False friends in advanced learners of English:
the effect of task type and mode

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The study of the circumstances in which false friends are likely to occur is not abundant. This paper focuses on studying this phenomenon and its aim is to study the way in which false friends can be a persistent error in advanced learners of English by relating it to the influence of task type and mode. The study is led by three research questions, namely to what extent advanced learners of English still struggle with the phenomenon of false friends, if false friends are more likely to occur in production or comprehension tasks and finally, if there is any influence of oral or written mode in the occurrence of false friends. Twenty C1 learners of English carried out a comprehension (i.e. picture selection) and a production (i.e. translation) task in oral and written mode and our data show that advanced learners still struggle with false friends. The written comprehension task yielded the best results whereas the oral production task was found to be more difficult for learners, which shows the effects of task type and mode in the acquisition of false friends.

1   Introduction

Scholars have been interested in language transfer and cross-linguistic influence from L1 to L2 for many decades. According to Kellerman (1993) and Cenoz (2001), when the mother tongue (in this case Spanish) and the target language (English) are typologically related, cross-linguistic influence is highly likely to occur. Moreover, Moss (1992) stated that language learners should be trained to use similarities between L1 and L2 to their advantage. This facilitates language learning and is known as "positive transfer", as in the case of cognate words. However, there is a chance that this leads to negative transfer, an example of which would be the persistent presence of false friends.

This paper will focus on studying the phenomenon of false friends and the way in which they can be a persistent error even in advanced learners of English. Beginners often struggle with this topic as they lack L2 experience and are likely to interpret words wrongly due to linguistic interference and strong reliance on their mother tongue (Cenoz, 2001). On the contrary, advanced learners are expected to have overcome their

mistakes in this area. This study aims to analyse comprehension and production of false friends in students of English in a C1 level classroom in order to explore the influence of their mother tongue (L1) on a second language (L2). Currently, there is not a large amount of research done on this specific aspect. Therefore, this paper aims to fill this gap by analysing the performance of Catalan/Spanish L1 speakers who are advanced learners of English regarding the topic of false friends.

The research questions that guide this piece of research are the following:

(1) To what extent do advanced learners of English still struggle with the phenomenon of false friends?

(2) Are false friends more likely to occur in production or comprehension tasks?

(3) Is there any influence of oral or written mode in the occurrence of false friends?

The first part of the paper focuses on clarifying theoretical concepts related to the topic and reviewing previous research on false friends and cognate words, followed by the clarification of concepts such as oral and written modes and an analysis of the differences between production and comprehension tasks. Relevant theories regarding L1 interference and the acquisition of false friends are also dealt with in this section.

The second part deals with the methodology and the experimental research. By means of four experiments, the way advanced students deal with false friends is going to be studied, in addition to the analysis of the differences between oral and written input and between production and comprehension tasks.

Finally, the results obtained will be analysed. This will lead to a discussion in which there will be an explanation of the results, a justification of the possible causes and a

proposal of possible methods that could be applied in order to improve the learners' performance. This study will potentially add some useful information to the study of false friends and might be particularly relevant for English teachers and students.

2 Acquisition of False friends: State of the art and literature review

The literature review of this paper is based on previous research carried out by scholars such as Arce (2006), Calvo (2005) and Durán (2004) among others. It is divided into three sections. The first one deals with previous research on the acquisition of false friends. The second one explores the differences between the oral and written modes. Finally, the third one covers the differences between the concepts of production and comprehension.

2.1 Previous research on the acquisition of false friends

Research on the acquisition of false friends is not extremely abundant. However, some studies do explore this phenomenon by taking into consideration different variables and various aspects. They consider, for instance, the importance of the degree of similarity between two languages (Arce, 2006; Calvo, 2005; Durán, 2004), the impact that false friends may have on developing reading skills (Arce, 2006; Lerchundi and Moreno, 1999), the reasons for the occurrence of negative transfer (Calvo, 2005; Frunza, 2006), the influence of age (Calvo, 2005; Garrudo, 1996), of proficiency (Arce, 2006) and even the historical perspective and present implications for their acquisition (O'Neill and Casanovas, 1997). Little has been said about the influence of register, mode or the kind of task used to test the subjects. That is why some of these variables are used as part of the experiment in this paper.

To begin with, it is important to have a definition of the concept of false friends. They are pairs of words in two languages that are perceived as similar but have different meanings, e.g. embarrassed – *embarazada* (pregnant). They are also referred to as "false cognates" on some occasions because cognates are words that have a common etymological origin and have a common meaning, e.g. family – *familia.* False friends

can easily be mistaken due to the similarity of spelling they share with the L1 of the speaker:

> […] the visual stimulus reaching the brain may become a misleading clue for the L2 learner lacking the required background knowledge, or the cognitive ability to discriminate stimuli. In these cases, the learning strategies related to meaning deduction of new words may turn into a foul for intermediate students who do not master other contextual clues. (Durán 2004: 94-95)

There are discrepancies when it comes to stating whether the number of false friends is higher or lower than the number of cognates in languages that are closely related etymologically. On the one hand, Hammer (1976) claimed that the number of cognates is significantly higher in related languages. He made a comparison between English and French and the ratio of cognates to false friends was approximately eleven to one. On the other hand, Friel and Kennison (2001) concluded that between English and German there is a larger number of false friends than cognates, even though both these languages share a Germanic background.

One of the causes for the wrong interpretation of false friends is the ignorance of the differences between homographs, homophones and polysemic words. These are likely to be false friends in certain contexts. The Oxford dictionary defines homographs as "each of two or more words spelled the same but not necessarily pronounced the same and having different meanings and origins (e.g. bow and bow)". Conversely, homophones are defined as "each of two or more words having the same pronunciation but different meanings, origins, or spelling (e.g. new and knew)". In these cases, a graphic or a sound stimulus reaches the brain but there are several meanings that might be attached to the word, thus leading to confusion. Lerchundi and Moreno (1999: 309-311) found out that Spanish students would often misinterpret cognates and false friends because they were homographs. They pointed out that the best way to avoid this was by making the students aware of such words in order to prevent them from being misled by

visual clues. They named "partial false friends" the homographs that become false friends for L2 learners in one of their meanings:

> This is the case with the word 'paper' meaning a flat material made from crushed wood, *papel* in Spanish; or meaning a piece of writing on a particular subject, written by an expert, *artículo* or *trabajo* in Spanish. Used as a plural noun 'papers', (*los papeles* in Spanish), may mean the same in both languages: official documents, especially ones that show who you are. Their identification and distinction depend on linguistic as well as on contextual knowledge (1999: 311)

The great number of false friends that can be found between English and Spanish is due to the common origin of these two languages. They both belong to the group of the so-called Indo-European languages. There are many subgroups within these, English being a Germanic language and Catalan/Spanish Romance languages. Nonetheless, they share many similarities mainly in the lexicon (Calvo, 2005:238). Moreover, many different cultures and languages have influenced the English language over the centuries. The introduction of new concepts (religious ideas, imported foods, new inventions, among others) creates a need to coin new terms. In many cases, these words were not created; they were just borrowed from other sources (mainly Latin). Pyles (1982:191) stated that the English language borrowed extensively from Latin through French. It is estimated that the number of words transferred to English from the eleventh to the eighteenth century is between 22,000 and 25,000, 75% of which are still in use.

Many scholars such as Gass and Selinker (2008) and Kellerman and Sharwood (1986) have proved that students can effectively transfer knowledge gained in their first language to a second language. This phenomenon known as language transfer is defined by Odlin as "the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired" (1993:27). Moreover, he also points out that "transfer can occur in all linguistic subsystems, including the morphological and syntactic one; and other influences besides transfer can affect all subsystems" (1993:23). There are many lexical

and morphological similarities between English and Catalan/Spanish which can help learners. In addition, as Hancin-Bhatt and Nagy indicated:

> Academic English is filled with Spanish-English cognates […] Often, words that are infrequent in English (e.g., infirm) have cognates that are everyday words in Spanish (e.g., enfermo). There are also systematic relationships between derivational suffixes in English and Spanish. For example, many English words ending in –ty (e.g.,felicity) have Spanish cognates ending in -dad (e.g.,felicidad). There are similar parallels between inflectional suffixes in the two languages. (1993: 2)

There is experimental evidence, such as the one presented by Adjemian (1983), that the lexical rules applied in L1 constrain the hypotheses that the learner makes about the rules of L2. A high degree of similarity between two languages turns these constraints into something beneficial for the learner by allowing positive transfer. This concept can also be transferred into the way lexicon acquisition functions. From a more general point of view, Bransford, Brown and Cocking stated that: "all new learning involves transfer based on previous learning" (2000: 53).

However, strong reliance on this phenomenon may lead to negative transfer, which involves the occurrence of false friends, for example (Calvo, 2005). This can also be referred to as interference, which is the "presence in the learner's performance in the target language of mother-tongue-like features which are incorrect" (Corder, 1992:19-20). Durán (2004) explains the process of identification of a cognate by referring to the cognitive mechanisms of association and transfer. This process can also lead to the possibility that the learner may in fact be mistaken about the nature of the word:

> The human brain is capable of identifying cognates in their adequate context, in a foreign language, even though the reader might not have met the word before. Linguistic input reaches the brain through the senses: sight or hearing. Through association mechanisms, mental representations are recalled and verbal labels are appended. When we come across a cognate in a second language, our brain automatically tends to match it with the meaning we already know from our mother tongue, but what might happen if the word is a 'false friend' instead of a real cognate? (2004: 96)

Regarding transfer mechanisms from L1 to L2, Garrudo (1996:18-19) corroborates that transfer (both positive and negative) does not follow the same rules and is affected by different variables such as age and proficiency among others.

As a variable, age is also a significant influence when it comes to lexical language transfer. As Calvo (2005) stated, adults are more likely to display L1 transfer than children due to the fact that they have their L1 structures strongly incorporated and internalised. Conversely, children tend to acquire false friends as new words without making a comparison to their mother tongue. Nonetheless, this variable will not interfere in this paper as the tested subjects belong to the same age group.

Durán (2004) explored cognition processes in second language acquisition, specifically the case of cognates and false friends by Spanish speaking engineering students. From a cognitive point of view, she stated that the mental processes responsible for L2 acquisition are developed in the internal system that a learner has constructed at a point in time and the series of interconnected systems characteristic of the learner's progress over time (Ellis, 1994: 350-352). She investigated learners' errors and the general patterns of L2 development by trying to explain why most learners do not achieve full target language competence (2004:90).

In her study there were two groups of subjects: group A were students with no experience about mine works and did not know the meaning of specific terminology while group B was a more experienced group. They had a limited time to complete a questionnaire and write a summary of a scientific text that incorporated false friends. She found out that the main cause of misunderstandings was the students' lack of background knowledge. These students who belonged to group A, contextualised the words provided in the text from a sociological perspective rather than from a mining

engineer's point of view, which led them to misinterpret the false friends (which were understood as cognates). As they had no background knowledge to understand the entire passage, the terms related to technical and specific activities were not considered relevant. Therefore, they went unnoticed: Once the graphic stimuli of specific terms such as 'reclamation' and 'disturbance' had reached their brains, they interpreted their meanings according to their previous experience, which was relating it to their mother tongue. On the contrary, group B students performed better because they were more experienced and used their previous knowledge.

Arce (2006), among other aspects, studied the process of recognition of false friends and cognates, which is described as "a complex phenomenon where linguistic, cognitive, and metacognitive processes constantly interact" (2006: iii). She also analysed the way proficiency is a relevant factor that affects the way learners deal with false friends or cognates by carrying out different reading tasks: "as reading proficiency decreases or increases, so does the editing of Spanish-English cognates in second language" (2006: iv). Her results proved the following:

> it was at least generally true that those with low and high reading proficiency scores also had low and high scores on the cognate identification reading passage and multiple-choice task and this degree of association between the criteria could also be perceived as a display of low and high ability when students identified cognates in a second language in this task (2006: 58).

Therefore, Arce's research question is answered positively: reading proficiency levels in English as a second language are a predictor of variability for ESL first year College students' scores on Spanish-English cognate identification tasks.

In this paper, we aim to contrast the occurrence of negative transfer (the case of false friends) by testing L2 learners in the following variables: oral-written mode and production-comprehension tasks.

2.2 Oral and written modes

Oral and written language have very different characteristics. The way in which we receive information influences the way we comprehend it and also produce an answer to it. However, there is not a lot of research done on the influence of mode regarding the acquisition of false friends.

On the one hand, written language is a more static and precise form of communication. There is a greater process of deliberation and thought in the written format, thus creating more elaborate and intricate arguments. In addition, writing allows the possibility of reformulating sentences easily while the reader has the possibility of re-reading them as many times as they need.

On the other hand, oral communication is, in general, less intricate. This does not imply that it is less effective in expressing a message. Actually, the speaker can make use of gestures, intonation, pauses and so on to create a speech that is easier to follow. The impossibility of revision before delivering the message is possibly what makes it a kind of communication with more probability of misunderstandings. Moreover, there are sometimes difficulties in understanding a speaker if they do not articulate or pronounce properly.

Comparing the two modes, Biber (1988:5) had claimed that "the general view is that written language is structurally elaborated, complex, formal, and abstract, while spoken language is concrete, context-dependent, and structurally simple". Olson (1977) also compared these two modes of communication by saying that in the oral mode the meaning is in the context whereas in written mode the meaning is in the text. Bateson (1972) put emphasis on the fact that oral communication is based on the metacommunicative function of language, which means that words are used to convey

something about the relationship between communicator and audience. However, written mode is based on the communicative function of language, which means that words are used to convey information or content.

Chafe (1982:37) took a clear position in saying that "in writing we have time to mould the succession of ideas into a more complex, coherent, integrated whole, making use of devices we seldom use in speaking." In his paper he made a recollection of what other authors had gathered about the written format. Drieman (1962) stated that written texts had longer words, more attributive adjectives and more varied vocabulary than oral texts and Devito (1966) claimed that written language had fewer words that referred to the speaker, fewer quantifiers and hedges and greater abstractness than oral language. Finally, both Harrell (1957) and Kroll (1977) argued that written language has more subordinate clauses than spoken language.

Scholars such as Kenworthy (2011) and Larsen-Freeman (2006) have explored how time is an essential factor to take into account when considering the differences between written and oral mode. The general conclusion is that in speech there are more difficulties in understanding due to different factors. Firstly, the listener is unable to control the speed at which the words are produced. Secondly, the listener may not comprehend the pronunciation of some words and may get anxious and unable to focus.

As we have seen through the literature review, there is more evidence supporting the fact that written output allows better and more precise output than speech does. Therefore, the expected results in the experiment are of better performance in the written tasks than the oral tasks.

2.3 Production and comprehension

In language acquisition, all research shows that comprehension develops ahead of production. A clear example of this can be seen in child language. Scholars such as Berk (2012) have proven that young children are able to understand (comprehend) much more than what they can actually use or say (produce). Moreover, psycholinguists have demonstrated that children can comprehend utterances containing certain grammatical constructions before they can actually say these utterances (Brown and Bellugi, 1972). Clark stated as follows:

> Logically, comprehension must precede production. How else can speakers know which words to use to convey a particular meaning? They must already have mapped the relevant meanings onto specific forms, and have these units represented in memory, to be accessed on subsequent occasions whenever they hear the relevant forms from others. (1993: 246).

Regarding second language acquisition (L2A), the issue is similar but there are some notions that should be taken into account. Many researchers have investigated foreign language learning and the role of production and comprehension in the L2 by relating it to two different approaches in teaching methodology that are the comprehension-based instruction (CBI) and production-based instruction (PBI). As stated by Shintani (2011):

> The fundamental distinction between CBI and PBI is whether or not the instruction requires the production of the L2. CBI […] aims to promote interlanguage development by exposing learners to L2 input that they can comprehend through listening or reading without requiring them to produce the targeted L2 features […] (while) PBI is instruction that attempts to promote interlanguage development by requiring learners to produce the targeted L2 features in either oral or written form" (2011: 13).

On the one hand, some theories related to CBI include The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1982, 1985, 1998), the early version of Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1983) and The Noticing Hypothesis by Schmidt (1990, 1994). On the other hand, PBI theories are based on Behaviourism and the audiolingual method, the Output Hypothesis by Swain (1985), the updated Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996), the Skill acquisition theory by DeKeyser (2007) and the Sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1998).

There are different theoretical positions regarding the roles of comprehension and production in second language acquisition. Nonetheless, in the case of vocabulary acquisition there seems to be a greater unanimity of opinions than in the case of grammar: comprehension comes ahead of production. Shintani (2011) argued that vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language consists on comprehending the meaning of a new word, which contributes productive as well as receptive abilities. Henriksen(1999) and Melka (1997) also agree that when it comes to vocabulary acquisition, lexical items enter the learner's receptive knowledge to become available for later production. Learners develop lexical memory through comprehension, which can then be used for both production and comprehension.

Ellis (2008) also agrees with the fact that comprehension is acquired before production. The performance in L2 is developed first in an inner level of understanding (comprehension) and then used to produce accurate content (production). Considering the neurobiological research to determine the association between L2 production and comprehension, he stated that "to a degree at least, different brain structures are involved in comprehension and production, although in both cases these structures are multiple and partly overlapping" (p. 749). Concerning comprehension, there is a combination of contextual traces and linguistic processing that facilitates learners to assign meaning to specific words and grammatical features in order to acquire them. This leads to the conclusion that L2 learners, particularly those of low proficiency, are more likely than native speakers to rely on context when conveying a message to compensate for their inadequate linguistic resources.

Little research has been found which is specifically related to the acquisition of false friends in second language acquisition and the variables production and

comprehension. However, according to the research that has been previously explained, the results expected are of better performance in comprehension tasks rather than production tasks.

3 Methodology

3.1 Participants

Twenty students taking an advanced English course (C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) were presented with different tasks in order to find out to what extent they struggled with the phenomenon of false friends. The variables taken into account were mode and task type. As there was no interest in having age or degree of proficiency as a variable, they all had the same age and level.

A learner profile and consent form were filled out by each participant (see appendix A). The learner profile included information such as the native language of the subject, the years of instruction of English as a foreign language, whether they had stayed abroad in an English-speaking country, etc.

3.2 Tasks

The experiment consisted of tasks that presented the following variables: production-comprehension task type and oral-written mode. Therefore, there were two different kinds of activities that were tested both in oral or written form. This allowed us to observe whether false friends are more likely to occur in one of these tasks and if there is influence of the tasks being oral or written.

The production task consisted of a translation activity (see appendix B). Fifteen different sentences or phrases were tested in the oral and written part. The subjects were presented with sentences in English, which contained false friends, and they had to translate them into their mother tongue (Spanish or Catalan). For example, the sentence "The argument was very intense" should be translated as *"La discusión fue muy intensa"*. However, mistakes are expected when it comes to translating the word

"argument", as it is a false friend with the Spanish word "*argumento*", which can be translated as "plot" in this case.

The comprehension task consisted of a picture selection activity in which there were fifteen sets of sentences, which included a false friend, with two different pictures each for both the oral and written tasks (see appendix C). The subjects had to decide which picture corresponded with the false friend that appeared in the sentence.

The written tasks were not time-constrained. However, in the oral tasks students were given three to four seconds to answer. On average, the students took approximately 10 minutes to complete the 60 questions.

Before carrying out these tasks, a pilot study was conducted in order to test the practicability of the experiment. This pilot study was useful in order to improve the tasks, make sure the length of the experiment was appropriate and the questions were clear. As a result of this pilot study, some elements were modified. For example, the pictures in number two in the oral comprehension activity and number eleven in the written comprehension activity were modified because they were not too clear and the false friend "bigot" (= *fanático, intolerante* in Spanish) was modified because it was too obvious.

4 Results and data analysis

The following section presents the outcome of the tasks that were carried out. Firstly, there is an analysis of the results obtained in the production task (both oral and written) and secondly there is a compilation of the ones attained in the comprehension task (both oral and written as well).

4.1 Oral and written production task

As can be seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3, the results obtained in the production task were, as expected, much worse than the ones obtained in the comprehension task. The average mark in this task is 16.5/30, which represents 55% of the task correctly completed. An overall of six students obtained a score lower than 50% in the oral and written production tasks. Out of these, four subjects failed both production tasks, with the following results: 13/30, 12/30, 11/30 and 7/30. Seven students failed only one of the tasks (five failed the written part and two failed the oral), and out of these, five students still managed to pass the overall section.

Regarding the oral production task, the average score for this task is 8.35/15, which represents 55.66% of correct answers. The most problematic words were "preservatives", which everybody failed to answer correctly and confused it by *preservativos*, which means "condoms" in English, "plague" was mistaken 19 times by *plaga* (pest) and "apparel" 14 times by different words such as *aparato, aparador, apartamento,* etc. The case of the word "actual" seems curious because most students 11/20 failed to provide a translation for this word at all and left it blank.

The written production task was slightly more challenging than the oral task. The average score for this part is 8.15/15, which represents 54.33% of correct answers. The most problematic word was "overzealous", with 20 mistakes out of 20. Almost

everybody confused it with *celosa*. "Patronize", was also mistaken on many occasions and the subjects provided a great variety of translations. Some of them have a similar spelling: *empadronar* (used in two cases, which means "to register"), *patronizar* (used in three cases, which is a word that does not exist in Catalan nor Spanish), and *patrocinar* (in two cases, which means "to sponsor". In other cases, translations that have little to do with the root of the word were provided: *promocionar, imitar* and *controlar* (each provided only in one occasion). In four cases, this word was avoided or left blank. Another common mistake is the case of "career", which was translated as *carrera* (degree) in thirteen cases, and by *grado* or *estudios* in two cases.

PRODUCTION TASK Raw data			
	Oral	Written	Total
1	8/15	10/15	18/30
2	5/15	7/15	12/30
3	7/15	6/15	13/30
4	9/15	8/15	17/30
5	10/15	6/15	16/30
6	8/15	9/15	17/30
7	10/15	5/15	15/30
8	8/15	5/15	13/30
9	6/15	5/15	11/30
10	9/15	10/15	19/30
11	4/15	3/15	7/30
12	5/15	9/15	14/30
13	9/15	6/15	15/30
14	11/15	11/15	22/30
15	9/15	7/15	16/30
16	12/15	12/15	24/30
17	12/15	13/15	25/30
18	10/15	13/15	23/30
19	9/15	8/15	17/30
20	6/15	10/15	16/30

PRODUCTION TASK Percentage			
	Oral	Written	Total
1	53,33%	66,66%	60%
2	33,33%	46,66%	40%
3	46,66%	40%	43,33%
4	60%	53,33%	56,66%
5	66,66%	40%	53,33%
6	53,33%	60%	56,66%
7	66,66%	33,33%	50%
8	53,33%	33,33%	43,33%
9	40%	33,33%	36,66%
10	60%	66,66%	63,33%
11	26,66%	20%	23,33%
12	33,33%	60%	46,66%
13	60%	40%	50%
14	73,33%	73,33%	73,33%
15	60%	46,66%	53,33%
16	80%	80%	80%
17	80%	86,66%	83,33%
18	66,66%	86,66%	76,66%
19	60%	53,33%	56,66%
20	40%	66,66%	53,33%

Tables 1 and 2: Results in the Production task (raw data and percentage); Light green= over 8/10. Dark green= best performances. Red= less than 5/10.

	ORAL		Written		Total
	53,33%		66,66%		60%
	33,33%		46,66%		40%
	46,66%		40%		43,33%
	60%		53,33%		56,66%
	66,66%		40%		53,33%
	53,33%		60%		56,66%
	66,66%		33,33%		50%
	53,33%		33,33%		43,33%
	40%		33,33%		36,66%
	60%		66,66%		63,33%
	26,66%		20%		23,33%
	33,33%		60%		46,66%
	60%		40%		50%
	73,33%		73,33%		73,33%
	60%		46,66%		53,33%
	80%		80%		80%
	80%		86,66%		83,33%
	66,66%		86,66%		76,66%
	60%		53,33%		56,66%
	40%		66,66%		53,33%
MEAN	55,66%		54,33%		55%
SD	0,15183602		0,19012523		0,15043854

Table 3: Percentages in the Production task (includes mean and standard deviation).

4.2 Oral and written comprehension task

As can be seen in Tables 4, 5 and 6, the results in the comprehension task, which was a picture selection activity, were much more successful than the ones in the production task. No one failed the overall activity and 15/30 was the lowest score obtained. The average score in the overall task is 21.85/30, which represents 73% of correct answers. Only three subjects failed one of the sections (two failed the oral part and one failed the written part).

The oral activity was not as successful as the written one. The average mark obtained in this activity is 9.9/15, which represents 66% of correct answers. The most problematic words were "guerrilla" (20/20 errors), "curb" (14/20 errors), "destitute" and "maroon" (10/20), "gripe" (9/10) and finally "constipated" and "cask" (8/20 errors).

"Commodity" and "gang" only had 5/20 errors. In addition, the words with fewer mistakes have been "record", "grapes" and "carpet", with no errors at all; "biscuit" with only two errors and finally "pan" and "quote", which only were mistaken once.

In the written activity, eleven subjects managed to score 12/15 or over. The average mark in this section is 11.95/15, which represents 80%. The most common mistakes in this section were: "physician" (15/20 errors), "American" (10/20 errors) and "agenda" (8/20 errors).

COMPREHENSION TASK Raw data			
	Oral	Written	Total
1	9/15	12/15	21/30
2	8/15	11/15	19/30
3	9/15	10/15	19/30
4	8/15	13/15	21/30
5	7/15	11/15	18/30
6	8/15	11/15	19/30
7	13/15	13/15	26/30
8	8/15	13/15	21/30
9	7/15	9/15	16/30
10	12/15	12/15	24/30
11	9/15	6/15	15/30
12	10/15	12/15	22/30
13	10/15	15/15	25/30
14	12/15	14/15	26/30
15	13/15	11/15	24/30
16	12/15	12/15	24/30
17	12/15	15/15	27/30
18	12/15	15/15	27/30
19	10/15	11/15	21/30
20	9/15	13/15	22/30

COMPREHENSION TASK Percentage			
	Oral	Written	Total
1	60%	80%	70%
2	53,33%	73,33%	63,33%
3	60%	66,66%	63,33%
4	53,33%	86,66%	70%
5	46,66%	73,33%	60%
6	53,33%	73,33%	63,33%
7	86,66%	86,66%	86,66%
8	53,33%	86,66%	70%
9	46,66%	60%	53,33%
10	80%	80%	80%
11	60%	40%	50%
12	66,66%	80%	73,33%
13	66,66%	100%	83,33%
14	80%	93,33%	86,66%
15	86,66%	73,33%	80%
16	80%	80%	80%
17	80%	100%	90%
18	80%	100%	90%
19	66,66%	73,33%	70%
20	60%	86,66%	73,33%

Tables 4 and 5: Results in the Comprehension task (raw data and percentage); Light green= over 8/1., Dark green = best performances. Red= less than 5/10.

	Oral		Written		Total
	60%		80%		70%
	53,33%		73,33%		63,33%
	60%		66,66%		63,33%
	53,33%		86,66%		70%
	46,66%		73,33%		60%
	53,33%		73,33%		63,33%
	86,66%		86,66%		86,66%
	53,33%		86,66%		70%
	46,66%		60%		53,33%
	80%		80%		80%
	60%		40%		50%
	66,66%		80%		73,33%
	66,66%		100%		83,33%
	80%		93,33%		86,66%
	86,66%		73,33%		80%
	80%		80%		80%
	80%		100%		90%
	80%		100%		90%
	66,66%		73,33%		70%
	60%		86,66%		73,33%
MEAN	66%		80%		73%
SD	0,13316323		0,14424492		0,11711411

Table 6: Percentages in the Comprehension task (includes mean and standard deviation)

5 Discussion

This study attempted to explore if advanced learners of English still struggled with false friends, if these false friends were more likely to occur in production or comprehension tasks and if there was any influence of oral or written mode tasks in the occurrence of false friends.

Regarding our first research question, our data suggests that advanced learners still do struggle with false friends as there were many mistakes in both tasks. The answer to the second research question had been predicted: as it had been anticipated and justified with previous analysis in the literature review, false friends are more likely to occur in production tasks rather than in comprehension tasks. The results in the comprehension task were much higher than the ones in the production task. The total percentage of the production task was 55% and in the comprehension task it was 73%, which is a difference of 18%.

As seen in the literature review, there is clear agreement that favours the position that comprehension will come before production. Scholars such as Henriksen (1999), Melka (1997) and Ellis (2008) agreed that first, lexical items are comprehended (they enter the learner's receptive knowledge) so that they can become available for later production. Moreover, learners develop lexical memory through comprehension, which can then be used for both production and comprehension: "to a degree at least, different brain structures are involved in comprehension and production, although in both cases these structures are multiple and partly overlapping" (Ellis, 2008: 749).

Finally, regarding the influence of oral and written mode, the results obtained were also expected: better scores were obtained in the written tasks. In the production task, the difference is very little between the two modes. However, in the

comprehension task, there is a higher dissimilarity: 66% of correct answers in the oral task while 80% in the written task.

As Chafe stated (1982:37), the difference in the influence of mode was expected because "in writing we have time to mould the succession of ideas into a more complex, coherent, integrated whole, making use of devices we seldom use in speaking." Moreover, Kenworthy (2011) and Larsen-Freeman (2006) explored how time is an essential factor to take into account when considering the differences between written and oral mode. The general conclusion is that in speech there are more difficulties in understanding due to different factors. Firstly, the listener is unable to control the speed at which the words are produced. Secondly, the listener may not comprehend the pronunciation of some words and may get anxious and unable to focus.

Another issue that seems important and recurrent in the analyses of these activities is the lack of inductive ability of the subjects. When it comes to false friends, inductive knowledge could easily be applied in order to achieve better results. A deductive approach (rule-driven) starts with the presentation of a rule and is followed by examples in which the rule is applied. An inductive approach (rule-discovery) starts with some examples from which a rule is inferred (Thornbury, 1999). This kind of knowledge should be used in order to perform correctly under any circumstances. Perhaps, the fact that students do not use it can be related to their lack of interest or also to their lack of working strategies.

Inductive ability could be easily applied as a strategy in the picture selection activity: the student should be able to tell at some point that the word that most resembles their mother tongue is not going to be the correct one. However, there were still many errors in these tasks. Finally, another factor that must be taken into account is the student's possible lack of motivation to participate in the study and do well.

Nonetheless, motivation is a variable which is difficult to measure and, moreover, this study did not focus on this specific factor.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, this study has confirmed by means of two different tasks that false friends are still an issue even for students at a university level taking a C1 English course. Moreover, it has proved that task type and mode can have an influence in the way subjects interpret false friends: comprehension comes ahead of production and written tasks provide more positive results than oral tasks.

The study has some limitations which should be taken into account for future research. One of the main problems has been the fact that the students tested were believed to have a higher level than what they actually had. Perhaps prior to giving them the tasks, they should have proved their level by showing an official language certificate in order to have results that are more accurate or they should have done a placement test that would have corroborated their real level of English. Additionally, a greater number of participants would have increased the reliability of the data.

Further research should be carried out regarding this topic as it can help students perform better in the foreign languages they learn. Other topics related to the one explored in this study that could complement it could be, for example, the influence of motivation in the acquisition of false friends, possible techniques to teach false friends to young learners, language immersion as a solution to language interference errors or the influence of register in the production of false friends, among others.

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8 Appendices

Appendix A:

Learner profile and Consent form

Student's code (to be filled in by the researcher):

Placement test (to be filled in by the researcher):

1. Name and surname:

2. Date of birth:

3. Age:

4. Native language(s):

5. Mother's mother tongue:

6. Father's mother tongue:

7. Language(s) spoken at home (if more than one please give the average % of each):

8. Years of instruction (and hours per week) of English as a Foreign Language at school/high school/university:

    a. At school:

    b. High-school:

    c. University (only if you are repeating Usos Bàsics):

9. Years of instruction of English as a Foreign Language (and hours per week) as an extra-curricular activity:

10. Stay in an English-speaking country: Yes   No

    a. Where?

    b. When?

    c. How long?

Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study investigating errors related to false friends and involving the creation of an L2 error corpus.

I understand that my name and my specific errors will remain confidential and that I will not be identified in any report or presentation which may arise from the study.

I understand that while I may not benefit directly from the study, the information gained may help achieve a better understanding of the process of learning English as a Foreign Language and may help improve methods of language teaching/learning in relation to errors in essay writing.

I understand what this study involves and I hereby give permission for my results to be used for research purposes.

_____   _____ _____

Name   Signature   Date

Appendix B:

Production Task: translation activity

ORAL:

1. We are sorry we couldn't attend your wedding.

2. There are no actual facts about it.

3. He had long been familiar with the tall waitress.

4. My sister was embarrassed when I told her the news.

5. The island was devastated by the plague.

6. The city was thickly inhabited.

7. The beans were bland.

8. The argument was very intense.

9. She was showing off her luxurious apparel to impress her friends.

10. The use of preservatives has increased in the last decades.

11. You need to realize this before it is too late.

12. The avocado was not good enough.

13. "Did you enjoy the lecture?" "Yes, I thought it was very interesting."

14. This is a very useful idiom.

15. The exam sheet was blank

WRITTEN:

1. "Mark, I'm offering my experience to assist you", said Maria.

2. She was clearly overzealous.

3. The casualties were very heavy.

4. It was inevitable that he would choke.

5. He is a disgrace to the profession.

6. After seeing that, he experienced a strong feeling of disgust.

7. His career was very successful.

8. She is a very sensible young girl.

9. He molested younger boys.

10. Sometimes you should pretend to be interested.

11. A comprehensive study of psychology.

12. He feels there is a need to patronize her.

13. He gave her a compliment.

14. Please send me your application.

15. It will be better if he introduces them.

Appendix C:

Comprehension Task: picture selection activity

ORAL:

1. The man was a destitute and nobody knew why.
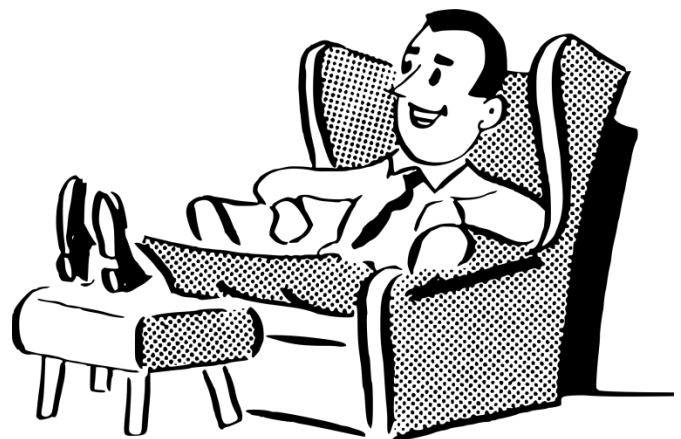
2. Water will be the commodity of the future.

3. "It is not specified in the quote", he said.

4. You need to record this. You might need it later

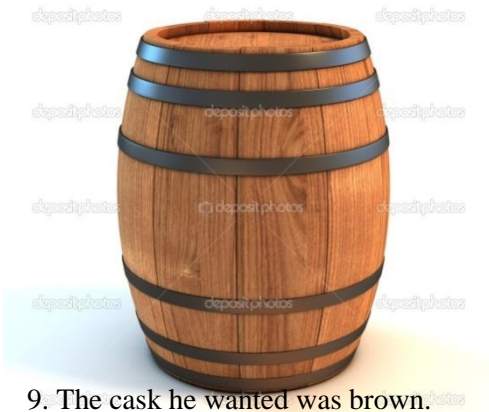5. Are there a lot of gangs in your city?

6. She bought a new carpet.

7. He had been constipated for a few days and decided to see a doctor.

8. Please, give me a biscuit.

9. The cask he wanted was brown.

10. He pulled away from the curb.

11. She had a maroon lipstick on.

12. Make sure to bring a pan when you come for dinner.

13. Continuing to gripe, the boy's mother took him to hospital.

14. Make sure to bring some grapes when you come.

15. A guerrilla has blown up a train in the mountains.

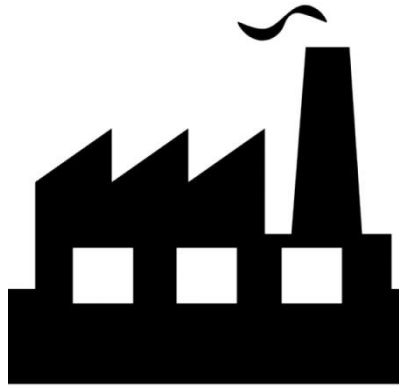**WRITTEN:**

1. He said that the bombers were approaching.
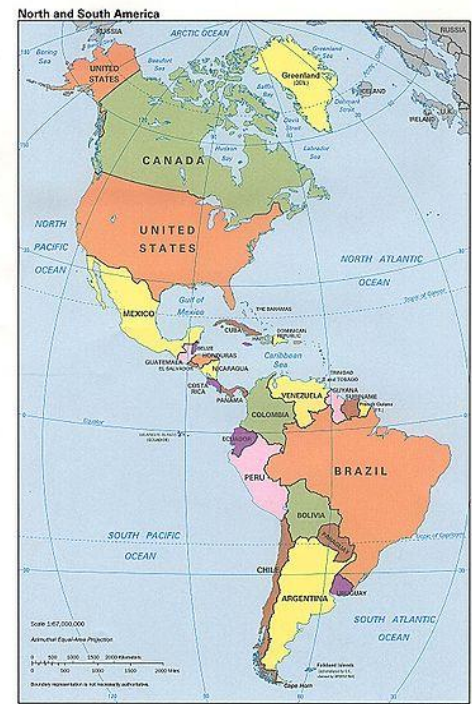
2. An American doctor discovered the cure.

3. "I should find a new dormitory for next year", said Lucy

4. There is need for a new kind of fabric.

5. It was a very large bench.
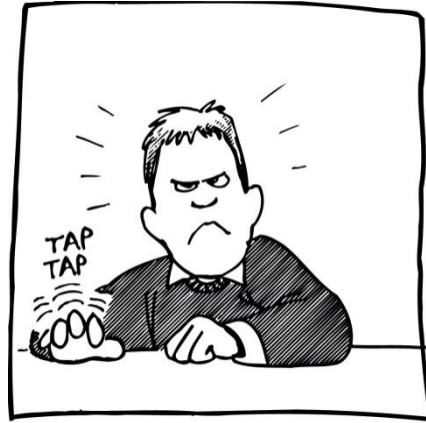

6. She has photographs on the mantel.

7. I need to go to the library.

8. She decided to wear a vest.

9. He was impatient.

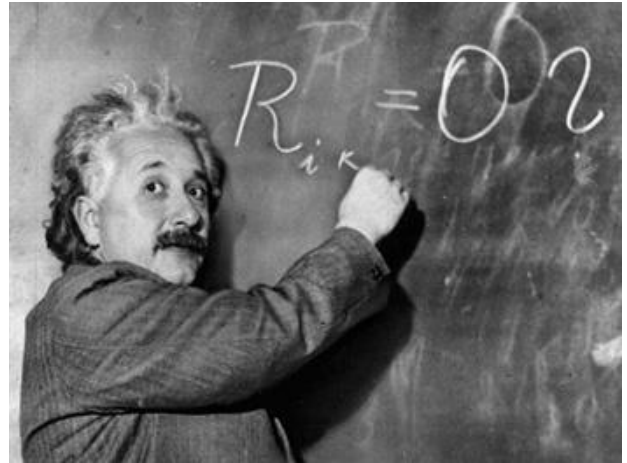10. She went into labour on the 15th May.

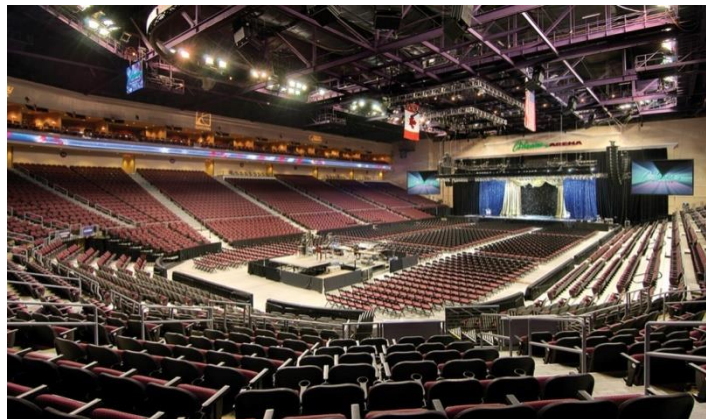11. Marc was the mayor.

12. I saw a notice in the supermarket.

13. He was a physician and she was a journalist.

14. Sophia was very secretive about the agenda.

15. I will meet him by the arena.