the subjects were undergraduate students in different fields except languages, as speakers specializing linguistics might have a better command of English than others. The Croatian participants were all students of the University of Zagreb, whereas the Spanish speakers studied at the University of Leon. The participants were given a modest compensation of 5 euros as an appreciation for their time and effort. The student assistants used language labs at the respective universities to conduct the experiment and they were free to choose whether to record students one at a time or to have several participants making recordings simultaneously in the same lab. During the recording process, the participants could not use any external help nor were they allowed to take notes. It is also worth mentioning that the Spanish recordings were made in a computer lab using Audacity, whereas the Croatian speakers were recorded in a phonetic lab of the university using a professional microphone\footnote{The sound quality of the Croatian recordings felt slightly better, but this will not influence the results as the same equipment was used for making recordings in each language group.}

The mean age of the selected speakers in the Croatian group was 20.1 ($SD = 1.9$), while the participants in the Spanish group were 19.7 years old on average ($SD = 2.3$). All the participants had grown up in their respective countries of birth (Croatia and Spain) and their first language was Croatian and Spanish respectively. Although several subjects reported they
had spoken another language at home in addition to their first language, including Basque, Galician and Albanian, none of the participants spoke English as a second language, which presumably would have given them an additional advantage over other speakers. None of the participants lived in abroad for more than a month, except for a speaker in the Spanish group who had reported living in Australia for a period longer than 1 month. Nevertheless, this speaker was not excluded from the experiment, as she stated she had been living in Spain most of her life and thus her temporary stay overseas was not expected to have a significant impact on her English proficiency. Additionally, all participants started learning English at school as an L2, with the Spanish speakers having started at the mean age of 5.8 (SD = 2.1), while the Croatian students began slightly later, at the average age of 7.3 (SD = 1.9).

3.3.2. Selecting recordings

The process of selecting recordings that were to be used in the listening test was quite challenging. First, the obtained retellings varied significantly in length, especially when it comes to recordings made in English. Some of the tracks were as short as 60 seconds, whereas some speakers took as much as 7 minutes to complete their retelling, since they were trying to describe every scene in great detail. The majority of the recordings, however, were between 2.5 to 4 minutes long. Second, the objective was to use recordings of varying levels of English proficiency, so it was essential to make a good balance between speakers of high and low language competence. Third, and most important, even though all speakers retold the same video materials, their narrative structures differed substantially regardless of proficiency and language mode. This posed a major challenge, as it was difficult to find recordings which referred to the same details and followed a similar storyline. For this reason, when selecting recordings it was of crucial importance to identify six points common to all narratives, as it was envisaged that the questions in the listening test would be applicable to all the recordings. To illustrate, if a speaker failed to describe that the girl in the first video missed her train because the young man took too long in front of the ticket machine, the narrative loses its coherence even if the speaker perfectly described all other details in the film. Such a recording had to be excluded, as the intended question about the scene in front of the ticket machine could not be answered based on this account. In addition, even if a speaker mentions all the details in the English retelling, but fails to refer to an important detail from the other film retold in the native language, neither of the retellings made by this speaker could be used
for the purposes of the listening test, as the intention was to test comprehension of the same person speaking his or her native language and English.

At last, a total of 19 recordings (out of 30) were selected from each language group based on sound quality, information contained in the narratives and taking into account the diversity of proficiency levels. As in the current design the same speaker is telling a story in their native language and English respectively, it was important to ensure that the number of English and mother tongue retellings remained as even as possible. In particular, nine selected speakers in each language group narrated video A in English and video B in their native language, whereas nine speakers narrated video A in their mother tongue and video B in English. This approach was adopted in order to control for the effect of task on both speaker and listener performance.

3.4. Listening task

As mentioned earlier, the recorded narratives were used for testing how well Slovenian and Portuguese speakers understand Croatian and Spanish interlocutors respectively speaking their mother tongues and English. Since the study focuses on the comprehensibility of free speech, it was of utmost importance to devise an appropriate testing method and reduce the impact of unwanted effects that may affect listener performance such as priming or heavy memory load. In this respect, having speakers listen to the entire narrative and then answer post-test content questions was ruled out, not only because some of the recordings are longer than others, but primarily because in such a design subjects would be drawing heavily on their short-term memory while working out the answers. Furthermore, playing the entire recording twice or more than once was also excluded, as this would give rise to leaning effects that could additionally obscure intelligibility, while it would also be very time-consuming. In addition, a cloze test was not an option either, as free speech is not suitable for such a test due to frequent pauses, rephrasings and repetitions. Finally, the method that seemed most feasible for the purposes of this task was a multiple choice question test, which is very convenient for testing, scoring and quantifying listener performance.

Taking the above considerations into account, especially memory load and priming effects, it was decided to split the narratives into six meaningful fragments based on which six multiple choice questions could be asked. Listeners heard each fragment only once, followed by a question with four possible answers. The small chunks varied in length and lasted
between 7 and 35 seconds. As some recordings were substantially longer than others, some of the smaller fragments were reduced by cutting out empty pauses, repetitions, false starts or unnecessary parts, provided that it does not affect the content and intelligibility of the narrative. Additionally, the volume of the recordings was aligned as much as possible, so all recording were set at approximately 60-70 db.

The entire comprehension test was made in the form of an online survey using the SurveyGizmo platform. It consisted of a background questionnaire, multiple-choice comprehension test and a post-test questionnaire. The text of the survey was drafted in English and subsequently translated into the native languages of prospective listeners (i.e. Slovenian and Portuguese) in order to avoid any comprehension problems and in order to avoid potential priming effects for the English part of the experiment. The translations were done by Slovenian and Portuguese native speakers respectively, who received assistance and clarification of the terms where necessary.

The online experiment started with a welcome note introducing the task, purpose of the research and the structure of the survey. The introduction also informed listeners that they were going to hear the same person speaking a related language (Croatian or Spanish) and English. In addition, they were also given a firm assurance that they would remain completely anonymous and that their data would only be used for the purposes of a research project about communication in Europe. Subsequently, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to provide some details about their personal and linguistic background. Apart from general questions such as age, sex, level of education and first language, the subjects were also asked where they grew up and if they spoke another language at home. The next section consisted of questions about English, including the age at which they started learning English, whether they had lived in an English speaking country for more than a month and their recent use of English. Additionally, the participants were asked to rate their English in comparison to their peers on a scale from much better to much worse, as well as to give their average English grade at high school (1-5 for Slovenian subjects, and 1-20 for Portuguese volunteers, where 1 is the lowest grade). Finally the third part of the background questionnaire comprised questions about the related language (Spanish and Croatian), including whether they learned it at school and how much they were exposed to it on a daily basis over the past year.

After the questionnaire, the subjects were asked to check whether their sound settings were set appropriately, i.e. whether they could hear the audio clearly. For this purpose, the
English version of the fairy tale *The North Wind and the Sea*, commonly used in phonetic studies, was uploaded to the platform in order to simulate the actual recordings that were used in the experiment. The participants were asked to play it over until they made sure that the audio could be clearly heard. Upon checking their audio settings, the subjects proceeded to the actual experiment.

The experiment was divided into two parts – Task A (a narrative about the girl and the young man) and Task B (a story about the boy who finds a dog). Both tasks were introduced by a short text without revealing any details about the content, while speakers were also encouraged not to give up even if they can hardly understand anything the speaker is saying. Task and speaker assignment was random and so was the language. This means that the listeners were presented with either Task A or B first and the narrative was told in either English or a related language. As stated above, the narratives were split into smaller meaningful fragments and could be played only once by clicking the play button. Each audio fragment was followed by a multiple choice question with four possible options, only one of which was correct. There was no time limit, but the participants could not proceed to the next question before choosing one of the answers, nor could they listen to the fragment again.

It is important to mention that all multiple choice questions were pre-tested to evaluate their appropriateness and the level of difficulty. Eight volunteers took the test without hearing the narratives or watching the videos to ensure that none of the answers was too obvious so that it can be guessed using common sense. If a question was answered correctly by four out of 8 test takers, the distractors were revised and changed. If less than a half of the respondents chose the correct answer, this signalled that the distractors and the correct answer were equally plausible. Moreover, in order to secure that questions are relevant for the content of the narratives, two volunteers were asked to watch the two short films and take the multiple choice test. Since both of them answered all the questions correctly, it was concluded that the multiple choice items are adequate.

After the participants completed the two tasks, they were presented with two post-test attitudinal questions. They were asked to rate the speaker on a nominal scale from very pleasant to very irritating, as well as to opt for a language mode (English or the related language) if they were to hear another story from the same speaker. Finally, at the end of the experiment the participants were given a score they achieved in both tests and were offered to leave their email address if they want to be informed about the results of the research.
4. Data and results

This section presents the listener data obtained in the survey and reports on the results of the experiment.

4.1. Listener data

The experiment was conducted online over the course of two months. Since the initial goal was to find around 90 volunteers from Slovenia and Portugal respectively who would take the test (5 per each speaker), the listener response had to be massive. For this reason, the majority of the participants were recruited via social network site Facebook, but also using personal contacts and email. The most common way of reaching subjects on Facebook was by posting the link accompanied by a short promotional text in online groups assembling Slovenians and the Portuguese. As I was primarily aiming for young people and particularly students, the publicity campaign was mostly run in such communities.

The promotion targeting Slovenian speakers was extremely successful, as a total of 142 volunteers completed the test. On the other hand, the response from Portuguese speakers was less enthusiastic, with 86 subjects having taken part in the experiment. In fact, the survey received quite a lukewarm response in the first weeks of testing, which is why alternative methods of recruiting participants had to be adopted. In this respect, a promotional email was sent to Portuguese subjects who participated in another research experiment on mutual intelligibility of closely related languages in Europe carried out at the University of Groningen\textsuperscript{12} and some of them agreed to take part in this project as well.

In both groups females outnumbered male subjects by almost a half. In the Slovenian group, 64 percent of the participants were female, while almost 36 percent of responses came from males (see Figure 1). Similarly, in the Portuguese group 63.5 of the total subjects were women, whereas men accounted for 36.5 percent (see Figure 2).

\textsuperscript{12} Mutual intelligibility of closely related languages in Europe: linguistic and non-linguistic determinants. The project is funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO Vrije competitie, 2011-2016). More information at \url{http://www.let.rug.nl/gooskens/project/}.
As regards education, the majority of participants in both groups either had a university degree or studied for a higher education qualification. More precisely, in the Slovenian group, 86.6 percent of the subjects had or studied for an academic or vocational degree, whereas 13.4 percent stated that secondary degree was their highest attained level of education. The percentage of highly educated subjects in the Portuguese group was even higher – 89.4 percent, whereas those with secondary education accounted for 10.6 percent of the testing population.

Subjects of different age groups took part in the experiment. Among Slovenian participants, the mean age was 23.8 (SD = 5.1), ranging from 15 to 58 years. Portuguese respondents were 32.5 years old on average (SD = 11), with the minimum age being 19, and maximum 63. Nevertheless, the bulk of the participants in both datasets were equal to or under the age of 30 – as many as 134 test takers in the Slovenian group (or 94.3 percent) were under 30, while there were only 8 subjects aged 32 or more. Conversely, the Portuguese population was more diverse, as 45 participants were 30 or younger, 22 of them were between 31 and 40 years of age, whereas 19 volunteers were aged 41 or older.

Most participants in both datasets declared themselves as having grown up in their respective countries of origin (i.e. Slovenia and Portugal). Only two volunteers in the Slovenian group said they had grown up in Macedonia and Montenegro respectively, whereas three among the Portuguese subjects spent a part of their lives in Mozambique, Spain and Switzerland. Furthermore, eight participants in the Portuguese group said they spoke another
language at home in addition to their L1, including French, German and English\textsuperscript{14}. Similarly, 18 Slovenian subjects or 12.7 percent used another language alongside Slovenian, such as Croatian/Bosnian/Serbian, German, Italian, Albanian, English, as well as the Prekmurian dialect spoken in Prekomurje, a region in East Slovenia bordering Croatia, Hungary and Austria\textsuperscript{15}.

As regards the participants’ use of English, 14.8 percent of the Slovenian respondents said they had lived for more than one month abroad where they used English for communication, while 28.2 of the Portuguese subjects reported the same. Furthermore, the participants were also asked to provide information about their recent use of English. In particular, watching television and movies was the most common form of exposure to English over the past year (on average 4.53 and 4.44 out of 5 for Slovenian and Portuguese participants respectively), while listening and speaking somewhat less frequent (on average 3.23 out of 5 in the Slovenian group and 3.77 in the Portuguese group); see the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>St. deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLO</td>
<td>POR</td>
<td>SLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and talking to people</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV, DVDs and movies</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in a language course</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 showing the participants’ use of English in certain situations over the past year\textsuperscript{16}

Finally, the subjects were also asked to provide a self-assessment of their English skills in comparison to their peers. In the Slovenian group, exactly 20.8 percent of the respondents rated their English as much better compared to people who are the same age as them, 33.1

\textsuperscript{14} These data should be taken with caution. Namely, some of the participants wrote they spoke as many as three languages at home besides their mother tongue, which is hardly plausible. It is quite possible that the subjects understood that they were asked if they used some additional language at home for communication, perhaps in interactions with guests, cousins or friends. However, the information requested referred to bilingual families, in which another language or dialect is spoken along with the participant’s native (dominant) language.

\textsuperscript{15} Just like in the Portuguese group, several Slovenian respondents mentioned they spoke two or three additional languages at home, often adding English to the languages that are otherwise common second languages in Slovenia, such as Serbian, German or Italian. This information is therefore questionable.

\textsuperscript{16} SLO = Slovenian, POR = Portuguese
percent said their English skills are better, 27.3 participants reported that their command of English is the same as that of their peers, 16.2 percent think that their English is worse, whereas 2.6 percent stated that they are much worse when it comes to their English competence (see Figure 3). Likewise, 23.5 percent Portuguese participants assessed their English skills as much better than those of their peers, 40 percent said they are better, 24.7 percent claim that their English is the, whereas those who think their English skills are worse and much worse compared to those of the same age as them accounted for 7.1 and 4.7 respectively (see Figure 4).

![Figure 3 – Slovenian participants’ self-assessment of English skills in comparison with their peers](image1)

![Figure 4 – Portuguese participants’ self-assessment of English skills in comparison with their peers](image2)

The last section in the background questionnaire before the two tasks was dedicated to contact with the related language. Six out of 154 participants in the Slovenian group said they had learned Croatian at school or in a language course, five of whom studied it for one year whereas one subject reported learning Croatian for four years. This was quite expected given the age of the majority of the test takers. Before the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990, Serbo-Croatian was a compulsory subject in Slovenian primary schools. After Slovenia declared independence, Serbo-Croatian was no longer part of the primary school curriculum in Slovenia, which is why people younger than 30 did not have an opportunity to learn it in formal education settings. On the other hand, Portuguese learners have reportedly been exposed to Spanish more than Slovenians were to

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17 Serbo-Croatian used to be the official language in ex-Yugoslavia until its dissolution in the early 1990s. After the break-up, all countries that were once part of Yugoslavia named their official languages after their respective nations (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and more recently, Montenegrin). Since these languages emerged from a single one, they share the same linguistic system and are mutually intelligible to a very high degree, which is why some linguists (e.g. Kordić, 2009) consider them as the standard varieties of the pluricentric Serbo-Croatian language. For more information on the language situation in the former Yugoslavia, see, for example, Greenberg (2008).
Croatian, as 18.8 percent of the respondents stated they had learned Spanish at school or in a course. Specifically, nine subjects took Spanish for only one year, whereas the rest of the Spanish learners studied it for 2 up to 6 years.

As regards the participants’ place of residence, 46 or 32.4 percent of the Slovenians who took part in the experiment said they live within 30 kilometres from the border with Croatia, which is not surprising given that Slovenia is rather a small country and keeping in mind that the Croatian-Slovenian border stretches for approximately 670 kilometres (Figure 5). The percentage of the Portuguese volunteers living in close proximity to the border with Spain was much smaller, as only 7 people specified they live in the area less than 30 kilometres from the Spanish border (Figure 6).

![Figure 5](image1.png)  
Figure 5 – Do you live within 30 km from the border with Croatia? (Slovenians)

![Figure 6](image2.png)  
Figure 6 – Do you live within 30 km from the border with Spain? (Portuguese)

Finally, in terms of exposure to the related language, most Slovenian participants stated they used Croatian in terms of either listening or speaking to a greater or lesser degree over the past year, ranging from every day (8.5 percent), sometimes (37.3 percent) or rarely (43.7 percent). A little over 10 percent of the Slovenian respondents said they had never used Croatian over the past year. Similarly, the majority of the Portuguese population were also in some kind of contact with Spanish through listening or speaking, including every day (11.8 percent), sometimes (50.6 percent) and rarely (34.1 percent), whereas less than 5 percent of the participants said they had never used Spanish over the past year (see the two pie charts below).

![Figure 7](image3.png)  
Figure 7 – The exposure of the Slovenian participants to Croatian over the past year through listening or speaking

![Figure 8](image4.png)  
Figure 8 – The exposure of the Portuguese participants to Spanish over the past year through listening or speaking
In summary, only a small percentage of the testing population in both groups claimed they had never been exposed the related language over the past year. This gives us reason to believe that the Slovenian and Portuguese participants can understand Croatian and Portuguese respectively to a greater or lesser extent. Still, whether the intelligibility of lingua receptiva is likely to be higher or lower than that of English as a potential lingua franca will hopefully be more evident with the results presented below.

4.2. Results

In order to ascertain how well Slovenians and Portuguese handle Croatian and Spanish compared to Croatian-accented and Spanish-accented English respectively, scores for each language mode had to be compared regardless of the speaker that was assigned to each listener. This approach was adopted so as to shed light on the general ability of Slovenian and Portuguese listeners to understand Croatians and Spaniards of different speaker-specific characteristics and varying levels of English language proficiency. Comprehensibility score was established based on the number of correctly answered multiple choice questions, where only one option was the right one out of four possible answers. For each correct response participants were given 1 point and the maximum score was 6. A t-test was used to compare listener performance in the two tests and the alpha level was set at 0.05.

While some of the test items seemed to be quite challenging for the participants, there were questions which appeared relatively easy to answer correctly, thus giving rise to a ceiling effect, especially in the Slovenian group. For example, the last question in Task A referring the end of the movie in which the girl robbed the boy proved to be well formulated, as exactly 50 percent of the Portuguese respondents provided the correct answer, while the score in the Slovenian group was somewhat higher and amounted to 67.8 percent. Similarly, the second question in Task B received just a bit above 50 percent of the correct answers in the Portuguese group, whereas item 1 in the same task resulted in 72 percent of the correct answers in among Slovenian participants. By contrast, subjects scored very highly on some of the questions, resulting in more than 90 percent of the correct answers like questions 3, 4 and 5 in Task A in the Slovenian group and questions 4 and 5 in Task B in both groups. There could be several possible explanations for this: the questions were perhaps too simple, the distractors were not plausible enough or simply, the participants had no difficulty understanding the fragments in question. Nonetheless, it is certain that in both tasks and in
both groups there was at least one question that could help distinguish between participants who deal more successfully with either lingua franca or lingua receptiva.

4.2.1. Overall intelligibility

On the whole, the participants in the Slovenian group achieved very high scores in both ELF and ReLa\textsuperscript{18} test. The average score in the test where Slovenians listened to Croatians speaking their mother tongue was 5.09 ($SD = 0.99$), whereas the mean result obtained in the English part of the test was 5.50 ($SD = 0.75$). A paired samples t-test revealed that this was significant, $t(139) = 4.06, p < 0.001$, two-tailed. The observed effect size\textsuperscript{19} was moderate and amounted to $d = 0.47$, which means that the mean score in the English test was on average 0.47 higher than the score in the related language test (see Figure 9).

The overall performance on both tests in the Portuguese group was somewhat poorer. The Portuguese subjects achieved an average score of 4.69 ($SD = 1.14$) on the Spanish test, while they performed slightly worse when listening to Spanish speakers telling a story in English (4.54, $SD = 1.25$). A paired samples t-test revealed that this difference was not significant, $t(172) = 1.09, p = 0.28$, two-tailed. The non-significant difference was not due to a small sample size, as Cohen’s $d$ effect size was only .12, which is implies a relatively small effect (see figure 10).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{Figure 9 – Mean intelligibility score by Slovenian participants}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure10.png}
\caption{Figure 10 – Mean intelligibility score by Portuguese participants}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{18} Related language

\textsuperscript{19} Effect size is an objective and standardized measure of the magnitude of a phenomenon (Field, 2009: 56). It is frequently reported alongside tests of statistical significance, as it quantifies the size of the difference between two groups irrespective of the sample size (see Coe, 2002). A common measure of effect size is Cohen’s $d$, which indicates the standardized difference between two means. A $d$ value of .2 represents a small effect size, a $d$ of .5 suggests a medium effect size, whereas a $d$ value of .7 or .8 denotes a very large effect size.
4.2.2. Intelligibility and age

Although the Slovenian group was quite homogenous in terms of age, given that the great majority of the test takers were under 30, age might be a predicting factor to some degree. The difference in comprehending Croatian and Croatian-accented English by Slovenians aged 25 or younger was also very significant, \( t(112) = 4.17, p < .001, d = -.53 \), two-tailed. The mean score for Croatian in this group was 5.05 compared to 5.53 for English. However, it seems that this gap disappears with age, as the difference in comprehensibility of Croatian and Croatian-accented English by Slovenians above the age of 26 was completely insignificant, \( t(26) = 0.57, p = .57 \), two-tailed, with the average score for Croatian increasing (5.26) and decreasing in the English test (5.37). Nevertheless, due to a small population sample (only 27 participants were aged 26 or more, and merely 6 more than 30) and an apparent ceiling effect, the difference between the performance in the two tasks was not clear enough. In addition, a split-plot ANOVA was also run to compare means across the two age groups (under 25 and above 26). Despite a significant main effect for the performance on the Croatian and English test, \( F(1, 138) = 5.41, p = .1 \), the performance on the two tests by group interaction was not statistically significant \( F(1, 138) = 2.09, p = .15 \) (see figure 11). In other words, while both groups combined scored higher on the English test, the difference in the scores on the English and Croatian tests in the younger group (<25) was not significantly greater than the difference in the performance on the two tests by the older group (>26), although the results are in the direction hypothesized. This result suggests that the role of age in intelligibility of Croatian and Croatian-accented English is in need of further exploration, under different testing conditions and especially on a larger testing sample.

![Figure 11 – Scores in the two tasks by Slovenian subjects aged 25 or less and those aged 26 or more](image-url)
Age could also be a factor in the intelligibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for Portuguese speakers. As the age distribution among the Portuguese volunteers was different from that of the Slovenian group, there emerged two equally sized age groups that took the Spanish test, namely 46 participants aged under 30 and 41 subjects who were 31 or older. However, this division did not yield significant results. Subjects aged 30 or less did not perform significantly better in either of the tests ($t(45) = 0.39, p = .73$, two-tailed), although on average they obtained a slightly higher score in the English part of the task (4.72 vs. 4.65). The difference in the performance of those older than 31 was not significant either, with the score in the Spanish task ($M = 4.67$) being higher than in that of English ($M = 4.40$), $t(40) = 1.98, p = .05$, two-tailed). Furthermore, in contrast to the Slovenian group, a split-plot ANOVA did not reveal a significant main effect for the two age groups (30 or less and 31 or more), $F(1, 85) = 2.80, p = .24$. However, the interaction effect between the two age groups was even closer to the significance level ($F(1, 85) = 2.80, p = .09$), which may suggest that the difference in the intelligibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for Portuguese speakers deepens with age (see figure 12). Keeping the above in mind, it may be concluded that a larger testing population and perhaps a different method may be needed to examine the role of age in comprehensibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for Portuguese speakers.

![Figure 12](image.png)

Figure 12 – Scores on the two tasks by Portuguese subjects aged 30 or less and those aged 31 or more
4.2.3. Intelligibility and border

The analysis also revealed that speakers living away from the border may be more comfortable listening to Croatians speaking English rather than their mother tongue. While the mean score achieved for the narrative in Croatian by the 94 participants living 30 kilometres or more from the border with Croatia is slightly lower than the average score in the same test for the entire population ($M = 5.02$), the same participants were also more successful in understanding the Croatian speakers retelling in English ($M = 5.52$). This difference was also significant, $t(186) = 4.17$, $p < 0.001$, two-tailed. On the other hand, the language mode does not seem to represent an issue for those living within 30 kilometres from the Croatian border, as the difference between the scores while listening to the same person speaking Croatian ($M = 5.24$) and English ($M = 5.43$) was not significant, $t(88) = -0.887$, $p = -.38$. A split-plot ANOVA did not reveal a statistically significant interaction effect in the scores between subjects living near or far away from the border, $F(1, 138) = 2.19$, $p = .14$, even though the direction of the effect was towards the expected (i.e. that Slovenians living close to the border tend to score better in the Croatian test than the rest of the population). Additionally, it was not possible to examine the contribution of border proximity in the Portuguese dataset, as only seven subjects that took part in the test stated they lived within less than 30 kilometres from the border with Spain.

4.2.4. Intelligibility and listener attitudes

Following the two tasks and, the participants were presented with two post-test questions involving language attitudes, before they were given the actual scores they achieved. They were required to rate the assigned speaker on a five-point Likert-type scale from very annoying to very pleasant. In addition, the participants were also asked to choose between English and the related language if they had to hear another story from the same speaker. No significant difference surfaced based on the relationship between the two categorical variables.

It also seemed reasonable to look at the association between language preference and the language mode in which the listener performed better. A chi-square analysis yielded interesting results in both groups. In particular, the strength of association between the better score in the two tests and language preference for the Slovenian participants was on the verge of significance $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.79$, $p = .05$. In other words, when the Slovenians were more
successful on the Croatian test, they would prefer to communicate with the same speaker by having them speak Croatian, whereas those who were more successful in English would prefer this language as a medium of communication with Croatian native speakers (see figure 13). Similarly, a chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between better language and preferred language mode in the Portuguese group. The association between the two variables was borderline significant ($\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 3.51, p = .06$), which indicates that Portuguese leaners may also be more comfortable communicating with a Spanish speaker in a language mode which is in reality more comprehensible to them (see figure 14).

![Figure 13](image1.png)  
Figure 13 - A clustered bar showing the relationship between the more comprehensible language mode for Slovenian speakers and preferred language of communication

![Figure 14](image2.png)  
Figure 14 - A clustered bar showing the relationship between the more comprehensible language mode for Portuguese speakers and preferred language of communication
5. Discussion

The goal of this empirical study was to investigate how well Slovenian native speakers understand Croatian and English produced by Croatian native speakers, and how well Portuguese native speakers deal with Spanish in comparison to Spanish-accented English. The study was carried out in two stages: (1) the recording of native speakers of Croatian and Spanish, and (2) an online experiment testing the ability of Slovenian and Portuguese volunteers to understand the recorded narratives. Given the genetic proximity of these two language combinations and a long history of relations between Croatia and Slovenia on the one hand and Spain and Portugal on the other, as well as frequent interactions between speakers of these neighbouring countries, the ultimate purpose of this research was to examine whether communication between Croatians and Slovenians and Spaniards and the Portuguese is more effective by resorting to receptive multilingualism or using English as a lingua franca. In this section I first discuss the results obtained in the experiment in which Slovenian speakers listened to Croatians, and then I proceed to the second experiment which involved Portuguese subjects listening to native Spanish speakers.

5.1. The intelligibility of Croatian and Croatian-accented English for Slovenians

A total of 142 Slovenian native speakers took part in the experiment. A great majority of the participants were aged under 30, whereas less than six percent of the subjects were older than 30 years of age. This was not completely accidental, as this study was primarily aimed at testing the comprehensibility of lingua franca and lingua receptiva for younger people and therefore the online promotion was targeted at the student population and communities assembling the young. In addition, as participant recruitment was conducted entirely online, it is not surprising that the strongest response came from older teenagers and people in their twenties, considering that they are generally believed to be the most active Internet users.

Most participants in the Slovenian group achieved high scores in the experiment, irrespective of the task they were presented with and the language of the retelling. There are several probable explanations as to why the subjects did well in the test:

(1) it is possible that the test format and some of the questions were too easy for the participants, resulting in a ceiling effect;

(2) Slovenians understand both Croatian and Croatian-accented English to a very high extent and
(3) the combination of these two factors lead to high scores.

Despite the fact that many participants managed to hit the ceiling, it was still possible to make a distinction in the degree of intelligibility of Croatian and Croatian-accented English for Slovenian native speakers.

On the whole, Slovenian participants were more successful when they listened to a Croatian speaker narrating in English ($M = 5.09$) than when a story was retold in Croatian ($M = 5.50$). The difference between the scores on the two tests was very significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that Slovenians find it easier to understand Croatian-accented English than Croatian. Furthermore, a number of different factors might play a role in comprehensibility. For instance, age could be used as a predictor of the degree of intelligibility of Croatian versus Croatian-accented English for Slovenians. Specifically, while English seems to be a more convenient mode of communication for Slovenians younger than 25, there is no significant difference in the ability of those older than 26 to understand Croatian and Croatian-accented English. Although the difference was significant at an alpha level of .15, it should be kept in mind that the group of Slovenians older than 26 may not have been not large enough to allow for the effect to surface, especially because the sample included only seven people who were older than 30. Had there been a more diverse population sample, it would have been interesting to see whether there is a significant difference in understanding Croatian between those younger and older than 30, considering that many speakers aged 31 or more used to learn Croatian as a mandatory subject at school for at least one year. Overall, although English appears to be more comprehensible than Croatian for predominantly young Slovenians, it is quite evident that effective communication can be maintained even if the Croatian interlocutor speaks their mother tongue.

As noted above, there are several possible explanations as to why the test yielded high scores in both languages. First, the mere test format was conducive to high scores, as subjects were only required to recognize the correct answer among four offered options. Previous research has shown that participants tend to score higher on multiple choice tests aimed at measuring intelligibility than, for instance, on cloze-tests or open questions tasks, as questions that require recognition tend to be easier than those aimed at language production (see, for example, Yorkston & Beukelman, 1978; Berne, 1993; Miller, 2013). However, in spite of its drawbacks, multiple-choice tests exhibit high internal reliability (see Brindley, 1998) and enable precise and objective scoring of subjects’ performance. Second, Croatian and Slovene are genetically closely related, which can be confirmed by linguistic distances. Heeringa et al.
(2013), for instance, found that the mean orthographic distance between Slovenian and Croatian amount to only 14 percent, which suggests that average phonetic distance could also be close to that level, given that both Slovenian and Croatian are pronounced the way they are spelt. Furthermore, the same authors also report that the average lexical distance between Slovenian and Croatian is 29 percent, which is relatively low.

Third, and most important, some studies have revealed that both English and Croatian are the most spoken languages in Slovenia after Slovenian. According to the 2012 European Commission Special Barometer entitled “Europeans and their Languages”, as many as 92 percent of Slovenians claim they are able to speak another language in addition to their mother tongue, which puts them in the top five European nations when it comes to multilingualism. Moreover, in the long term perspective, Slovenia ranks third among EU member states whose citizens will have practical skills in at least two foreign languages (67%), just after Luxembourg (84%) and the Netherlands (77%) (European Commission, 2012: 13). Not surprisingly, the two most commonly spoken foreign languages in Slovenia are Croatian (61 percent) and English (59 percent). In fact, the number of citizens with a command of English is higher in Slovenia than in any other Slavic-speaking country, leaving behind even some of the Germanic-speaking countries such as Germany or Luxembourg. If we add to this that the subjects in the experiment on average started learning English at the age of 9 and keeping in mind that this language is a mandatory subject in both primary and secondary school, it is quite reasonable to assume that overall comprehension does not represent a major problem, especially if the interlocutor is a speaker of a related language whereby some kind of interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit might be a contributing factor.

Regarding the language situation in Slovenia, ever since the foundation of Yugoslavia, or the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians as it used to be called in the first decade of its history, (Serbo)-Croatian had a long history of use in the Slovenian territory. In the former Yugoslavia, Serbo-Croatian enjoyed a prestigious status in all the republics including Slovenia, which was especially evident in the government, administration, diplomacy and the army (Stabej, 2007). Men were additionally exposed to Serbo-Croatian during their military service in the Yugoslav National Army, no matter whether they served in Slovenia or in other parts of the federal country. Also, in the years after the Second World War, Slovenia became increasingly populated with workforce from the Serbo-Croatian speaking regions, who were able to meet most of their communicative needs by speaking their mother tongue. It was then
receptive multilingualism became part of the sociolinguistic reality in Slovenia, given the Slovenians’ passive or active competence in Serbo-Croatian and certainly their tolerance for this kind of communication (Stabej, 2007: 24) Additionally, Serbo-Croatian was compulsory part of the school curriculum, but the number of hours consistently decreased from the 1970s onwards as the public awareness of the Slovenian language grew. Yet, after Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Serbo-Croatian was no longer taught at school. Following the independence, the attitude towards Serbo-Croatian changed, as the command of this language was not regarded as something affirmative, in contrast to the knowledge of other foreign languages that Slovenians used to be proud of (Stabej, 2007). Nevertheless, Slovenians have remained exposed to Croatian as well as to other languages stemming from Serbo-Croatian to a higher or lesser degree, particularly through mass media, films, music and the Internet. Besides, around 90 percent of the participants in the listening experiment have stated they are exposed to Croatian, ranging from every day to rarely, which also confirms that most Slovenians indeed get in contact with Croatian. Taking into account all these historical facts and the underlying sociolinguistic situation, it is reasonable to expect that many Slovenians, even the younger generations, have at least the receptive competence in Croatian at a certain level.

Lastly, high scores by Slovenians in the English part of the experiment could also be accounted for by the intelligibility of English produced by Croatian speakers. In consultation with two language specialists (native and near native), it was concluded that Croatian speakers recorded for the purposes of this survey generally displayed an acceptable level of English skills and as such is not likely to cause major intelligibility problems for listeners of a similar language background. Moreover, it is believed that these speakers fit well into Jenkins’ (2000) conceptualization of a successful ELF speaker, consistently adhering to Lingua Franca Core features which have been argued to enhance intelligibility while still making creative use of non-core features, such as realizing dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ as /t/ and /d/ respectively. Furthermore, Slovenians speakers are likely to have benefited from interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit, considering that the phonetic inventories of Slovenian and Croatian are very similar. Specifically, Slovenian and (Serbo)-Croatian are the only Slavic languages that have retained phonemic pitch, while some qualitative vowel differences in Slovenian, such as the one between open /ɛ, ɔ/ and closed /e, o/ mid vowels, are also found in the kajkavian dialect of Croatian, which is native to most speakers in the experiment (Reindl, 2008).
### 5.2. The intelligibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for the Portuguese

Which mode of communication is more effective for Portuguese speakers they are interacting with their Spanish neighbours seems to be less clear than in the above discussed language combination. Even though Portuguese subjects performed slightly better on the Spanish test with an average result of 4.69 than when their interlocutor was speaking Spanish ($M = 4.54$), the difference between the two scores was not within statistical significance ($p = .28$). Unlike the Croatian-Slovenian experiment, the testing population in this part of the study was rather diverse, comprising Portuguese speakers of all ages and levels of education. However, the number of participants was much lower than in the first experiment, which perhaps could the reason why significant differences and underlying patterns did not emerge. Statistical analyses have shown that factors age might place a certain role in intelligibility of Spanish and Spanish-accented English for Portuguese speakers, whereas level of education and proximity of the border did not play a significant role.

On the whole, this test did not suffer from a ceiling effect like the Croatian-Slovenian might have so. The average percentage of correct responses for Task A was around 75, whereas Task B elicited a mean of 78 correct answers. As noted earlier, in each of the tasks there was at least one question that could help distinguish which language mode is more comprehensible for Portuguese listeners. At the same time, this test has shown that overall comprehension between a Spanish speaker and Portuguese listener can be achieved through both lingua franca and lingua receptiva. Still, a deeper analysis of how well Portuguese deal with Spanish versus Spanish-accented English would require a different test format and certainly a larger population sample.

When analysing the results it is also important to take into account previous studies and findings. Spanish and Portuguese are genetically very close, so high mutual intelligibility is not surprising. Heeringa et al. (2013) reported that the lexical distance between Portuguese and Spanish, measured as the percentage of non-cognates, is only 4 percent, just like the proximity of Czech and Slovak, for example. Phonetic distances, however, have not been measured so far, so it is not clear how close these languages are in terms of pronunciation. According to the 2012 European Commission survey on Europeans and their languages, English is the most commonly spoken foreign language in Portugal (27%), followed by French and Spanish. However, the knowledge of English is below the European average (50%), but still better than some other countries such as Spain, Hungary or Slovakia. The
survey also reported that some 20 percent of the Portuguese respondents are able to understand English well enough to follow the news on the radio or television\textsuperscript{20}, which is again below the European average, whereas around 13 percent of the interviewed Portuguese nationals are likely to understand broadcast news in Spanish, more than any other nation in Europe. This partly explains why the scores achieved by Portuguese subjects in the experiment were lower than those of Slovenians, who generally claim to have much higher foreign language competence. Yet, it remained unclear to what extent Portuguese participants experienced the interlanguage speech intelligibility benefit in the English task, given that they were listening to a lingua franca variety produced by speakers of a closely related language.

One thing that was particularly striking apart from results was the way Portuguese listeners perceived Spanish speakers. Just like in the first experiment, the participants rated their Spanish interlocutor on a Likert-like scale ranging from very annoying to very pleasant. As many as half of the respondents said the speaker they were assigned was a bit annoying, whereas nearly 13 percent rated their interlocutor as annoying. By contrast, only 3.5 percent thought the Spanish speaker was very pleasant and slightly more than 8 percent judged them as pleasant. This looked particularly remarkable in comparison to the Slovenian subjects, most of whom rated their Croatian interlocutor as pleasant (43 percent) and very pleasant (6.3 percent), whereas just slightly more than 15 percent of the participants rated the speaker as annoying (less than 0.1 as very annoying). Incidentally, while Slovenian volunteers were quite divided in terms of which language they would prefer their Croatian interlocutor to speak (56.3 vs. 43.7 in favour of Croatian), the great majority of Portuguese speakers (81.2 percent) said they would rather hear their Spanish interlocutor speaking to them in Spanish than in English\textsuperscript{21}. Although the correlation between the preferred language and the more successful language mode as per the task was borderline significant, this post-test questionnaire has revealed that many Portuguese speakers would feel more comfortable employing receptive multilingualism in their communication with Spanish speaker than resorting to English as a lingua franca, irrespective of whether lingua franca English is more successful in practice.

\textsuperscript{20} By way of comparison, the countries where respondents are most likely to understand news in English include Malta (85\%), Cyprus (63\%), Denmark (57\%), the Netherlands (57\%) and Finland (50\%).

\textsuperscript{21} Here are some of the comments the Portuguese participants left after having completed the experiment:

"The girl does not seem to be very good at English. She has a very “Spanish” accent.”

"Her diction was not very good at all in her native language, Spanish, and she swallowed a lot of words which made it harder to understand, although I believe if she spoke slower it would have been better.”

"I think it makes a big difference which Spanish variant we hear. Her accent seemed to me to very harsh to be Castilian, with many “shhs” that made understanding difficult. Maybe if we were to hear a Galician or a South American accent, it would be easier to understand their Spanish.”
This raises the question of whether listener irritation can be a factor in Portuguese-Spanish communication, which goes beyond the scope of the present study.
6. Conclusion

This thesis reported on an empirical study of interlingual communication between speakers of closely related languages, with a view to comparing receptive multilingualism and lingua franca English as two possible modes of spoken interaction. It particularly addressed the issue of how well Slovenian native speakers understand Croatian compared to English produced by Croatian speakers, as well as whether Portuguese speakers are more likely to understand their neighbours from Spain when speaking Spanish or English. Having regard to the genetic proximity of these two language combinations and a long history of relations between the countries in question, this study attempted to shed more light on the sociolinguistic reality underlying interactions between speakers of the above languages.

As the analysis has shown, Slovenians understand Croatian and Croatian-accented English to a high degree, although they perform significantly better when confronted with a Croatian interlocutor speaking English. This is in line with surveys conducted by top European institutions, claiming that a substantial part of the Slovenian population have a good command of either English or Croatian, or both. On the other hand, the results did not offer clear evidence as to whether Portuguese speakers find it easier to understand their Spanish interlocutors when the latter speak Spanish or English. Even though Portuguese subjects generally performed better on the Spanish test, it cannot be claimed with certainty that Spanish is indeed more likely to enable more successful communication than English. Also, the preference for one or another communicative mode seems to match with comprehensibility, so subjects in both groups were generally more comfortable with the language mode they understood better. Additionally, listeners in both groups have expressed a positive attitude towards receptive multilingualism as a mode of communication, especially Portuguese participants, who almost uniformly stated they would rather listen to their Spanish neighbours speaking Spanish than English.

On a larger scale, this thesis is a contribution to the existing body of literature on receptive multilingualism and intelligibility of closely related languages, as well as to the intelligibility of English used as a lingua franca between non-native speakers. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first experimental study exploring and comparing communication between speakers of closely related languages through lingua receptiva and lingua franca. Moreover, it is one of the few studies dealing with Croatian-Slovenian communication, while it is also a rather novel approach to interactions between native speakers of Spanish and Portuguese. What also makes this piece of research different from other studies is the fact that
it tested the comprehensibility of (semi)-spontaneous speech produced by a speaker of a closely related language, thus giving importance to the listener ability to understand spoken discourse as it occurs naturally while still preserving control of the content of the narrative generated by an array of speakers.

This study is not without its limitations, of course. For instance, the speech samples used in the experiment varied in length and structure, which made it difficult not just to formulate identical questions about them, but also to draw broad generalizations about the degree of their comprehensibility for listeners with a related language background. Another limitation of this thesis could be the methodology used to test intelligibility. In particular, the multiple choice tasks turned out to be quite easy, as participants generally scored highly irrespective of the language mode, which was especially evident in the Slovenian group. Also, intelligibility was examined based on only six test items, so a great variation in the data could hardly be expected. This might have obscured the results to an extent and prevented me from gaining a deeper insight into the effectiveness of interaction through receptive multilingualism and ELF respectively. In addition, although the multiple choice questions were tested before the actual experiment, I was not able to find reliable volunteers who would go through the both tasks and give me their feedback on the level of difficulty. Nevertheless, I was still able to carry out a proper analysis and obtain meaningful results despite these methodological drawbacks.

Furthermore, the testing populations in both groups differed in size and age distribution. The number of Slovenian participants who took part in the experiment was more than satisfactory. Also, while this subgroup was quite homogenous in terms of age (the great majority of subjects were under 30), this on the other hand prevented me from making comparisons across generations and examine which language mode works better for people older than 30. By contrast, the Portuguese population was pretty diverse age-wise, but the age groups were too small to enable relevant comparisons.

Finally, the limited scope of this project did not allow me to investigate intelligibility in the opposite direction, i.e. how well Croatian speakers understand Slovenians when the latter speak their mother tongue and English and how successfully Spaniards deal with Portuguese in comparison to Portuguese-accented English. This would have provided an indication of whether mutual intelligibility between these two language combinations is symmetric or asymmetric, and it would certainly have helped me obtain a clearer picture as to which language mode is indeed more effective.
In conclusion, this study will hopefully be a starting point for further investigation into communication through receptive multilingualism and English as a lingua franca between speakers of closely related languages, especially when it comes to quantitative studies. Keeping in mind the European Union’s policy on promoting linguistic diversity while still insisting on learning foreign languages, this piece of work aims to be an additional input to creating language strategies in relevant member countries. On another level, the present study hopes to help researchers who will be working on similar topics to come up with appropriate research design and methodology which will enable them to add more clarity to the issues addressed here. One thing is certain – the phenomenon of communication though receptive multilingualism and English as a lingua franca between speakers of related L1 backgrounds is in need of a closer scrutiny.


APPENDIX: The listening survey

Please choose your native language.
- Portuguese
- Slovenian
- Other (see the test version in English)

Welcome!
Welcome to our language experiment! In the next ten minutes we are going to test how well you can understand Croatian/Spanish and how well you can understand English spoken by a native speaker of Croatian/Spanish. To measure this you will complete two short tasks (Task A and Task B). In both of these tasks the voice you hear is from the same person.
Before you start, we kindly ask you to answer a few questions about yourself. You will remain completely anonymous and your data will only be used for the purposes of a research project about communication in Europe. Your data will not be disclosed to third parties.
If you are ready, click NEXT and get started! We hope you'll have fun!
Good luck!

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS
1) What is your age?

2) What is your sex?
- Male
- Female

3) What is your highest completed or ongoing level of education?
- No degree
- Primary school degree
- Secondary school degree
- Higher education degree (vocational)
- Higher education degree (academic)

4) Which country did you grow up in?

5) How many years have you lived there?

6) Did you speak another language at home?
□ Yes □ No
If so, which language?

**Questions about English**

7) How old were you when you started learning English?

8) Have you lived abroad for more than a month (at one time) in an English-speaking country?
□ Yes □ No

9) In the last year, how often have you used English in the following situations?

- Listening and talking to people?
  1  2  3  4  5
- Watching television, DVDs or movies?
  1  2  3  4  5
- Participating in a language course?
  1  2  3  4  5

10) How do you rate your English in comparison with your peers?
□ Much worse □ Worse □ The same □ Better □ Much better

11) What was your average grade in English in high school?

**Questions about the ReLa**

12) Have you ever learned Croatian/Spanish at school or in a course?
□ Yes □ No

If so, for how many years?

13) Do you live within 30km of the border with Croatia/Spain?
□ Yes □ No

14) How often have you used Croatian/Spanish over the past year (listening or speaking)?
□ Every day □ Sometimes □ Rarely □ Never
**Audio Test**
Before you begin the task we would like to make sure that you can hear the audio file clearly. Please set up put on your headphones (if you have them) and click 'Play'. You should play this sound over until you are sure that you can hear it clearly.
Can you hear the recording clearly?

□ Yes □ No

**TASK A**
Welcome to Task A. You are going to listen to a Croatian girl telling a story in English, so we want to check how well you can understand her. The story is divided into six fragments (about 5 to 30 seconds long), so your task will be to listen carefully to each part and answer a simple question. Please note that you will hear the recording only once. After you hear each fragment, a question will appear with 4 possible answers, so you should pick the one that fits best. When you choose the answer you think is correct, click NEXT and proceed to the next fragment.

You can listen to the recording one time only. When you are ready to hear the recording, click "Play".

**Question 1**
**What is the girl doing at the beginning of the story?**

□ She is waving at someone on the train.
□ She is meeting someone at the train station.
□ She is running to catch the train.
□ She has just got off the train.

**Question 2**
**Why is the girl taking so long to buy the ticket?**

□ She is looking for money.
□ A man asked her to help him buy a ticket.
□ The ticket machine is faulty.
□ The person in front of her is slow.

**Question 3**
**What happened while the girl was sitting next to the boy?**

□ The girl started crying.
□ A man stole the girl's purse.
□ The boy fell asleep while reading a book.
□ The girl started listening to music.
**Question 4**

How did the girl get her bag back?

- The boy took it from the thief.
- The girl managed to catch the thief.
- The police caught the thief.
- The thief dropped the bag.

**Question 5**

What did the girl do when the boy returned the bag to her?

- She couldn't stop crying.
- She gave the boy a hug.
- She kissed the boy.
- She offered the boy a reward.

**Question 6**

What do we learn at the end of the movie?

- The girl gave the boy her phone number.
- The boy and the girl kissed on the train.
- The girl robbed the boy.
- The boy mistakenly gave the girl his wallet.

**TASK B**

Welcome to Task B. You are now going to listen to the same girl telling another story in Croatian, so we want to check how well you can understand her. The story is divided into six fragments (about 5 to 30 seconds long), so your task will be to listen carefully to each part and answer a simple question. Please note that you will hear the recording only once. After you hear each fragment, a question will appear with 4 possible answers, so you should pick the one that fits best. When you choose the answer you think is correct, click NEXT and proceed to the next fragment.

**Question 1**

What do we learn at the beginning of the movie?

- The boy feels lonely.
- The boy does not have enough food.
- The boy is excited about his new job.
- The boy lives with two roommates.
Question 2
What happened while the boy was walking after work?

□ He met a friend.
□ He found a skateboard.
□ He started crying.
□ Someone pushed him.

Question 3
What did the boy lose when he fell on the ground?

□ Keys
□ Phone
□ Ring
□ Glasses

Question 4
What did the boy find when he was leaving the house?

□ A letter
□ A dog
□ A new pair of glasses
□ A Bible

Question 5
What was written on the note he saw in the park?

□ A job advertisement.
□ Someone was looking for a dog.
□ A call for a skateboarding competition.
□ A quote from the Bible.

Question 6
How does the movie end?

□ The boys wins a money prize.
□ The boy becomes rich.
□ The boy found a new apartment.
□ The boy lives together with the dog's owner.
You're almost done! We want to ask you just two more questions.

1. **What do you think of this speaker?**
   - □ Very annoying
   - □ A bit annoying
   - □ Neutral
   - □ Pleasant
   - □ Very pleasant

2. **If you had to listen to another story from this speaker, which language would you prefer her to speak?**
   - □ English
   - □ Croatian/Spanish

**Congratulations!** You scored e.g. x out of 6 on the English test and x out of 6 on the Croatian/Spanish test!

If you would like to be informed about the results of this study, please enter your email address here.

Thank you for taking our survey. Your response is very important to us.