THE EFFECTS OF *FOCUS ON FORM* IN THE TEACHING
OF SPANISH-ENGLISH *FALSE FRIENDS**

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ABSTRACT. *In this study two different teaching strategies were adopted for the teaching of* false friends *within an overall communicative framework. The effect of interlinguistic influence usually causes learning problems for Spanish-speaking EFL learners. As a rule, learners tend to overestimate their current knowledge without noticing the misleading transparency of these words. For this reason, the learners' input was enhanced by means of a contrastive focus on form. Group A received an explicit treatment of the linguistic feature which consisted in providing L1 equivalents of the key words (false friends) in addition to brief metalinguistic explanations. Group B received synonyms or short definitions of the key words and an* input flood *which involved a deliberate increase in the amount of exposure to these words.*

In this empirical study, both strategies were shown to validate their methodological potential to actually modify the learners' erroneous analysis. However, the approach that incorporates an explicit focus on form has proven to be more beneficial than the implicit one in the learning of complex lexical items.

KEYWORDS. *Vocabulary teaching, explicit instruction, vocabulary learning, focus on form, false friends.*

RESUMEN. *En este estudio se utilizaron dos estrategias pedagógicas diferentes para la enseñanza de* falsos amigos *dentro de un marco comunicativo para la enseñanza de lenguas. El efecto de la influencia interlingüística normalmente causa problemas a los hispanohablantes que aprenden inglés como lengua extranjera dado que éstos suelen sobreestimar su propio conocimiento sin percatarse de la transparencia engañosa de estas palabras. Por este motivo, se intensificó el* input *de los aprendices haciendo uso de un énfasis en la forma lingüística contrastivo. El grupo A recibió un tratamiento explícito que consistió en proporcionar los equivalentes en L1 para las palabras en cuestión (falsos amigos), además de breves explicaciones metalingüísticas. El grupo B recibió sinónimos o definiciones breves de estas palabras así como un* torrente de input, *es decir, un incremento deliberado en la cantidad de exposiciones a dichas palabras.*

En este estudio empírico, ambas estrategias pedagógicas mostraron su potencial metodológico para modificar el análisis erróneo de los aprendices. Sin embargo, el enfoque que incorpora un énfasis en la forma lingüística explícito ha demostrado ser más beneficioso que el implícito en el aprendizaje de estos términos léxicos complejos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *enseñanza de vocabulario, enseñanza explícita, aprendizaje de vocabulario, énfasis en la forma lingüística, falsos amigos.*

1. Vocabulary teaching background

In the history of foreign language teaching, vocabulary has been dealt with in different ways. The degree of attention paid to vocabulary has varied depending on the leading methodological trends. The proponents of the Grammar-Translation Method, for instance, assumed that language learners could benefit from memorising lists of words. They would also take advantage of lexical similarities across languages and, therefore, systematic equivalence patterns were taught, such as Spanish ending "*-mente*", which corresponds to English ending "*-ly*". Later, due to the importance of Structuralism, the Audiolingual Method focused on the teaching of grammatical and syntactic aspects. In any case, the general interest in vocabulary learning and teaching has been rather limited in the past (Zimmerman 1997).

Since the early 80's, SLA researchers' interest in and the quality of studies related to second language vocabulary learning and teaching have experienced a considerable increase. However, it was in the 90's when this field of research expanded noticeably. Today, vocabulary teaching and learning looks to be turning into a promising research field. This is especially noticeable in areas such as vocabulary acquisition, general English vocabulary teaching and learning and English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

2. Crosslinguistic influence and vocabulary teaching

As far as the lexical component is concerned, the relationship between the languages in contact has often been analysed from two different points of view in L2 teaching. First, it has been studied as a factor favouring the learning process due to positive crosslinguistic influence (e.g. Eng. *University* – Sp. *Universidad*). Second, as a hindering factor in language learning as a result of negative crosslinguistic influence (e.g. Eng. *relevant* [*pertinent*] – Sp. *relevante* [*important*]). The leading methodological approaches have sometimes been influenced by these factors; both tendencies have always been present in foreign language teaching, but the historical relationship between the languages in contact has not received as much attention as it deserves. It would be necessary to determine the real incidence of crosslinguistic influence depending on the individual pairs of languages involved, in order to obtain an appropriate academic profit.

False friends are not very common in everyday language but they are relatively frequent in certain contexts (e.g. academic-related language) where they can entail a serious learning problem that deserves close consideration. Another distinctive feature of this learning difficulty lies in the fact that these kinds of mistakes are not exclusively characteristic at certain language proficiency levels, but they may even affect professional language users such as foreign language teachers, translators, interpreters and journalists with a high language proficiency both in their L1 and in their L2. Therefore, even though the proportion of English-Spanish *false friends* does not seem very high, it is worth paying attention to them given the possible repercussions of this sort of mistake.

Arnold (1992) confirmed that the misinterpretation of a *false friend*, while reading, is more dangerous than coming across completely unknown lexical items because learners tend to try to infer the meaning of the linguistic form without later verification. Some other authors that corroborate this view are Paribakht and Wesche (1999) and Fraser (1999) who consider that inferring the meaning of apparently familiar words brings with it a potentiality for confusion. The impact of this problem increases if it is taken into account that when a learner is reading and interprets a *false friend* as a true cognate, it is almost impossible for him/her to come up with the mistake on his/her own if negative evidence is not provided. Therefore, the teaching of *false friends* in the classroom context seems appropriate. In Lightbown and Spada's words "[...] when an error learners make is the result of transfer from their first language, and when all the learners in a group tend to make the same error, it will be virtually impossible for learners to discover this error on their own." (Lightbown and Spada 1993: 96).

The degree of difficulty of *false friends* can be determined by examination of two main inherent characteristics, that is, if they are total or partial *false friends*. The former group would comprise those *false friends* with clearly different meaning in both languages (e.g. Eng. *terrific* – Sp. *estupendo*), whereas the latter would consist of polysemous words, one of their senses being a *false friend* (e.g. Eng. *to approve* – Sp. *dar el visto bueno*, *dar su aprobación*, but which also means *aprobar un examen* (Eng. *to pass*)). It is this type of *false friend* that seems to be more difficult to learn and retain by Spanish learners of English.

Swan considers that the mother tongue may play an important role in second language vocabulary learning and use. He suggests that "[…] the mother tongue can support, fail to support or actively hinder someone who is learning or using the vocabulary of a second language." (Swan 1997: 156). Taking this principle into account, learners may make use of what he calls "the learner's equivalence hypothesis" by means of which they would try to establish correspondences across languages (L1 and L2) on the ground of formal similarities. This phenomenon may favour the lexical learning process, but it may also interfere with it in the case of misinterpretations like *false friends*.

Holmes and Guerra Ramos (1993) point out that, in spite of the importance cognate vocabulary has for language learning, research in this area is relatively scarce. This may be due to the fact that researchers usually prefer to deal with other more teachable language-related aspects, such as grammatical features. Research findings of contrastive features in two languages are not always easy to extrapolate to the learning of other L2 languages. In relation to *false friends*, conclusions drawn from this type of studies are generally applicable to the involved languages, and, what is more, this kind of research requires a deep knowledge of both languages. Nowadays, language-related problems concerning crosslinguistic influence are seldom dealt with in EFL textbooks –or any other teaching materials– and, when they are, they are not treated adequately despite their far-reaching significance.

3. Focus on form and vocabulary learning

In the 90's, a new methodological trend came up which acknowledged the importance of L2 learning in formal contexts. Works such as Long (1991), Long and Robinson (1998), Spada (1997) and Doughty and Williams (1998) introduce *focus on form* (FF) as a way to direct the learner's attention to specific linguistic features, which are made salient either by the teacher or the teaching resources. It includes a curriculum based on an analytic approach to language learning such as task-based instruction; or the occasional explicit attention to linguistic forms while doing communication-oriented activities. Spada, who prefers to talk about *form-focused instruction* defines this methodological technique as:

> [...] any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learner's attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly. [...] The term FFI is used here to refer to pedagogical events which occur within meaning-based approaches to L2 instruction but in which a focus on language is provided in either spontaneous or predetermined ways. (Spada 1997: 73)

Up to now, most studies and research dealing with FF have concentrated on syntactic features in a second language teaching situation. The present study incorporates two new characteristics such as the analysis of vocabulary learning and the EFL classroom. Language learning research in such a context becomes more reliable as the control over the different input sources (radio, TV, newspapers, etc.) becomes more efficient and the amount of input the language learner may receive outside the classroom or research environment is insignificant in contrast to a second language situation.

Another important aspect for this research consists in determining which linguistic forms are more likely to be learned by means of a FF. That should determine the selection of an appropriate linguistic feature. Harley (1993) suggests that some of the best candidates for effective FF are:

1. Those linguistic features that differ from the L1, but in non-obvious or unexpected ways.
2. Those linguistic features that are not very common due to irregular use or infrequent appearance in the L2 input.
3. Those linguistic features without a heavy communicative load that are not essential for successful communication.
4. Those linguistic features that are likely to be misinterpreted or misanalysed by the language learner.

Although Harley (1993) was mainly interested in the acquisition of French morpho-syntactic features, each of these conditions could be applicable to the acquisition of *false friends*. In this study, it is assumed that formal instruction has positive effects on L2 acquisition as stated in studies like Long (1983, 1998), Ellis (1990,

1994) and Norris and Ortega (2000), despite the possible individual and contextual variables that may play a part in the process. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out what kind of instruction turns out to be more effective in a FL context.

Most research related to FF has been carried out with the aim of analysing its repercussions on the learning of either syntactic or phonetic features, leaving aside other equally important linguistic features such as vocabulary. Doughty and Williams (1998) consider that it is possible and, what is more, probable that FF can enhance lexical acquisition given the amount of research showing that some degree of teaching intervention seems necessary for L2 vocabulary acquisition.

4. THE ASSESSMENT OF VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

In 1993, Paribakht and Wesche designed an evaluation scale known as VKS (*Vocabulary Knowledge Scale*) in order to assess the development of vocabulary knowledge in a group of English-language learners in an university second language learning context. The main purpose of the VKS consisted in checking the initial level and the evolution during a relatively short period of time. It involved a progressive five-level scale that combined self-assessment and vocabulary production with the purpose of obtaining information about the way students perceived their own knowledge and their actual writing performance. The scale levels ranged from no knowledge at all to proper use in a sentence, with some degree of assertion (see Wesche and Paribakht 1996).

Taking into account some drawbacks with the VKS that Schmitt (1994, 2000) and Fraser (1999) noted, and the peculiarities of the present study, the VKS was adapted in order to increase its suitability for the present research. Therefore, the AVKS (*Adapted Vocabulary Knowledge Scale*) was created (see Appendix 1). It was thought that the best way to present the key words to the students would be their inclusion in a brief sentence-level neutral context. It should allow the students to get information about the morphosyntactic behaviour of the key word in the sentence but without providing clues to the meaning. Although complete knowledge of a word, either in the L1 or in the L2, implies possession of certain types of information (e.g.: meaning, form, pronunciation, morphosyntactic behaviour, lexical collocations, register, frequency, etc.) (Nation 1990), it seems reasonable to consider that an L2 learner has a satisfactory command of a specific word if s/he is able to recognise it in a written context and, solely on the ground of morphosyntactic behaviour (i.e. without any clues as to its meaning), s/he can provide a synonym in the L2 or a translation into the L1. If this level of productive knowledge is shown, it would seem that at least a first step in the complexity of vocabulary learning has been successfully attained.

One of the main problems with the VKS is that it is difficult to interpret the scores students get when more than one word is being tested. This effect was minimised in two ways. Firstly, the scores students could get with the AVKS ranged from 0, at level I, to 3, at level IV. This way students would not get scores if they chose option I (see caption

Appendix 1). Secondly, the total scores for each test and each student were analysed taking into account both the global scores and the options they chose.

5. The study

5.1. *Subjects and the learning context*

This study was carried out at the University of Seville, and it comprised five different stages: (a) completion of personal and academic background questionnaires; (b) initial test (IT); (c) classroom intervention period; (d) immediate post-test (IPT), and; (e) delayed post-test (DPT), which took place three months after the IPT.

Two groups taking an intermediate, university-level course with an academic orientation (English Language 100) were selected as appropriate research groups: group A with 88 students and group B with 72 students. A sample of the overall population was chosen according to the following criteria: (a) regular attendance to class[1]; (b) not having spent long periods of time in English-speaking countries (in any case less than three months) and; (c) not using the English language outside the classroom regularly with relatives or friends. Consequently, it could be stated that all the subjects were in a typical FL learning situation. So, 19.9% of students in group A and 26.4% of students in group B were actual research subjects, although they were not explicitly informed and thought they were doing regular class activities. There were 17 informants in group A and 19 informants in group B, and their average age was 19.25 years and they had studied English for around eight years in state schools.

5.2. *Aims of the experiment*

The main aim of this pedagogical research was to determine the relative effectiveness of two vocabulary teaching techniques for noticeably difficult and misleading vocabulary for Spanish speakers, *false friends*. The objective was to find out if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups and if the target vocabulary was retained. *False friends* were selected as a suitable feature to be studied and two techniques based on a proactive FF were implemented. The first of them was used with group A and was explicit as it consisted in providing the L1 equivalent of the words under study, apart from short metalinguistic explanations of this learning problem in the form of language awareness boxes during the intervention. The second approach, used with group B, involved an implicit teaching technique in the form of an *input flood* of the same key words. In this case, there was no metalinguistic explanation but an increased number of contextualised occurrences. Teaching time was the same in both groups. The false friends used in this study were: *actual*, (*to*) *advise*, *agenda*, *arts*, (*to*) *assess*, (*to*) *attend*, *career*, *college*, *comprehensive*, *conference*, *demanding*, *dormitory*, (*to*) *edit*, *educated*, (*to*) *enrol*, *facilities*, *idiom*, *inadequate*, *journal*, *lecture*, *library*, *notice*, (*to*) *prevent*, *qualifications*, *relevant*, *reunion*, *scholar*, (*to*) *support*, *syllabus*, *topic*.

The tests used were the same on all occasions but the order of the items was altered and the distractors were different. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out at a level of significance of $\geq 5\%$.

5.3. *Description of the intervention*

The pedagogical treatment took place during a 5-week period. Twenty to twenty-five minutes of regular class time were spent on communicative activities related to the study. It was not possible to find appropriate published teaching materials to work with, so they were especially designed for this study. Therefore, the AEP (*Academic English Pad*) was designed containing 21 pages and was used by students during the experiment. In relation to the general features of the AEP, it was composed of activities in general accordance with a communicative approach to language teaching (e.g.: scramble sentences, joining split sentences, speaking activities, pair work, learning record, etc.), the methodological criteria and the teaching goals established for English Language 100.

The teaching materials were divided into four units to be implemented in class at a rate of one a week during a 4-week period. The teaching materials for group A included four language awareness boxes where the mistransparency of *false friends* was explained and exemplified. Each of these language awareness boxes briefly clarified that, from a historical point of view, there are *cognate* and *non-cognate* words. Within the former group there are false cognates or *false friends*. This information was expanded with each of the four boxes and exemplified with instances taken from the AEP. This version of the AEP also included some translation exercises containing the same *false friends*. Group A received the Spanish L1 equivalent for the key words when they appeared for the first time, although it was given orally and it was not provided in the booklets.

Instead of the Spanish translation of the key words, group B received a synonym or a brief L2 definition. Teaching materials for group B had no language awareness section or translation exercises, but the total number of contextualised *false friends* was increased, that is, they were exposed to an *input flood* carried out completely in the L2. This teaching technique is described by Williams and Evans as: "[…] a flood of positive evidence in their input, in the form of artificially increased incidence of the forms in focus." (Williams and Evans 1998: 141). In this study, *input flood* students were exposed to the target items three times whereas students without it just once. Given the fact that in this study the teacher and the researcher were not the same person, a close co-operation between them was necessary. Some of the classroom sessions were tape-recorded for the researcher to check the correct implementation and differentiation in the application of both teaching techniques.

5.4. *Data analysis*

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was computed with the scores both groups got on the initial test (IT), immediate post-test (IPT) and the delayed post-test (DPT). The results of the IPT revealed a main effect for group A (L1 equivalents) ($p < 0.045$) over

group B (*input flood*). The results of the DPT, however, showed that this difference stops being statistically significant three months later (see graphic 1). Nevertheless, parallel to the analysis of the overall scores (following the AVKS), a second analysis was carried out. In this case, the object of analysis was the options each student chose in each test. The idea was to find out how the students' assertiveness developed over time, the analysis of the options selected by the students in the IT, the IPT and in the DPT shows that in both groups students tend to select options 3 and 4 more often than options 1 and 2, which indicates that in both groups the students' self-confidence increased over time. Therefore, an analysis of the right and incorrect items in options 3 and 4 of the AVKS was carried out. These options were productive instead of receptive: the students needed to provide a synonym or translation for the key word.

The analysis of option 4, which scored three, was as follows. Group A got 23% correct items on the IT (incorrect items were down-graded), a 53% on the IPT, and a 55% on the DPT (see graphic 2). For group B, the evolution ranged from 22% on the IT to 37% on the IPT and 45% on the DPT. Both groups, then, started with a rather similar level of correct items in option 4, which suggests that in both groups the initial level of certainty was similar, but the evolution was different. In group A, the percentage of correct items increased considerably on the IPT and kept on growing at least until the DPT. This fact suggests that their self-confidence on that knowledge increased (see graphic 2). In relation to group B, there was also an improvement but it was not so marked.

All these results seem to indicate that after the implementation of the two different vocabulary teaching techniques, learners in group A had not only learned more *false friends*, but they were also more confident of their knowledge. Learners in group B more often thought they knew the actual meaning of a *false friend* but, in fact, their answers were often wrong.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

First of all, the low scores obtained on the initial test show to what extent *false friends* constitute a learning problem for intermediate learners of English as an L2 –first year students of English language and literature at the University of Seville– and especially in English for Academic Purposes. It seems very likely that these vocabulary items constitute a significant problem, more generally, for Spanish mother-tongue students at this level.

The level of correct items on the IT was 3.1 for group A and 3.6 for group B out of the 30 *false friends* that were selected for the study (10.3% and 12% of correct items respectively). Taking into account such low performance, there is no doubt about the need for increased attention to a learning problem that, as some researchers point out (Arnold 1992; Bueno González 1998; Frantzen 1998; Laufer 1990; Schmitt 2000) requires specific pedagogical treatment.

What is more, the results of the IT show a general tendency on the part of the learners to choose an option which is above their present knowledge, that is, an option which indicates that they believe they know a word that simply looks similar to them. This overestimation of self-knowledge is caused by a formal similarity between the L2 word and an L1 word, and is clear evidence of the existence of an interlinguistic influence problem from the L1 to the L2, as sometimes students tend to infer the meaning of new L2 words from an existing L1 term.

This problem is a complex one as students usually assume the erroneous meaning to be right and, therefore, they do not check it with individual strategies (e.g. looking it up in a dictionary) or with social strategies (e.g. asking the teacher or another student) as they might do with completely unfamiliar words. In this situation, students may lack self-evident reasons to suspect there is anything wrong with their suppositions. This situation has other possible repercussions such as the distortion of the immediate language context. This occurs because while reading, whether in the L1 or the L2, it is common for the reader to relate new words to known ones, in this case supposedly known. In this sense, the equivalence hypothesis (Swan 1997) makes learners assume that L2 words with some formal similarity to other words in the L1 mean the same, unless there is evidence of the contrary. According to this principle, most formal similarity is interpreted in terms of equivalence, chiefly at elementary and intermediate levels.

In the reading process there is usually a subconscious link between the lexical unit and the immediate context. In this case, it is possible that the unconscious lack of knowledge of a given word reaches unpredictable repercussions given the so-called "domino effect", that is, if a word is assigned a meaning erroneously, it may distort the immediate context (at the sentence level) and conversely, the wider context (at the paragraph level) (Arnold 1992). This is especially true and frequent at lower-intermediate and intermediate levels. Laufer (1997) describes this process related to the L2 vocabulary mistaken transparency as a progression with five levels: (a) unconscious lack of word knowledge; (b) misinterpretation of an apparently familiar word; (c) distortion of immediate context; (d) the use of distorted knowledge to interpret the meaning of other words and, finally; (e) alteration of wider context which may affect the whole text.

It should be pointed out that the results of this study may be particularly interesting as the lexical units dealt with entail added difficulty given the usual misleading Spanish speakers' interpretation. Learning *false friends* involves more difficulty than learning other lexical aspects. In the same way that true cognate vocabulary turns out to be easier for learners at all levels of formal similarity, learning completely unknown vocabulary may even be easier than deceptive cognates. Learning *false friends* implies the modification of mistaken existing knowledge, which may be fixed in the mind of the speaker. This study was carried out in an L2 classroom context using an approach and a methodology in accordance with a communicative approach to language learning. It can be concluded that in the classroom context it is more expeditious to provide the L1 translation of unknown words with a formal similarity to the L1, which are potentially problematic, than an implicit treatment by means of an *input flood*. Nonetheless, it

should be pointed out that the efficacy of both teaching procedures has been confirmed in this study, and both *focus on form* techniques have had positive effects on L2 learning. By means of moderate L1 use –simple translation at the word level– communication is interrupted for a shorter period of time and meaning-based communication can go on. Indeed, one of the purposes in using the target language in the classroom is the transmission of meaning, avoiding therefore, interruptions in the psycholinguistic process. Another implication of this technique is the amount of time –so precious in the FL context– that is saved when providing the L1 equivalent instead of a deliberate increase in the number of contextualised exposures to the word. This study also shows that in the learning of complex lexical units it is more useful to provide some metalinguistic information that allows the adult learner better understanding of the complexities of the target language. This type of consciousness raising, although a metalinguistic process, may help learners notice the gap between the L1 and the L2 in connection with language features that require deeper processing.

The results of the DPT indicate that the global scores, although higher in group A, are not statistically significant. There is an approximation between the performance of both groups in the AVKS three months after the pedagogical intervention. This approximation may be due to the fact that group B reaches the level of group A, as far as the overall level of knowledge in the L2 is concerned (Harley 1989), or that the language learners in group A gradually forget what they learned during the teaching period (White 1991). In either case, it seems that the durability of the results is conversely connected to the amount of time between the IPT and the DPT, and the learning context. Norris and Ortega (2000) indicate that the effects of L2 explicit instruction seem to last although there is a tendency for experimental and control groups to approximate each other as a result of general learning, the incorporation of new knowledge or maturation. This is validated in the present study. In general, Norris and Ortega (2000) also perceive a difference in favour of explicit instruction over natural exposure.

Up to now, the interpretation of the results has been based on the students' performance in the different tests designed for the present investigation. The subjects of this study also took an objective test, the English Language 100 test. This global test was designed by the Department of English Language (Faculty of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics) to assess students' proficiency. The students who pass it are normally expected to have attained an upper-intermediate level of English. The results of the comparison between the two groups show that 47% of the learners in group B passed the subject at the end of the academic year. However, only 17.6% of the students in group A did. This contrast between the academic performance may have also influenced the results of the study. Taking into account their better command of the language, it can be assumed that group B would take advantage of any activity to a greater extent than group A. This means that if the teaching techniques in group A had been implemented in group B, the results of this study would have been even more remarkable (groups, of course, were assigned at random). A group of language learners with higher motivation and taking more responsibilities for their own learning process probably experiment a clearer

sustained development in all linguistic domains. Less motivated students, taking responsibility for their own learning, would get less profit from any teaching technique.

Two final remarks can be made on the teaching of *false friends*. On the one hand, as far as the teaching of cognate vocabulary is concerned, it is important to explore the linguistic similarities between the L1 and the L2 as it can considerably help lexical acquisition and learning (Ringbom 1992). However, it is also advisable to develop some degree of language awareness in the language learner so that s/he can make use of the similarities but also be cautious and avoid overgeneralization of these learning strategies.

On the other hand, the field of teaching English as a foreign/second language is often dominated by an ethnocentric approach in some English-speaking countries where a significant part of the research has traditionally been carried out. Therefore, most methodological approaches to teaching show a generic perspective that does not address learners' specific needs in the EFL situation, (i.e., foreign language learners sharing the same L1 and the same cultural background). Meara (1993) and Martín Martín (2001) point out that this phenomenon contributes to the fact that most teaching materials used in ELT have been designed to be used in an English-speaking country with a heterogeneous group of students as far as their linguistic and cultural background is concerned. In these cases, it is clearly difficult to pay attention to particular idiosyncratic linguistic features such as cognate and non-cognate words. Therefore, it is desirable that future research considers a more individualised teaching approach, bearing in mind the learner's L1, their possibilities and their needs.

NOTES

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1. This criterion was the first one to be taken into account as only about 50% of the students that had registered for the subject regularly attended classes. It should be pointed out that this situation may look odd, but it is commonplace in the Spanish learning context at this level of formal education.

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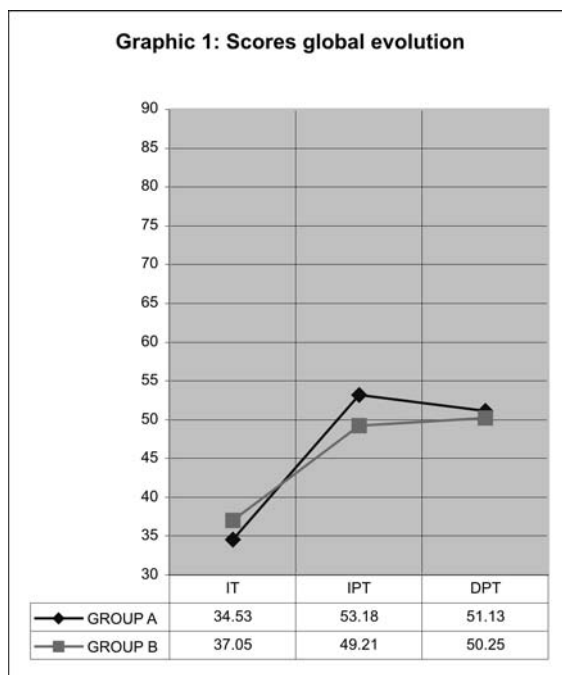
APPENDIX 1

Key words were presented to the students following this format. They could choose only one out of the four options in the AVKS.
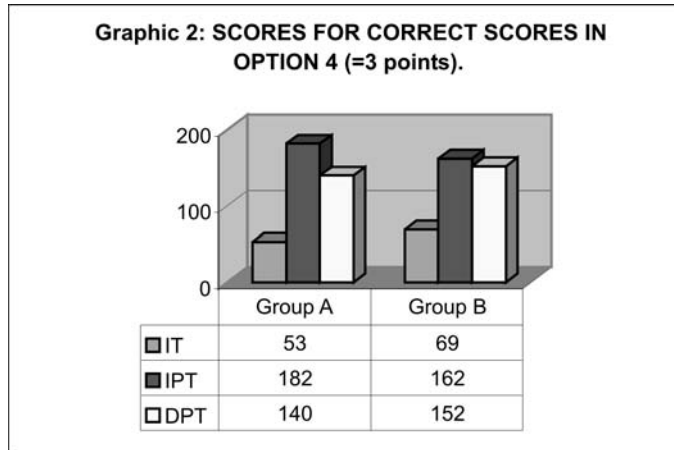
IDIOM: **Idioms** are always difficult to learn.
I.   I don't remember having seen and/or heard this word before.
II. I have seen and/or heard this word before, but I don't know what it means.
III. I have seen and/or heard this word before, and I **think** it means _____.
     (synonym or translation).
IV. I **know** this word. It means _____. (synonym or translation).

The scores obtained with each option ranged from 0 to 3 depending on the students' choice. However, although options I and II would invariably get 0 and 1 point, options III and IV would get 2 and 3 points, respectively; but only 1 if the student's answer was wrong. In this way, they got the score assigned to familiarity with the word instead of with the actual knowledge.

Graphic 1: Scores global evolution

	IT	IPT	DPT
GROUP A	34.53	53.18	51.13
GROUP B	37.05	49.21	50.25

Graphic 1. *IT (initial test); IPT (immediate post-test); DPT (delayed post-test)*

Graphic 2: SCORES FOR CORRECT SCORES IN OPTION 4 (=3 points).

	Group A	Group B
☐ IT	53	69
■ IPT	182	162
☐ DPT	140	152

Graphic 2

Graphic 2 shows the amount of correct items per group and test. Correct items are those that students choose as option 4 and then they could provide an adequate translation or synonym (see appendix 1). IT (initial test); IPT (immediate post test); DPT (delayed post test).