



The Effect of Cognates on vocabulary retention of Iranian bilingual EFL Students

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Abstract. Vocabulary is one of the most important tools in second language learning process. It is important to know a good range of vocabulary in order to have good reading comprehension in a foreign language. In Addition, it is important to know strategies such as cognates, to have better vocabulary retention. For that reason, when people do not know a high range of vocabulary in the second language, or when people do not know the strategies (cognates), they face a problem to vocabulary retention. This fact encouraged the researcher to give implicit instruction on such strategies and on the words that are similar between languages and have the same meaning. The experimental group (n= 35) received cognate method as the treatment, whereas the control group (n= 35) received non-cognate method as the treatment. This study used three instruments, one works as a cognate test, a vocabulary pretest, and a vocabulary posttest. The data from this study indicated that students in experimental group (bilingual) significantly outperformed the students in control group in vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Cognate, Strategy, Bilingual

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English vocabulary is an important area worthy of effort and investigation. Recently methodologists and linguists emphasize and recommend teaching vocabulary because of its importance in language teaching. Vocabulary is needed for expressing meaning and in using the receptive (listening and reading) and the productive (speaking and writing) skills. “If language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organs and the flesh” (Harmer, 1991, p.153).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study, in general, aims at investigating the effect of the cognates on vocabulary retention of Iranian EFL learners. In other words, this study is to find out whether instruction of cognates helps EFL learners on vocabulary retention. Finally, this study aims at finding out whether or not there is a difference between different groups of Students with different proficiency levels in terms of the effect of cognates on vocabulary retention. This study set out to pursue answers to the following a Research question:

a) What is the effect of cognates on vocabulary retention of Iranian Bilingual EFL Students?

In order to provide a reliable answer to the previously-stated research question, the following hypotheses are proposed:

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H0₁: there is no significance effect of cognates on vocabulary retention of Iranian Bilingual EFL Students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's globalizing world, borders between people are disappearing one by one and languages share more day by day leading to an increase in the number of cognates in all languages. Defined as the vocabulary items in two different languages that are similar both orthographically and semantically (Holmes & Ramos, 1995), cognates constitute an important part of the vocabulary even in languages differing dramatically from each other such as Japanese and English. It is crucial to make a distinction between true cognates and false cognates. Although both types of cognates have the same or very similar form in two languages, only true cognates have the same meaning. As false cognates, or deceptive demons (Reid, 1968) deserve a different focus. Research on cognates focuses mainly on two main topics: the facilitating role of cognates in L2 vocabulary activation, and the use of cognates as a learning strategy in second/foreign language learning. The investigation of cognates as a learning strategy in EFL/ESL settings aims to foster listening and reading comprehension.

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants

The majority of the participants volunteered to take part in the study. All participants are from an Islamic Azad university in Shushtar City. The experimental group, bilinguals' native language is Arabic. The control group, other participants' native language is Farsi. Nearly all participants are young adults with an average age of 20. The experimental group (n=35) received cognate method as the treatment, whereas the Control group (n= 35) receive non-cognate method as the treatment.

3.2. Instrumentation

This study used three instruments, one works as a cognate test, a vocabulary pretest to assess participants background knowledge before the treatment, a vocabulary posttest assess participants' ability to recall and retention the new words after a week from the treatment sessions. Thus, each participant completed a total of three different protocols. The vocabulary pretest and posttest for the main experiment not have the same format as the cognate test.

3.3. Procedure

All participants in both groups met with the researcher in seven sessions each lasting for 45 minutes. At the first session, the participants received an introduction to the study and take a cognate test. The purpose of the cognate test is to form a list of words unknown to the participants to take part in the study. The participants received a sheet of 53 English words and they asked the questions. At the second session, the participants take a vocabulary pretest, the next sessions are the treatment sessions. Each of these treatment sessions lasted for about 45 minutes. At these sessions, the new lexical items, which choose from the cognate test, taught to

the participants. During these sessions, the experimental group taught the vocabulary via 3 C's approach, also the control group taught via the 3 C's approach.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary pretest

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the participants' scores on the vocabulary pretest and on the vocabulary posttest. These descriptive analyses can help identify the overall patterns of students' scores in both groups in order to address the research question.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary pretest were computed to summarize the participants' scores on the vocabulary pretest.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
bilingual	35	5	50	25.69	12.172
control	35	8	46	23.89	10.194
Valid N (listwise)	35				

Mean score for the bilingual condition ($M = 25.69$, $SD = 12$) was not significantly different than the control condition ($M = 23.89$, $SD = 10$).

4.2. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary post test

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of vocabulary pretest were computed to summarize the participants' scores on the post-test.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
bilingual	35	12	50	31.80	10.535
control	35	9	46	24.86	10.042
Valid N (listwise)	35				

Mean score for the bilingual condition ($M = 31.80$, $SD = 10$) was not significantly different than the control condition ($M = 24.86$, $SD = 10$).

The present study indicates that vocabulary teaching is combined with cognates, it could be much easier for learners to acquire the target words. Rahimi (2005) stated that a Systematic teaching of lexical collocations effects vocabulary learning by Iranian EFL Learners positively. Along with the present study findings the research results indicated that, the students had a notable lack of awareness about the cognates and the similarities that exist between English and their mother tongue. Nesselhauf (2005:252) has suggested that: It is essential that learners recognize that there are combinations that are neither freely combinable nor largely opaque and fixed (such as idioms) but that are nevertheless arbitrary to some degree and therefore have to be learnt. Viviana (2011) Indicated cognate recognition through reading strategies instruction for written Comprehension among ninth grade students. Indeed, in an L1 acquisition setting,

children learn language from exposure only. However, in an L2 setting, a complement to this exposure would be some sort of explicit learning of collocations. Because of their sheer number, it is probably unrealistic that collocations should be taught en masse in a structured way, just like it is unrealistic, mostly for lack of time, that teaching focuses on vocabulary material beyond the high-frequency words of the language (Nation 2001).

4.3. Result of vocabulary pretest

The questions addressed in this study was whether the use of cognates would effect on collocated words of Iranian bilingual EFL Students. To capture the initial differences between the mean of two groups, a t-test was applied. It should be reminded that t-test is a statistical test which is employed to make sure whether significant differences can be found between mean of two groups or not. The results appear in Tables 3.

Table 3. present t-test that is a statistical test which is employed to make sure whether significant differences can be found between means of experimental group and control group

Independent Samples Test										
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
testscore	Equal variances assumed	2.214	.141	.671	68	.505	1.800	2.684	-3.555	7.155
	Equal variances not assumed			.671	65.969	.505	1.800	2.684	-3.558	7.158

There was not a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by t-test. T-Test revealed that the cognates on collocated words was not statistically significantly higher before taking the bilingual treatment compared to the control group. There were no statistically significant differences between the bilingual and control.

4.4. Result of vocabulary post test

Independent Samples Test

Independent Samples Test										
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
testscore	Equal variances assumed	.009	.924	2.822	68	.006	6.943	2.460	2.034	11.852
	Equal variances not assumed			2.822	67.844	.006	6.943	2.460	2.034	11.852

There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by t-test. T-Test revealed that the cognates on collocated words was statistically significantly higher after taking the bilingual treatment compared to the control group. There were statistically significant differences between the bilingual and control.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The data from this study indicate that students in experimental group (bilingual) significantly outperformed the students in control group in vocabulary learning .In other words, the treatment given to the experimental group had affected this group to some extent. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that cognate strategy has no effect on vocabulary retention was rejected.

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