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UNDERSTANDING COGNATE WORDS IN A FIRST CONTACT WITH ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**UNDERSTANDING COGNATE WORDS IN A FIRST CONTACT WITH ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

**ENTENDENDO PALAVRAS COGNATAS EM UM PRIMEIRO CONTATO COM O
INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the processing of Portuguese-English cognate words by people who have never taken an English course. There were 10 (ten) participants who took part in the present study. Their average age was 44 (forty-four) years old. The present study consisted of a task, in which participants received a list of 40 cognate words English- Portuguese and were required to write the correspondent word in Portuguese that best expressed the meaning of the respective word in English. More specifically, the present study aimed at understanding if cognate words are understood in a first contact with English. The results indicated that cognate words work as a motivational factor to make people inspired to learn a second language, in this case English, as reported by all of the participants of the present study. Furthermore, the findings also favor the view that cognate words are easier to learn and are remembered better than noncognate words. Besides, the results confirm the view that similar form and characteristics between L1 and L2 are automatically detected and explored to establish memory traces to new L2 words.

Keywords: Bilingualism. Vocabulary. Cognates.

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RESUMO

O objetivo do presente estudo foi investigar o processamento de palavras cognatas do Português-Inglês por pessoas que nunca haviam feito um curso de inglês. O presente estudo contou com 10 (dez) participantes. A idade média dos participantes era de 44 (quarenta e quatro) anos de idade. Este estudo consistiu em uma tarefa, onde fornecemos uma lista de 40 (quarenta) palavras cognatas (Inglês-Português) aos participantes, os quais foram instruídos a escrever a palavra em português que melhor expressasse o significado da respectiva palavra em inglês. Os resultados indicam que as palavras cognatas funcionam como um fator motivacional fazendo com que as pessoas sintam um desejo de aprender uma segunda língua, neste caso a língua inglesa, conforme relatado por todos os participantes do estudo. Os resultados favorecem a visão de que as palavras cognatas são mais fáceis de aprender e são lembradas melhor que as palavras não cognatas. Além disso, os resultados confirmam a visão de que forma e características semelhantes em L1 e L2 são automaticamente detectadas e exploradas para estabelecer traços de memória para novas palavras em L2.

Palavras-chave: Bilinguismo. Vocabulário. Cognatos.

1 INTRODUCTION

Language is used to express our feelings, ideas, to make us understand other cultures, and the breadth of the world around us. As a result, the number of people interested in learning not only one language but also two or more languages has grown. One of the most important aspects to consider is to acquire new vocabulary to develop a Second Language (L2). Teaching new vocabulary in a foreign language classroom can be a challenge for many teachers. Therefore, it is important that everything that facilitates learning of new words be used. According to Laufer; Meara; Nation (2005): “learning new vocabulary is not an easy task. Anything the teacher does to facilitate this process is an advantage for the students”. Möller and Zeevaert (2015, p.314) affirm that, “the possibility for intercomprehension is necessarily closely linked to the amount of common vocabulary in the respective two languages”. Consequently, cognates are an obvious bridge to the English language.

This study asks whether cognate words in English, cognates are word pairs with similar form and the same meaning in two languages, facilitate understanding in a first contact with the English language. The present study is organized as the following: in section 2 (two)

a literature review of bilingualism, vocabulary, and cognates is presented. In section 3 (three) the methods are described. In section 4 (four) the results are presented. At last, section 5 (five) concludes the paper with a discussion of the results.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents definitions for the main concepts involved in the present study and a review of literature regarding cognate words. This section is organized as follows: subsection 2.1 presents assumptions concerning the bilingualism. Subsection 2.2 presents arguments that justify the importance of acquiring vocabulary. Finally, subsection 2.3 presents a review of literature on cognate words.

2.1 Bilingualism

Today, language is essential to every aspect. Marian and Shook (2012), affirm that,

We use language to communicate our thoughts and feelings, to connect with others and identify with our culture, and to understand the world around us. And for many people, this rich linguistic environment involves not just one language but two or more (p. 2).

However, it is very important to consider what bilingualism is and what constitutes the phenomena of bilingualism. There are many definitions for the term bilingualism. For instance, Cook and Bassetti (2011) define bilingualism as “the knowledge of more than one language, as opposed to monolingualism” (p. 1). Bloomfield (1933) says that bilingualism is “native-like control of two languages” (p. 56), which means speaking two languages with equal fluency in every situation. This perhaps corresponds best to the everyday concept of bilingualism, namely that a bilingual has a high level of proficiency in both languages. On the other hand, Haugen (1953), for example, affirms that bilingualism starts at “the point where a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language” (p. 7). That is, bilingualism refers to any real-life use of more than one language at any level.

Evidently, the major positive consequence of bilingualism is knowing two languages—and thus being able to communicate with a larger group of individuals, as well as having access to two cultures, two bodies of literature, and two worldviews. Marian and Shook (2012) state something important about cognitive consequences of bilingualism:

When a bilingual person uses one language, the other is active at the same time. When a person hears a word, he or she doesn't hear the entire word all at once: the sounds arrive in sequential order. Long before the word is finished, the brain's language

system begins to guess what that word might be by activating lots of words that match the signal (p. 3).

According to the article *Second Language Learning Bilingualism and English as a Second Language*³, bilinguals are people who use limited knowledge of a second language (L2) for school or work purposes, and others who are sophisticated speakers, such as writers and readers of two or more languages. In short, it can be seen that the bilingual category is quite broad.

Much research has been done regarding the nature of bilingualism. One of the purposes of the studies in this area is to know whether there are two language-specific stores in the bilingual memory organization or if there is only one integrated, language-independent memory structure with memory nodes shared between the two languages (DE GROOT, DELMAAR, LUPKER, 2002, pp. 397-398). Many types of research have been done to discover the manner through which bilinguals gain access to their language system whether selectively or non-selectively. The same researchers, De Groot, Delmaar, Lupker (2002), state that “the selective-access view holds that a language input is processed only by the contextually appropriate language system whereas the non-selective-access view posits that both language systems respond to the input” (p. 398). As can be seen, there are many unanswered issues regarding bilingual lexical access in the literature.

One of the most important aspects to consider in Second Language (L2) acquisition research is the learning process of a new vocabulary. Learning new words in a Second Language (L2) is a successive and cumulative process that involves the linking of new lexical forms to conceptual representations already connected to word forms in the first language (L1). In the next section, this important aspect – vocabulary – is discussed.

2.2 Vocabulary

Studies focused on the vocabulary of native speakers seem to suggest that Second Language (L2) learners need to know very large number of words. According to Nation (2001), “part of a language development program is teaching and learning vocabulary” (p. 1). In addition, in order for the student to perceive new lexical items, there are two necessary

³ Available in < <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1789/Bilingualism-Second-Language-Learning-English-Second-Language.html>> *Second Language Learning Bilingualism and English as a Second Language - Early Literacy Development of English Language Learners (ELLs), Language-of-Instruction Studies* > Access on April 12.

conditions: interest and motivation on the part of the students. Beglar and Hunt (2005) affirm that many linguists and psychologists place the lexicon at the center of the process and the production of human language (p.7).

Based on a series of studies on foreign language errors in L2 and L3, Hall (1992, 1996, 1997; Hall; Schultz 1994) and Ecke and Hall (1998, 2000) have discussed that vocabulary development may usefully be viewed as a problem of pattern-matching and assimilation with current lexical knowledge, at least at the beginning of the word learning process. Hall et al (2009) affirm that:

To acquire a new vocabulary item in a native or nonnative language, learners must establish an entry for it in lexical memory and link it to a representation of its meaning(s). For infants, the process is automatic and largely unconscious, whereas for adults, initial noticing of the form and awareness of the problem of form-meaning mapping may regularly occur, especially in the learning of nonnative languages at the beginner level. (p. 154).

Following the steps of Chacón-Beltrán, Abello-Contesse e Torreblanca-López (2010, p. 01), this study considered that teaching and learning of vocabulary has come to be seen “as a key component in learning a second language”. Nowadays, vocabulary is widely recognized as a central area in the recognition of any language. “Learning new vocabulary is not an easy task. Anything the teacher does to facilitate this process is an advantage for the students” (Laufer; Meara; Nation, 2005).

In a foreign country where an unfamiliar language is spoken, words such as hotel, taxi, and café can often still be recognized because they possess the same or a similar spelling and meaning across languages. Such words are called cognates. Assche, Duyck, and Brysbaert (2013) affirm that:

Learning words in a second language (L2) is a gradual and incremental process that involves the linking of new lexical forms to conceptual representations already connected to word forms in the first language (L1). This process of word learning has been shown to be easier in the case of cognate words. (pp. 237-238)

Hall (2002) strongly suggests that similar form features in the L1 and L2 are automatically detected and exploited in the establishment of memory traces for new L2 words (p. 71). The following section sketches the importance of cognate words for learning a second language.

2.3 Cognates

Cognates are an obvious bridge to the English language. Frequently, cognates are recognized or produced faster than monolingual control words—an effect referred to as the cognate facilitation effect (COSTA; CARAMAZZA; SEBASTIAN-GALLES, 2000; DIJKSTRA et al., 1999). According to Lemhöfer and Dijkstra (2004), “when homographic cognates are processed in a second-language context, the first-language reading seems to become active as well and to facilitate recognition” (p. 535).

Dijkstra, Grainger, and van Heuven (1999) present very important assumptions related to cognates: “Word forms may also be shared by words of different languages” (p. 497). According to them, this happens with cognates (words that have similar orthography and the same meaning), interlinguistic homographs (words with the same spelling but different meaning - also known as false friends). Dijkstra, Grainger and van Heuven (1999) also says that “In addition to their form, words of different languages may share (some of) their meaning(s), i.e., they may be translation equivalents” (p. 497). They affirm that:

For researchers investigating word recognition, such similarities of words within and across languages are also interesting because form-similar or form-identical words provide a real challenge to the recognition system. If word recognition involves the retrieval of semantic information on the basis of a word’s phonological or orthographic form, word forms that are associated with multiple meanings require the selection of one of these from the different possibilities. (DIJKSTRA; GRAINGER; VAN HEUVEN, 1999, pp. 496-497):

Therefore, cognate words are easier to learn and are remembered better than noncognates. (i.e., translation equivalents with full or partial form overlap, as in Portuguese-English actor-actor). As already mentioned, cognates are, therefore an obvious bridge to the English language. According to Lemhöfer and Dijkstra (2004):

In sum, when homographic cognates are processed in a second-language context, the first-language reading seems to become active as well and to facilitate recognition. The few available studies on the recognition of cognates in a first-language context indicate that under these circumstances, cognate effects are weaker but still present. For noncognate interlingual homographs, the results are more variable. Homograph effects seem to depend on several factors, such as the frequency characteristics of the words, the task requirements, and the mono- or bilingual composition of the stimulus list (p. 535).

According to many bilingual studies, noun cognates presented out of context are processed faster than noncognates. For instance, Hall (2002) affirms that “early experimental research on cognate representation and processing in bilinguals [...] appeared to demonstrate

that true cognates, but not false cognates, are accessed, named, and translated faster than noncognates” (p. 70).

This cognate facilitation effect has been observed using tasks such as visual lexical decision (Dijkstra et al., 1999; Lemhöfer & Dijkstra, 2004), picture naming (COSTA et al., 2000), and word naming (SCHWARTZ; KROLL; DIAZ, 2007).

Van Assche, Duyck, and Hartsuiker (2012) affirm that depending on the amount of overlap with the input word the phonological, orthographic, and semantic representations become activated in both languages on the presentation of a word. The reason for this is that cognates have similar crosslingual orthographic, phonological, and semantic representations, activation levels are higher for cognates as compared to noncognates, which leads to faster recognition times (p. 5).

Cognates are a rich source for the investigation of the bilingual lexicon due to their orthographic and semantic similarity, they have an integrated representation in the two languages of the bilingual, according to the BIA+ model (DIJKSTRA; GRANGER; HEUVEN, 2002, p. 496). According to Hall et al. (2009), the literature on cognates, within both the SLA and bilingual lexicon research traditions, states unanimously that words that share an orthographic and/or phonological form across languages have different effects on learning, representation, and processing than words that do not share such characteristics (p. 155).

Furthermore, studies on lexical production and comprehension errors in a foreign language usually reveal patterns of formal organization in and between the native and foreign language lexicons. Ecke's work on tip-of-the-tongue recall stages in second and third language learners (ECKE 1996, 1997; ECKE; GARRETT 1998) shows clearly that interlexical influence at the level of phonological and orthographic form plays a crucial role in learners extended word searches. In a study of cognate reliance on reading comprehension by Brazilian learners of English, Holmes and Ramos (1993) report on lexical misidentification on the basis of formal similarity with other words in the L1 and L2 (e.g., L2 *poll* interpreted as L1 *polo* ‘city, central point’ and L2 *swing* taken as L2 *swim*). Table 1 presents some studies that found evidence in favor of the cognate facilitation effect.

Table 1 - Empirical studies supporting the cognate words

Study	Goal	Participants	Task	Results
ROBERTS; DESLAURIE RS (1999)	To investigate whether cognateness affects verbal	L1: French L2: English	Naming color photographs of	The cognate pictures were more often

	confrontation naming performance in balanced bilinguals.		30 animals and 30 foods.	correctly named in both languages and more often correctly named in English than the non-cognate pictures.
LEMHÖFER ; DIJKSTRA (2004)	To investigate how cross-linguistic overlap in semantics, orthography, and phonology affects bilingual word recognition	L1: Dutch L2: English	Lexical decision	Cognate facilitation effect occurred with semantics and orthographic overlap, but not with phonology.
TOASSI; MOTA (2014)	To investigate the influence of cognates English-Portuguese in the comprehension of English.	L1: Brazilian Portuguese L2: English	Sentence comprehension with eye movement recording.	Double cognates were processed faster than their respective controls.
VANHOVE; BERTHELE (2015)	To investigate the lifespan development of the ability to correctly guess the meaning of foreign-language words with known translation-equivalent cognates.	L1: German L2: Swedish, English, French	Guessing the meaning of written and spoken words.	Cognate guessing skills improve throughout childhood and adolescence. In the written modality, cognate guessing skills show some further improvement throughout adulthood. In the spoken modality, cognate guessing skills remain fairly stable between ages 20–50 but then start to decline.
VANHOVE (2016)	To investigate whether learners are able to quickly discover simple, systematic graphemic correspondence rules between their L1 and an unknown but closely related	L1: German L2: Dutch	A computer-run learning experiment in the form of a translation task and three paper-and-pencil vocabulary tests.	Participants who encountered <oe> or <ij> cognates in the first part were more likely to translate <oe> or <ij> cognates using German words containing <u> or <ei>.

	language in a setting of receptive multilingualism			respectively, in the second part compared to their respective controls, suggesting that correspondence rule learning took place.
TOASSI (2016)	To investigate the effect of triple cognates in the comprehension of English.	L1: Brazilian Portuguese L2: German L3: English	Sentence comprehension with eye movement recording.	Triple cognates were processed faster than double cognates.
SMIDFELT (2017)	To investigate the intercomprehension processes of multilingual Swedish L1 speakers while reading and decoding text in Italian, an unknown language.	L1: Swedish L2: English, French L3: Spanish and German	Lexical decision	All the languages known by the participants were activated during the intercomprehension task.

As can be seen in Table 1, empirical support for the cognate facilitation effect was found when cognate pictures were more often correctly named than the non-cognate pictures (ROBERTS; DESLAURIERS, 1999), in a lexical decision task (LEMHÖFER; DIJKSTRA, 2004), for the faster processing of double cognates as compared to non-cognates (TOASSI; MOTA, 2014), in the investigation of guessing skills of cognate words (VANHOVE; BERTHELE, 2015) in systematic graphemic correspondence rules between their L1 and an unknown but closely related language (VANHOVE, 2016), in the faster processing of triple cognates as compared to double cognates (TOASSI, 2016). Finally, there was evidence that all the languages known by the participants are activated during an intercomprehension task (SMIDFELT, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

Aiming at investigating the understanding of cognate words in a first contact with English as a foreign language, a task was designed with the main goal of investigating the influence of cognate words (English - Portuguese), in the comprehension of English language.

In order to achieve this objective, one group of monolingual participants who had never taken an English course before took part in the present research.

This section presents and justifies the method of the present research. The criteria for selection of participants, preparation of the stimuli, and procedures for data collection are presented in detail. More specifically, this section is organized into the following subsections: subsection 3.1 presents the research design of the present study. After that, subsection 3.2 provides general information regarding participants' profile and describes the criteria for the selection of the participants. Subsection 3.3 consists of the description of the procedures for data collection. The following subsection 3.4 presents the conclusions of the task carried out. The following section provides an overview of the general research design of the present study.

3.1 Design of the study

The present subsection has the main goal of providing an overview of the research design of the present study as well as to illustrate how the experimental session worked.

The design of the present study was the following. First, one experimental group was necessary to perform the task of the present study: one group of speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, who had never taken an English course before, as already stated. In addition, the task of this study was applied with cognate words (English-Portuguese) as the target language for the group of participants. Having presented a general idea about the design of the present study, we proceed now to the presentation of the selection of the participants.

3.2 Participants

Participants of this study were all volunteers and adults, and they should be native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese and with no knowledge of other languages. The age range of the participants varied from 30 (thirty) to 50 (fifty).

A total of 10 (ten) participants took part in the present study. An important factor for the participants of the group described above is that none of them had taken an English course before. Therefore, they were real beginners. The only information that participants received before agreeing to take part in the present study was that they had to write the word in Portuguese that better expressed the word that was presented in the task.

The specific information about these participants regarding sex, age, city of birth, profession, level of schooling, and knowledge of English are displayed in Table 2 in order to facilitate the analysis of this data.

Table 2 - General information about the participants

Information	Participants
Sex	2 (two) male 8 (eight) female
Age	Average: 44 (30 – 59)
City of birth	Fortaleza-CE 90% Arneiroz-CE 10%
Profession	Military policeman 10% Seamstress 10% Housewife 20% Self-employed 30% Cashier 10% Nurse 10% Bus driver 10%
Level of schooling	Middle School Junior: 10% High School (incomplete) 10% High School (graduate) 60% Higher education (incomplete) 10% Higher education (graduate) 10%
Knowledge of English	Beginners: 100%

N = 10

Note: N= number of participants

As can be seen in Table 2, there were more female participants than male ones. According to Table 2, the mean age of the group, that was 44 (forty-four), it can be concluded that participants of this group were adults. All of them were Brazilians; most of them were born in the city of Fortaleza (90%). In relation to their profession, it can be observed that they were quite different and varied. Half of them, fifty (50%) were housewives or self-employed, and the other 50% per cent were military police, seamstress, cashier, nurse and bus driver. Regarding the level of schooling most of them (60%), were graduated from high school, and only a few had access to a graduation (20%). In addition, all of them reported themselves as beginners. The next section presents the task applied to participants.

3.3 The task

For the present study, 40 (forty) cognate words were selected between the English and Portuguese languages using the database Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and we discriminated these words in 4 groups corresponding to the range of comparative graphical similarity, with group 1 corresponding to the scope from 0.5 to 0.59, group 2 from 0.6 to 0.69, group 3 from 0.7 to 0.79 and group 4 from 0.8 to 0.89.

The grammar class of the selected words was noun and the frequency listed was offered by Google search. Graphical similarity was calculated using an algorithm of orthographic similarity developed by Weber (1970) and Van Orden (1987), described in Van Orden (1987, p.196).

Table 3 – Words' Graphics Similarity and Frequency

Nº	Word	Translation	Idiom	Graphemic Similarity	Gramatical class	Frequency
1	Air	Ar	PT-EN	0,563	Noun	1.110.000.000
2	Area	Área	PT-EN	0,508	Noun	1.520.000.000
3	Blouse	Blusa	PT-EN	0,566	Noun	496.000.000
4	Galaxy	Galáxia	PT-EN	0,55	Noun	255.000.000
5	Memory	Memória	PT-EN	0,578	Noun	297.000.000
6	Music	Música	PT-EN	0,539	Noun	1.730.000.000
7	Palace	Palácio	PT-EN	0,55	Noun	1.930.000.000
8	Panic	Pânico	PT-EN	0,539	Noun	47.800.000
9	Series	Série	PT-EN	0,553	Noun	944.000.000
10	Sofa	Sofá	PT-EN	0,598	Noun	135.000.000
11	Competition	Competição	PT-EN	0,64	Noun	899.000.000
12	Confusion	Confusão	PT-EN	0,687	Noun	159.000.000
13	Dictionary	Dicionário	PT-EN	0,692	Noun	517.000.000
14	Dissertation	Dissertação	PT-EN	0,638	Noun	110.000.000
15	Effects	Efeitos	PT-EN	0,696	Noun	937.000.000
16	Electricity	Eletricidade	PT-EN	0,65	Noun	302.000.000
17	Elephant	Elefante	PT-EN	0,643	Noun	346.000.000
18	Groups	Grupos	PT-EN	0,641	Noun	1.520.000.000
19	Information	Informação	PT-EN	0,62	Noun	8.190.000.000
20	Language	Linguagem	PT-EN	0,67	Noun	3.190.000.000
21	Academic	Acadêmico	PT-EN	0,797	Noun	626.000.000
22	Access	Acesso	PT-EN	0,71	Noun	9.330.000
23	Activities	Atividades	PT-EN	0,779	Noun	1.370.000.000
24	Auditorium	Auditório	PT-EN	0,735	Noun	155.000.000
25	Calendar	Calendário	PT-EN	0,757	Noun	1.160.000.000
26	Crocodile	Crocodilo	PT-EN	0,773	Noun	95.200.000
27	Department	Departamento	PT-EN	0,798	Noun	1.570.000.000
28	Equipment	Equipamento	PT-EN	0,717	Noun	2.830.000.000
29	Metabolism	Metabolismo	PT-EN	0,797	Noun	111.000.000
30	Movements	Movimentos	PT-EN	0,792	Noun	192.000.000
31	Actor	Ator	PT-EN	0,801	Noun	597.000.000
32	Alarm	Alarme	PT-EN	0,857	Noun	963.000.000
33	Animals	Animais	PT-EN	0,845	Noun	1.230.000.000
34	Apartament	Apartamento	PT-EN	0,803	Noun	32.300.000
35	Camera	Câmera	PT-EN	0,8	Noun	1.080.000.000
36	Class	Classe	PT-EN	0,802	Noun	799.000.000
37	Computer	Computador	PT-EN	0,814	Noun	2.540.000.000
38	Exams	Exames	PT-EN	0,855	Noun	150.000.000
39	Factor	Fator	PT-EN	0,841	Noun	695.000.000
40	Lists	Listas	PT-EN	0,81	Noun	739.000.000

Comparing the two words and following the instructions described using the algorithm - Orthographic Similarity is the ratio between GS of word one with itself and GS of word 1 and word 2 (Van Orden, 1987). - The calculation is based on:

- A: Sum of letters in each word / 2
- B: If first two letters are the same B = 1 else B = 0
- C: Number of letters, which are present in both words.
- E: If last two letters are the same E = 1 else E = 0
- F: number of pairs of adjacent letters in the same order, shared by pairs
- T: ratio of shorter word to longer word
- V: number of pairs of adjacent letters in reverse order, shared by pairs

Then the Graphic Similarity = $10 \left(\frac{50F + 30V + 10C}{A} + 5T + 27B + 18E \right)$

From this calculation, we have been able to separate these 40 (forty) words in the aforementioned groups. The final task consisted of these 40 (forty) cognate words organized in alphabetical order. Instructions were added to this list. They were instructed to try to find a word that had a similar meaning. The task was performed on a sheet of paper. Participants also answered a biographical questionnaire and a posttest. The students performed the task individually and in the same location. After that, all participants had doubts clarified. It is

important to mention that all of them were volunteers and were not be paid for their participation. The researcher was present the whole time while the participants only translated the words, without an explanation of how they were able to guess the meaning of the words. The next section describes the procedures adopted to for data collection.

3.4 Procedures

The experimental session consisted of filling in a biographical questionnaire, performing one task and, after that, a posttest. The task consisted of a list of 40 (forty) cognate words (English-Portuguese) in which participants were required to write the word that best expressed the meaning of the respective word.

The task was presented to the participants on a sheet of paper. They were instructed to try to guess the meaning of as many words as possible. In this task, we analyzed how was the understanding of cognate words (English-Portuguese). Before that, participants were required to answer a biographical questionnaire, and after the task, a posttest. The researcher was present the whole time and gave 15 (fifteen) minutes for participants to try to carry out the task. The whole procedure lasted approximately 20 (twenty) minutes. Thus, the participants had 15 (fifteen) minutes to perform the task and 5 (five) minutes to answer a biographical questionnaire and a posttest. The students performed the task individually and on different occasions but with the same criteria, which were: participants who had never taken an English course (beginners), being between 30 (thirty) and 50 (fifty) years old. To perform this task they had the same time to answer the questions that were 15 minutes. The present task has limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the data. It was done only with 10 (ten) participants and some of the results can thus be explained by individual differences. Future research should be conducted with more participants.

3.4.1 The biographical questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided in three parts (see Appendix A for the biographical questionnaire). In the first part, participants were asked to provide general information. It included questions about the day of data collection, participants' name, date of birth, age, sex, nationality, place of birth. In the second part, participants were asked about their level of schooling and area of study (when graduated) and occupation. In the third part, participants

were required to report their language experience/ competence, by answering questions about their English language experience.

3.4.2 The posttest

After applying the task and the biographical questionnaire, the posttest was administered. The posttest is considered a valuable diagnostic tool. More specifically, this posttest contained 3 (three) questions (see Appendix B for the posttest). The first question was about their perception of the task performed, and whether it was easy or difficult to identify the corresponding word in Portuguese for the words given in English. In the second question, they were asked about their perception of the English language if it had changed after the task was completed. Finally, the third question was whether they had an interest in learning the English language.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained. For the data analysis, first we analyzed the percentage of correct answers for each participant (Table 4). Second, we analyzed the percentage of the correct answers for each word, according to Table 5, which presents the descriptive statistics with the results of mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores.

Table 4 - Percentage of correct answers for each participant

PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF CORRECT WORDS	PERCENTAGE OF CORRECT ITEMS
Participant 1	14	35,00
Participant 2	17	42,50
Participant 3	37	92,50
Participant 4	5	12,50
Participant 5	15	37,50
Participant 6	24	60,00
Participant 7	31	77,50
Participant 8	36	90,00
Participant 9	31	77,50
Participant 10	7	17,50
Mean	22	54,25

Minimum	5	13
Maximum	37	93
Standard Deviation	12	29

According to Table 4, it can be seen that the average of right answers per participants was 54.25% percent. It is important to mention that as previously stated, the participants reported, according to the biographical questionnaire, that they had not taken English courses before, and were all beginners. Participants were asked if they had any experience with English language learning and 80% (eighty percent) of them responded that they did not have any experience. After that, participants were asked how their level of English was, and all of them affirmed that they were beginners. However, throughout all this work it was realized that although the knowledge of English by the participants was limited, this did not impede them and they could read and understand many words presented in English.

Table 5 - Percentage of the correct answers for each word

ENGLISH WORD	NUMBER OF CORRECT WORDS	PERCENTAGE OF CORRECT ITEMS
Academic	2	20,00
Access	5	50,00
Activities	3	30,00
Actor	6	60,00
Air	3	30,00
Alarm	7	70,00
Animals	10	100,00
Apartment	7	70,00
Area	4	40,00
Auditorium	7	70,00
Blouse	1	10,00
Calendar	8	80,00
Camera	7	70,00
Class	6	60,00
Competition	5	50,00
Computer	6	60,00
Confusion	6	60,00
Crocodile	5	50,00
Department	7	70,00
Dictionary	4	40,00

Dissertation	3	30,00
Effects	1	10,00
Electricity	4	40,00
Elephant	7	70,00
Equipment	7	70,00
Exams	8	80,00
Factor	2	20,00
Galaxy	5	50,00
Groups	4	40,00
Information	5	50,00
Language	5	50,00
Lists	3	30,00
Memory	8	80,00
Metabolism	6	60,00
Movements	7	70,00
Music	10	100,00
Palace	5	50,00
Panic	4	40,00
Series	5	50,00
Sofa	8	80,00
Mean	5	54,25
Minimum	1	10
Maximum	10	100
Standard Deviation	2	22

As can be seen in Table 5, the results of the correct answers for each word, the average was 54,25%. All participants were able to translate from English to Portuguese two words, which were *animals* and *music*, and 80% of them translated 3 (three) words correctly, that were *calendar*, *exams*, and *memory*. On the other hand, only 10% of the participants translated 2 (two) words correctly, which were *blouse* and *effects*.

5. DISCUSSION

We can affirm that more than half of the participants achieved good results even without knowledge of English as reported by them, and with the average age of 44 (forty-four) years old. The analysis of the results presented affirms what we mentioned before that Hall

(2002, p. 71), strongly suggests that similar form features in the L1 and L2 are automatically detected and exploited in the establishment of memory traces for new L2 words. The findings of the present study, mainly in the posttest, indicate that cognate words in a first contact with English as a foreign language make people more motivated to learn it. Furthermore, when participants were asked if they would like to learn English, all of them reported that knowing that these words are similar in English and in Portuguese made them motivated to study English. Some of them provided the following answers:

“Descobri que o inglês não é tão difícil assim como pensamos ser”. – Participant 4

“Não sabia que era fácil e parecido com o português”. – Participant 9

After performing the task, they reported an interest in learning English because they felt motivated by the similarity of words with their native language. Some of them provided the following answers:

“Tenho muito interesse em aprender inglês. Pude perceber que sei muitas palavras. Mesmo com a idade que tenho sei que sou capaz”. – Participant 4

“Sim, pois consegui responder várias perguntas. Depois da tarefa, acho que consigo aprender inglês”. – Participant 1.

“Sim, pois sei que sou capaz, e basta perceber que existem semelhanças”. – Participant 3

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be claimed that cognate words, as measured using a word translation task work as a motivational factor to make people inspired to learn a second language, in this case, English language, as reported by all participants of the study. Further, the findings also suggest that cognate words are easier to learn and are remembered better than noncognates. Even among participants with an average age of 44 (forty-four) years old, and without knowledge of English language, as reported by them, they felt encouraged to take an English course.

The findings of the present study indicate the importance and necessity of searching for possible approaches, strategies, and alternatives both for target language vocabulary instruction and for the motivational aspects, especially in the early stages of learning,

corroborating with Hall (2002) "cognate words in a first contact with English as a foreign language to make people more motivated to learn".

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APPENDIX A – THE BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO CEARÁ
CENTRO DE HUMANIDADES
DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDOS DA LÍNGUA INGLESA, SUAS LITERATURAS E
TRADUÇÃO
CURSO DE LETRAS-INGLÊS

Código do participante _____ (a ser preenchido pela pesquisadora)

QUESTIONÁRIO BIAGRÁFICO

Data da entrevista: _____/_____/_____

Data de nascimento: _____/_____/_____

Idade: _____

Sexo: () masculino () feminino

Nacionalidade: _____

Local de Nascimento: _____

Grau de escolaridade:

() Nenhuma escolaridade

() Ensino Fundamental: de 1º à 4º série

() Ensino Fundamental: de 5º à 8º série

() Ensino Médio incompleto

() Ensino Médio completo

() Superior incompleto

() Superior completo. Nesse caso especifique a sua formação:

Ocupação atual: _____

- Qual a sua experiência com o aprendizado da língua inglesa?

- Qual a sua experiência com a língua inglesa?

- Como você estima o seu nível atual de inglês?

() Iniciante () Básico () Intermediário () Avançado

<input type="checkbox"/> Lê	<input type="radio"/> Pouco	<input type="radio"/> Razoavelmente	<input type="radio"/> Bem
<input type="checkbox"/> Fala	<input type="radio"/> Pouco	<input type="radio"/> Razoavelmente	<input type="radio"/> Bem
<input type="checkbox"/> Escreve	<input type="radio"/> Pouco	<input type="radio"/> Razoavelmente	<input type="radio"/> Bem
<input type="checkbox"/> Compreende	<input type="radio"/> Pouco	<input type="radio"/> Razoavelmente	<input type="radio"/> Bem

APPENDIX B - POSTTEST

The posttest

PARTICIPANTE Nº _____

1. Qual foi a sua percepção sobre a tarefa realizada? Foi fácil identificar a palavra correspondente em português para as palavras fornecidas em inglês? Ou foi difícil? Por favor, justifique sua resposta.

2. Após realizar essa tarefa, a sua percepção sobre a língua inglesa mudou?

() SIM () NÃO

Por que?

3. Você teria interesse em aprender a língua inglesa? Por favor, justifique sua resposta.
