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Lexical processing: Exploring the use of cognates by multilingual speakers

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Abstract

This paper studied cognates as an aspect of lexical processing among Burundian multilingual speakers. Thirty people who could speak Kirundi, French, English and Kiswahili participated in language production through an oral semi-structured interview. The aim of this paper was to investigate the types of cognates produced by Burundian multilingual speakers. To achieve this aim thirty (30) people participated in the interview. The language produced by participants was transcribed and utterances containing cognates were highlighted and analysed through themes building. It was found that among cognates produced by participants, there were true cognates from French and English. Their main difference is pronunciation. Participants pronounced these true cognates as they would be pronounced in French, therefore making them inappropriately pronounced in English. In addition, false cognates were also produced and they were associated with words from either French or English. Words which are highly identical in both forms and meaning in the two different but similar languages were simultaneously activated. Surprisingly there was no production of cognates from Kiswahili and Kirundi even though these languages are very close (both being bantu languages). It was concluded that speakers of both French (where French was learned before English) easily access words in French and in case the same words exist in English, the words are simply used as such. This leads to incorrect use of such words in the target language (English in this study). Besides, processing English words leads to production of false cognates which are considered to be appropriate but which are actually wrong in English. It was recommended that since both languages involved in the cognates production are learned as foreign languages, the teaching of these languages should systematically consider the existence of the cognates in a purposive scaffolding.

Keywords Burundian multilingual speakers, lexical processing, foreign languages, true/false cognates

1. Introduction

Multilingual speakers are confronted to a number of linguistic phenomena that monolingual speakers do not experience Pavlenko, (2017). Different languages known by multilingual speakers provide a great diversity of vocabulary from which some words are similar (in the case of close languages) and others completely different. Different models of lexical processing such as the Competition Model developed by Bates and

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MacWhinney, (1982) have shown that during lexical processing, words from different languages compete for production. Such words include mainly those known as cognates. Multilingual speakers of four languages (Kirundi, French, English, Kiswahili) where some are close languages (Indo-European) and others (Bantu) have nothing in common. This study is so interesting in the sense that it aimed to investigate the kinds of cognates produced by speakers of languages belonging to different language families. In normal circumstances cognates belong to only related languages. There is a need to also investigate whether there is a possibility of cognates production when the speakers use some related and unrelated languages.

1.1. Types of Cognates and their uses

One of the linguistic aspects that occurs among multilingual speakers is the use of cognates. Ringbom, (2007, p. 73) defines cognates in two languages as "historically related, formally similar words, whose meanings may be identical, similar, partly different or occasionally, even wholly different". There are two main kinds of cognates: true cognates and false cognates, (also known as false friends). True cognates are words of two languages that share meaning and false cognates, those that do not share meaning. However, some words which are formally similar in two different languages are not considered cognates. These are words whose formal similarity is accidental and has nothing in common as far as meaning is concerned. This includes the examples of the English *pain* and French *pain*. According to Sunderman and Schwartz (2008) cognates also involve lexical units i.e. the formal external representations either visual or auditory with semantic ambiguity i.e. they map onto only one meaning across the languages involved. They are partial cognates.

According to Carroll (1992, p. 94) cognates are lexical items from different languages which are identified by bilinguals as somehow being 'the same thing'. Cognates include deceptive cognates (also known as false cognates, false friends or accidental cognates) and true cognates. Carroll identifies four essential properties for cognates: a) they are always structural units; b) they are words; c) words paired may be but need not be semantically identical; d) there is always some kind of formal resemblance between cognates.

Stamenov (2009) argues that even though there exist either true or false cognates, there is a great number of partial cognates in any pair of languages. The partial cognates are those that share one sense, but differ with respect to others. According to him, these are the ones which give the greatest challenge to bilingual/multilingual learners and speakers. An example of true cognate is the English *good* and German *gut* which are similar in form and have the same meaning (Stamenov, 2009). Another example is that of *eventually* and *eventuell* which are false friends in the pair English-German. Stamenov argues that such words can be looked at as partial cognates since they share certain senses. Knowing languages that can be used by the speakers in Burundi, there is a great interest to study the kinds of cognates these speakers can produce and the sources of such possible cognates.

1.2. Word Activation in Multilinguals Speakers

Regardless of the intention to function in a monolingual mode, multilinguals activate information about words they known in both languages in parallel (Dijkstra, 2005). Cognate effect is one of the most frequent evidences of the existence of co-activation during the activation of the non-target language on target language processing (Frances, et. al., 2021). Consequently, the similarities in forms and meanings of cognates make them easily accessible during language processing in the languages known by multilinguals. However, this facilitation in cognates processing can be affected in partial cognates. This is due to the competition among multiple-meaning mappings (Kroll& Diaz, 2007). The Competition Model (CM) posits that if a speaker is competent in both languages, s/he has the ability to suppress the activated words which belong to languages that s/he is not using.

In their study on a translation task, Kroll and Tokowicz (2001) found that multilingual speakers were slow to translate words with multiple meanings. This finding shows that the two meanings in the different languages were active and were competing for selection. This slowed the multilingual speakers in their task. The facilitation effect in full cognates production means that in case multilingual speakers access their mental lexicons to retrieve a full cognate, the overlap in the form and in the meaning between the words of the languages involved speeds up the processing of cognates and the retrieval process (Poort & Rodd, 2019b; Poort, Warren, & Rodd, 2016; Poort, & Rodd, 2022). This is possible because these "words from a multilingual's different languages are stored in a shared mental lexicon" (Poort & Rodd, 2021, p. 29). They are active in parallel during lexical access. Therefore, the convergence in meaning across the multilingual speaker languages helps and ease production.

Given the nature of cognates (full or partial) their learnability becomes different from other words. During vocabulary learning for instance, lexical inferencing is a beneficial strategy. Thus, learners can acquire full cognates much easier (Paribakht and Wesche, 2015). For false cognates, the situation becomes challenging. However, other studies in learning cognates (Dressler et al., 2011 for instance) have shown that they are not that easy to learn due to the fact that learners often fail to identify these words as cognates.

In the case of false cognates, the learning is challenging even when the learner has realised cognateness between two words. In this case, when the learner recognises a false cognate, the meaning of the learners L1 misleading equivalent gets automatically activated. In this situation, in order for the learning to occur, it requires that the learner inhibits the irrelevant L1 meaning.

For either full or false cognates, the learning is also affected by the learners' level of competence in the languages involved. More competent learners may be more sensible to unknown words that have formal similarity to their L1. They can then use some strategies to treat them as valuable cues for meaning making (Jessner 2006; Ringbom 2007). Also, more competent learners can have more advanced knowledge of form-to-meaning mappings in the target language. Whereas true cognates can serve as source of learning during additional language learning, deceptive cognates or 'false

friends' makes the learning complicated. During the learning of an additional language, the confusion created by deceptive cognates mainly takes place across two non-native languages instead of a native language and a non-native one (Poort & Rodd, 2021). The case of languages used in Burundi is different in the sense that the languages used are of two different language families. This could make a difference in the types of cognates produced.

1.3. The Learning and Processing of Cognates

Considering the learning and processing of cognates, it is possible to predict that languages which are genetically related will likely interact more by influencing each other both positively and negatively. Otwinowska & Szewczyk (2019) revealed that cognates were known better, whereas false cognates were known worse among their participants which showed that cross-linguistic formal similarity affects L2 word learnability. In their work Peeters, Dijkstra, Grainger, (2013) researched late French-English bilinguals processing of identical cognates and control words in an English lexical decision task. They found that reaction times to identical cognates were shorter than for non-cognate controls and depended on both English and French frequency.

In the context of this study (Burundi), this would be the case of the pairs French-English and Kirundi-Kiswahili. French and English being both Indo-European languages have many similarities especially in vocabulary. Kirundi and Swahili being bantu languages are also genetically associated. Furthermore, Kiwahili is spoken in the surroundings of Burundi where Kiswahili speakers and Kirundi speakers consistently interact. Some vocabulary in Kirundi have been borrowed from Kiswahili (like *sawa*). This means that cognates from French can be found in English and vice versa. The same is true for Kirundi and Swahili. It would also be interesting to see how languages which are not genetically related behave during multilingual production. This may lead to revealing how language competence is affected by word construction among multilingual speakers. In the case of Burundi, the languages involved are used at different levels of competence. This can also affect the processing of cognates from different languages and the kinds of cognates produced.

1.4. Research Purpose and Question

This study aimed at researching the processing of cognates by Burundian multilingual speakers who formally learned three foreign languages (French-English-Kiswahili) in addition to their mother tongue (Kirundi).

This present study intended to investigate the following research question:

What are the types of cognates that are mostly produced by Burundian multilingual speakers?

2. Methodology

This study was a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews. Data was collected with three groups of participants (referred to as G1, G2, G3) made of people who have formally been exposed to French, English and

Kiswahili in addition to Kirundi their L1 during their formal education. These participants were expected to meet the minimum level of formal exposure to the four languages required for this study. Although the participants are expected to have sufficient exposure to these languages, French is the primary language of instruction in the Burundian education system from grade 5 level onwards in public schools. The total number of participants was 30. They had all completed at least high school.

This study used a semi-structured interview in order to help participants produce the language that was later analysed. Asked questions were answered in a duration of 45 minutes for each participant. The questions in the conversation were built on topics such as studies, work, hobbies, spare time activities, family, etc. The language used during the interview was English.

For data analysis, the interviews were transcribed. From the transcribed data, utterances in which cognates were produced were sorted. After data sorting, useful cognates pronunciation was transcribed with phonetic symbols in both French and English whenever necessary. I later analysed the cognates which were produced by analysing both the form and its meaning in both the languages these words belong to. For ethical considerations, participants in this study were informed on the goals of the project and volunteers were recruited. Informed consent and statements from participation were signed. Also, participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study any time they wished to.

3. Findings

In this study, the languages English and French which are known by the speakers are genetically related and historically connected. This led to the use of cognates from the two languages. In Table 1, the words produced by the speakers, the intended word, and the words that have been the source of error as far as cognates re-concerned are highlighted.

Table 1
Cognates used by speakers

Speakers	Speaker's Version	Target Word	Source of Error
G1	fruits	fruits	fruits (French)
	musique	music	musique (French)
	systeme	system	systeme (French)
	personne	person	personne (French)
	piano and guitar	piano and guitar	piano and guitar (French)
	frequented	attend	frequented (French)
G2	produits	products	produits (French)
	audience	audience	audience (French)
	fruit	fruit	fruit (French)

	personne	person	personne (French)
	grand	elder	grand (French)
	devise	devise	devise (French)
G3	fruit	fruit	fruit (French)
	adulte	adult	adulte (French)
	piano	piano	piano (French)
	arrive on	reach	arrive on

As can be seen from data produced by G1 speakers, most of the cognates that have been produced were useful and have led to positive transfer. The use of cognates means that these words from two languages are simultaneously activated. There is limited cognitive effort to activate these words in the language being used if they also exist in another strong language. In the language produced for the present study, these words exist in both English and French and their meaning is identical at least in the contexts where they were used by the participants as shown in the utterances given below.

(1) Okay, ehhh some shoe shops, ehhh some cloves shops but also where they sell fruits, and ehhh of course meat. Yeah.
(2) Yes. I like to listen musique.
(3) They don't have maybe enough qualified teacher in date maybe in this new systeme because teachers who could maybe teach Swahili are no there
(4) Normally murundi was errr a person that you can neglect, a personne who is not adapted to be in town…
(5) Normally when I was err.. in the church when maybe observing some people playing piano or guitar…
(6) …. I've I've frequented errr the lycee of kiremba kiremba sud.

The illustration in example (1), the word *fruits* was produced with a French pronunciation. This word exists as such with its phonology and meaning in both French and English. However, its pronunciation differs in both languages. The way the speaker pronounced it in this case would lead to say that he used a French [fʁqi] word in an English /fruːt/ utterance. But since this word is a true cognate, it is not looked at as a change of code or insertion as it has been discussed in codeswitching section but as a use of a cognate.

The same is true for the words musique and systeme in (2), and (3). The words involved differ only in their pronunciation. For someone who does not know French, it will be difficult to understand what the speakers intended to say even though it would be possible to guess in some cases. In written form for example, the word would cause no problem to either French or English speakers since the spelling and the meaning are identical.

The words in (2) and (3) are true cognates as far as both meaning and form are concerned. It can be argue that the occurrence of these words has

led to facilitation during their cognitive processing and word retrieval. These words are said to easily trigger competition among candidates of this type from different languages. The speaker produced these words not necessarily to change the code under use but used them as English words. Only that the pronunciation was completely a different language. The one word which exists in both languages will easily be retrieved if one of the languages is strong enough. Competition will lead to positive transfer and will likely go unnoticed. But in the present case, the effect of influence of French on English is noticed due to the difference in pronunciation.

Examples of such true cognates in terms of pronunciation and meaning were also discussed by Stamenov (2009). These were samples of cognates in English and German. These examples include *compatible* (English) and *kompatibel* (German); *competence* (English) and *Kompetenz* (German). However, these examples share both the pronunciation and the meaning in both English and German. Whereas the cognates produced by the participants in this study share the meaning but not the pronunciation in both French and English.

The other type of cognates, the false cognates, has also been produced by the participants in this study. That is the illustration in example (6) whereby the verb *frequented* used in this context would be taken as a false cognate. The equivalent of this word in French is *fréquenter*. When used in this context, it does not match the meaning that the word has in English. The most appropriate word in English would be the verb to attend. Nonetheless, in terms of form the verb in French (*fréquenter*) and in English to frequent are identical. Therefore, the speaker would have put it as I've attended and not I've frequented.

Such false cognates have also been found by Bardel (2015) in data from the InterIta corpus as in the use of the word libreria instead of biblioteca whereby the speaker erroneously hypothesised that there is full cognateness between the two words. Instead, the word libreria would be translated as ('book shelf'/book shop) not biblioteca (library) that the speaker wanted to mean.

ci sono libri italiani nella libreria…
(There are Italian books in the book shelf)

In the use of *frequented* instead of attended, the speaker assumed that there is full cognateness between the English to frequent and the French fréquenter. In this study, most of the used cognates are of the noun category. However, the verb category was also affected. This implies that different word categories can be affected while producing language specifically because cognates are more facilitative and yield positive transfer.

Broersma et al. (2016, p.1) studied Welsh-English highly competent bilinguals and found that there is strong evidence for the manifestation of lexical competition across languages in the bilingual mental lexicon.". They then argue that cognate processing might be affected by "competition at the lexical level."

As far as the use of cognates in this study is concerned, it can be said that the production of cognates has been a result of competition between

similar candidates in French and English as the words produced were from these two languages. This point can be supported by the fact that the cognates produced are either true cognates and mispronounced as far as the language being used is concerned or then the cognates produced were false cognates which give support that the words were in competition for production.

Languages which share a number of cognate words and expressions can trigger positive transfer from native language or other known languages either during language acquisition or language production. However, a number of factors are important in order for this to occur. These include according to Włosowicz (2017) the psycho-typological distance between the learner's L1, L2 and Ln, and the number of languages known. Therefore, language interaction, viewed through the lenses of cognates production is triggered by different phenomena. For the cognates to be useful during language acquisition, learners should learn to categorise the differences and similarities in cognates explicitly if there has to be any positive transfer. Besides, Włosowicz (2017) argues that some learners can create some cognates based on languages they know whereas these cognates do not exist in the target language. This normally leads to errors.

In terms of cognitive processing of cognates (as words having similarities in both the form and the meaning), Green (1993) argues that if non-target language words reach a sufficient level of activation, they may be selected instead of the target words. When English is the target language, French cognate words are also activated and can be the ones to reach production due to the competition between the unintended words and the target ones which leads to production of erroneous words in the target language.

In the language produced by G2 speakers, there was a considerable number of cognates. In most cases, these cognates helped the speakers where they needed to use a word but this turned out to be weaker and it could not win over other lexical items in competition. This is true because most of the cognates were true cognates and they resulted in positive transfer which is normally said to be facilitative during both language learning and processing for both comprehension and production. However, cognates do not always facilitate the access and processing of lexical items. In their experiment on late Italian-English bilinguals (Italian being an L1and English an L2), Filippi et al. (2014) found that cognates were produced more slowly than non-cognate words showing there is effect of inhibition.

In the data for the present study, cognates which have been produced (especially French-English) are only differentiated in their pronunciation, i.e. they resulted in mispronunciation in English. These words exist in both English and French in terms of phonology and meaning. For this reason, the cognates were mostly (but not always) pronounced the same way they are pronounced in French. The words *audience*, *groupe*, *fruit*, *personne* in the examples below have been pronounced as in French and they exist in French and have the same meaning as their equivalent in English. The only way to differentiate them in speech is by their pronunciation with the exception of produits in illustration (7).

(7) I have learned those ehhh… how to make up, to make up and this shop eeh they are some product like produits, like radiant and so on
(8) I don't know is mom or a miss dis is the parson whose name Odette Nsengimana have… give an audience I don't know how can I explain but he make, she made a groupe Inama y'umusi
(9) you can findi de for example de place where you can found de err fruit is not de same
(10) The personne [long silence]. Can you repeat again?

These words will only be recognized as French or English in speech through their pronunciation otherwise if they are only written (as single words) there will be no possibility to know whether they are French or English. For instance, the *audience* /odjɑ□s/ is French while the same word pronounced as /ˈɔːdɪəns/ becomes English. The word fruit pronounced as /fʁqi/ is French whereas the same word pronounced as /fruːt/ becomes English. The same is true for person even though French phonologically adds some sounds and becomes personne, it is very much similar especially in speech. The only way is to differentiate it from pronunciation: when it is produced as /pɛʁsɔn/ it is a French word, but when it is pronounced as /ˈpəːs(ə)n/, then we know that it is English.

Broersma, et al. (2016) have also discussed such an issue with illustrations from English—Welsh cognates *balloon-balwn* which are pronounced the same unlike their difference in spelling. They note that if a Welsh-English bilingual speaker wants to produce a balloon in Welsh, both the Welsh and the English lemma will be activated. Therefore, the speaker's intention to express a certain meaning leads to the activation of the lemmas of the cognates in both English and Welsh.

Furthermore, some false cognates have been produced. They are results of negative transfer as in the example below.

(11) Before others and my grand brother eee help me to go to school end eee try to pay all the money which is necessary to continue my studies.

In this utterance, the word *grand* would also be used in French and would have its equivalent in English as *elder* like my elder brother. The same word exists in English but with a different meaning. This word would mean in English magnificent and imposing in appearance, size, or style which would be translated in French as grandiose or magnifique. However, the speaker has used it the same way it is used in French not in English. This shows that the lexemes in both languages were activated and competing for production but finally the stronger one was produced.

Furthermore, the word devise in the examples below is interpreted as a false friend as far as the use of cognate is concerned.

(12) I can devise her to to plan time to tell deme that if you are listening music while you are studying it's not good because it can disturb you or you can't take time for studying. Yeah.

The word *devise* exists in both English and French with different meanings. From the dictionary, this word, as a verb, has either of the meanings below:

a. to form in the mind by new combinations or applications of ideas or principles,
b. to plan to obtain or bring about
c. to give (real estate) by will

In French, the same word means word that expresses a thought, feeling. It is used as a noun and pronounced differently from English pronunciation. The equivalent of devise in English would be *motto*. The speaker has used this word as a verb. It is possible to guess that he might have wanted to produce advise looking at the context, but the fact that he produced it twice without correction means that it was the word coming to his mind and that he thought he was using an appropriate English word. But it can also be said that this word is in competition with another one which is actually a French word which has a different meaning. But the fact that this word form is the same in French and in English, this highly activates it to the extent that the speaker of both French and English, if s/he is not highly competent in both the two languages, will produce one instead of the other. Being identical in form, both will be activated in the mind of the speaker and they compete for production. Nonetheless, it has a different meaning and pronunciation in French as mentioned earlier.

As I have highlighted from data from other groups discussed previously, G3 group also have produced language from which they have significantly used cognates. Most of the cognates were useful since they were true cognates. These cognates are French-English cognates and they resulted in positive transfer except that they were produced with a French pronunciation. The utterances in which such cognates were produced are shown below.

(13) they are many product like fruit, wears, shoes and other things like … like and other thing like fruit and many fingsi to eat.
(14) because if eehh you are a child you are adulte [French] ifi you, you think that in your routine in future you can change your mind if eehh you are adulte but if you are a child you fink da you have da things which can go with this your years.
(15) I were a child I..I.. I didn't learn da music instrument like piano and err I can go to de church

The words highlighted exist both in French and in English and their meaning is completely the same. The thing that differentiate them is only their pronunciation. The word fruit is pronounced as /fruːt/ in English but

the French pronunciation is [fʁqi]. The English production of the word *adult* is /ˈadʌlt/ or /əˈdʌlt/ whereas its French pronunciation is /a.dylt/. The same for the word *piano* /pɪˈanəʊ/ in English and /pja.no/ in French. It is possible to look at these words illustrated as similar in both English and French. However, the illustration of their ways of production especially when speech production is concerned show that they are actually different. The knower of the two languages would also be able to produce these words the ways they are produced in each of the languages. For foreign speakers, even though it is strengthened in literature that an L2 speaker is different from an L1 speaker of the same language, the closer the words are pronounced the better.

For an English speaker who has never heard the pronunciation of the word *fruit* in French for example, it will be difficult to know what the speaker who pronounces this word with a French pronunciation wants to mean. The same is true for the other words. However, due to context and other factors it might be possible to guess but if these words become recurrent in the speech of a given speaker, it might complicate communication and understanding.

Even though the majority of cognates were true cognates, there was also the use of false cognates in the language produced by the participants in this study as in the illustrations below.

The cases of false friends involved situations whereby the word (expression) used exists exactly both in French and English but used in different contexts.

(16) …. we will arrive on something which on will be special for us yes
(17) … it is easy to arrive on your dreams. Yes

In the illustrations above, the equivalent of the English verb *to arrive* in French is *arriver.* The English verb *to arrive* means either of the following:

1. reach a place at the end of a journey or a stage in a journey.
2. (of an event or a particular moment) happen or come.

Considering the context in which the speaker used this verb, I argue that he was misguided by the fact that the verb *arriver* in French can mean *to reach* as for instance in *reach consensus*. The fact that *to arrive* can be translated as *arriver* made the speaker think that using *arrive* in this context (will *arrive on* something) will also yield the same meaning. The appropriate word in the context of the speaker in (17) for example would be *reach*. This is the use of a false cognate which is explained by the fact that the most activated word was the French *arriver.* But since the same word exist in English, the speaker has used it even though it does not match the English intended meaning. The word *arrive* got high activation since its form exists in both English and French.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The use of cognates among Burundian multilingual speakers is a significant phenomenon. Two main types of cognates which are the most discussed in literature are also produced by participants in this study: true

cognates and false cognates (also known as false friends). However, some authors argue that there are also partial cognates (Stamenov, 2009). In the present study, participants have produced language that contains more true cognates all coming from French and being incorrectly used in English. Based on the tenets of the Competition Model, this is due to the fact that these two languages have significant similarities at the lexical level (form and meaning).

In the language produced by participants, most of the cognates produced differ only by their pronunciation (French vs English). Surprisingly there were no presence of what would be considered as Kirundi vs Kiswahili cognates. Considering the results of this study, for someone who does not know French, it might be difficult to understand what the speakers intended to say even though it would be possible to guess in some cases. Considering the assumptions of the Competition Model, the occurrences of some words easily trigger competition among candidates of the same type from different languages. The speaker produced these words not necessary for the sake of changing the language under use but used them as if they were using the English language that was required during the interview. On this issue, VanHell and DeGroot, (1998) and Finkbeiner et al, (2004) argued that bilingual languages are simultaneously active even when there is a requirement (on the side of the speaker) to use only one language.

In the language produced, there was also the use of false friends. The word used in the context does not match the meaning in English. The speaker assumed that the known French words would match the English words and therefore erroneously hypothesized that there is full cognateness between the two words. In this study, even though most of the used cognates are of the noun category, the verb category was also affected. This implies that different word categories can be affected while producing language specifically because cognates are more facilitative and mostly yield positive transfer and can go unnoticed.

In the data analyzed and interpreted, all the participants made use of true cognates in the language they produced. The main characteristic of those words is that they are words found in both French and English but pronounced differently in the two languages. Since most of these cognates are differentiated through pronunciation, they resulted in mispronunciation in English. In most cases, cognates helped the speakers where they needed to use a word but this turned out to be weaker and it could not win over other sounds made to form lexical items in competition. Mispronouncing such words meant that the speakers could not differentiate between the French and the English words properly.

However, cognates do not always facilitate the processing of lexical items. In their experiment on late Italian-English bilinguals (Italian being an L1and English an L2), Filippi et al. (2014) found that cognates were produced more slowly than non-cognate words showing there is effect of inhibition on production of this type of words. In the design of the study, it was not easy to find whether there has been inhibition or not, what was apparent is that the French-English cognates were produced the same way they are produced in French. This means that among all participants French is stronger than English. A phenomenon which is normal in the multilingual

education system of Burundi design. French was either studied before English or the two languages were simultaneously introduced to the participants in formal education. Moreover, even though in the current multilingual design French and English have the same amount of time on the weekly schedule, from grade 5, French is the language of instruction. This explains why French might be stronger among participants compared to English.

Since the speakers were using English, it was difficult to find cognates from Kiswahili for example. There might be few or no such cognates in the two languages. However, French and English have a considerable number of cognates. When a speaker needs a word in English, this word will also activate its counterpart in French, a phenomenon which is facilitated by the fact that these words have similarities in their phonology and might have identical meaning (Hernandez& MacWhinney, 2005); Truscott, & Smith, 2004); Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019).

In terms of cognate production, the knower of the two languages (French and English) would also be able to produce these words the ways they are produced in each of the languages. For a foreign speaker, even though it is strengthened in literature that an L2 speaker is different from an L1 speaker of the same language, the closer the words are pronounced, the better. For someone speaking English and who has never heard the pronunciation of the word fruit in French for example, it will be difficult to know what the speaker who pronounces this word with a French pronunciation wants to mean. There was also the use of false friends in the language produced at this level. These types of cognates exist exactly both in French and English but used differently. Since the two words are similar phonologically, they seemed to be true cognates but they are false friends which turn the speakers to produce inappropriate meaning.

It can be concluded that the use of cognates can yield a positive transfer if only the words had been pronounced appropriately in the target language. Since the study used spoken language, it turned out to be realised that most of the cognates produced by the participants were inappropriately pronounced. Among all the participants, such words were found in French and English and the characteristics is that they were mispronounced (as far as English is concerned). However, false cognates have also been used showing that the speakers wrongly hypothesise cognateness between words of two languages. The occurrence of these words has led to facilitation during their cognitive processing and that they easily trigger competition among candidates of this type from closely related languages. The main characteristic about the cognates produced is that they are words found in both French and English but pronounced differently in the two languages.

Patterns of lexical features that are most important for success in these languages use such as cognates should be taken into account for language content materials design so that students can develop their competence as they progress through the grades. Some language features that picture spoken interactional characteristics should be considered to ensure students get much familiar with similar words such as cognates from different languages to facilitate learning and later language production. The kind of the language produced by participants in this study can inspire on an

appropriate pedagogical design that can help multilingual learners in formal education such as developing instructional modules that explicitly contrast French-English false friends or focus on the pronunciation differences of true cognates.

The usage of GenAI: GenAI was not used at any stage of this research and paper.

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