



Strategy Training for English-French Cognate Awareness: Contributions to Korean Learners' L3 French Competency

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Abstract

This study examined how possessing a second language (English) affected Koreans' ability to access, acquire, and use an L3 (French). Focusing on the cross-linguistic influence of the two languages in question, the current study adopted the hypothesis that teaching vocabulary by making the learners consciously aware of the cognates of typologically similar languages (French and English) could improve target language competency. A questionnaire was first conducted to measure and compare the frequency of using cognates in the learning process between A1-level and B1-level learners. Next, strategy training was carried out for A1 learners to distinguish and recognize English and French cognates and false friends, focusing on strategies that showed the most significant differences between the two groups. Finally, to determine this strategy's effects on French-language competency, we measured and comparatively analyzed the French-language competency and strategy frequency of A1 learners before and after strategy training. The findings especially highlight the need for learners to consciously recognize the advantages of using English to learn French and seek their own strategies for this. In this learning process, teachers should mobilize learners to actively and consciously reuse their prior learning knowledge and strategies through the systematic training program or tasks.

1 Introduction

The Council of Europe (2001) differentiates between plurilingualism, an individual's competence in using more than one language, and multilingualism, which refers to the presence of several languages within a given area. One key notion of plurilingualism is that of repertoire, which relates to the entirety of an individual's linguistic and cultural experiences. A linguistic repertoire is not limited to languages that can be used at the present moment: not only do plurilinguals use languages and varieties they already know, they can develop new languages and even have the possibility of a new start, either personally or professionally, because of their linguistic diversity. Generally, plurilingual education aims to enhance individual language repertoires, especially the language(s) already present (Choi & Ollerhead, 2018; Council of Europe, 2001).

Currently, we live in a multilingual world that requires a diversity of linguistic and cultural experiences. Though different from the circumstances in Europe, whose geographic and political conditions have naturally shaped the multilingual environment, Koreans also live in a multilingual environment due to the development of transportation, communication, and media, as well as changes in social and economic structures. Given this context, it is not impossible to implement in Korea the plurilingual education that characterizes Europe.

Unfortunately, Korea's language education policies focus only on English unlike the situation in much of Europe. In effect, while students are learning English at a younger age, the learning age for other languages is rising. Within the Korean education system, learning English as a second language (L2) is mandatory starting in the third grade, while students interested in learning French as a third language (L3) must wait until their second year of high school. Furthermore, L3 French education in Korea has been studied solely on the theory of L2 learning without considering the linguistic repertoire of French learners, which comprises at least three languages (L1: Korean, L2: English, and L3: French) (Choi, 2017). This means that an important fact – namely, that Korean learners of French, consciously or not, depend on their knowledge of English (L2) when learning French as an L3 – has been overlooked.

Thus, to appropriately consider the effects of an L2 on an L3, we should no longer apply theories developed for children's English education to adolescents' or adults' French education. Instead, we must seek a suitable teaching methodology for L3 French language learners in Korea since applying those same L2 teaching methods for children to adolescents or adults learning French as an L3 will inevitably produce different effects.

Against this backdrop, this study looked for evidence of the influence of English (L2) on French (L3) competency from the perspective of plurilingual education theories. In particular, this study focused on the cross-linguistic influence between typologically similar languages that appears in learners' lexical learning processes. Accordingly, we examined how training French-language learners in Korea to consciously mobilize the strategies of recognizing and using French and English cognates in the learning process affected target-language competency.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Cross-linguistic influence*

Early studies on cross-linguistic influence focused on identifying the interaction between L1 and L2 based on bilingual education (De Bot, 1992; Green, 1986). In particular, many studies attempted to ascertain the influence L1 has on L2. They also sought to determine whether L1 causes a negative or positive transfer in L2 learning (Chen, Shu, Liu, Zhao, & Li, 2007; Grosjean, 2001; Tokowicz & MacWhinney, 2005). These findings and models based on L2 learning, however, limit their consideration of L3 learning to simply extending and applying the same models as with L2 learning.

Consequently, during the last two decades, researchers have tried to distinguish between L2 and L3 acquisition. A number of recent studies in this area have argued that the acquisition of three or more languages is qualitatively distinguished from L2 acquisition. They have started to pay more attention to the cross-linguistic influence of different languages on learners' linguistic repertoire, not just the dynamics that occur between two languages (Beltran, 2006; Bono, 2007; Cenoz, Hufeisen, & Jessner, 2001; Ecke, 2015; Hall, Newbrand, Ecke, Sperr, Marchand, & Hayes, 2009; Leung, 2007; Lindqvist, 2009, 2010; Ringbom, 2001; Sanz, 2000; Tremblay, 2006; Tsang, 2015). L3 acquisition is no longer explained by bilingual education theory based on the interaction between the two languages in question; all the languages in the learners' linguistic repertoire interact with one another during the L3 learning process (Bono, 2007; De Angelis, 2007). Therefore, L3 learning should be studied using different approaches from those that correspond to L2 learning. In effect, when L3 learners are confronted with difficulties in actual communicative situations, they often unconsciously use prior knowledge from L1 or L2 learning and use.

When accessing, acquiring, and using an L3, a number of factors seem to play an important role as to which of the background languages will be activated and possibly transferred: linguistic typological distances between the languages in question (typology), L2 status, characteristics of the languages themselves, proficiency level of the user, age of acquisition, and recent use (recency) (Bardel & Lindqvist, 2007; Dewaele, 2001; Falk & Bardel, 2010; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998). Several experimental studies have tried to identify which factor is the most important to activate the background language: according to many, it is the so-called typology factor (Bardel, 2006; Bardel &

Lindqvist, 2007; Cenoz, 2001; De Angelis, 2005; Lindqvist, 2009; Ringbom, 2007).

Kellerman (1983) introduced the notion of psychotypology, which refers to the learner's own perception of the distance between languages and which has often been discussed in L3 studies (Bardel & Lindqvist, 2007; Cenoz, 2001; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Ringbom, 2007). They pointed out that L3 learners tend to always search for similarities among languages and use the language that is psychotypologically related more actively. According to this perspective, Korean learners are more likely to acquire vocabulary and structure by relying on English (L2) rather than Korean (L1) as their background language during their French (L3) learning process.

2.2 *Cognate awareness*

According to previous research, taking advantage of cognates (words in different languages that are of a common historical origin and that are often similar in pronunciation, spelling, and meaning can accelerate vocabulary acquisition and be closely connected to target language proficiency (De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Gibson & Hufeisen, 2003; Herwig, 2001; Lemhöfer, Dijkstra, & Michel, 2004; Odlin & Jarvis, 2004; Van Hell & Dijkstra, 2002). Researchers have recognized that providing learners with explicit information about cognates can enhance positive transfer (true cognates, which are pairs of words that are perceived as similar and are mutual translations) and minimize negative transfer (indirect cognates or partial false friends, which, although they look or sound similar, can have different meanings depending on the context, and false friends, which look or sound similar and have different meanings). Eventually, cognates can play a significant role in the organization of lexical competence and linguistic performance.

Even though English-French belong to different branches of the Indo-European family of languages, their vocabularies share many similarities due to the geographical, historical, and cultural contact between the two countries over many centuries. LeBlanc and Séguin (1996) estimated that there are more than 20,000 English-French cognate pairs (e.g. nature - nature, problem - problème, question - question), a number representing approximately 30% of all entries in two general purpose French-language dictionaries. English and French also share false cognates (e.g. main - main [hand], lecture - lecture [reading], hazard - hazard [chance], actually - actuellement [at present]), but Tréville (1996) estimates there to be approximately one tenth the number of false cognates as true cognates. The sheer number of French-English cognates suggests that cognate awareness may be a valuable skill for dual language learning even among beginners (Hipfner-Boucher, Pasquarella, Chen, & Deacon, 2016). In effect, while most perceived similarities will facilitate learning, there are also instances where similarity can lead to errors, as in the relatively few false friends (Ringbom, 2007).

Cognate awareness is the ability to recognize the cognate relationship between words in two (psycho-)typologically related languages, and thus learners can understand the meaning of the unfamiliar word (Chen, Ramírez, Luo, Geva, & Ku, 2012; Kellerman, 1983). Because it requires one to reflect on the relationship between lexical items in two languages, cognate awareness is considered a metalinguistic skill (Hipfner-Boucher et al., 2016; Jessner, 1999; Pop, 2008; Thomas, 1988). In other words, recognizing form and meaning relationships across languages is an aspect of metalinguistic awareness. To date, most experimental studies in this area have shown that cognate knowledge facilitates the vocabulary development of the target language (August & Shanahan, 2006; Beltrán, 2006; Brunner & Ankerstein, 2013; Chen et al., 2012; Dressler, Carlo, Snow, August, & White, 2011; Hipfner-Boucher et al., 2016; Keogh, 2012; Malabonga, Kenyon, Carlo, August, & Louguit, 2008; Pop, 2008; Proctor & Mo, 2009; Ramírez, Chen, & Pasquarella, 2013). However, previous research has tended to focus only on finding evidence of the positive influence of cognate awareness or cognate relationships and not on deliberate and explicit strategy training to use cognate knowledge, although the latter is needed for learners and teachers. In the current study, we will focus on the effects of strategy training for cognate awareness of English-French to facilitate the L3 French learning process through linguistic (psycho-)typological proximity.

3 Research setting and methodology

3.1 Participants

Study participants consisted of Koreans learning English as an L2 and French as an L3. They comprised two groups: 15 French A1-level learners and 15 French B1-level learners. These participants, whose average age was 21.3 ($SD=1.45$), were learning French as a college major. Their English level was B1 or higher because, according to Trévisiol (2006), positive transfer is more likely to occur when the background language is at least B1 level.

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected with an 18-item questionnaire (Table 1). This questionnaire was developed by restructuring Oxford's (1990) strategy classification and Schmitt's (1997) vocabulary learning strategy classification into items suitable for observing the frequency of using the abovementioned strategies. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree). The average Cronbach's α was .89.

Table 1. Questionnaire framework

Part A: Strategies for discovering a new word's meaning	
Determination strategies	1. I assume the meanings of new French expressions or words based on English expressions or words I already know.
	2. I use a French-English dictionary.
	3. I assume the meaning from the context and determine the meaning of the French word by thinking about the meanings of English words or expressions I already know.
Social strategies	4. If I cannot remember a specific French word, I use the English word with the same meaning.
	5. I ask the instructor to translate new words into English words or expressions.
	6. I discover the same expressions in French and English through group activities.
Part B: Strategies for consolidating a word once it has been encountered	
Memory strategies	7. I remember new words using my flashcards or vocabulary lists that record both English and French words.
	8. I remember new French words or expressions by thinking about places or situations where similar forms of English words have been used.
	9. I separately classify and remember French words that have similar forms with but different meanings from English.
Cognitive strategies	10. I practice pronouncing French words by comparing the pronunciation of similar English words.
	11. I look up new French words from English words or expressions that have a similar form.
	12. I take notes on the meaning of new words in class that are the same as English words or expressions.
Metacognitive strategies	13. I pay attention to words or expressions I misunderstood due to different meanings despite the similar form.
	14. I enthusiastically find French words or expressions similar to English words or expressions I already know.
	15. Before I look up new words in the dictionary, I try to determine whether they are similar to English words or expressions I know.
Social strategies	16. I seek various ways to minimize errors due to English.
	17. I have my word cards or lists confirmed by the instructor for accuracy.
	18. I seek help from a native instructor.

This questionnaire was used to collect data two times, before and after the cognate awareness training. First, when taking the midterm exam, students with different levels of French competency (A1 and B1) completed this questionnaire regarding strategies they applied to recognize and use cognates and false friends in English (L2) and French (L3). The purpose of this first questionnaire was to determine the most commonly used strategies by A1 (beginner) and B1 (intermediate) learners to discover a new word's meaning. These responses were then used to develop the cognate awareness strategies used in the experimental training part of the study.

A1-level learners were selected for strategy training. The experimental portion of the study focused on whether training A1-level Korean French-language learners to recognize English and French cognates and false friends improved their strategy use and target-language competency. In particular, strategies that differed significantly in frequency of use between the two proficiency groups or that were frequently used by B1-level learners (based on first survey questionnaire results), were used to train A1-level learners. These procedures were chosen because beginners tend to rely on the morphological similarity of two languages to infer the meaning of the target-language vocabulary (Trévisiol, 2006; You, 2008), while intermediate learners use other vocabulary strategies more effectively (Kim & Im, 2014; Shin, 2005). Therefore, results of the first questionnaire (pretest) were used to determine training strategies. The pretest (administered in conjunction with the midterm) was followed by five hours of class for seven weeks, then re-administration of the questionnaire (posttest) (in conjunction with the final exam). Because previous studies reported a strong relationship between the use of language learning strategies and target language proficiency (Gu & Johnson, 1996; Hon-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Kim & Seo, 2007; Lai, 2009), we narrowed our focus to the effect of strategy training on English-French cognate awareness A1-level Korean French-language learners.

There were six strategy training steps used for A1-level learners (based on Grenfell and Harris, 1999):

- (1) *Awareness raising*. The concept of cognates and false friends (true false friends/partial false friends) was described to the first class for an hour after the midterm and the first frequency survey. The students practiced distinguishing cognates and false friends with words they already knew. Afterward, the students completed a reading comprehension task and then identified the strategies they used.
- (2) *Modeling*. The teacher modeled, discussed the value of new strategies and made a checklist of strategies for later use. These were centered around determination, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies that revealed significant differences between the two groups (A1 and B1) in the first questionnaire survey on strategy use.
- (3) *General practice*. The students practiced the newly observed and recognized strategies with different dialogues and texts in the textbook *Festival 1*. For example, when faced with new words while listening to and reading new dialogues or texts, students were prompted to think about whether English words with similar meanings existed, instead of immediately looking words up in the dictionary. Then, after this reflection, students were instructed to look up and pronounce the words in the French-English dictionary, thereby training them to distinguish and recognize cognates and false friends. Moreover, learners were trained to distinguish and be aware of English and French cognates and false friends while inferring the meanings from dialogues and texts as well as in word forms. This strategy was developed from the results of previous research, wherein beginners tended to frequently mistakenly infer the meaning of false friends based simply on cross-language morphological similarities in word forms (You, 2008).
- (4) *Action planning*. Students set goals and chose strategies to attain these goals. The teacher advised students who found it difficult to choose strategies independently. For example, students were advised to organize English and French cognates and false friends using individual flashcards or in lists in the vocabulary-learning process. The teacher encouraged students to find or develop their own ways to remember, by separately classifying the false friends

they erred on frequently. In addition, the teacher advised students to make a habit of enthusiastically finding and organizing cognates and false friends for words learned previously. Furthermore, the teacher suggested that students take notes on a word's meaning by finding equivalent English words or expressions and to identify ways to minimize errors due to English vocabulary interference.

- (5) *Focused practice*. Students carried out action plans using selected strategies; the teacher faded prompts so that strategy-use became automatic. At this step, training was also centered around determination, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies that revealed significant differences between the two groups (A1 and B1).
- (6) *Evaluation*. A final exam and the second frequency survey were conducted to observe how the strategy use and French competency changed after the training plan.

3.3 Data analysis

SPSS 20.0 was used to test the following hypotheses:

- (1) The types and frequency of strategy use vary depending on the French competency level of each learner (independent sample *t-test*);
- (2) Explicitly teaching A1-level French learners' strategies frequently used by B1-level learners significantly affects the former's French competency (paired sample *t-test*);
- (3) A1-level learners will show significant changes in strategy use as well after this strategy training (paired sample *t-test*).

4 Results

First, an independent sample *t-test* was conducted to determine the frequency of using French and English cognates and false friends by level of French competency (Table 2).

Table 2. Use of English vocabulary utilization strategies according to level of French

Classification	Level	N	M	SD	t	Sig	
Part A	Determination	A1	15	2.07	.458	-12.075	.000
		B1	15	3.87	.352		
	Social	A1	15	2.20	.561	-3.055	.005
		B1	15	3.00	.845		
Part B	Memory	A1	15	1.60	.632	-12.130	.000
		B1	15	3.87	.352		
	Cognitive	A1	15	2.20	.414	-6.813	.000
		B1	15	3.67	.724		
	Metacognitive	A1	15	1.40	.507	-16.767	.000
		B1	15	4.53	.516		
	Social	A1	15	2.07	.458	-7.155	.000
		B1	15	3.13	.352		

As shown above, overall, B1-level learners made more frequent use of various strategies compared to A1-level learners. In particular, there was a huge difference in strategy use between the two groups for determination strategies related to the discovery of a new word's meaning, as well as

memory and metacognitive strategies used to reinforce a word once it had been encountered, which was also statistically significant ($p < .05$).

There was also a statistically significant difference between the two groups in using cognitive strategies that consciously compared French words with English words with similar forms and meanings ($p < .05$). B1 learners also used social strategies (seeking help from Korean instructors, native instructors, or fellow learners) more frequently than A1 learners to discover the meanings of new words and to reinforce words already learned, which all showed statistically significant differences ($p < .05$).

Next, Table 3 shows the paired sample *t*-test results to determine whether significant changes can be made to the French-language competency of A1 learners by training them with strategies frequently used by B1 learners in the first experiment or strategies showing significant differences in frequency between the two groups (determination strategies and metacognitive strategies).

Table 3. French competency of A1-level learners before and after receiving strategy training

	N	M	SD	t	Sig
Pre	15	22.67	5.924	-6.556	.000
Post	15	27.53	4.502		

Based on the results of the French proficiency test (40 points for a perfect score) conducted before and after strategy training, the French language competency of A1 learners improved after strategy training, which was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Table 4. Use of English vocabulary utilization strategies before and after receiving strategy training

Classification		N	M	SD	t	Sig	
Part A	Determination	Pre	15	2.07	.458	- 4.583	.000
		Post	15	2.87	.352		
	Social	Pre	15	2.20	.561	- .435	.670
		Post	15	2.28	.713		
Part B	Memory	Pre	15	1.60	.632	- 10.717	.000
		Post	15	2.87	.640		
	Cognitive	Pre	15	2.20	.414	- 6.000	.000
		Post	15	3.40	.737		
	Metacognitive	Pre	15	1.40	.507	- 17.486	.000
		Post	15	3.47	.743		
	Social	Pre	15	2.07	.458	- 9.539	.000
		Post	15	2.93	.258		

Furthermore, as shown in Table 4, based on the same questionnaire, the frequency test regarding the use of French and English cognates and false friends conducted before and after strategy training also showed statistically significant differences in the use of the five strategies, excluding social strategies, among those discovering meaning ($p < .05$). In particular, there was a very significant change after training in the use of metacognitive strategies among those reinforcing a word, which was also statistically significant ($t = - 17.486$, $p < .05$).

Meanwhile, there was no significant change after training for social strategies, in which learners interact with Korean or native instructors or other learners to discover the meanings of newly encountered words ($p = .670$). This could be because the strategy training in this experiment focused

on training individual learners to recognize and use cognates and false friends and did not focus on promoting interactions among learners or between instructors and learners.

5 Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed to determine the effects of training French-language learners in Korea to recognize and use English and French cognates and false friends in vocabulary learning to improve target-language competency. To this end, this study measured and compared the frequency of using cognates and false friends in the learning process between A1-level and B1-level learners. After that, strategy training was conducted for A1 learners to distinguish and recognize English and French cognates and false friends, focusing on training the strategies that showed the most significant differences between the two groups. Finally, to determine the effects of this strategy training on French-language competency, this study measured and comparatively analyzed the French-language competency and strategy frequency of A1 learners before and after strategy training. This study obtained the following three results.

First, it was discovered that while learners with higher levels of French competency more diversely and frequently applied strategies using English and French cognates and false friends in learning French, learners with lower levels of target-language proficiency showed a lower frequency of use and were indifferent to strategy use. This result is consistent with Malabonga et al. (2008), who found that there is a difference in distinction and awareness of Spanish and English cognates and false friends between A1-level and B1-level learners. It also aligns with Keogh (2012) and Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2016), who found that the ability to distinguish the cognates and false friends of two typologically similar languages is not irrelevant for improving target-language competency.

Second, metacognitive strategies showed the biggest difference between A1 and B1 learners. Moreover, the result of examining the frequency of using cognates and false friends among A1 learners after strategy training showed that there was a remarkable change in the use of metacognitive strategies. This result is consistent with Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2016), who found that recognizing cognates and false friends led to learners adopting self-learning methods, thereby promoting their use of metacognitive strategies. It is also related to the studies by Thomas (1988), Jessner (1999), and Pop (2008), who have argued that cognate awareness is considered a metalinguistic skill.

Third, the strategy training in this study that enabled A1 learners to recognize and use English and French cognates in the learning process also helped bring about significant changes in target-language competency and strategy use. This supports Brunner and Ankerstein (2013), who studied the awareness of cognates and false friends in English and French among Germans learning L2 English and L3 French. They found that the teaching method of providing explicit and specific information for learners reinforced positive cross-linguistic transfer and decreased negative transfer, thereby improving target-language competency. This also aligns with Keogh (2012) and Hipfner-Boucher et al. (2016), who found that the learners' awareness of cognates and false friends between two languages develops their own learning strategies and leads to increased use of communication strategies to resolve issues in actual communication, thereby positively affecting target-language competency.

In summary, this study shows that it is necessary to provide deliberate and explicit strategy training for A1-level French-language learners who generally do not know how to use their knowledge of English to learn French. In this way, these learners can realize the possibilities and advantages of using the English-language competency they already possess to learn French and seek out their own strategies and methods. Nation (2013) suggested that the diversification of vocabulary learning strategies may significantly affect achievement by contributing to an increase in learners' interests and motives. Ellis (2012) also argued that the use of certain learning strategies does not always contribute to language-competency improvement; however, by using association strategies with vocabulary they already know, learners can learn more effectively than they would if they used no strategies at all.

Only a few studies have been conducted in Korea on cross-linguistic influence in L3 learning. Those studies involved German-language education (Jou, 2012; Lee, 2014), Spanish-language education (You, 2008), and Vietnamese-language education (Yun, 2003). Only You (2008) studied L3 education using the cognates and false friends of two typologically similar languages. She analyzed errors in vocabulary use made by Spanish learners in writing and found that most errors were attributable to false friends.

However, in the field of French-language education, while some studies have comparatively analyzed similar grammatical rules (Kim, 2011) or vocabulary (Choi, 2005), emphasizing the relationships between French and English, there have been no studies of explicit education methods and learning-strategy training methods using the cognates and false friends of L2 English and L3 French. Likewise, there have been no experimental studies showing the correlation between such strategy training and French-language competency. Accordingly, this study is significant in that it conducted an actual field experiment based on plurilingual education theory to demonstrate that French-language learners either consciously or unconsciously use previous English knowledge and skills, as well as foreign-language learning methods, in the learning process. However, this study has a few limitations, since it was based on an experiment in college education. Based on the three following limitations, a few suggestions for follow-up research can be proposed.

First, the sample size was small as the experimental group had to be selected from lectures conducted by the researcher. This study shows the results of analyzing the strategies and achievements of a specific group; thus, the results have limited general application. Future experiments should be conducted on many samples under the same educational environment in collaboration with other instructors so that the characteristics of French-language learners in Korea or the strategies of using English by level can be more generalized.

Second, since the strategies for using English and French cognates and false friends were determined by the analysis of survey responses alone, there may be an absence of an in-depth understanding of strategy use among learners. This can be improved by conducting qualitative research through, for example, individual or group interviews, which will allow for a better observation of the transfer between English and French and the reinforcement of positive cross-linguistic transfer, thereby specifically developing practical and useful teaching methods to minimize negative transfer or intervention.

Finally, there was no control group in testing the effects of strategy training. In practice, it was not feasible to select and experiment with two groups with the same conditions except for strategy training. If a control group can be selected in collaboration with other instructors for the experiment, it will be possible to more clearly show that changes in the frequency of using strategies to recognize and use English and French cognates and false friends, as well as the French proficiency of learners, are not attributable to factors other than strategy training.

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