A preliminary study of the relationship between lexical availability and cognate use

Maria Pilar Agustin-Llach

Universidad de La Rioja, Spain

In the present paper we want to explore the contributing role of cognates to lexical knowledge through a lexical availability task. Cognates are words which share same or similar form, and meaning in the source and target language, here L1 and L2. Accordingly, they are believed to represent a positive source of lexical transfer (cf. Otwinowska 2016). From this, it seems safe to assume that cognate words will have a facilitative effect in lexical learning, and will contribute to increasing word knowledge. However, previous studies had shown that low proficient learners have problems in benefitting from this facilitative advantage (cf. Otwinowska 2016).

Here, we asked 86 pre-university Spanish learners of EFL to complete a lexical availability task and scrutinised the data produced for presence of cognates. Informants were required to provide words or multi-word lexical items as response to 15 stimulus words or centres of interest.

Results point to a rather scarce presence of cognates in the data. Cognate production can be the result either of word familiarity, simply students know the word at stake (learned interlingual identifications, Jarvis 2009) or the conscious or unconscious application of a compensatory or communicative strategy. In this last case, the simultaneous activation of L1 and L2 is probable (cf. Jarvis 2009, Levelt et al. 1999). This might point to a mediating role of L1 during lexical access and retrieval.

References


Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Spanish Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad, grant no. FFI-2013-47707-P.

Keywords: L1 influence, cognates, lexical availability.